

**University Alcohol Policy and Student Attitudes**

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The intellectual potential of our university is being destroyed by problem drinking. According to a study by *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 66% of college presidents feel problem drinking is an issue at their universities. The issues associated with problem drinking affect student and community-level health, safety, and academic functioning (Lavigne, Francione-Witt, Wood, Laforge, & DeJong, 2008). University policies that attempt to decrease problem drinking have been implemented with varying degrees of success on university campuses. This pilot study hopes to strengthen alcohol policy by helping administration better understand student attitudes. By sampling students at a small, rural midwestern state university campus, and while utilizing an in-person survey, this study investigated the gendered relationship between university alcohol policy and student attitudes.

### **Literature Review**

A review of existing literature was performed to study the significance between the attitudes of college students regarding alcohol policy. The literature review examined what policy measures and prevention programs are most effective forms of alcohol-control policies on college campuses. Zakocs et al. (2008) investigated what environmental factors, within and outside of a college campus, assist or hinder alcohol prevention partnership. Five four-year colleges took part in the case study. The study attempted to determine the level of partnership between the university and the outside community and its institutions. The study revealed that some factors are important contributors to creating helpful partnerships: college staff who work as community organizers and high-level administrators who champion community partnerships. The study determined that an administrator should hold the position of advocate and organize the community in order for the university and community better work together. Having a campus

advocate can help a college implement its policy by working with important outside organizations like tavern owners or Greek systems. Zakcos et al. pointed to unilateral action when it comes to the implementation of alcohol policy, which means having all members of a community act together as one

DeJong et al. (2007) examined students' support for alcohol policies and strategies implemented by campuses to reduce problem drinking. The study used a random sampling of 32 four-year campuses. Students were sent the Survey of College Alcohol Norms and Behavior (SCANB) annually for five years. All 32 of the colleges participated in the Social Norms Marketing Research Project (SNMRP). The SNMRP determines the success of social norms marketing effects on problem drinking. The study found that when a student indicated support for a policy, the same student would indicate that others would not support the said proposal. The study also suggested that administration should not just presume students will refuse to support policy. The study recommended university administration conduct a survey regarding students' level of support for alcohol policies. The result of such a study may help illustrate to students that many of the policies are supported by their peers, empowering them to publically speak up regarding their support for tougher policy (DeJong et al., 2007).

Rhodes et al. (2005) conducted a study examining the connections between alcohol policies enforced by administrators of historically black colleges and, students' understanding of alcohol policies, and reports of binge drinking. The study determined some such factors as gender and ethnic differences that strongly influence student consumption of alcohol. Environmental characteristics, such as alcohol prices and the accessibility of alcohol, also greatly impact campus drinking. Rhodes et al. found that administrators try to resolve this major issue by enforcing many policies, including campus alcohol bans, beer kegs bans, limitations on the

maximum amount of drinks per student, and different alcohol-free activities. The extent of campus drinking policy differed with the varying perceptions of administration regarding students' alcohol use (Rhodes et al., 2005).

Sheffield et al. (2005) on the other hand measured binge drinking on community college campuses and alcohol problems encountered by campus community. Their study discovered that heavy drinking on college campuses has a damaging influence on non-binge consumers; 77% of non-binge drinking students reported at least one secondhand effect of others' abuse of alcohol. Other research examined in the literature review largely focused on alcohol use and prevention strategies concerning four-year universities; yet, this study concentrated on combined samples from vocational, technical, junior, and community colleges. Sheffield and his colleagues concluded that the rate of binge drinking and its connection with unsafe behavior remains largely unknown amongst community college students due to lack of research.

Wagenaar et al. (2004) believe the solution to avoiding alcohol-related problems is to have public and institutional policies which may decrease the rates of "high-risk" drinking."Wagenaar et al. found that college students who lived off-campus were less likely to be influenced by the college alcohol policies. Furthermore, they identify several suggestions to help decrease alcohol problems on college campuses: getting rid of happy hours or any other kind of promotion, raising taxes on alcohol, reducing the number of alcohol retail business, and refusing sales to anyone who is under the age of 21 and/or is displaying noticeable signs of intoxication (Wagenaar et al., 2004).

