

## HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES

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This article features **H. Wesley Perkins, professor of sociology** at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

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# THE VANCOUVER SUN

## Regular booze-ups still norm, university, college students say



The Vancouver Sun, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

This story also ran in The Calgary Herald, Calgary, Alberta.

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Byline: Sarah Schmidt

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OTTAWA -- The majority of university and college students say they only consume alcohol twice per month or less, but most believe regular boozeups -- seared into the campus psyche by the classic movie Animal House -- are still the norm, according to a national survey of campus drinking patterns.

The survey of more than 5,000 students from 10 schools found respondents overestimated both the quantity and frequency of student drinking.

Sixty-three per cent of respondents said they drink bi-monthly or less, but 80 per cent believe their peers typically drink once per week or more often. One in three assumes fellow students drink at least three times per week.

Further, most students (64 per cent) say they consume no more than four drinks at parties or bars, yet, two-thirds believe students consume at least five drinks.

One in four believes average consumption is seven or more drinks.

There is also near unanimity among students (93 per cent) they should not drink to levels that interfere with their academics or other responsibilities, yet the survey also found 32 per cent believe the majority of their peers consider such behaviour acceptable.

Four out of five respondents reported they always or usually have a designated driver when they know they'll be travelling to a party by car. But, these same students believe only 59 per cent of their peers always or usually use a designated driver.

"The gap exists because what we typically observe and remember in social settings is the extreme behaviour. We don't take an accurate cross-section. We remember and talk about the person who acted out of character, or passed out on the floor, or got into a fight. We talk about the extreme and that seems to normalize it," lead researcher **Dr. Wesley \*Perkins\*** of the Canadian Centre for Social Norms Research said in an interview.

The centre, financially supported by the Brewers of Canada, espouses the theory that much of people's behaviour is influenced by their perception of how other members of their social group behave.

**\*Perkins\*** said closing the gap between perception and reality is key because

young people are "being influenced in accordance with what is an imaginary norm, what they think is the norm."

But, the centre also played down certain findings. In releasing the results, it did not provide any further information about the 37 per cent of respondents who said they drank more than twice per month, or the 36 per cent who said they consume more than four drinks at parties or bars.

This approach -- and the source of funding for the survey -- is raising some eyebrows.

"I find any survey that suggests that binge drinking is not a problem seems to be wholly incompatible with the overwhelming evidence," said Robert Solomon, specialist in drinking patterns and professor of law at the University of Western Ontario.

A 2002 joint study by the Toronto-based Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the Harvard School of Public Health involving over 19,000 students found that 87 per cent of Canadian university students surveyed and 81 per cent of college students in the United States reported having a drink at least once in the last year.

Among American students who drank regularly, 54 per cent were considered "heavy drinkers," compared to 42 per cent on Canadian campuses. This label applied to young men who had five or more drinks in an evening and at least four for young women.



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