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*She's Working Her Way Through College*; dir. Bruce Humberstone; Ronald Reagan, 1952, U.S.

## Peer Pressure: Binge Drinking

How would you respond if your friends put pressure on you to participate in a binge drinking game?

## EXPLORATION

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After reading the each statement, respond to each one by answering yes (Y) or no (N).

1. I am susceptible to peer pressure and tend to go along with what my friends want to do.
2. It is difficult for me to stand up for my opinion and not follow the crowd.
3. Many of my friends drink a lot and use drugs.
4. If an activity involves risky behavior, I refuse to participate.
5. Drinking more than five drinks at one drinking occasion is not dangerous.
6. Binge drinking occasionally (once a month) is acceptable.
7. Alcohol and substance abuse are part of the culture at most universities today.
8. Moderate drinking is relaxing and good for our health.
9. I am accustomed to drinking heavily, so alcohol doesn't affect me much.
10. I enjoy drinking alcohol in moderation, but I do not engage in excessive drinking.
11. I drink more frequently when I am under stress.
12. Hazing activities should be prohibited at university fraternities.

## GLOSSARY

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<b>abuse</b>	misuse
<b>accustomed</b>	familiar with, used to
<b>binge</b>	to drink more than five alcoholic drinks on one occasion (man) or more than four alcoholic drinks on one occasion (woman) during the past two weeks
<b>bleary</b>	blurry, unfocused
<b>choke</b>	to have difficulty breathing
<b>chug</b>	to gulp down or drink quickly
<b>culture</b>	customs, traditions, way of life
<b>dilapidated</b>	run down, decaying, falling apart, decrepit
<b>exception</b>	exclusion, exemption, different treatment for someone

<b>excessive</b>	extreme, more than necessary
<b>hazing</b>	treating new fraternity members badly, hurting them physically or emotionally as initiation into a fraternity
<b>factor</b>	issue, feature, aspect, reason
<b>fraternity</b>	men's social organization at universities and colleges
<b>hard liquor</b>	alcoholic beverage such as bourbon, gin, rum, scotch, vodka
<b>high</b>	pleasant feeling resulting from drinking alcoholic beverages or using drugs
<b>initiation</b>	opening activity to make new members part of an organization
<b>intoxicating</b>	causing one to become drunk from drinking alcohol
<b>key</b>	important, major, central
<b>moderation</b>	temperance, self-control, not excessive
<b>nerd</b>	studious and intelligent person
<b>pass</b>	to skip or not participate in an activity
<b>peer pressure</b>	attempt by friends to make you do what they want you to do
<b>phenomenon</b>	occurrence, event, trend
<b>pledge (n.)</b>	person who agrees to join a fraternity or sorority
<b>pledge (v.)</b>	to agree to join a fraternity or sorority
<b>pledge master</b>	person in charge of the new fraternity member
<b>prohibit</b>	to forbid, ban, make illegal
<b>reputation</b>	standing in the opinion of others
<b>risky</b>	dangerous, hazardous, unsafe
<b>rush (v.)</b>	to participate in social activities at fraternities and sororities in order to be invited to join these organizations
<b>rush season</b>	period in which fraternities and sororities meet potential new members and consider whether to ask them to join their organizations
<b>shot</b>	drink of hard liquor in a small glass
<b>slump</b>	to fall, droop, slouch
<b>sorority</b>	women's social organization at universities and colleges
<b>stress</b>	tension, strain, pressure
<b>susceptible</b>	likely to be influenced by others' opinions, vulnerable
<b>tend</b>	to be inclined, to be likely, to have a tendency
<b>underage drinking</b>	drinking alcoholic beverages before reaching the age of 21

## CASE STUDY: FOLLOW THE LEADER

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After you read the case study, discuss the major problem the case presents and answer the discussion questions with the members of the class. Then write a case study report following the format that is provided on page 234.

Jack Donohue, from Denver, is a first-year student at Colorado State College. He plans to study computer science, but he is also well aware of the university's reputation as a school whose students love to party, and Jack wants to have a good time. Actually, Jack was kind of a nerd in high school, and he thinks he missed out on lots of fun, so he hopes to make up for what he missed. He has just pledged a fraternity, Gamma Delta Chi, where he was a popular choice among all the members during rush because of his great personality.

Jack is proud that he was asked to pledge Gamma Delta Chi, and he wrote emails to his parents and sisters telling them about how lucky he was to be chosen. The Gamma Deltas are considered one of the best fraternities on campus, and it is not easy to become a fraternity brother. Most of the guys are good athletes as well as students, and the fraternity has always been the place to go for a good party. Jack was also asked to join several other fraternities, but he decided on Gamma Delta Chi because he knows some of its members from his high school days in Denver. His high school friends reassured Jack that the hazing was not as bad as it was at other fraternities, which was a key factor in his decision to go Gamma Delt.