Considering existing literature, problem drinking is clearly an ongoing issue on four-year college campuses; between 34%- 47% percent of students participate in problem drinking (Sheffield et al, 2005). Environmental factors that facilitate or impede administrative policy

measures have also been identified, including stakeholder development, working governance, and written governance procedures. Existing literature shows the need for administration to partner with community members as well as students in the implementation of alcohol policy. The current study seeks to better understand the effect of alcohol policy on a small, rural campus and to investigate whether there are gender differences among the student sample.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Ecological Theory of human development serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Ecological Theory states that there is interplay between the psychological characteristics of a person and of a specific environment; one cannot be defined without the other (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Stienmetz, 1996). This theory focuses on studying interrelationships among subsystems, in particular, during transition periods. There are five systems within the Ecological Theory: the microsystem which refers to the immediate environment the individual lives; the mesosystem referring to the connection between the immediate environments; the exosystem, an external environment that one does not control but whose effects are felt; the macrosystem which includes cultural contexts such as values and laws, and the chronosystem which is the change and transition of environment throughout life. For example, regulations such as an institution's alcohol policy may also affect the actions of the individual in the individual's microsystem; Ecological Theory suggests that the interplay between one's subsystems, such as one's school life and home life, influences the individual.

The Ecology Theory of human development supports the idea that the rules of an institution affect the lives of individuals within that institution. This theory predicts that clear university alcohol policy could help reduce the frequency of alcohol abuse by all students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The three main objectives of this study are (1) to examine the gendered relationship between University alcohol policy and attitudes of the students by sampling students in a midwestern state university, (2) to develop a survey tool to measure attitudes of university students towards alcohol policy, and (3) to increase the understanding of the effects of alcohol policy on a small rural campus, including whether there are gender differences among the student sample.

The central research question of this study was “What is the gendered relationship regarding university alcohol policy and student attitudes?” Based on the literature, we hypothesized that female students would be more prone than male students to have alcohol policy affect their attitudes; in addition, we suspected that students’ perception of the effect of alcohol policy on their peers would differ, with females indicating that policy affects peer’s behavior. Based on the Ecology Theory, we furthermore theorized that the presence of outside environmental forces, such as taverns and drink specials, would affect both genders equally, increasing both genders’ likelihood to drink.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The study took place at a university in northwestern Wisconsin. The participants were 87 undergraduate students in human development and family studies courses, an English course, and an applied science course. Of the 87 participants, 31 were male and 56 were female. There were three participants between the ages of 18-19, forty seven participants between 20-21, twenty five participants between 22-23, six participants between 24-25, and six participants were 26 years and older. There were four participants who were sophomores, 27 who were juniors, and 56 of the participants were seniors. There were ten participants who lived on campus and 77

who lived off-campus.

### **Research Design**

The function of this survey research was to be able to generalize to a comparable, larger population so that some inferences could be made about characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of this population of male and female college students (Babbie, 1990). The survey design type used can be best explained as a cross-sectional study design which was utilized to capture knowledge from male and female college students at one point in time. The form of data collection was self-administered questionnaires. The reasoning for using this method was that it was the most proficient type of method in order to collect the data on campus due to convenience, low cost, and quick return of data. The university student population made up the population of the study; the sample was male and female students in the Human Development and Family Studies Department, Engineering and Technology Department, and in the English and Philosophy Department. The study used a non-random design in order to be inclusive in the classroom. The study used purposive sampling because the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship of gender and the impact university alcohol policy has on students' attitudes. In order to achieve an equitable number of male and female students, data was gathered from departments based on the male to female ratio of each classroom. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Data Collection Instrument**

In order to examine the attitudes of college students towards university alcohol policy, a survey was constructed. The survey included a brief description of the study with an implied consent, definition of any terms not commonly known, risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, voluntary participation, contact information for the research team and the

supervisor, and instructions for completing the survey.

The survey contained four demographic questions associated with gender, age, academic status, and living arrangements. Participants were given nine closed-ended statements based on a 5-point Likert Scale, measuring the intensity of the respondents' attitudes ranging from one (*strongly disagree*) to five (*strongly agree*). Questions were informed by literature and theories regarding gender and attitudes toward university alcohol policy.

