

The Presidential Leadership Academy
Task Force on the Prevention of High-Risk College Drinking:
Alumni

FINAL REPORT

Ilana Bucholtz
Lindsay Eisenhut
Christopher Randby
Kaitlyn Randol
Alexander Thomson

“Perception is real even when it is not reality.”

-Edward de Bono,

Leading U.S. authority in the field of human thinking, originator of Lateral Thinking

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Dr. Christian Brady
Dean of the Schreyer Honors College

Mrs. Melissa Doberstein
Program Director of the Presidential Leadership Academy

Ms. Lynne Feeley
B.A. in English from Cornell University and currently pursuing a Graduate Degree at Duke University

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I. Introduction

At noon on Wednesday in New Haven, CT, Philomena Sappio prepares lunch and pours herself four ounces of wine. Later at 6:00 p.m., while enjoying her dinner, she consumes an additional six ounces of wine. This daily routine of drinking wine with her meals has been commonplace since earlier days in her native country of Italy and will continue for the rest of her years in America. Many other Italian immigrants follow this same regimen. “Alcohol has no larger social or emotional reward. It’s food, consumed according to the same quotidian rhythms as pasta or cheese.”¹ This healthier attitude toward alcohol, however, did not persist into the following generations of Italian immigrants. Yale sociologists, Phyllis Williams and Robert Straus, conducted a study requiring 10 first-and-second generation Italian-Americans to keep diaries describing their drinking habits. They found that “Americans did not learn to drink like Italians.”² These Italian immigrant families had lost their healthier alcohol habits by the time of the third and fourth generations. The more “American” attitude towards alcohol that they adopted is ubiquitous among college students today.

Pennsylvania State University students embody these attitudes about drinking that do not regard alcohol as a food or as part of a meal, but rather as a social lubricant. At 9:00 a.m. on almost any football game day, Penn State students can be found participating in “eggs and kegs.” For instance, at one such tailgate, Jane Doe consumed four beers and a few shots of vodka before a noon kickoff. After leaving Beaver Stadium around 4:00 p.m., Jane Doe attended a celebratory

¹ Williams, Phyllis H., and Robert Straus. *Drinking Patterns of Italians in New Haven. Utilization of the Personal Diary As a Research Technique.* New Haven: Yale Univ, 1950.

² *Ibid.*

party where she resumed heavy alcohol consumption. The following morning like 94.7% of all high-risk college drinkers, Jane Doe experienced a hangover.³

The consequences of high-risk college drinking in educational institutions have risen to a level of great national concern. Students enter collegiate environments with skewed perceptions that promote excessive drinking. Academics have become significantly devalued in the eyes of first-year students on college campuses nationwide. Rather, college life has more to do with drinking and socializing than the pursuit of knowledge.

This shift is illustrated in a 14-year college alcohol study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health, consisting of four national surveys in over 80 publications, and a nationally-representative sample of 50,000 students at 120 colleges. This study “was designed to provide the first nationally representative picture of college student alcohol use and to describe the drinking behavior of this high risk group.”⁴ Regarding academics, 25% of students reported “missing classes, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers and receiving lower grades overall.”⁵ While academics declining, sexual abuse cases are steadily increasing as a result of prevalent alcohol use on campuses. According to the article, “Magnitude and Trends in Alcohol Related Mortality and Morbidity Among US College Students Ages 18 to 24, 1998-2005” in *The Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs*, from 1998-2001 more than 97,000 students were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.⁶ According to Richard Felson, Professor

³ Pennsylvania State University. *Annual Assessment Report 2008-2009*. p. 21

⁴ Wechsler, Henry, and Toben F. Nelson. "What We Have Learned From the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study: Focusing Attention on College Student Alcohol Consumption and the Environmental Conditions That Promote It."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hingson, Ralph. “Magnitude of Alcohol-Related Mortality And Morbidity Among U.S. College Students Ages 18–24: Changes from 1998 to 2001.” p. 267

of Crime, Law, and Justice, and Sociology at Penn State, only 31% of all sexual assaults are even reported.⁷

Pop culture, which can be an effective indicator of current American customs and concerns, has incorporated these trends of significant alcohol use and related sexual assaults into many of its productions. Michael Park of Fox News explains this phenomenon when he says, "...movies such as National Lampoon's Animal House and Old School, paint the campus experience as a nonstop tour de farce of beer, binges, and last and somewhat least, books."⁸ In addition to the immediate repercussions binge drinking has inflicted on college campuses, administration officials are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of binge drinking on student's futures.

A second conclusion drawn from the Harvard School of Public Health study states that nearly three in five students who binge drink qualify as alcohol abusers and of those same five students, one can be classified as alcohol dependent.⁹ To put these ratios into perspective, in a large lecture hall of 350 students, 154 will engage in high-risk drinking. Of these individuals, about 31 will be dependent on alcohol. These sobering statistics are even more dramatic when viewed in connection with mortality rates as a result of alcohol among college students, aged 18-24 in the United States. "Alcohol related unintentional injury deaths increased 3% per 100,000 from 1,140 in 1998 to 1,825 in 2005."¹⁰ The consequences of high-risk college drinking resulting in declining academics, increased sexual assaults, staggering numbers of alcohol-

⁷ Felson, Professor Richard. Department of Sociology and Crime, Law, and Justice. Lecture.

⁸ Park, Michael. "College Alcohol Abuse Sparks Drinking Prevention Debate."

⁹ Wechsler, Henry, and Toben F. Nelson. "What We Have Learned From the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study: Focusing Attention on College Student Alcohol Consumption and the Environmental Conditions That Promote It."

¹⁰ Ibid.

dependent students, and alcohol related deaths have become a major concern for educational establishments nationwide.