The rush season has just ended, and the fraternity is throwing a huge party in its aging house to celebrate having pledged 12 new "brothers." Jack is excited and has already had a few beers with six of his pledge pals while waiting for the party to get going. He enjoys drinking beer, and once in a while he has a rum and Coke, but generally he is a moderate drinker and avoids hard liquor. Actually, he has never even been drunk. Jack has heard that the new pledges will be drinking shots of whiskey—maybe as many as 20. He plans to explain to his pledge master that he really can't drink more than a couple of shots at most, and that he can't participate in the game.

While chugging his third beer, Jack notices that Ron Reilly, his pledge master, is talking to Mac Peters, one of the guys in charge of hazing.

"Hey, what's going on tonight?" Jack asked his new pledge brother Craig.

"Probably some dumb game, don't you think?" answered Craig, a tall guy with plans to join the college track team.

"Well, I guess I can handle whatever they throw at me, just so I can see it coming," Jack laughed. He felt a bit high already.

Ron Reilly approached and threw his arm around Jack's shoulders. "Time to get started, guys. It's drinking time. We'll count while you drink the whiskey in these shot glasses. The one who drinks the most shots wins."

"What's the prize—it had better be good." Craig grinned at Ron.

"The prize is more drinks tomorrow night—you're going to party all week."

Jack hesitated and then looked at Ron. "I think I'll pass on this—it's really not my thing. Sorry."

Ron poured the Jim Beam into six shot glasses. "Wait a minute. If you're a Gamma Delt, you have to play. It's our initiation ceremony into Gamma Delta Chi. No exceptions, Jack. Once you get going, you'll love it! To the Gamma Delt—Cheers!" he shouted.

Everyone was looking at Jack and laughing. Jack gave in and picked up his shot glass. The group of pledges clicked glasses, drank, drank again, and kept drinking. They were on shot six, but Jack was not keeping up. And he was starting to feel dizzy and sick to his stomach. Suddenly his knees gave way and he slumped on the floor. "Can't do it," he mumbled, and closed his eyes.

Ron reached down to pull Jack up, but Jack was unresponsive. He stayed in a heap on the floor. Ron decided to give Jack a drink himself, so he put the shot glass to Jack's lips and poured the whiskey into his mouth. Jack began to cough and choke and seemed to be having trouble breathing. His face looked pale, and he continued to choke on the whiskey.

Several of the frat brothers gathered in a circle around Jack and began making fun of him. "This one can't handle his liquor—what a baby," Mac Peters said, poking Jack's leg with his shoe. "Maybe he doesn't fit in here."

"But what if he's really sick?" asked Craig, looking at Jack. "Shouldn't we take him to the emergency room to make sure nothing's wrong?"

"Nah, he'll come out of it. Let's drag him to the first-floor back bedroom, where he can sleep it off," said Ron, grabbing Jack's arms and pulling him toward the bedroom.

The next morning when Jack woke up, his eyes were bleary, his mouth was dry, and his head was aching. It took several minutes before he realized that he was in the back bedroom of the frat house. Then slowly memories of the previous night began to come back to him. He remembered having a few beers with his friends, and then he pictured Ron telling the pledges about the drinking game and shouting "Cheers!"

"I never drank that much in my life," he thought to himself, weakly trying to stand up. His legs were unsteady, his hands were shaking, and he had to lie down again because his head hurt terribly. He closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind.

"I must have been totally drunk last night. Maybe I am not the fraternity type. Can I get out of this?" Jack wondered. "If I have to go through another night of hazing, I'll never make it out alive."

Just then, Jack heard a knock on the door, and Ron came in. "Not feeling your best, I see. Well, this is only the beginning. Welcome to the intoxicating world of Gamma Delta Chi!"

## DISCUSSION

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1. What kind of person is Jack Donohue?
2. Why has Jack pledged Gamma Delta Chi fraternity?
3. Is the hazing game at the fraternity dangerous? Explain your answer.
4. Why did Jack go along with the binge drinking?
5. Why does Ron insist that all the pledges participate in the binge drinking?
6. Should universities outlaw hazing activities at fraternities and sororities?
7. Should Jack report the hazing activities to the dean?
8. What options does Jack have at this point?

## CASE STUDY REPORT

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Working with a partner or in a small group, write a case study report analyzing the problem Jack is facing in regard to joining the fraternity Gamma Delta Chi.

- I. Statement of the Problem
- II. Suggestion of Possible Solutions
- III. Evaluation of Possible Solutions
- IV. Selection of a Solution

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## VOCABULARY

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Fill in the blank with the most appropriate words. Use each word only once.

<b>accustomed</b>	<b>excessively</b>	<b>hazing</b>	<b>shots</b>
<b>binge</b>	<b>fraternity</b>	<b>peer pressure</b>	<b>susceptible</b>
<b>culture</b>	<b>hard liquor</b>	<b>phenomenon</b>	<b>underage</b>

Binge drinking was defined in 2004 by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as having five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women on one drinking occasion in the past two weeks. High-risk drinking is an increasingly serious problem on college campuses today. Unlike the last decades of the 20th century where students usually drank beer at large parties, many \_\_\_\_\_ students are drinking \_\_\_\_\_ secretly in campus dorms or off-campus apartments. This is a result of the 1984 law that changed the drinking age in the United States from 18 to 21. College fraternities are also engaging in \_\_\_\_\_ activities in which students drink multiple \_\_\_\_\_ of liquor in a short time period of perhaps two hours. In fact, deaths and hospitalizations from alcohol poisoning have occurred frequently because of this risky behavior, which is popular among students at both public and private universities.