Both face validity and content validity made up the survey instrument. The instrument questions as well as the research questions shared a logical connection to the concept; this was the face validity. The questions asked in the survey were literature-based, and it was determined that the questions showed a clear connection between gender and attitudes towards the university alcohol policy. Content validity refers to whether the instrument statements' appropriately covered the breadth of concepts under the larger topic.

The questions addressed had a broad range of issues regarding the attitudes towards university alcohol policy. The survey was piloted to five college students to increase validity and ensure that the survey was clear and ready for distribution. Some students felt their own institution's alcohol policy should be defined; therefore, a copy of the university alcohol policy was added to the survey. In addition, the variable AUP, which measures the participants' familiarity with university alcohol policy, was adjusted to read "I was familiar with the university alcohol policy before reviewing the policy handout today."

## **Procedure**

Data was collected from two human development and family studies courses, an English course and an applied science course. Purposive sampling was used to ensure proportionate numbers of male or female students. Randomization was not used in order to be inclusive in the

classroom. The implied consent was read aloud to the students. After the researchers and the professor left the classroom, surveys were completed and placed in an envelope and sealed to guarantee participants' anonymity. This procedure was followed exactly the same for all surveyed classes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data collected was cleaned and checked for missing data. The cleaned surveys were coded and acronyms were used for each variable. The measured demographics included *age* (AGE), *gender* (GEN), *academic status* (ACS), and *living arrangements* (LIA). The only independent variable on the survey was *gender* (GEN), which was the category used to compare groups with. Each survey statement was a dependent variable and assigned an acronym: *I was familiar with the university alcohol policy before reviewing today* (AUP); *My awareness of the alcohol policy affects my own drinking behavior* (SAP); *The university alcohol policy is an effective tool in preventing problem drinking on campus* (UPE); *The university alcohol policy helps to decrease problem drinking among my peers* (PAP); *Harsher enforcement of university alcohol policy affects my drinking behaviors* (HEF); *Student input has been asked for regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on this campus* (STI); *Student input is taken seriously on this campus regarding the alcohol policy* (SIS); *As a student, I would like to be more involved in the rule making process regarding alcohol policy* (MIV); *Drink specials and the availability of alcohol affect my consumption* (OCE).

The data-analyzing program called the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The individual was used as the level of analysis. The data analysis included the following calculations frequencies: cross-tabulations, mean comparisons, and independent t-tests. This was a result of the groups being compared by gender. A Cronbach's

Alpha reliability analysis was also conducted.

### Results

The first analysis run was a frequency distribution analysis. This analysis indicated that there was no data missing from the surveys. In addition, cross-tabulations were run with the independent variable, GEN. For STI, PAP, SIS, UPE, HEF, and SAP, there appeared to be no difference between groups, with the majority of males and females having disagreed and/or strongly disagreed. For MIV and AUP there were no difference between groups with the majority of males and females having agreed and/or strongly agreed. For OCE, a difference was found, with more males disagreeing and/or strongly disagreeing, while the majority of females agreed and/or strongly agreed. There were also several variables with high numbers of undecided response' rates. That is, for PAP and SIS, females' undecided responses were over 20%. For OCE male undecided responses were over 20%. For MIV and STI both male and female undecided responses were over 20%.

**Table 1**

Cross-Tabulations

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	6.5%	19.4%	16.1%	25.8%	32.3%	100.0%
Female	7.1%	17.9%	17.9%	44.6%	12.5%	100.0%

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	45.2%	35.5%	6.5%	3.2%	9.7%	100.0%
Female	17.9%	32.1%	16.1%	32.1%	1.8%	100.0%

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	54.8%	29.0%	3.2%	6.5%	6.5%	100.0%
Female	21.4%	30.4%	17.9%	25.%	5.4%	100.0%

## PAP

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	48.4%	35.5%	3.2%	9.7%	3.2%	100.0%
Female	25.0%	39.3%	21.4%	14.3%	0.0%	100.0%

## HEF

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	58.1%	19.4%	6.5%	3.2%	12.9%	100.0%
Female	23.2%	39.3%	12.5%	17.9%	7.1%	100.0%

## STI

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	41.9%	12.9%	32.2%	6.5%	6.5%	100.0%
Female	16.1%	32.1%	26.8%	23.2%	1.8%	100.0%