Penn State is no exception to the shift in the drinking culture plaguing universities across the country. Commonly referred to as a “drinking school with a football problem,” Penn State was named the nation’s number one party school for the 2009-2010 academic school year.¹¹ Consequences surrounding high-risk drinking have penetrated all aspects of student life. From academics to relationships, alcohol has become commonplace whether one is directly participating or indirectly affected. Penn State conducts an annual PULSE survey, which presents aggregate data portraying issues faced by Penn State students. According to the 2008-2009 assessment, 61.4% of students categorized as high-risk drinkers had a grade point average of less than 3.0. The survey lists consequences of excessive drinking ranging from missing classes to experiencing unwanted sexual encounters.¹²

Penn State must not only address the problems of high-risk college drinking that are typical of all American educational institutions but also specific issues to Penn State. The surrounding community members have a unique relationship with the University insofar as they live within such close proximity to students. As a result, there is frequent overlap between destructive student behavior and residents’ privacy. “Every morning, I come in with beer cans in our bushes in front of our school, and people have urinated at our fences,” said Jon Downs, Director of State College Area School Districts Delta Program.¹³ Many community members, who share similar opinions to Downs, no longer venture downtown during peak partying hours for fear of harassment.

¹¹ Beale, John H. "Princeton Review Rankings: Penn State Is Life of the Party - USATODAY.com."

¹² Pennsylvania State University. *Annual Assessment Report 2008-2009*. p. 6

¹³ Mahon, Ed. "Table talk seeks fix to drinking problems."

An event that has outraged community members is the notorious State Patty's Day. This year, the student-fabricated, day-long drinking event, led to 160 arrests, which is twice as many as the previous two years combined. The police-station was also bombarded with 365 calls throughout the weekend.¹⁴ The increased presence of law enforcement required to deal with the influx in complaints and arrests cost the State College Borough approximately \$15,000 dollars in taxpayer money according to State College Police Chief Tom King.¹⁵ Further remonstrations from State College Police Department Captain, Dana Leonard, described the event as having only "one purpose – to see how many people can get drunk." The combination of community resentment and negative social implications of high-risk drinking behaviors has been acknowledged by the University's administration. Penn State has been actively pursuing solutions to the overwhelming alcohol problem in an attempt to effectively alter alcohol consumption practices among its 38,630 undergraduate students.

The Presidential Leadership Academy gave the following charge to the Academy students: "The primary assignment is the development of a policy paper corresponding to one of the six aspects of HRCDD (high Risk College Drinking). Each student will be placed in one of six groups...the group will research, develop, write and on the last day of class present a policy paper on that aspect to Damon Sims, Vice President of Student Affairs."¹⁶ In developing this program, the administration decided upon six critical aspects of high-risk college drinking that needed to be addressed, which are:

- Culture
- First-year Transition
- Alumni

¹⁴ Special to The Patriot-News. "160 arrested in unofficial 'State Patty's Day' in State College."

¹⁵ King, Tom. Personal Interview. 2 Mar. 2010

¹⁶ Brady, Professor Christian. Honors 301H Spring 2010 Syllabus

- Greek Community
- Academic Expectations
- “Pre-gaming”

The intent of this project was to allow students to utilize the critical thinking skills they have acquired through the Academy to address a current issue facing the community. Among other topics considered, high-risk college drinking was decided upon because of recent significant events, which brought this topic to the forefront of discussion. Specifically, the Alumni Group was tasked with researching alumni involvement in high-risk college drinking at Penn State as well as proposing possible policy solutions targeting alumni.

II. Research

i. Preconceived Notions & Research Progression

In determining which six aspects of high-risk college drinking to assess, ‘alumni’ was decided upon under the assumption that the task force would focus on alumni interactions and behaviors in the Greek community. However, the research directed us elsewhere. Despite the contributions of alumni to dangerous drinking habits among students in the Greek community, their behavior during visits to events like football tailgating and Arts Fest were believed to more critically impact students. The initial consideration was the role of alumni in furnishing alcohol to students at these events. Therefore, the first policy proposal contemplated was a punitive measure directed at alumni to decrease the alcohol available to students. Consequently, decreasing the likelihood students would endanger themselves.

The role of alumni in high-risk college drinking is a rather abstract concept that is difficult to determine for a number of reasons. There is a staggering lack of research or statistics on the matter, few people familiar with the issue of high-risk college drinking even recognize alumni as contributors; and the politics surrounding alumni can be very heated. Furthermore, are the administrators who deny the involvement of alumni correct; are alumni even involved in high-risk college drinking?

Before that question can be answered, however, a clear understanding of what ‘involvement’ constitutes should be explored. Alumni have the potential to affect the drinking practices of college students in two ways. First, they can have an immediate impact by directly providing alcohol to the students: offering drinks at tailgates or furnishing fraternities with alcohol. The second kind of involvement is more indirect and less quantifiable. The behavior of alumni sends messages when they visit the campus, which whether they realize it or not, affects the perceptions of students and in turn, shapes their future habits.

In determining whether or not alumni are involved directly in high-risk college drinking, the behavior of alumni during the football season was carefully researched. Students Penn State football experience inevitably includes unintentional observations of the behaviors of returning alumni. Tailgating is a game day tradition that has in the past been focused on spending time with family, friends, and alumni to celebrate school pride. Inappropriate and illegal behavior, such as providing alcohol to minors, was determined to be a common occurrence. Unfortunately, in recent years, tailgating has been subverted to the point where it is nearly unrecognizable. The Penn State University Police website describes this shift in the Penn State tailgating culture as follows: “Increasingly in recent years, some people have used football

Saturdays as simply an excuse to stage an all-day drinking party in the University's parking lots and have lost the true spirit of Penn State football.”¹⁷

To better understand the new Penn State tailgating culture, the first phase of research centered on investigating the alcohol policies of the other Big Ten universities as a comparison to our own (See Appendix A). The intention was to determine if this shift was a result of a national culture shift that plagued schools similar to Penn State. If the other institutions faced similar problems, what were they doing to combat it? We discovered that nearly all the Big Ten Schools prohibit alcohol possession or consumption in their respective stadiums. Some schools, such as the University of Minnesota, have taken even greater steps by prohibiting alcohol related games at tailgating sites. However, no Big Ten institutions have gone so far as to make tailgating a dry event.