Scientists at the University of Michigan at the Substance Abuse Research Center published a study in 2006 on the \_\_\_\_\_ of binge drinking among undergraduates to determine factors such as association with gender, race, ethnic group, and age when this behavior begins, and negative effects of drinking large quantities of alcohol.<sup>1</sup> They used a sample of 4,580 students at a midwestern university who took an online survey of alcohol and drug use. The researchers added new factors, specifying that the \_\_\_\_\_ takes place within two hours and including drinking over the past year, not just the past two weeks. The study revealed an estimate of binge drinking of 63.6 percent among participants, which was higher than the two-week standard measure of 53.2 percent.<sup>2</sup> A second study

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Cranford et al. "A New Measure of Binge Drinking: Prevalence and Correlates in a Probability Sample of Undergraduates." *Alcoholism* 30, no. 11 (2006): 1896–905.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Cranford et al. "A New Measure of Binge Drinking: Prevalence and Correlates in a Probability Sample of Undergraduates." *Alcoholism* 30, no. 11 (2006): 1896–905.

on binge drinking by Jeff DeSimone, published in the *Journal of Health Economics* in 2007, revealed that \_\_\_\_\_ membership correlated with increased binge drinking.<sup>3</sup>

A comprehensive report on drug and alcohol abuse by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University was released in March of 2007. The report revealed that a \_\_\_\_\_ of extreme alcohol consumption has taken root on U.S. college campuses. Joseph Califano, president of the Columbia University Center, stated: "The percentage of kids who drink and binge drink is essentially the same between 1993 and 2005, but the intensity of the drinking has dramatically changed."<sup>4</sup> According to the report, there has been an increase since 1993 in the number of "students who binge drink frequently (take five drinks at a time, three or more times in two weeks), who drink 10 or more times a month, and who get drunk three or more times in a month."<sup>5</sup> One university vice president described college students as wanting "to become intoxicated as fast as they possibly can."<sup>6</sup>

Because many students today think that drinking to get drunk and getting high on drugs are acceptable behaviors, they have become \_\_\_\_\_ to drinking \_\_\_\_\_ and abusing drugs. The authors of the Columbia University report asked educators to take a strong stand to combat this culture. Roger Vaughan, one of the authors, proposes that college administrators allocate time and money to fighting binge drinking among college students. He believes substance abuse should not be tolerated because if it continues, "we're going to destroy our best and brightest."<sup>7</sup>

Michigan State University developed a Social Norms Project to change the acceptance of high-risk drinking at the school. Since many students are \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, and they begin to binge drink because they believe everyone does it, the goal of the project is to correct misperceptions about alcohol use on campus. MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research

<sup>3</sup> Jeff DeSimone, "Fraternity Membership and Binge Drinking." *Journal of Health Economics* 26, no. 5 (September 1, 2007): 950.

<sup>4</sup> "Binge Drinking, Pill Abuse Intensify at Colleges," MSNBC. March 15, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> "Binge Drinking, Pill Abuse Intensify at Colleges," MSNBC. March 15, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> "Binge Drinking, Pill Abuse Intensify at Colleges," MSNBC. March 15, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> "Binge Drinking, Pill Abuse Intensify at Colleges," MSNBC. March 15, 2007.



has conducted surveys each semester to “determine how students actually use alcohol and how they perceive the ways in which other students use alcohol.”<sup>8</sup> By correcting misperceptions revealed by the survey through social marketing (posters, flyers, presentations), the faculty is using social norms theory to guide prevention efforts. Students are encouraged to follow their own instincts and internal cues about drinking, rather than follow the crowd. These efforts have been so successful in reversing the culture of excessive drinking that MSU received a \$175,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support its activities and to disseminate information about the Social Norms Project to other colleges and universities.<sup>9</sup> According to Dennis Martell of the MSU Olin Health Center, “Behaviors have changed, protective behaviors are up, and harm has decreased.”<sup>10</sup>

What is your opinion on this topic? Write one or two paragraphs that express your point of view on the issues discussed.

## ACTIVITIES

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1. Binge drinking is a major problem at many universities. Do Internet research to find out how many university and college students have died as a result of binge drinking in the past ten years. Then write a fact sheet that lists the names, ages, and universities where these deaths occurred.

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Oswald, “MSU Earns National Award for Challenging the Environment of High-Risk Drinking.” *MSU Today*, July 27, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Oswald, “MSU Earns National Award for Challenging the Environment of High-Risk Drinking.” *MSU Today*, July 27, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Oswald, “MSU Earns National Award for Challenging the Environment of High-Risk Drinking.” *MSU Today*, July 27, 2007.