## SIS

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	45.2%	29.0%	19.4%	.0%	6.5%	100.0%
Female	21.4%	39.3%	23.2%	14.3%	1.8%	100.0%

## MIV

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	22.6%	9.7%	25.8%	16.1%	25.8%	100.0%
Female	8.9%	14.3%	25.0%	32.1%	19.6%	100.0%

## OCE

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	48.4%	12.9%	25.8%	12.9%	.0%	100.0%
Female	26.8%	16.1%	12.5%	39.3%	5.4%	100.0%

*Note.* (GEN)=Gender of participant; (AUP) = I was familiar with the university alcohol policy before reviewing today; (SAP)= My awareness of the alcohol policy affects my own drinking behavior; (UPE)= The university alcohol policy is an effective tool in preventing problem drinking on campus; (PAP)= The University of Wisconsin-Stout alcohol policy helps to decrease problem drinking among my peers; (HEF)= Harsher enforcement of University of Wisconsin-Stout alcohol policy affects my drinking behaviors; (STI)=Student input has been asked for regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on this campus; (SIS)= Student input is taken seriously on this campus regarding the alcohol policy; (MIV)= As a student, I would like to be more involved in the rule making process regarding alcohol policy; (OCE)= Drink specials and the availability of alcohol effect my consumption.

**Table 2**

Compare Means

GEN		AUP	SAP	UPE	PAP	HEF	STI	SIS	MIV	OCE
Male:										
	Mean:	3.58	1.97	1.81	1.84	1.94	2.23	1.94	3.13	2.03
	SD:	1.31	1.25	1.19	1.10	1.41	1.26	1.12	1.50	1.14
	Range:	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
Female										
	Mean:	3.38	2.68	2.63	2.25	2.46	2.63	2.36	3.39	2.80
	SD:	1.40	1.16	1.23	1.00	1.24	1.07	1.03	1.22	1.35
	Range:	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

*Note.* (GEN)=Gender of participant; (AUP) = I was familiar with the university alcohol policy before reviewing today; (SAP)= My awareness of the alcohol policy affects my own drinking behavior; (UPE)= The university alcohol policy is an effective tool in preventing problem drinking on campus; (PAP)= The University of Wisconsin-Stout alcohol policy helps to decrease problem drinking among my peers; (HEF)= Harsher enforcement of University of Wisconsin- Stout alcohol policy affects my drinking behaviors; (STI)=Student input has been asked for regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on this campus; (SIS)= Student input is taken seriously on this campus regarding the alcohol policy; (MIV)= As a student, I would like to be more involved in the rule making process regarding alcohol policy; (OCE)= Drink specials and the availability of alcohol effect my consumption.

An independent samples t-test was run to compare mean scores for males and females.

Significant differences were found between the both genders in SAP, UPE and OCE.

**Table 3**

## Independent T-tests

Variable	Gender		T	df	Sig.
	Males	Females			
SAP	1.97 (1.25)	2.68 (1.16)	-2.60	58.23	*0.012
UPE	1.81 (1.19)	2.63 (1.23)	-3.03	63.55	**0.004
OCE	2.03 (1.14)	2.80 (1.35)	-2.82	71.41	**0.006

*Note.* (GEN)=Gender of participant; (AUP) = I was familiar with the university alcohol policy before reviewing today; (SAP)= My awareness of the alcohol policy affects my own drinking behavior; (UPE)= The university alcohol policy is an effective tool in preventing problem drinking on campus; (PAP)= The University of Wisconsin-Stout alcohol policy helps to decrease problem drinking among my peers; (HEF)= Harsher enforcement of University of Wisconsin- Stout alcohol policy affects my drinking behaviors; (STI)=Student input has been asked for regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on this campus; (SIS)= Student input is taken seriously on this campus regarding the alcohol policy; (MIV)= As a student, I would like to be more involved in the rule making process regarding alcohol policy; (OCE)= Drink specials and the availability of alcohol effect my consumption.

\*\*Correlation is significant at the  $p < .01$ , \*Correlation is significant at the  $p < .05$

A reliability analysis was run to indicate whether variables were a reliable index to measure the major concept, the gendered relationship between university alcohol policy and students' attitudes. Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of reliability, was 0.730. This value indicates that survey items were a reliable measure of the major concept. If the variable MIV would be removed, the reliability would rise to 0.782.