It is important to note that few administrators at Penn State were willing to even acknowledge the significance of alumni conduct on high-risk college drinking. While there are certainly instances of the provision of alcohol to minors by alumni, this behavior is not recognized as occurring frequently enough to have a substantial effect on college drinking. For example, when asked in an NPR piece titled “#1 Party School” whether alumni contributed directly to the problems at Penn State, University President, Graham B. Spanier, said, “No, I don't buy that at all... the fact is what happens, you know, with 6 or 7 home games is not the heart of this issue here, we're talking about, you know, the weekend-in-weekend-out every day of the week throughout the year kind of issue.”¹⁸ Similarly, during an informal class discussion,

¹⁷ University Police. Pennsylvania State University

¹⁸ Glass, Ira. “#1 Party School” NPR

Vice President of Student Affairs, Damon Sims was unwilling to name alumni as direct contributors to the problems plaguing Penn State.

Further complicating the process of determining alumni involvement was the general lack of data on the effects of alumni on the drinking behaviors of students. It was quickly apparent that there was a significant dearth of information. There are a great number of contributing factors to dangerous drinking that have been explored by a wide array of academics over the years, none of which include alumni. Even within the data that was available, it was clear that within the spectrum of age ranges of alumni, perspectives varied greatly between the oldest and youngest members. This would prove a challenge to our ability to form a single, cohesive policy that addressed the concerns of these former Nittany Lions.

Alumni donations to Penn State are greatly valued and important; therefore, it is in the interest of the administration to ensure their continued support. Many administrators are greatly hesitant to upset alumni by accusing them of contributing to high-risk college drinking and thereby chase away financial contributions. Furthermore, the administrators not only want to avoid offending alumni, but also try to avoid restricting alumni as a result of student behaviors. The alumni clearly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with any policies that might restrict their alcohol related practices, as seen in 2006 when the University banned drinking at tailgates from kick off to the final play of the football game for the remainder of the season. The *Daily Collegian* wrote an article, "Ban gets icy reply," that quoted Penn State alumnus Bob Reichart, who exclaimed frankly, "I think it's stupid," in reference to the new policy. Another alumnus, Geoff McCollom, added, "We give \$1,800 a year to be here; we've earned the right to drink

during the game.”¹⁹ Considering the power wielded by alumni, it would be unwise to target them specifically in alcohol policies because of the backlash and potential repercussions it could generate.

Recognizing this hurdle, further research was geared towards educational institutions that have successfully instituted policies that affected alumni. The University of Rhode Island was one such institution, which implemented an alcohol policy restricting alumni. The policy was not enacted without difficulty, however. The campus-wide ban on alcohol, which extended to all athletic events, proved to be successful in decreasing underage drinking at the University. Of additional importance, the ban, while it faced initial push back, in the end did not deter monetary contributions from alumni.

Given that alumni, as of yet, cannot be quantifiably determined as part of the problem, that few administrators are willing to consider them a problem, and that politically they are untouchable, few routes were left open. The acknowledgement by Vice President Damon Sims that alumni, while not directly contributing to high-risk college drinking, could affect college drinking behavior through indirect means, was the only alumni impact still open for exploration. At this point, the decision was made to shift our perspective from understanding the negative impacts alumni wrought on high-risk college drinking practices to imagining the potential positive influence they could have. With a view towards eliciting the help of alumni and considering the role of alumni behavior, all further research was directed to better understand how the alumni might impact student drinking behavior through their own actions.

¹⁹ Larchuk, Travis. "Ban gets icy reply."

In keeping with this new approach, we sought to determine the psychological impact of peer behaviors on an individual's decision making process. Alumni may return for only 48 hours to relive their "glory days," but their actions do not go unnoticed and have a direct impact on the behavior of students. The studies used in reaching these conclusions are referenced in the *Literature Review and Consultancy Visit* section of this paper. Many of the studies have suggested that students' perceptions and assumptions about the drinking culture have an impact on their own drinking behaviors. For example, when a student overhears a recent graduate telling a story about how they spent an afternoon at Hooters "getting completely hammered", or they see an alumni stumbling down College Avenue at one in the morning on a Saturday, their assumptions of the acceptability of such behavior might be reinforced. Alumni may not be permanent members of the State College community, but their intermittent visits do not go unnoticed, nor are they innocuous. Building from this, a search was conducted for already-established student outreach and mentor programs that utilized alumni. The results of the research showed that few universities incorporate alumni in addressing dangerous drinking practices. Alumni involvement in combating high-risk college drinking was only seen in a proposal from the Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse at the College of New Jersey (See Literature Review).