2. Write a four-paragraph essay in which you argue that Congress should keep the legal drinking age at 21.
3. After researching the topic, write a short report on underage alcohol abuse in the United States. Include the following points:
  - Statistics on underage drinking
  - Causes of underage drinking
  - Results of underage drinking
  - Methods to discourage underage drinking
4. Conduct a survey of at least ten people. Ask the questions listed, and report your results to the class.

1. Have you ever participated in binge drinking?
2. How often have you done so in the past two weeks—and in the past year?
3. What problems have you experienced as a result of binge drinking?
4. What reasons caused you to participate in binge drinking?
5. To what extent was peer pressure a factor in your binge drinking?

5. After the class is divided into two teams, debate this topic:  
*The U.S. Congress should pass a law making 18 the legal age for drinking.*
6. Choose one of the role plays for presentation in class. Plan and practice your dialogue before presenting it.
  - A. Act out the scene at the Gamma Delta Chi party when Jack is drinking the shots of whiskey and then passes out.
  - B. Act out a future scene in which Jack meets with the president of the fraternity to describe the hazing he experienced and to request that the fraternity end hazing.

## ORAL PRESENTATION

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Prepare and give an oral presentation on one of the topics listed. Use the suggested methods of development to organize your presentation, and do Internet research to gather information.

- The Increase in Binge Drinking at Universities and Colleges (Comparison-Contrast)
- Factors That Encourage Underage Alcohol Abuse (Cause-Effect)

## READINGS

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### Two Takes<sup>11</sup>

*Robert Schlesinger, ed.*

#### **A Lower Age Would Be Unsafe (by Laura Dean-Mooney)**

As the fall semester begins at colleges across the country, campuses once again face the challenge of combating underage and binge drinking. This is a serious and difficult issue for colleges, for communities, and for parents like me who are preparing to send a son or daughter to college.

Unfortunately, more than 100 college presidents have chosen to address the issue by signing on to a misguided initiative that ostensibly favors a debate but is supported by a group, Choose Responsibility, whose sole aim is lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18 years old. Mothers Against Drunk Driving is open to a discussion about solving the problems of underage and binge drinking. But the discussion must be based on facts, and, in this case, the facts are clear: 21 saves lives.

Since states began setting the legal drinking age at 21, the law has been one of the most studied in our history. The evidence is overwhelming: More than 50 high-quality scientific studies all found the 21 law saves lives, both on and off the road. And the public agrees: 72 percent of adults think that lowering the drinking age would make alcohol more accessible to kids, and nearly half think that it would increase binge drinking among teens, according to a new Nationwide Insurance poll.

This is why stakeholders from scientific, medical, and public health organizations have joined MADD to form the Support 21 Coalition: We believe in basing public health policy on sound medical research and are committed to highlighting the life-saving impact of the 21 drinking age.

Twenty-one isn't just an arbitrary number set by Congress—more than 20 states already had laws setting the drinking age there in 1984. And since the 21 law was widely enacted, the number of young people killed annually in crashes involving drunk drivers under 21 has been cut in half, from more than 5,000 individuals in the early 1980s to around 2,000 in 2005. By the end of 2005, the 21 drinking age had saved nearly 25,000 American lives—approximately 1,000 lives a year.

The Support 21 Coalition stands behind the indisputable scientific research that demonstrates lowering the drinking age would make the difficult problems of underage and binge drinking far worse. Research indicates that when the minimum legal drinking age is 21, people under age 21 drink less overall and continue to do so through their early 20s. When the drinking age has been lowered, injury and death rates significantly increased.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Schlesinger, ed., "Two Takes," *U.S. News & World Report* 145 (September 22, 2008): 10–11.

Lowering the age of those who have easy access to alcohol would shift responsibility for underage drinking to high school parents and educators.

**A neurotoxin.** Research has shown that the harmful effects of alcohol abuse are magnified on a teenager's still-developing brain. The adolescent brain is a work in progress, marked by significant development in areas of the brain responsible for learning, memory, complex thinking, planning, inhibition, and emotional regulation. The neurotoxic effect of excessive alcohol use is a danger to these key regions of the maturing adolescent brain.

A person's brain does not stop developing until their early to mid-20s. During this period, alcohol negatively affects all parts of the brain, including cognitive and decision-making abilities as well as coordination and memory. Adolescent drinkers not only do worse academically but are also at greater risk for social problems like depression, violence, and suicidal thoughts.

Lowering the drinking age would have dangerous long-term consequences: Early teen drinkers are not only more susceptible to alcoholism but to developing the disease earlier and more quickly than others.

The problem of binge drinking on college campuses needs to be addressed, but lowering the drinking age would be not only short-sighted but deadly. The simple fact is that the 21 law saves lives and is, therefore, nonnegotiable.

### **The Status Quo Has Bombed (by John McCordell)**

It is time to rethink the drinking age. That's the message of nearly 130 college and university presidents who have signed on to the Amethyst Initiative, which declares that the 21 drinking age does not work and has created a culture of binge drinking on campus. While the initiative intentionally does not prescribe a specific new policy, it seeks a debate that acknowledges the current law's failure. (As a former college president, I am not a signatory, but I have helped spearhead the effort.)

