



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER
EDUCATION
CENTER**

for Alcohol,
Drug Abuse, and
Violence Prevention

PREVENTION UPDATE

Prevention at Community Colleges

Overview

In his 2012 State of the Union address, President Obama trained a spotlight on community colleges when he called for a national commitment to help create an economy built to last by training two million workers with skills that will lead directly to a job. A new \$8 billion [Community College to Career Fund](#), co-administered by the Department of Labor and the Department of Education, will help “forge new partnerships between community colleges and businesses to train two million workers for good-paying jobs in high-growth and high-demand industries.” According to a 2012 fact sheet from the [American Association of Community Colleges](#), there are 1,132 community colleges enrolling 13 million students. Community college students represent 44 percent of U.S. undergraduates.

According to “[Community College Student Alcohol Use: Developing Context-Specific Evidence and Prevention Approaches](#),” community colleges have traditionally had a threefold mission that includes preparing students for transfer to four-year colleges, developmental education, and workforce preparation: “As open-access colleges, community colleges enroll by far the highest proportion and most diverse undergraduate students of any institution type . . . community colleges enroll 55 percent of all Hispanic undergraduates, 47 percent of African Americans, 47 percent of Asian or Pacific Islanders, and 57 percent of Native Americans. Moreover, they enroll half of all first-generation college students, and 45 percent of students from the lowest household income quartile. One half of community college students work full-time and over one third have dependents. About 45 percent are first-generation college students, and slightly fewer than half are 25 years or older. More than 90 percent commute to college, and more than half receive no financial assistance from parents.”

The researchers point out that the demographic characteristics of community colleges and their unique organizational context and culture are important factors when it comes to alcohol consumption and the reduction of associated harms. In addition, institutional student health and service capacity is significantly smaller at community colleges than at four-year institutions. For example, a 2011 [Midwestern state study](#) of institutional resources dedicated to alcohol abuse prevention found that, on average, the 17 community colleges participating in the study devoted very little staff time (0.14 of a full-time position) to alcohol-related intervention and prevention activities compared with 0.31 on average at a four-year institution.

Participants in a [survey](#) about student substance use, and infrastructure (staff and funding), programs, and collaborations dedicated to substance use prevention of 100 administrators, faculty, and health services staff at 100 community colleges reported a number of alcohol- and other drug-related concerns. Participating community colleges reported implementing a number of programs, although many are not implementing some of the programs popular at traditional four-year colleges, and collaborating with a number of on- and off-campus groups on substance abuse issues and services. According to the researchers, the findings of this survey indicate that administrators are quite concerned about student alcohol and other drug use and are developing programs despite limited staff and funding.

What the Evidence Tells Us

The preponderance of research regarding alcohol and other drug use and related harms among college students has focused on those attending four-year colleges and universities. Past surveys suggest that community college students differ in significant ways from traditional four-year college students. According



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to the [2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), young adults aged 18 to 22 enrolled full-time in college were more likely than their peers not enrolled full-time (i.e., part-time college students and persons not currently enrolled in college) to use alcohol in the past month, binge drink, and drink heavily. Among full-time college students in 2010, 63.3 percent were current drinkers, 42.2 percent were binge drinkers, and 15.6 percent were heavy drinkers. According to a [2012 report](#), “studies involving community college students indicate that demographic differences between residential and community college students help explain differing student patterns in alcohol use. Among traditional-age college students (those who are 17–24 years old), incidences of heavy consumption diminish as a student’s age increases. Because the average age of community college students falls outside of the 17 to 24 range predictably, their consumption patterns differ from those that emerge in existing national normative data on student alcohol use. Nonetheless, although consumption patterns vary, research suggests that community college students engage in episodes of heavy consumption and experience related negative consequences that are similar, if not equal, to the harm incurred by the students attending four-year residential colleges.”

That same report analyzed data from 7,965 students at 19 community colleges who responded to the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey to examine the prevalence of heavy alcohol use, related harm, and implications for prevention among community college students. It found heavy consumption among 47 percent of 17- to 24-year-old community college students, a figure that reflects national trends at four-year colleges, and a significant heavy consumption rate (23 percent) among students who are 25 or older. Similarly, the study found that consumption and harm varied by individual background, environment, and student attitudes. The researchers contend that “community colleges are challenged to consider the role alcohol plays in student health and learning, and whether new efforts to ameliorate the harm from heavy alcohol use are warranted in an era of limited institutional resources.”

Lessons Learned from Colleges and Universities

The [Alcohol & Drug Education & Prevention Team \(ADEPT\)](#) at the Orange County (California) Health Care Agency has launched a Community Colleges Initiative to provide high-risk drinking prevention strategies and resources for students, staff, and administrators of Orange County community colleges. It awarded Orange Coast College (OCC) a \$220,000 grant to conduct a campuswide study of student drinking habits. The study also aims to reduce underage and high-risk drinking among the student population, with an emphasis on driving under the influence (DUI) policy enforcement. OCC’s new Alcohol Prevention Services will take a three-pronged approach to reducing drinking-related risks. The program will target new or inexperienced drinkers, who are most likely to respond to interventions; identify sources of alcohol for new and inexperienced drinkers, as well as where they drink and driving distances; and enact a high-visibility DUI enforcement project. ADEPT also posts a quarterly *Community Colleges Initiative E-News* on its Web site.

Related Higher Education Center Resources

- **Case Studies:** [Bloomington Normal Community Campus Committee](#); and [Finger Lakes Community College: Campus Community Coalition](#)
- **Publications:** [Community College Presidents’ Role in Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention](#) (2006); [Engaging the Nation’s Community Colleges as Prevention Partners](#) (2003); and [Prevention Challenges at Community Colleges](#) (1998)
- **Web Page:** [Prevention at Community Colleges](#)

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