After researching alumni involvement in high-risk college drinking, it became clear that the potential positive impact alumni could have far outweighed their negative influence. If alumni's behaviors can impact a student's perspective on the drinking culture at the University and consequently their own drinking habits, then the greatest role alumni play in high-risk college drinking is in the form of a behavioral model. This decision marked a critical turning point in the evolution of our project whereby alumni were viewed as part of the solution as

opposed to being targeted as part of the problem. After journeying through the research on alumni involvement in high-risk college drinking, it was evident that the best solutions would be those that focused on educating and raising awareness among alumni.

ii. Literature Review & Consultancy Visits

The Impact of peer and parental norms and behavior on adolescent drinking: The role of drinker prototypes by the Addiction Research Institute Rotterdam, the Netherlands

In researching high-risk college drinking, we looked to various studies on the psychological impact of others on drinking behaviors. This study, "...aimed to test mediating influences of prototypes on relations between peer and parental variables and adolescents' alcohol use."²⁰ Data was retrieved through a longitudinal study of 2,031 students in the Netherlands consisting of written questionnaires. The study shows that parents' physical consumption helps determine when adolescents consume their first drink. Additionally, parents' attitudes towards drinking affects adolescents' continued drinking habits. The effects of parents' drinking norms on their children's long-term behavior are similar to the role alumni play in the lives of college students. In other words, a connection can be made between alumni norms towards alcohol and students long-term drinking habits. If a program intended to transform alumni attitudes, which have been shown to contribute to students' perceptions and behaviors regarding alcohol while at school, can be created, rates of high-risk college drinking may be altered.

²⁰ Spijkerman, Renske. "The impact of peer and parental norms and behavior on adolescent drinking; The role of drinker prototypes." p. 12

The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behavior in young people: systematic review of prospective cohort studies by the Oxford Brooks University, School of Health and Social Care

The conclusions of the various studies presented in this article suggest “there is an association between exposure to alcohol advertising or promotional activity and subsequent alcohol consumption in young people.” This research article analyzed studies, which looked at “more than 13,000 young people aged 10 to 26 years old...[and] evaluated a range of different alcohol advertisement and marketing exposures including print and broadcast media.”²¹ Essentially, this study supported our assumption that the interactions of students and exogenous agents have an impact on their decision to imbibe alcohol and the rate of consumption. While this study looks at the impact of increased alcohol use as a result of advertisements, it also lends support to the idea that advertisements could potentially lead to decreased alcohol use among college-aged students.

Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse Final Report by the College of New Jersey

The College of New Jersey’s *Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse Final Report*, was very useful when forming our policies. The report provided an example of a university’s incorporation of alumni into its policy proposal, which intended to decrease high-risk college drinking. Interestingly, Commission members were comprised of students, faculty, staff, parents and alumni. Alumni were included in the policy formation process because the commission realized, “a collaborative effort will be needed in order for students, parents, faculty, staff and alumni to ‘buy-in’ to the vision.”²² The report also included anecdotes from alumni

²¹ Smith, Lesley. "The effect of alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal on drinking behaviour in young people: systematic review of prospective cohort studies."

²² "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse at The College of New Jersey." p. 46

who fondly remembered participating in events during their college years that were alcohol-free. Recognizing the potential of alumni, the College of New Jersey sought to involve them in prevention practices, as seen in the suggestion by the Commission to involve alumni in social events like Homecoming and fundraising events where alumni could model “legal, responsible drinking that insures the health and safety of students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors to the college.”²³

E-mail Interview with Kim Dude, coordinator of the University of Missouri-Columbia’s social norms program

In researching the social norming approach, it became clear that a number of educational institutions had implemented programs with great success. Schools, such as the University of Missouri-Columbia, saw dramatic decreases in high-risk drinking during the earliest years of the program; the University of Missouri-Columbia saw a 21% reduction in heavy episodic drinking. Included in the social norms program was training for the most influential people in a student’s life, such as admissions recruiters, academic advisors, faculty, residential life staff, orientation leaders, coaches, parents, and key administrators. To further understand the success of the program, we contacted the Coordinator of the University of Missouri-Columbia’s Social Norms Program, Kim Dude. Interested in using their successful program as a model for our recommendations, we asked her about the role, if any, alumni played or could play. She responded with the following:

“The closet outreach we have done related to alumni would be our fan behavior efforts. We have surveyed our students and ticket holders about tailgating. What they like about tailgating, what they think of other fans behavior at tailgating and etc. We then created a social norms marketing effort that we placed on sandwich boards throughout the tailgating area. These messages illustrated that alcohol had a role in tailgating but was

²³ Ibid. p. 27

not considered as important as the friends, family, food, the game itself were. We also learned that people didn't like it when other fans were rude to the opposition or when they littered or when they got too drunk. We also share social norming messages to parents during our summer orientation program."

Phone Interview with Jim Purdum, General Manager of the Nittany Lion Inn and the Penn Stater and Ashley Frankhouse, front desk clerk of the Quality Inn on North Atherton St. (March 14, 2010)

In order to gauge the plausibility of our proposed reminder program, we made an attempt to interview several general managers of local hotels. Although four of the seven called on March 14, 2010 were unresponsive, Jim Purdum, the General Manager of the Nittany Lion Inn and Penn Stater Hotel was very willing to serve as a resource. Mr. Purdum, an alum himself (class of 1977), has been an employee of the University for 21 years and has gained open access to State College police reports, which has made him well-informed on the matter. He described the clientele of the Nittany Lion Inn as an older crowd, many in their mid- to upper-fifties. Many of his guests are alumni and retirees whose families have stayed at this establishment for several generations. Mr. Purdum depicted these clients as respectable, responsible men and women who have rarely caused the hotel any issues. While the guests of the Penn Stater are a bit younger and may exhibit more bizarre behaviors at times, "they certainly are not the people publically urinating in the streets,"²⁴ Purdum said. All of these guests are very loyal and have high regard for the institution. They contribute many resources to the University and should be considered helpful in formulating a solution.

Mr. Purdum clearly stated, "We don't want to offend these people with such messages [about the impact of their drinking behaviors on surrounding students]."²⁵ Presently, every hotel guest receives a letter on football weekends that is written and signed by Mr. Purdum. The letter

²⁴ Purdum, Jim. Telephone interview. 22 Mar. 2010.