The National Minimum Legal Drinking Age Act could not, constitutionally, mandate a national drinking age. Instead, it allowed the states to set the age as they chose. If, however, the age was lower than 21, the state would forfeit 10 percent of its federal highway appropriation.

End of debate. Until now.

As the discussion renews in earnest throughout the media and society, "science" will be used to support the status quo. Yet any survey of the evidence at hand shows that the data are peskily inconsistent. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a respected authority, believes that the 21-year-old drinking age works. Yet its website reveals that of 5,000 Americans under the age of 21 who die of alcohol-related causes each year, only 1,900 are traffic fatalities, meaning the remaining 3,100 occur *off* the highways. Drunk teens behind the wheel are less of a problem than those drinking in private.

And drinking continues to be widespread among adolescents: The institute says that 75 percent of 12th graders, two thirds of 10th graders, and two fifths of eighth graders have consumed alcohol. Not surprisingly, the institute concludes that we have an "enormous public health issue." The Institute of Medicine notes that "more

youth drink than smoke tobacco or use illegal drugs.” The estimated annual social cost of underage drinking is \$53 billion. These statistics will most likely not be offered in support of the current law.

Moreover, the evidence that raising the drinking age has been primarily responsible for the decline in alcohol-related traffic fatalities (a trend that effectively stopped in the mid-1990s and has been inching upward) is underwhelming. One survey of research on this subject revealed that about half of the studies looked at found a cause-and-effect relationship between the 21 drinking age and diminishing alcohol-related traffic fatalities—and half showed no relationship whatsoever.

**Hidden drinking.** Yet college presidents are pilloried for daring to question our current laws. Even though many students who enter their institutions have already consumed alcohol, the presidents are labeled “shirkers” and “lawbreakers” for not enforcing an unenforceable law. The more they crack down on campus drinking, the more they simply force that behavior into clandestine locations, often off campus, beyond their sight and their authority.

Where, after all, does “binge drinking” take place? Not in public places, from which the law has effectively banned alcohol consumption, but in locked dorm rooms, off-campus apartments, farmers’ fields, and other risky environments.

The “abstinence” message—the only one legally permissible—is failing, as prohibition has always failed. Presidents looking for a solution find such remarkable documents as the 2002 “Call to Action,” written by a National Institutes of Health task force, which advises presidents to, in effect, break the law. It describes programs to “reduce,” not eliminate, alcohol consumption. It recommends teaching “students basic principles of moderate drinking.” In short, it advises what others have condemned.

Effective laws reflect not abstract, unattainable ideals but rather social and cultural reality. The reality in this case is that one is a legal adult at age 18; that alcohol is present in the lives of young adults ages 18 to 20; that most of the rest of the world has come out in a very different place on this issue; and that the 21-year-old drinking age is routinely evaded. Either we are a nation of lawbreakers, or this is a bad law.



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## How Bingeing Became the New College Sport<sup>12</sup>

*Barret Seaman*

In the coming weeks, millions of students will begin their fall semester of college, with all the attendant rituals of campus life: freshman orientation, registering for classes, rushing by fraternities and sororities and, in a more recent nocturnal college tradition, “pregaming” in their rooms.

Pregaming is probably unfamiliar to people who went to college before the 1990s. But it is now a common practice among 18-, 19- and 20-year-old students who cannot legally buy or consume alcohol. It usually involves sitting in a dorm room or an off-campus apartment and drinking as much hard liquor as possible before heading out for the evening’s parties. While reporting for my book *Binge*, I witnessed the hospitalization of several students for acute alcohol poisoning. Among them was a Hamilton College freshman who had consumed 22 shots of vodka while sitting in a dorm room with her friends. Such hospitalizations are routine on campuses across the nation. By the Thanksgiving break of the year I visited Harvard, the university’s health center had admitted nearly 70 students for alcohol poisoning.

When students are hospitalized—or worse yet, die from alcohol poisoning, which happens about 300 times each year—college presidents tend to react by declaring their campuses dry or shutting down fraternity houses. But tighter enforcement of the minimum drinking age of 21 is not the solution. It’s part of the problem.

Over the past 40 years, the U.S. has taken a confusing approach to the age-appropriateness of various rights, privileges and behaviors. It used to be that 21 was the age that legally defined adulthood. On the heels of the student revolution of the late ’60s, however, came sweeping changes: the voting age was reduced to 18; privacy laws were enacted that protected college students’ academic, health and disciplinary records from outsiders, including parents; and the drinking age, which had varied from state to state, was lowered to 18.

Then, thanks in large measure to intense lobbying by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Congress in 1984 effectively blackmailed states into hiking the minimum drinking age to 21 by passing a law that tied compliance to the distribution of federal-aid highway funds—an amount that will average \$690 million per state this year. There is no doubt that the law, which achieved full 50-state compliance in 1988, saved lives, but it had the unintended consequence of creating a covert culture around alcohol as the young adult’s forbidden fruit.

