

What Do Heavy Drinking and Misperceived Norms Have to Do with Student Retention: Uncovering the Connections”

The topic of student retention has attracted a great deal of interest among college and university administrators in recent years for several reasons. First of all, the nature of the profession commits college student personnel to helping students develop their full academic potential and be successful in completing their undergraduate education. Added to this fundamental concern has been the increased attention given by the public to institutional rankings by the media in which retention and graduation rates play a significant role as well as the institution’s economic costs of student attrition through loss of tuition and additional recruitment to replace students. Given this heightened focus on retention, schools should be paying even more attention to already present concerns about alcohol misuse among college students because heavy or high risk drinking is likely to be a prominent factor contributing to student attrition. This presentation examines the variety of pathways through which heavy drinking can contribute to students dropping out of school and also explains why institutional research often fails to accurately identify how dramatic the effect of heavy drinking is on attrition. One must also consider the how drinking is linked to the social activities that influence on student retention. Finally, this presentation considers how students’ misperceptions of drinking norms at their school play a role in retention/attrition of both heavy drinking and light drinking/abstaining students.