²⁵ Ibid.

touches on key principles of the University such as “May no act of ours bring shame” and may we have “success with honor.” Anything beyond this would be “incredibly wasteful,” Purdum said, because “the people we’ve lost [to the current drinking culture] won’t read a ticket stub or coaster and think twice.”²⁶

Mr. Purdum believes that there needs to be more engagement from the alumni association. “They should foster innovative ideas to combat the lunacy and to contribute to the solution.” This year’s State Patty’s Day festivities fostered numerous arrests, 60% of which were involving people unaffiliated with the University. Mr. Purdum noted that Arts Fest is another example of when his guests tend to drop their inhibitions most, but many are “non-alumni jumping on the bandwagon.”²⁷ Yet, hotel guests read the local newspapers and are appalled by the current behaviors being exhibited here and the negative image reflected onto the University. Betsey Howell at the Central Pennsylvania Visitors Bureau has cited, while studies show the vast majority of visitors are not alumni, these guests contribute to the University’s reputation.

We were also able to speak with Ashley Frankhouse, the front desk clerk of the Quality Inn on North Atherton Street. She described football weekends as the busiest, but commented that there have not been any memorable alcohol problems or behavioral issues in the past. She also mentioned that although room rates are considered quite affordable, ranging from \$84.99-\$99.99 a night, the majority of guests, approximately 60%, are over the age of 50. While discussing possible solutions with Ms. Frankhouse, a conflict emerged regarding the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

implementation of our proposed policy due to their corporate policy of strictly using items branded by their company.

Interview with Sara Jones, Assistant Director of Student Involvement at the Penn State Alumni Association (February 18, 2010)

In an attempt to gain more information from people often in contact with alumni, we contacted Sara Jones, Assistant Director of Student Involvement at the Penn State Alumni Association. She discussed the motivations behind alumni drinking behaviors when they return to campus, noting that alumni primarily come back to Penn State to relive their college years. Campus provides a familiar and comfortable sanctuary, which allows them to leave their problems at home and let loose. Contributing to this mentality is an idealist view of their college years, formed from repeatedly recounting their experiences to others and to themselves. An element of this tendency, she explained, had to do with the institution of “Senior Week” at Penn State. The very last memory most seniors have of college is a string of parties, bars, and various other drunken moments during the week between finals and graduation.

Interview with Jeff Rundle, Beta Theta Pi re-establishment coordinator for Penn State (March 15, 2010)

To gain a Greek life perspective, we enlisted the help of Jeff Rundle, the Beta Theta Pi re-establishment coordinator for Penn State. In the spring of 2009, the National Beta Chapter revoked the charter of the Penn State Alpha Upsilon Chapter after failing to uphold their rules and standards. After the former Betas were evicted from the house, the National Chapter sent in Jeff Rundle to start a new Beta colony at Penn State. Since then, the chapter house has been renovated, designated substance-free, and has recently inducted over 60 new Beta Theta Pi

brothers. With this history in mind, we asked Mr. Rundle about the role alumni played in the degradation and subsequent rejuvenation of the Alpha Upsilon Chapter.

He remarked that in his experience, alumni are largely responsible for setting the standard when it comes to social interaction, especially at events. This role is even greater when new students are being inducted. New students have nothing to base their expectations off of except stories from alumni. The problem with that, he says, is that stories tend to be sensationalized. Hypothetically, if an alum had an incident where he threw something out of the window when he was drunk one time at the frat, the next iteration of the tale might be him being thrown through the window. Therefore, what normally makes for entertaining tales of misadventures acts as a dangerous standard and set of expectations.

During the discussion of possible roles alumni could play in combating high-risk college drinking, Mr. Rundle commented on how differences in age and experience can prevent alumni from connecting with current members of the fraternity. This inability to relate, limits their ability to influence. However, should there be a way for alumni to connect to students (particularly younger ones) he admitted that opportunities for change could develop.

Interview with Tom King, State College Police Chief (March 2, 2010)

To further grasp the exact nature of high-risk college drinking and its implications for the surrounding community, we interviewed State College Police Chief, Tom King. This consultation transpired on Tuesday, March 2, immediately following State Patty's Day. The student-created holiday of State Patty's represents the pinnacle of dangerous drinking practices at Penn State. The State College Police was forced to prepare for this day of expected alcohol-related debauchery by spending an estimated \$15,000 to increase the available police officers

by 35-40%.²⁸ This year there was a 100% increase in arrests and citations for alcohol related incidents. Chief King also noted that of the arrests and citations, a significant number were administered to college-aged students who did not attend Penn State. State Patty's has become renowned across all of Pennsylvania and has even garnered attention in newspaper publications as far away as Los Angeles. The 'culture' of Penn State and its biggest drinking holiday, State Patty's, was so appealing that many non-Penn State students chose to make the trek to State College to experience the holiday first hand. It was under these circumstances that a discussion on lowering the prevalence of dangerous drinking, and specifically how the alumni might be involved, occurred.

Chief King was very receptive to the idea of inviting alumni to model responsible drinking behaviors. He noted that of alumni, those under the age of 30 were most often a concern for the State College police. He therefore suggested the use of three or four well-established alumni, whose opinions all would respect, to act as leaders within their community to vocalize their concerns. When asked to elaborate on some of the problems the State College police have with alumni, Chief King was forced to speculate because he does not have any statistics on them the way he does with students. He then explained the process by which the State College police identify who among their arrests and citations are students. The process described entails the transmittance of arrest reports to the Penn State judicial affairs office where the names are run through the student database and the results are sent back to the State College police.

From this consultancy visit we came to two realizations. Foremost, it was beneficial to confirm that the State College police would support attempts to involve alumni against rising

²⁸ King, Tom, Chief of State College Police. Personal Interview. 2 Mar. 2010

numbers of dangerous drinkers. After seeking statistics on alumni, again, the search proved fruitless. This only helped to reaffirm the conclusion that alumni involvement in high-risk college drinking is an area of research not fully explored.