Drinking has been an aspect of college life since the first Western universities in the 14th century. My friends and I drank in college in the 1960s—sometimes a lot but not so much that we had to be hospitalized. Veteran college administrators cite a sea change in campus culture that began, not without coincidence, in the 1990s. It was marked by a shift from beer to hard liquor, consumed not in large social settings, since that is now illegal, but furtively and dangerously in students’ residences.

<sup>12</sup> Barret Seaman, “How Bingeing Became the New College Sport,” *Time* (August 29, 2005): 80.

In my reporting at colleges around the country, I did not meet any presidents or deans who felt that the 21-year age minimum helps their efforts to curb the abuse of alcohol on their campuses. Quite the opposite. They thought the law impeded their efforts since it takes away the ability to monitor and supervise drinking activity.

What would happen if the drinking age was rolled back to 18 or 19? Initially, there would be a surge in binge drinking as young adults savored their newfound freedom. But over time, I predict, U.S. college students would settle into the saner approach to alcohol I saw on the one campus I visited where the legal drinking age is 18: Montreal's McGill University, which enrolls about 2,000 American undergraduates a year. Many, when they first arrive, go overboard, exploiting their ability to drink legally. But by midterms, when McGill's demanding academic standards must be met, the vast majority have put drinking into its practical place among their priorities.

A culture like that is achievable at U.S. colleges if Congress can muster the fortitude to reverse a bad policy. If lawmakers want to reduce drunk driving, they should do what the Norwegians do: throw the book at offenders no matter what their age. Meanwhile, we should let the pregamers come out of their dorm rooms so that they can learn to handle alcohol like the adults we hope and expect them to be.

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## Wasting the Best and the Brightest<sup>13</sup>

*Joseph A. Califano, Jr.*

The recent report of The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, *Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges and Universities*, reveals a disturbing ambience of hedonistic self-indulgence and an alarming public health crisis on college campuses across this nation.

From 1993, the year of CASA's original assessment of drinking on the nation's campuses, to 2005, the last year for which relevant data are available, there has been no significant reduction in the proportion of students who drink (70 percent vs. 68 percent) and binge drink (a steady 40 percent). Far more troubling, the intensity of excessive drinking and other drug use has risen sharply.

The shocking results: Half of all full-time college students (3.8 million) binge drink, abuse prescription drugs and/or abuse illegal drugs. Almost one in four of the nation's college students (22.9 percent, some 1.8 million) meet the medical criteria for substance abuse or dependence, two and a half times the proportion (8.5 percent) of those who meet the criteria in the rest of the population.

Rates of dangerous drinking increased from 1993 to 2001, the latest year for which these data are available. Over that period, the proportion of students who:

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph A. Califano, Jr., "Wasting the Best and the Brightest," *America* 196 (May 28, 2007): 16–18.

- binge drink frequently (three or more times in the past two weeks) is up 16 percent;
- drink on 10 or more occasions in the past month is up 25 percent;
- get drunk three or more times in the past month is up 26 percent;
- drink to get drunk is up 21 percent.

And the drug abuse problem among college students goes far beyond alcohol. Since the early 1990's, the proportion of students using marijuana daily has more than doubled. Use of drugs like cocaine and heroin is up 52 percent. Student abuse of prescription opioids, stimulants and tranquilizers has exploded. From 1993 to 2005, the proportion of students who abuse prescription painkillers like Percocet, Vicodin and OxyContin shot up 343 percent to 240,000 students; stimulants like Ritalin and Adderall, 93 percent to 225,000; tranquilizers like Xanax and Valium, 450 percent to 171,000; and sedatives like Nembutal and Seconal, 225 percent to 101,000.

This explosion in the intensity of substance abuse among college students carries devastating consequences. Each year:

- more than 1,700 students die from alcohol poisoning and alcohol-related injuries.
- 700,000 students are assaulted by classmates who were drinking.
- almost 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assaults and rapes.

### Looking at Catholic Institutions

The CASA study, conducted over four years, is the most exhaustive examination ever undertaken of the substance abuse situation among the nation's 7.8 million full-time college students (age 18 to 22). It did not separate out Jesuit college and university students. Sadly, however, there is no reason to believe they are any better than the general population of college students.

Fordham University is ranked New York City's number one school in self-reported campus alcohol violations, with 905 in 2005, more than four times the 194 reported by New York University, which is in second place. (Some of the spread may reflect different reporting methods.) The College of the Holy Cross (my alma mater) has been plagued by a series of tragic incidents over recent years, including accusations of rape by a female student who was drinking heavily (1996), a drunken student killed by a pickup truck (1998), another killed by a train (2000), one killed in a fight between drunken classmates (2002) and a student hospitalized in a booze-fueled rugby team hazing (2002). In Spokane, Wash., Gonzaga University basketball players were picked up on suspicion of possession of drugs (marijuana) in February of this year. As at most other colleges, students at Holy Cross, Boston College and Georgetown have engaged in alcohol-fueled rowdy conduct and vandalism that has drawn the ire of neighboring residents and local police.



