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# *How to Make Students Uncomfortable With Drinking*

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Like college and university presidents across the country, I am appalled at the drinking that goes on among some college students. It's not just the frequency; the amounts are alarming as well. According to the most recent data from the CORE Institute, which maintains the largest national database of statistics on college students' drinking and drug use, 72 percent of all college students consumed alcohol in the preceding 30 days, 65 percent of under-age students consumed alcohol during the same period, and 46 percent of all students reported binge drinking—consuming five or more drinks in one sitting—in the previous two weeks. As the statistics show, despite colleges' best efforts, students still find ways to drink—a lot.

It's an issue that affects all of us—administrators, faculty, staff and, most important, students. Excessive alcohol consumption by college students has deep implications later in life. Excessive drinking can also lead to academic problems, social isolation, vandalism, sexual violence, injuries, even death.

Recently I've begun holding individual meetings with students whose excessive alcohol consumption has risen to levels requiring medical attention. I want those students to know that I care about them, that people on campus are paying close attention to their behavior, and that we will not hesitate to intervene. I also let them know in no uncertain terms that there can be no repeat of their episodes.

I know some may wonder if this is an appropriate use of presidential time, but I require continuing conversations—with my senior administrative colleagues, the deans, and the staff involved in our drug-and-alcohol education-and-prevention efforts, as well as with students—so that we are all constantly informed of the college's efforts to combat this national problem.

To their credit, the handful of students I've met with to date all seemed uncomfortable during these meetings, embarrassed by the attention from their college president and by the reason for it. I believe our conversations have helped elevate the seriousness of the situation for them and for others. On a small campus like ours, word gets around that certain behaviors are going to precipitate conversations at the highest levels.

I have also met with many of our student leaders to enlist their help in our efforts to curb excessive drinking. And recently I asked the president of our student government to lead me on a tour of late-night campus parties. I make it a point to be very visible on campus—I routinely attend games and events, chat with students in the dining halls, visit classes and the residence houses—but it was good for students to see me late at night as well.

Some colleges and universities have banned alcohol outright, while others have outlawed hard liquor. We are looking at the latter step, but know that both are very difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.

Students who choose to drink alcohol to excess, especially those who are under age, aren't doing it in places where they can be seen. They drink behind closed doors in their residences or other private spaces, often "pre-gaming" or "pre-partying"—students' terms for binge drinking to get "buzzed" before attending campus events where alcohol is not permitted.

Stopping them is a major challenge. As administrators, we talk about this issue, we debate solutions, we take it very seriously, and we give it a lot of attention. But administrators are not the ones out there late at night when students are making decisions about drinking.

I propose that we, as college leaders, keep this issue at the forefront of our priorities. We need to invest resources and adopt strategies to limit drinking. Approaches that we're taking include:

**Senior administrators' support.** College leaders must recognize the seriousness of the problem and be willing to invest in programs and resources, even in difficult economic times.

**Robust education, intervention, and outreach programs.** Staff need support and resources to stay on the cutting edge of practices that work in a college environment.

**Program analysis.** We must continually analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and

determine if new efforts need to be undertaken or changes made.

**Trustees' involvement.** Governing boards must understand how this issue plays out on campus, and what our professionals are doing to curb excessive behavior.

**Partnerships.** It is essential to build bridges to campus constituencies, parents, and, where appropriate, municipal and state coalitions. Everyone should know it's a goal of the institution to curb harmful behaviors. We must all let students know that this is an issue that faculty members and administrators care about.

College leaders need to do more, and we need to involve a broad range of stakeholders in our efforts. We should encourage parents to have conversations with their children to make sure the students know their limits and the implications of excessive drinking. Professors should feel comfortable engaging students on the issue in the classroom. Talking about responsible behavior—even in a classroom setting—is entirely appropriate. And students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their choices.

On our campuses, students are receiving world-class educations to prepare them for the best possible futures. We shouldn't let alcohol get in the way of that.

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