E-mail Correspondence with Dr. Robert L. Carothers, former president of the University of Rhode Island (February 2, 2010)

In the process of forming our own proposals, we consulted administrators from other institutions that had implemented effective programs against high-risk college drinking. Dr. Robert L. Carothers, former President of the University of Rhode Island, was helpful in this endeavor. The University of Rhode Island (URI) had been named “#1 party school” by the *Princeton Review* three years in a row before Dr. Carothers decided to take action. In an effort to promote change, Carothers implemented a number of ambitious programs, such as a “three strikes” approach towards student alcohol offenders, as well as the first dry homecoming in University history. Since adopting a more stringent policy, freshman retention rose from 76 to 82 percent and SAT scores of applying students increased by an average of 200 points.²⁹

At Penn State there has been a legitimate concern of chasing away alumni donations to the University. We, therefore, were curious about the effects of the newly implemented alcohol policies at URI on alumni donations.

“People are also afraid of legal liability issues, which emerging case law suggests are not a problem, and of angering key constituencies. But we’ve seen important benefits from focusing on the problem [at URI] and taking a tough stand. Applications are up, student quality is up, more students are participating in activities like drama and music, and alumni giving has increased, for example. It’s become clear to me that people are hungry for strong statements about values. I know that support for me personally has

²⁹ Carothers, Dr. Robert L. E-mail correspondence. 2 Feb 2010.

*grown with my reputation for taking strong ethical positions and sticking with them.”
(College Drinking Prevention)³⁰*

Correspondence with Bob Heisse, Centre Daily Times Reporter (March 17, 2010)

The Centre Daily Times (CDT) is a local paper that has become an active participant in the high-risk college drinking discussion. For the Spring 2010 semester, the *CDT* is running a weekly feature describing the drinking situation at Penn State. The column includes guest writers that propose possible solutions to the problem.

Through our research it became clear that increasing education and awareness would be tools. Incorporating the community into our initiative could garner greater support from administrators and increase the likelihood of success. We therefore reached out to *CDT* reporter Bob Heisse, who was extremely pleased to incorporate students into the weekly column. Mr. Heisse asked us to write an introductory article on the background of the Presidential Leadership Academy and the reasons for the project, as well as an explanation of our intended goals. Curbing dangerous drinking habits of Penn State students will not succeed without the support and involvement of the community.

III. Policy Proposals

i. Recommendation #1

Collaborate with State College establishments to institute an advertising program that aims to raise awareness concerning the alumni impact on undergraduate students at Penn State.

³⁰ Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "How To Reduce High-Risk College Drinking: Use Proven Strategies, Fill Research Gaps."

This social-norms inspired program directly targets alumni in their consumption of alcohol. To effectively accomplish the goal of educating and promoting self-awareness among alumni, advertising tactics should be implemented throughout the State College community. The purpose of this advertising is to raise awareness about the impact of alumni drinking behaviors on students. Messages should be presented through various media, including but not limited to coasters in downtown bars and restaurants, room keys at local hotels, ticket stubs at community events, trash receptacles, and CATA bus banners. These venues have been selected in order to maximize visibility.

The examples set by alumni influence students' perceptions, which are later reflected in their individual drinking practices. The intention of the program is to focus on utilizing alumni as part of the solution, not to regard alumni as a root of the problem. Placing ads throughout the community serves to remind alumni of the potential difference they can make.

During their time in State College alumni will encounter various advertisements, which will encourage them to think twice before consuming their next drink. Therefore, as alumni begin monitoring their personal consumption of alcohol, indirectly students may begin to recognize their own outlandish behaviors. This motion is supported by research conducted by the Addiction Research Institute in The Netherlands, which shows that parents' behaviors impact the longer-term behavior of their children. As parents are role models for their children, similarly alumni set the standard embraced by incoming students.

A successful program was instituted at Florida State University in January 2002, which inspired this advertising program. Titled "The Real Project," the initiative aimed "to correct

misperceptions about student alcohol use and to reinforce healthy, protective norms.”³¹ The program reached out to the student body through a variety of media including: billboards, movie theater ads, and social networking services. Since the start of this program, high-risk drinking at Florida State declined 20.9% overall. Also, students’ perceptions of their peers who drank moderately increased by 22.9%, suggesting that the student body believed their drinking behaviors were well refined.³²

In addition to looking at the Florida State program, policy proposals out of the College of New Jersey were also considered. The College of New Jersey addressed the role of alumni by proposing their increased involvement in student social activities. “In this way, our alumni can be seen as assets, as partners in implementing carefully designed social programs that include serving alcoholic beverages on campus, including students of legal drinking age in the process, in an effort to ‘model’ moderation and responsible consumption of alcohol in appropriate social settings.”³³ The goal of TCNJ’s proposal was to increase alumni involvement by informing students of responsible drinking behavior. Recommendation one incorporates a similar concept by attempting to use alumni as models for appropriate drinking conduct.

While the success of similar programs suggests positive results from this initiative, there are still potential difficulties in its implementation. One concern is that these advertisements may be found offensive by older alumni. The intended target audience is alumni under the age of 30, who are most often engaging in excessive consumption and irresponsible behavior. However, as the messages will be placed in public areas they will be received by all alumni,

³¹ "Case Studies." National Social Norms Institute. University of Virginia

³² Ibid.

³³ "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse at The College of New Jersey." The College of New Jersey. p. 47

including those who behave responsibly, most of whom are over 30 years old. As General Manager, Jim Purdum '77, said, "It's just preaching to the choir."³⁴

Another obstacle that may be encountered is enticing local establishments to participate in the program. There are two main concerns, the first of which is that corporate policy may prevent the placement of advertisements on materials found in their places of business. For example, Ashley Frankhouse, an employee of the Quality Inn on Atherton Street, noted that their corporate policy requires that all their products bear only the company brand. Secondly, some local establishments may be unwilling to comply with this proposed initiative. Local bars may fear a loss of revenue from decreased alcohol sales as a result of these advertisements.

