

*A Case for*

# COLLEGE PREVENTION

RETURN ON INVESTMENT



College administrators continue to identify drinking as one of the most significant challenges on campus. Recent data highlights that over 52% of full-time college students aged 18-22 consumed alcohol in the past month, and nearly 33% engaged in binge drinking during that time. Binge drinking is defined as consuming 4 or more drinks for females and 5 or more drinks for males in a single occasion (SAMHSA, 2019).

Rates of alcohol consumption correlate with numerous campus issues, including injuries, assaults, and property damage. Each year, 600,000 college students suffer injuries related to drinking, and nearly 700,000 students are assaulted by peers under the influence of alcohol. Alarming, 100,000 students report alcohol-related sexual assaults (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009).

## ECONOMIC COSTS OF COLLEGE DRINKING

In a 2010 study, the societal cost of underage drinking in the United States was estimated at \$24 billion annually, accounting for 9% of the total cost of alcohol misuse nationwide (NIAAA). For a campus of 5,000 underage students, this equates to approximately \$2,160 per student annually, resulting in an estimated total annual cost of \$10.8 million, or about \$207,692 per week (NIAAA, 2010). These figures likely underestimate current costs, as inflation and rising healthcare, legal, and property damage expenses since 2010 have undoubtedly increased the financial burden.

## ACADEMIC AND RETENTION IMPLICATIONS

Alcohol use adversely impacts academic performance and retention rates. Heavy drinkers are more likely to miss classes, perform poorly on exams, and report lower sleep quality, all of which contribute to academic underachievement (Singleton & Wolfson, 2009). Studies reveal that heavy drinking is linked to a 30% increase in the likelihood of attrition from college (Martinez, Sher, & Wood, 2008). Institutions may face significant financial losses from reduced retention; for a medium-sized university with 10,000 students and an annual net revenue of \$5,000 per student, a 5% drop in first-year retention equates to \$625,000 in lost revenue annually (Doumas et al., 2011).

## REPUTATION

College drinking also has an effect in more far-reaching ways, for instance by affecting the reputation or “brand” of a college in the effort to attract and retain the best students, faculty and staff. Studies show that academic reputation is a primary concern to potential applicants. For instance, surveys by the Educational Testing Service and the National Association of College Admission Counselors find that, after financial cost, academic concerns are the most important factor in a student’s school selection (NACAC, 2019). In this process, popular websites such as The Princeton Review, undoubtedly influence student perception by rating colleges on factors such as “Party Schools” and “Major Frat Scene.” Although difficult to quantify in actual dollars, it is clear that an institution’s reputation as a “party school” dissuades a large number of quality students, faculty and staff from considering that school.

In recognition of the importance of college drinking prevention, colleges and universities have been required to comply with the Federal Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, which



specifies that, at minimum, colleges must adopt a series of programs to prevent drug and alcohol abuse by students. For most colleges, a cornerstone of such a program involves a primary prevention program that targets incoming students with alcohol prevention messages.

A program like **Alcohol Wise** set the tone for the academic and health climate by demonstrating to students, parents and the community that the institution is thoughtfully responding to any potential problems on their campus.

## ■ THE BETTER YOU ARE AT PREVENTION, ■ THE LESS YOU'LL HAVE TO RELY ON A REACTIVE APPROACH.



After taking **Alcohol Wise**, the individual will be able to:

- Identify high-risk and low-risk drinking patterns
- Refute common misconceptions about drinking norms
- Understand the factors that affect BAC
- Identify personal risk factors for drinking and alcohol dependence
- Know how to access campus resources

## REFERENCES

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