

DRINKING, DRUGS, AND CHOOSING A COLLEGE

IS COLLEGE LIFE REALLY ALL ABOUT DRINKING AND DRUGS? Films like *Animal House* and *Road Trip* depict heavy drinking and other drug use as the focal point in college. Yet, students must remind themselves that the film industry's goal is to entertain, not to portray reality accurately.



WHAT DO MOST STUDENTS REALLY WANT FROM THEIR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE?

Although heavy drinking and other drug use may sometimes *seem* to be a central part of the campus culture, most campuses offer opportunities for students to have fun without relying on alcohol and other drugs as the source of entertainment.

In fact, a 2001 study* of 281,064 students found that *fewer than half drank a beer during their first year at college*. Rather, most students participated in substance-free activities such as parties, dances, movie nights, cultural events, concerts, sporting events, performances, and outdoor activities.

*The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2001, by L. J. Sax et al.: Los Angeles, Calif.: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, 2001.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ME TO CONSIDER ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE WHEN CHOOSING A COLLEGE?

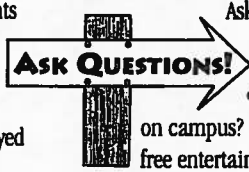
If you end up at a campus where many students drink heavily, you're much more likely to suffer unwanted consequences due to their behavior. Do you really want to baby-sit a drunk roommate or have your property destroyed because of intoxicated dorm mates?

There is no question, college drinking can cause even more serious problems. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov) reports that each year approximately 1,400 college students die from unintentional alcohol-related injuries. Alcohol is involved in 500,000 unintentional injuries, 600,000 assaults, and 70,000 cases of sexual assault and acquaintance rape among college students. By finding a campus where most students choose positive lifestyles, you decrease the chances for negative consequences.

In the 2001 study of first-year college students, the top two reasons students gave for their choice of college were its reputation and job opportunities after graduation. A degree from a school branded as a "party school" may not be worth as much in the eyes of future employers.

Finally, various studies reveal that students who drink heavily earn lower grades. You'll be better off academically if alcohol and other drug use are not central to the campus environment.

HOW CAN I TELL HOW MUCH DRINKING AND OTHER DRUG USE IS HAPPENING ON CAMPUSES?



Ask current students and recent graduates the following:

- What do students do for fun on campus? Is there a variety of substance-free entertainment options available?
- In what ways does the campus help freshmen make a positive transition to college life?
- Is there support on campus for students in recovery?
- How late are the student center, library, and gym open?
- How does the campus restrict alcohol from residence halls?
- Do many students participate in community service activities?
- Do fraternities and sororities dominate the social scene?
- What is the sports culture on campus—do students drink heavily during and following sporting events?
- Are there opportunities for students to interact with faculty and staff after hours and on weekends?
- Does the social scene disappear if you decide not to drink? Are there enough alternatives and enough people choosing these alternatives that you can still enjoy yourself?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A visit to the campus is one of the best ways to learn about its culture regarding alcohol and other drugs. Current students, tour guides, and residence hall advisors are good sources of information.

Look at the neighborhood surrounding campus. Is the area filled with bars? Are they the primary source of entertainment? Do they advertise on campus?

Wander through residence halls. Notice how students decorate their rooms. Are there many alcohol-related posters or pyramids of beer cans? Are trash cans filled with beer cans or bottles?

Look through the campus newspaper. Are there many alcohol-related ads or articles?

College is an opportunity for personal and intellectual growth and creativity. Find a school with less drinking and you're likely to have a much more positive experience!



This guide is available on the Web at www.edc.org/hec. For more information about alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention on college campuses, contact:

- U.S. Department of Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/)
- The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention (www.edc.org/hec)