Lastly, this program requires frequent updating in order to keep the advertisements current and captivating. The high demands of this initiative would entail employing a team to frequently monitor and refresh the messages. This program will be most effective if there is constant ingenuity.

ii. **Recommendation #2**

Create a program responsible for gathering and analyzing data pertaining to alumni and their effects on undergraduate drinking behaviors.

Throughout the research process, our team encountered several anecdotes about how alumni involvement and their behaviors can have both a direct and indirect impact on the drinking habits of students. At Penn State, alumni can have both a positive and negative impact. Despite the wealth of anecdotal evidence and personal intuition on the matter, the supply of statistical and scientific information regarding the relationship between alumni and students'

³⁴ Purdum, Jim. Telephone interview. 22 Mar. 2010.

drinking behavior is limited. According the article, “Social Norms and the Prevention of Alcohol Misuse in Collegiate Context,” from *The Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, “The value of graduate [alumni] norms in prevention initiatives remains an open question, however, without any research evidence.”³⁵ Furthermore, the few solutions incorporating alumni have not been continually studied, making the analysis of their effectiveness all but impossible.

In the interest of addressing the issue of dangerous alcohol consumption on campus, as well as empowering other collegiate institutions to do the same, we recommend the creation of a program to gather and analyze data on the role of alumni in high-risk college drinking. We believe that strong and definitive evidence is a foundation for a successful program. With the largest alumni network in the world, Penn State is in the most advantageous and well-equipped position to lead research efforts in this area. Leaving the collection methods of this data up to the entity in charge we advise at least including ways of: understanding alumni behavior both on- and off-campus, measuring the frequency and nature of interaction between students and alumni, documenting solutions involving alumni and their correlation with student binge drinking, and collecting the perspectives and opinions of alumni with regards to student alcohol abuse.

In addition to the costs associated with this initiative, we understand the possible issue of inconclusive evidence at its outset. As with any research endeavor, the difference between correlation and causation presents an area of potential difficulty – one that can only be overcome by large amounts of data over a large period of time with a healthy amount of experimentation. We strongly recommend continuing this program for several years in order to increase the amount of reliable information and eventually reach a definitive answer. This research will lead

³⁵ Perkins, H. Wesley. Social Norms and the Prevention of Alcohol Misuse in Collegiate Contexts. p. 170

to an improved understanding of the relationship between students and alumni, as well as valuable foresight into the effectiveness of solutions Penn State might implement. For a research program such as this to perform optimally, the university must be dedicated to its implementation, diligent in its improvement, and cautious with the analysis of the information it generates. Should these criteria be met, we believe the conclusions derived from this policy will bring Penn State and other similar universities much closer to a solution to the problem of high-risk college drinking.

IV. Conclusions

i. Reflection & Areas for Further Research

After a semester of examining alumni and their involvement in undergraduate student drinking, we have concluded that they are uninformed, underused, and under-researched. We believe that the two policies put forth will encourage alumni to become more proactive in tackling excessive student alcohol consumption. Implementing an advertising campaign in local establishments that are frequently visited by alumni will hopefully prove a catalyst to move high-risk college drinking into a more visible forum. There exists a great potential for alumni to be a part of the high-risk college drinking solution; however, the Penn State administration relies on factual information and the limited research that exists about alumni hinders their ability and willingness to utilize them as a resource.

In moving forward and pursuing a solution to high-risk college drinking, there are a few areas which require further investigation. Towards the end of our research, we spoke with Jim

Edwards, a 1977 Penn State graduate, resident of the Bureau, and alumni corporation president of Sigma Phi Epsilon. Mr. Edwards has already played a large role in addressing the drinking culture at Penn State. As the leader of the alumni fraternity group, he organized the gathering of about 40 university officials, students, neighborhood leaders, and borough council members in January to take action against excessive drinking. Mr. Edwards made it very clear that alumni involvement does matter. Specifically, he discussed the relationship fraternity alumni have with the community and the ways in which they can make a difference, by explicitly stating, “Alumni need to get involved.”³⁶ It became apparent that this would require a coordinated community effort tackled by all members of the area.

Mr. Edwards noted that many of the fraternity alumni are divided over the issue of high-risk college drinking. Many believe that since they were allowed to drink freely, so should this generation. Others, such as Jim Edwards, are more aware of the drastic changes that have occurred and are eager to address the issue. Mr. Edwards presented the following anecdote: “How quickly can you serve 100 people with three kegs? It takes about one half-hour.”³⁷ This is one of the major differences seen today. Kegs are illegal, forcing fraternities to turn to cases of beer and hard liquor. It takes roughly 10 minutes (if that long) to serve 100 people using cans of beer. This allows students to drink five beers very quickly compared to when they had to wait a little longer when using kegs.

Along with educating alumni, it was evident from the conversation that there exists a desire from upperclassmen to be taught appropriate drinking behavior in the “real-world.” Mr. Edwards noted the importance of teaching responsible drinking behavior to students before they

³⁶ Jim Edwards. Interview. 7 Apr. 2010.

³⁷ Ibid.

enter professional environments. About 10 years ago, the senior class of Sigma Phi Epsilon brought to Mr. Edwards's attention their observations that the brothers consumed alcohol differently than those who had previously graduated. In response, Mr. Edwards decided to initiate a workshop where the seniors could learn appropriate and responsible drinking conduct in a business setting. After getting the necessary approvals and gathering interested of-age seniors, Mr. Edwards brought them all to a local bar. Recounting the event, he said that this was an eye opening experience for many of the young men and, consequently, they were more informed about what would be expected of them after college. In our discussion, Mr. Edwards emphasized the importance of teaching quality over quantity and even voiced his willingness to participate in a program for current students for these ends. To better educate students, it will be critical to assure that alumni are well-informed. The disparity between alumni perceptions of alcohol consumption is astounding; this indicates that there needs to be a way to properly educate them about the culture shift that has occurred in recent years.