## Why Students Drink and Take Drugs

Why do students drink and drug themselves like this? CASA surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,000 students, who said they did so to relieve stress, relax, have fun, forget their problems and be one of the gang. College women in focus groups said they wanted to keep up with the guys so they went drink for drink with them (though on average one drink has the impact on a woman that two have on a man). These women also said they were under enormous pressure to have sex and they used alcohol as a disinhibitor.

CASA also surveyed some 400 college administrators and interviewed scores of experts in the field, and the findings are disturbing. At many institutions, college presidents, deans, trustees and alumni accept binge drinking and other drug use as a rite of passage. College presidents and trustees are consumed with raising money, building new facilities and recruiting faculty; the substance abuse problem gets low priority. One Ivy League board chair told me that the alumni resisted efforts to reform drinking and related social practices, particularly among fraternities and clubs. (The CASA report found that excessive drinking and other drug abuse was higher among such groups.) Turnover in administrative positions related to student conduct is high, and resources are low. Many Catholic colleges (and several others) have initiated steps, such as education, prevention efforts and AA meetings, to mitigate the problem.

## Tolerating a Culture of Substance Abuse

Nevertheless, the CASA report's overall grim conclusion: College presidents, deans and trustees have facilitated or tolerated a college culture of alcohol and drug abuse that is linked to poor student academic performance, depression, anxiety, suicide, property damage, vandalism, fights and a host of medical problems. By failing to become part of the solution, these presidents, deans and trustees have become part of the problem. Their acceptance of the status quo of rampant alcohol and other drug abuse puts the best and the brightest—and the nation's future—in harm's way.

Edward Malloy, C.S.C., president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame and chair of the CASA advisory commission that supervised the study, says, "College presidents are reluctant to take on issues they feel they cannot change and this growing public health crisis reflects today's society where students are socialized to consider substance abuse a harmless rite of passage and to medicate every ill." These institutions have an obligation to confront the problem of campus substance abuse in order to maintain their academic credibility, to protect the health and safety of students on their campuses and to preserve their financial resources from liability for injury and death of students as a result of foreseeable harm from the culture of alcohol and drug abuse and addiction. Catholic universities have an added incentive: the recognition that students, like all of us, are made in God's image, with an inherent human dignity that should not be debased by excessive use of alcohol. Catholic college campuses incur a special obligation to discourage an atmosphere of excessive alcohol consumption that facilitates the deadly sin of gluttony.

It is time to take the “high” out of higher education. But school administrators cannot do it alone. As Father Malloy also points out, “To change this culture, college and university presidents will need help from parents, alumni, students, Greek and athletic organizations, and state and federal governments.”

Parents bear a significant measure of responsibility. Three-fourths of college drinkers and drug users began drinking and drugging in high school or even earlier. Teen drinking and drug use is a parent problem. Parents who provide the funds for their children in college to purchase alcohol and drugs and party at substance-fueled spring breaks enable the college culture of abuse. If parents cannot say no to children who want to go on such breaks, how can they expect their children to say no to alcohol and marijuana?

### What Can Be Done?

Much can be done, and Jesuit colleges can lead the way. They can ban alcohol in dormitories, in most common areas and at campus student parties and college sporting events. They can stop alcohol marketing on campus and at campus athletic events and broadcasts. They should insist that the National College Athletic Association refuse to permit beer advertising during broadcasts of athletic events like the March Madness basketball tournament, which draws a large college audience.

Many students arrange their schedules to have classes only three or four days a week so that their partying can begin on Wednesday or Thursday evening and continue until Monday morning. Colleges have the power to require that full-time students attend classes at least five days a week. Parents who are paying \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year for room, board and tuition should demand it.

Colleges and universities can engage local authorities to limit the number of bars and retail liquor stores surrounding their campuses. Students should be educated about alcohol abuse, as Georgetown now requires of all freshmen. For a host of other suggestions, see CASA’s website, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org), where the entire 256-page report can be downloaded free.

The first step is for college administrators, trustees, alumni and parents to accept responsibility for tossing the nation’s college students into the high seas of alcohol, tobacco and prescription and illegal drugs that so many college campuses and their surrounding communities have become. Substance abuse-free campuses should be the rule, not the exception. Television broadcasts of college athletic events should not be opportunities for beer merchants to hawk their products to underage undergraduates. Admission to elite clubs and fraternities should not carry the risk of alcohol poisoning. Drunkenness should not mark half-time at college football games. Nor should Ritalin and Adderall abuse be the price of performance.

Most important, college administrators, trustees, alumni and parents should abandon their view that binge drinking is some harmless rite of passage and instead see it for what it truly is: a dangerous game of Russian roulette that threatens our nation’s best and brightest.

## COMPREHENSION

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Answer the questions about "Two Takes: A Lower Age Would Be Unsafe."