### Discussion

The hypothesis that female students would be more likely than male students to have alcohol policy affect their attitudes is supported by the data, with significant mean differences indicating that females' awareness of alcohol policy is more likely to affect their drinking behavior. The majority of males and females indicated that they were familiar with the university

alcohol policy; however, the majority of males and females both disagreed or strongly disagreed about their awareness of the policy affecting their drinking behaviors. The significant mean differences indicate that females are more likely to let awareness of policy affect behavior. The female mean for the variable *My awareness of the alcohol policy affects my own drinking behavior* (SAP) was 2.68 while the mean was 1.97 for males.

At the beginning of this study, we had also hypothesized that females would be more likely to perceive alcohol policy affecting their peers' behaviors; this claim was also supported by the data. Significance tests indicate females are more likely than males to view alcohol policy as an effective tool in preventing problem drinking. The female mean for the variable *The University of Wisconsin-Stout alcohol policy helps to decrease problem drinking among my peers* (PAP) was 2.25, whereas the males mean for the same variable was 1.84.

The third part of the hypothesis theorized that outside environmental forces such as drink specials would have an equal effect on both genders increasing their likelihood to drink. The data does not support this hypothesis. In fact, the data suggests that females are more affected by outside forces such as advertising and price behaviors by taverns than males.

Statistical significance of  $p < 0.01$  level and  $p < 0.05$  were found for three of the variables. There was a significance of  $p < 0.01$  level for the variable that dealt with students' perceptions of alcohol policy. The question asked whether students viewed policy as an effective tool in preventing problem drinking; the t-test indicated females are more likely to view policy as an effective tool. The significance of  $p < 0.01$  was also found in the variable that dealt with the availability of alcohol or drink specials and whether these specials affected students' consumption of alcohol. The data does not fully support existing literature that claims environmental changes would affect drinking habits of both genders. Some environmental

suggestions in the literature include eliminating happy hours or any other kind of promotion, raising taxes on alcohol, reducing the number of alcohol retail businesses, and refusing sales to anyone under the age of 21 as well as anyone who displays signs of noticeable intoxication (Wagenaar et al. 2004). Data from the Wagenaar et al. study suggests that drink specials as well as the availability of alcohol would not affect males' consumption. However, our data indicates that these environmental suggestions may indeed affect females' consumption because the majority of females agreed that drink specials and alcohol availability affect their consumption.

For the study's variable dealing with whether students feel that alcohol policy affects their behavior, a significance of  $p < 0.05$  was measured. This suggests that males and females are more likely to let alcohol policy affect their drinking behavior. This data is not supported by the Ecological theory, which proposes that the policies of surrounding institutions have an effect on the individual (Boss et al., 1993).

The cross-tabulations' table reveals several interesting findings. A majority of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their awareness of alcohol policy affects their drinking behavior. The data supports the environmental management prevention approach, which states that decisions students make about the use of alcohol shape their environment. Therefore, the most effective way to reduce problem drinking in the campus community is to change the students' environment (DeJong et al., 2007). With both males and females indicating that alcohol policy does not affect their behavior, a more comprehensive environmental approach to lowering the risks of high drinking may be more appropriate than policy alone.

A majority of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their input has been requested regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on campus. Zakocs et al. (2008) found that instead of administrators focusing solely on written governances, administration should work to

form a partnership with the student body. When partnerships achieve cultural change on campus, rates of students' heavy drinking and alcohol-related consequences decrease. By creating a partnership with students and giving them a voice in the formation and execution of alcohol policy, administration may notice students taking a less oppositional stance toward alcohol policy. Thus, students may feel more responsible for the policy formation and less as a target of the policy.

A majority of students disagreed or strongly disagreed about whether their input in alcohol policy making is taken seriously on campus. In order for students to feel that their input can make a significant difference in regards to an alcohol policy, the campus community should work together to form the most effective policy possible. Creating stakeholders in the policy process is an important part of showing students they have something to gain from the success of the policy (Zakocs et al., 2008).

A majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be more involved in the rule-making process regarding alcohol policy on campus. In order to gain accurate information on students' insights, administrators should survey students based on their personal views of alcohol policy rather than relying on their general impressions or the opinions of vocal opponents to tougher policies (DeJong et al., 2007). Knowing the feelings, concerns, and opinions of those targeted by policies is also important. While aforementioned variables suggest students do not regard themselves as stakeholders in the policy-making process, the answers to variable MIV, which states "*As a student, I would like to be more involved in the rule making process regarding alcohol policy,*" suggests that they in fact would like a greater voice in the rule making process.

A majority of male and female students disagreed or strongly disagreed on the statement

that university alcohol policy helps decrease problem drinking among peers. According to the reviewed literature, the fact that the majority of surveyed students responded with disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the current policy is effective in changing peer behavior may be problematic in the success of the alcohol policy.(DeJong et al. 2007). Powerful resistance becomes more apparent when opponents believe they will be speaking for a bulk of the students on campus (DeJong et al., 2007). Therefore, with the majority of students indicating alcohol policy does not help decrease drinking among peers; students may be under the false notion that a negative view toward alcohol policy is the norm. The data indicates that opposition to alcohol policy may be due to the perception that peers do not support the policy. Thus, DeJong et al. (2007) conclude that a survey should be sent to students in order to help students as well as administration to gain a better understanding of what policies would be supported. Such a survey could help illustrate to students that many of the policies are supported by their peers, which in turn may empower students to publically speak up regarding their support for tougher policies. Since the majority of male and female students believe that alcohol policy does not reduce problem drinking in their peers, it may indicate that opposing voices on alcohol policies have significant influence on the student population at large.

A majority of students disagreed or strongly disagreed on whether university alcohol policy is an effective tool in preventing problem drinking on campus. The best barometer to gauge a policy's success may be to ask those directly affected by regulations, the students. Based on the current data, students do not consider current policy effective; this may be due to a policy that is less comprehensive, in that it doesn't take all members of the campus community, into account. Drinking behavior and offenses at off campus establishments may not be considered punishable offenses. In addition, effective prevention programs may not be part of the

policy, and thus students may view policy as ineffective. Previous studies also suggest that certain factors help with creating partnerships: college staff working as community organizers, and high level administrators who champion community partnerships (Zakocs et al., 2008). The current alcohol policy may be lacking in these areas.

The perception that ineffective alcohol policy is a result of administrators' lack of understanding or experience with the issue may be reasonable considering the fact that only half of administrators who are assigned to alcohol and drug abuse issues report regular monitoring of campus drinking problems (Rhodes et al., 2005). Yet, it is essential for the administrators in charge of alcohol-related issues to be personally familiar with drinking faced by the campus community (Rhodes et al., 2005). Through student and community involvement in the policy-making process, administrators may be better able to understand the issues surrounding problem drinking. Furthermore, better understanding and awareness of problem drinking may lead to a more effective policy.

A majority of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that harsher enforcement of the alcohol policy has an effect on their drinking behaviors. Rhodes et al.'s study (2005) asserts that the range of perception the administration displays clashes with the depth of the campus drinking policy. The study suggests many administrators may not perceive problem drinking to be as serious a problem as it may actually be on their campuses. Thus, the current data may indicate a lack of understanding of extent of the problem. Students may deem punishment for alcohol-related infractions unlikely. Moreover, students may dismiss the seriousness of problem drinking, and therefore, perceive strict policy enforcements as an overreaction by the administration.

A majority of male and female students agreed or strongly agreed that they are familiar

with university alcohol policy. Familiarity with the campus' alcohol policy was an important variable because assessing whether or not students feel they understand the policy is a key component before students are able to take an active part in becoming stakeholders along with the administration and the community at large. Thus, since the majority of participants indicated their understanding of existing alcohol policies, unfamiliarity with campus policies is unlikely to play a role in participants' responses. At the same time, while a majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they are aware of the policy, a majority also believed that alcohol policy has little effect on their behavior. Wagenaar et al.'s (2004) findings support the idea that changing the rules of students' social environment would affect students' behavior. However, current data indicates that both male and female students feel differently about this, with both male and female having responded that policy has little or no effect on their behavior

More males disagreed or strongly disagreed on whether drink specials and availability of alcohol affects their consumption, whereas more females agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. Male and female differences in response may be explained by a complex combination of physical, social, economic, and legal issues influencing alcohol's appeal and availability (DeJong et al., 2007). For example, bars may specifically market drink specials to women in order to attract more female customers. As a result, the most helpful and resourceful way to decrease problem drinking on campus may be to change the environment through institutional, community, and public policy changes.

