



Chancellor, John R. Ryan

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Alcohol Awareness & Education

Adequately addressing the issue of alcohol abuse among college students is a challenge facing higher education systems across the country. It is perhaps one of our greatest challenges, because it puts our students physically and mentally at risk.

A task force that reported to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in 2005 found that drinking by college students aged 18 to 24 contributes to an estimated 1,700 student deaths, 599,000 injuries, and 97,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year.

These are astonishing, devastating statistics the higher education community cannot and does not ignore.

However, there is much debate over the most efficient and effective ways to address the issue. Approaches commonly used on campuses across the nation today include implementing social norm campaigns, sponsoring non-alcoholic social events, opening on-campus bars for students over age 21, screenings, and greater enforcement of alcohol and other drug policies.

This semester, SUNY is trying something new.

SUNY schools have enrolled 18,000 first-year students in two innovative alcohol education courses, *AlcoholEdu* and *Alcohol 101+*.

AlcoholEdu is an online course developed by Outside the Classroom. It is currently being used by more than 400 schools nationwide.

Alcohol 101+, a CD-ROM developed by education professionals in collaboration with the Century Council and funded by America's leading distillers, is being used by more than 2,000 colleges nationwide.

In each program, students answer questions about their individual drinking habits and general background, allowing the courses to be developed around each student's personal risk profile. This interactive approach engages student interest more than other prevention strategies that are designed to treat larger, more generic groups.

To date, both programs have generated favorable comments from both students and administrators throughout American higher education.

The changing of an unhealthy culture will not be immediate. The impact of these programs will be seen clearer in the coming years, as incoming students who take the courses become sophomores, juniors and seniors, and the classes who succeed them also enroll and participate in the programs. We will continue to monitor and measure our progress over the coming years.

Changing the culture of high-risk drinking on college campuses will require a long-term, comprehensive prevention plan, implemented effectively over a sustained period of time. Fortunately for New York State students and their families, SUNY schools continue to be open to new approaches, while maintaining programs already in place that successfully address high risk drinking in the college community.

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