1. How have more than 100 college presidents chosen to address underage and binge drinking?
2. What does the author believe about the facts in this case?
3. What evidence does the author give to support her argument?
4. What does the Support 21 Coalition believe?
5. List the statistics the author gives about number of young people killed since the 21 law was widely enacted.
6. What does the research show about keeping the legal drinking age at 21?
7. Who would be responsible for underage drinking if the drinking age is lowered?
8. How does alcohol use affect the adolescent brain?
9. What are the long term consequences of lowering the drinking age?
10. How convincing is the author's argument?

Answer the questions about "Two Takes: The Status Quo Has Bombed."

1. How does the Amethyst Initiative feel about the 21 drinking age?
2. Describe the National Minimum Legal Drinking Act.
3. What does the website of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reveal about underage drinking?
4. What statistics does the author cite to prove that drinking continues to be widespread among adolescents?
5. What was the result of a survey of research on the drinking age and traffic fatalities?
6. Why are college presidents pilloried and labeled "shirkers" and "lawbreakers"?
7. Where does binge drinking take place?
8. What did the 2002 "Call to Action," written by a National Institutes of Health Task Force, advise college presidents to do?
9. Why is the 21-year-old drinking age a bad law, in the author's opinion?
10. How convincing is the author's argument?

Answer the questions about "How Bingeing Became the New College Sport."

1. Explain the meaning of "pregaming."
2. Why has "pregaming" become common among college students?
3. How do college presidents react when students are hospitalized for alcohol poisoning or die from binge drinking?
4. Describe the changes that took place after the late 1960s regarding the age-appropriateness of various rights.
5. How were states blackmailed into raising the minimum drinking age to 21?
6. What was the unintended result of making the legal drinking age 21?
7. What major change took place in the college campus drinking culture in the 1990s?
8. According to the author's experience, why don't college presidents or deans believe that the 21-year age minimum helps them curb alcohol abuse on their campuses?
9. In the author's opinion, what would result from rolling back the legal drinking age to 18 or 19?
10. Explain the approach to alcohol that is used at McGill University in Montreal.
11. What does the author think that Congress should do about the drinking age?
12. Compare the opinions of John McCardell in "The Status Quo Has Bombed" and Barrett Seaman in "How Bingeing Became the New College Sport."

Answer the questions about "Wasting the Best and the Brightest."

1. What did the CASA report "Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges and Universities" reveal about drinking and drug use?
2. Give the report statistics on the drug abuse problem among college students.
3. How do Jesuit colleges and universities compare to non-Jesuit schools in terms of their students' substance abuse?
4. According to a CASA survey, what reasons did students give for drinking and drugging themselves?
5. Why does the substance abuse problem get low priority with college presidents and trustees?

6. What was the overall conclusion of the CASA report?
7. What did Edward Malloy, chair of the CASA advisory commission, say about this growing public health crisis?
8. Why do parents bear a significant measure of responsibility for teen drinking and drug use?
9. What suggestions does the author make to reduce alcohol and drug abuse?
10. What is the first step for college administrators, trustees, alumni, and parents?
11. What is the main idea of this article?

## STRATEGY SESSION

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Imagine that you are a member of a fraternity and that you had to undergo hazing. The hazing involved drinking many shot glasses of bourbon. You tried to do this and passed out after drinking six shots. You don't want to participate in any more hazing.

Which strategy would you use in this situation and why? Provide a written justification for your decision. If none of the listed strategies would be your choice, you may develop your own strategy.

1. Go to the president of the university and ask him or her to investigate the hazing practices at fraternities because they are dangerous to students.
2. Talk to the president of your fraternity and ask him to stop the hazing activities.
3. Withdraw from the fraternity.
4. Organize a meeting with the new pledges of your fraternity and ask them to sign a petition demanding that hazing be outlawed in fraternities.
5. Go to the next party at the fraternity and refuse to participate in the hazing.
6. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## SUGGESTED FILMS

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| <i>Accepted</i> (2006)                 | <i>Mean Girls</i> (2004)                           |
| <i>Angela's Ashes</i> (1999)           | <i>The Rose</i> (1979)                             |
| <i>Arthur</i> (1981)                   | <i>Round Midnight</i> (1986 U.S.-French)           |
| <i>Barfly</i> (1987)                   | <i>Small Faces</i> (1995 Scottish-English)         |
| <i>Beerfest</i> (2006)                 | <i>Smoke Signals</i> (1998)                        |
| <i>A Brother's Kiss</i> (1997)         | <i>The Terminal</i> (2004)                         |
| <i>Candy</i> (2006 Australian)         | <i>Thirteen</i> (2003)                             |
| <i>Days of Wine &amp; Roses</i> (1962) | <i>28 Days</i> (2000)                              |
| <i>Drunks</i> (1996)                   | <i>Under the Volcano</i> (1984)                    |
| <i>I'll Cry Tomorrow</i> (1955)        | <i>Wab-Wab</i> (2006 British-French-South African) |
| <i>Leaving Las Vegas</i> (1995)        | <i>A Walk to Remember</i> (2002)                   |
| <i>Little Fish</i> (2005 Australian)   |  |
| <i>The Lost Weekend</i> (1945)         |  |

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