### **Qualitative Comments**

Several themes were identified in the qualitative section of the survey. One theme is peer pressure because it was mentioned as a cause for students' problem drinking. Several participants also identified a lack of campus activities as a factor affecting their alcohol consumption. These

two responses support Rhodes et al.'s (2008) findings that environmental characteristics tie into campus drinking culture. In addition, several of the survey responses could be themed as critical toward the enforcement of the alcohol policy; more than a few students stated that administration cannot control their drinking behaviors. One participant's response exemplifies this type of thinking: "We are grownups, the Chancellor cannot tell us not to drink. The more he tells us to stop the more we are going to do it." This and other responses suggest that drinking behavior may be seen as a way for college students to assert their independence as adults. In order for a policy to be successful there needs to be unilateral action with the campus community (Zakocs et al., 2008). Perhaps participants' responses indicate that students do not feel understood and acknowledged by the administration and in turn do not support the policy.

Other open-ended responses criticized institutional policies and offered suggestions for change. One response stated, "College students are going to drink, penalties are going to have a low impact. Education about drinking and the risks is what can help avoid tragedies. However students should be a part of an education campaign other students are much more likely to take them seriously rather than an authority figure." The idea of strong education and student involvement is also supported by Zakocs et al.'s (2008) findings.

### **Limitations**

The major limitation to this study is the small sample size and the non-random design. There were a large number of undecided responses, which may have been the result of using only a five-point Likert scale instead of a seven-point with more variation. Another limitation is the use of self-administered questionnaire because participants report their own perception of behaviors; clearly, at times, there is a noteworthy difference differences between what a person says is affecting his or her behavior and what actually does affect a person's behavior.

**Implications for Practitioners**

The data demonstrates that the environment strongly influences students' consumption of alcohol. Females report that drink specials and the availability of alcohol affect their consumption. Since there is a high likelihood of females being affected by outside factors such as gender-specific alcohol marketing, it may be beneficial for policy makers to form a partnership with outside forces (e.g., local tavern owners). The present study clearly suggests the need for a collaborative policy-making process, including all individuals affected by alcohol policies. If students do not see themselves as stakeholders, they may be less likely to hold a positive attitude toward any policy; they might even take an oppositional stand. Moreover, while students do not agree with current alcohol policy, students still want to be involved in the policy-making process. If policy makers would partner with students as well as the community, and thereby including students in the rule-making process, student's attitudes toward policies could become more accepting. Similarly, if policy makers seek to make their alcohol policy more effective, they may want to actively engage students as stakeholders by offering them ways to express their opinions and experiences (e.g., listening sessions or open forums). As a result, policy makers may begin to see an increase in the effectiveness of university alcohol policy.

**Implications for Future Research**

There are some suggestions for future researchers; future research should include a random, large sample in order to be able to generalize the findings nationwide. It would also be useful to increase the variability on the scale, using a seven-point Likert scale instead of a five-point. Over 20% of participants responded undecided in regard to whether or not they would like to be more involved in the policy rule-making process on campus and whether students' feedback had been solicited regarding ideas on how to decrease problem drinking on campus.

The high number of undecided responses may be a result of the limited scale range. On the other hand, the large amount of undecided responses could also be a result of participants misinterpreting questions. Over 20% of females responded undecided to two of the variables, which stated whether the university alcohol policy helps decrease problem drinking amongst peers and whether students' input on problem drinking is taken seriously. Editing such statements for clarity and conciseness may result in participants' improved understanding of what they are being asked about in terms of input.

### **Conclusion**

Confirming previous studies, the pilot study at hand clearly suggests the need for a collaborative alcohol policy-making process; a process that should include all individuals affected by these policies. If students do not feel they are stakeholders, they may be less likely to hold a positive attitude toward policies and take an oppositional stand. On university campuses across the nation, problem drinking continues to rob young people of their potential and puts communities at risk. With continued research, there will be greater student involvement and as a consequence more effective alcohol policy, which will likely lead to a reduction in problem drinking and alcohol-related deaths.

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