As seen in our second policy proposal, it is imperative to have statistics that illustrate the problem. Beyond obtaining information and gathering the statistics regarding the connection between alumni and high-risk college drinking, it will be equally important to make sure people have access to and are aware of this information. Alumni need to be the driving force behind such an initiative because students often look to them for advice upon graduating. Essentially, Mr. Edwards stressed the need for further education of both alumni and students on appropriate drinking conduct.

In researching the perspectives of alumni of other universities with regards to high-risk college drinking, we came across an online forum established by Hamilton College. On this site, alumni of various generations are easily able to present their opinions on many current issues and

events as well as share their personal experiences. It fosters a conversation amongst the alumni and allows for debate and deep analysis. This “Alumni Review” improves communication between alumni, strengthens their connection with the college, and can greatly influence future decisions made by the school. After all, colleges and universities cherish the beliefs and concerns of alumni, seeing as the monetary contributions of their former students play a significant role in the well-being of these institutions.

While many forums designed to facilitate discussion and conversation amongst Penn State alumni already exist, we found very little evidence indicating the effectiveness of these media. We have discovered that these fragmented communication services had low enrollment, infrequent use, and were completely isolated from one another. Even the most expansive online network of alumni, the Penn State Alumni group on Facebook, with over 10,000 members, was found to be rarely used to discuss anything related to policy at Penn State. Other means of mass communication with alumni do exist, but are primarily a unidirectional process; publications such as *The Penn Stater* and other local alumni newsletters reach a wide audience but do not emphasize feedback or dialogue. After comprehending the current character and qualities of various alumni media (online forums, local and regional magazines, etc.), we believe a Hamilton-like program would be most effective at Penn State.

ii. **Connections with Other High-Risk College Drinking Groups**

Culture

The Penn State drinking culture has evolved over the years and the standards by which acceptable drinking practices are measured have changed with each passing generation. As older alumni observe current student behaviors, they are appalled by the general disrespect exhibited.

Meanwhile, more recent graduates tend to engage in and contribute to the excessive alcohol consumption. The convergence of these two generations occurs habitually throughout the fall semester on football weekends. Their respective behaviors have a direct impact on the current tailgating practices ranging from participation in drinking games to the furnishing of alcohol to those around them. Although alumni are often physically removed from the campus, they have great influence in defining acceptable conduct and forming the drinking culture at Penn State.

First Year Students

Bombarded by images, stories, and other media, students' college experiences are often defined before they even arrive. Currently, there are minimal relations established between incoming students and former Nittany Lions. Alumni need to be involved in the process of changing students' perceptions of alcohol consumption upon entering the University. This requires alumni to actively promote healthier drinking behaviors, be it through a mentorship-inspired program or by other means.

Greek Life

Alumni are often the torchbearers, passing down stories, traditions, and expectations, all of which define the micro-culture of Greek life at Penn State. When Greek alumni come back for specific events such as Homecoming and Greek Week, they jointly partake in the drinking festivities with current undergraduate members. Their explicit behavior further condones and amplifies future, irresponsible drinking patterns. Since Greek organizations play such a prominent role within the social environment of Penn State, alumni are therefore an indirect influence on the drinking culture of a majority of the student population.

Academic Expectations

The alumni connection with this group is less obvious; however, alumni can influence academic standards of Penn State students. Alumni unintentionally emphasize the importance of fulfilling the “college experience” of drinking and partying over excelling academically. When alumni return to Penn State to relive their “glory days,” their actions reflect what they may have valued most about their college experience. When those actions involve excessive alcohol consumption, the definition of “the college experience” is warped to emphasize drinking over academics.

Pre-gaming

As generations have come through, the prevalence and regularity of the pre-gaming phenomenon has increased. This results in a cultural barrier and makes it exceedingly difficult for alumni to work towards a solution. However, if alumni become more cognizant of their drinking behaviors, they can depict responsible and healthy drinking habits.

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VI. Appendix A: Figure 1

University Name	Undergrads	Stadium Size	Tailgating/Alcohol Policy
Indiana University	31,626	52,692	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in stadium. Kegs not permitted unless approved by an Indiana University caterer.
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	30,900	62,870	Alcoholic beverages are not permitted in stadium. No restrictions at tailgating venues.
University of Iowa	20,823	70,585	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in stadium. All alcohol beverages at tailgating sites must be stored in locked containers.
University of Michigan	26,208	106,201	Alcohol possession and or consumption is prohibited at all athletic events inside the stadium.
Michigan State University	36,489	75,005	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in stadium.
University of Minnesota	33,236	50,000 (expansion up to 80,000 seats)	Alcohol consumption by those of legal age is permitted in tailgating lots. Kegs, party balls, drinking game accessories and large quantity or common source containers of alcoholic beverages are not permitted in lots. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted inside the stadium.
Northwestern University	8,476	55,000	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in stadium.
Ohio State University	40,212	102,329	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in the stadium. Alcoholic beverages are permitted in parking lots.
Pennsylvania State University	38,630	107,282	Alcoholic beverages not permitted in the stadium. No alcohol consumption is permitted in parking lots from kick off to the final play.

Perdue University	31,761	62,500	Alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the stadium. Tailgating is not permitted in any of the university's free parking lots.
University of Wisconsin-Madison	30,750	80,321	Designated lot 34 alcohol-free tailgate areas. Students with previous alcohol violations must have a BAC of .00 to enter a subsequent game.