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Oregon Daily Emerald

Studies show binge drinking in college continues to rise

■ One report says that of the students living away from home who say they drink, 70 percent fit the mold of a 'binge drinker'

By Robin Weber
Oregon Daily Emerald

Beer guzzling and playing drinking games are thought by many to be as synonymous with college as the classes themselves, and according to experts, the numbers show more and more students are living up to this stereotype.

A study released by Harvard University at the end of last month found the number of college students who admitted to engaging in high-risk drinking is rising. These results were similar to those found in a University Health Center survey last year.

The Harvard study, reported in the Journal of American College Health, defines high-risk or "binge" drinkers as those who said they'd consumed five or more alcoholic beverages in a row, for males, and four or more drinks for females, at least once in the previous two weeks.

The study showed 70 percent of college drinkers living away from home fit that bill.

Although high-risk college drinking seems to be running rampant, the study found less binge drinking at the high school level, less enrollment in national fraternities and sororities and more requests for substance-free housing. Also, more than 50 percent of students surveyed reported they had been taught the hazards of alcohol.

Despite these factors, which the researchers previously believed played a key role in binge drinking, student drinking rates continued to rise.

Underage drinkers were found by the Harvard report to drink less often, but more in quantity, than older students. The lowest rate of drinking was found in students who had yet to leave the parental nest, with only 25 percent admitting to excessive imbibing.

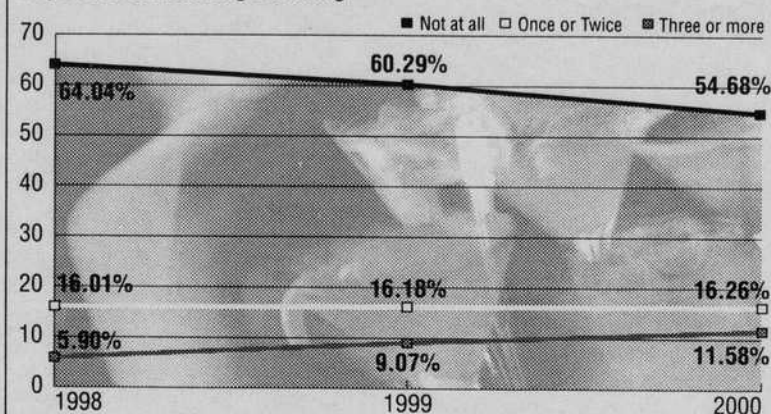
The health center and the University of Oregon Survey Research Laboratory also conducted a student survey from May through June to assess student health trends. The study found binge drinking has reportedly increased at the University, as well.

Previous health center reports have shown that students reportedly downing five-plus drinks

Binge Drinking

The number of University students who say they've imbibed five or more alcoholic beverages in one sitting one or more times a week has shown a slight increase over the three years studied, according to data from surveys conducted by the University Health Center.

Reports of student binge drinking:



Have you ever injured yourself because of drinking?

	1998	1999	2000
NO:	94.42%	95.57%	94.78%
YES:	5.58%	4.43%	5.22%

Have you ever injured anyone else because of your drinking?

	1998	1999	2000
NO:	99.57%	99.51%	98.75%
YES:	0.43%	0.49%	1.25%

Source: University Health Center

Russell Weller Emerald

more than three times a week rang in at 11.58 percent in 2000, an increase of more than 5 percent from 1998. While more than half the students polled in 2000 said they did not consume five or more drinks in a sitting in the previous two weeks, a majority of students surveyed said they typically drank three to five libations in a given situation.

The health center's study also looked at some effects of drinking. Of the students who said they'd had three or more drinks at a time in the two-week period, almost one-tenth said they still attempted to drive home. Others admitted to injuring themselves or others as the result of drinking. Health officials at the University sometimes see pregnancies as a result of unplanned sex while drinking, health educator Annie Dochnahl said.

"It's not uncommon," she said. She added that because drinking-related incidents often occur at night or on a weekend, many are referred to Sacred Heart Medical Center, not the health center.

Several University groups are stepping up to bat to help beat the war on unsafe drinking.

Health educators are offering talks by request in residence halls, fraternities and sororities. They also have information tables at the Student Recreation Center and a newsletter in the Oregon Daily Emerald once per term, Dochnahl said. Students wanting to learn more independently can check out books from the Health Education Library on how to help themselves and friends through intervention.

Other campus groups are trying to topple student assumptions that "everyone" on campus drinks to excess in order to take some of the peer pressure off drinking.

Through the New View 2000 social norms campaign, the Office of Student Life has been working to reduce student drinking rates by proving through the CORE survey that the average student actually drinks less than many students assume. The CORE survey, conducted by the Office of Student Life, asks University students about their drug and alcohol use.

"The aim of the social norms campaign is if you change the erroneous perceptions about drinking, you will drink less," Associate Dean of Students Laura Blake Jones said.

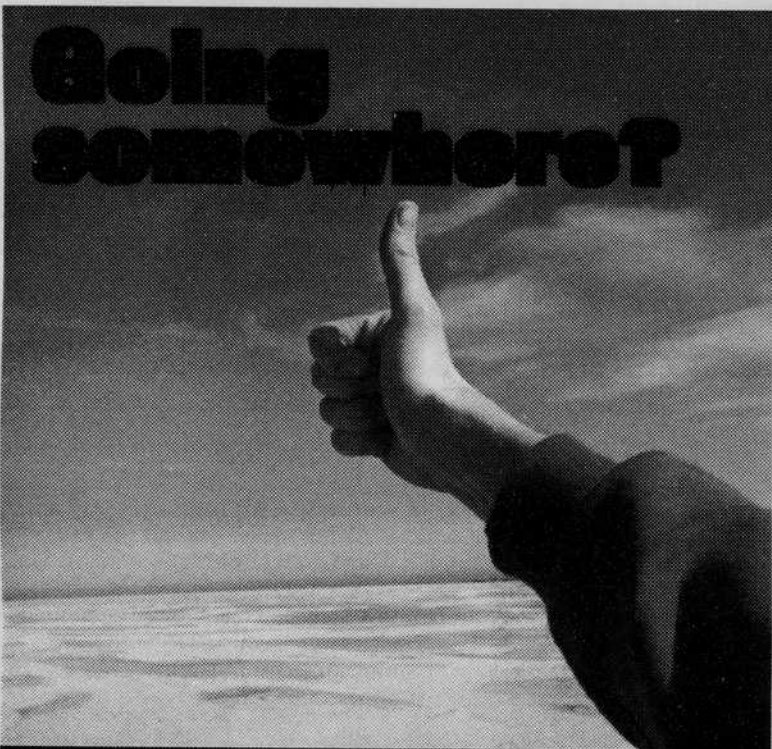
This was coupled by an education outreach to students in Greek houses and the residence halls, she said.

"We believe the synergistic effect of managing the campus environment through broad-based coalition work, combined with the ability to implement a comprehensive social norms campaign, may be the icing on the cake that makes a difference in prevention work," she said.

Although many groups are working to cut down on the unsafe drinking, the decision ultimately rests in the hands of the students.

"We know 'Just Say No' doesn't work 'cause students say 'yes,'" Kingston said.

E-mail reporter Robin Weber at robinweber@dailyemerald.com



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