



Student Drinking

February 2004

Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to provide information regarding alcohol use and high-risk drinking behavior among undergraduate students at University Park. Also included are information on the consequences of alcohol use and the effectiveness of prevention efforts. Repeated regularly, this survey allows the ability to track changes in alcohol use over time. When applicable, national data from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study are provided.

Implications/Highlights

While the percentage of students who drink remained relatively consistent, there was a decrease in the overall high-risk drinking rate and the frequent high-risk drinking rate. In addition, while there was an increase in the percentage of students who experienced a range of consequences from other students' drinking, alcohol-related problems caused by one's own drinking either decreased slightly or remained the same.

Participation Rate

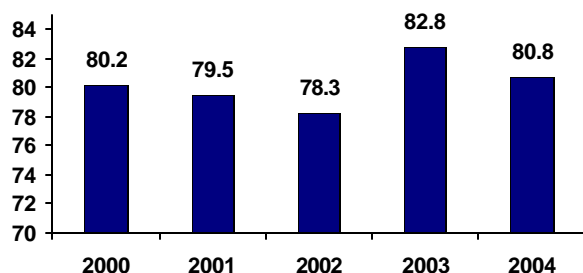
Total: n = 1,446
Phone: n = 953 of 1,734 contacted (54.9%)
Web: n = 493 of 1,990 contacted (24.7%)¹

Findings

Prevalence of Alcohol Use

The percentage of students who report that they drink alcohol has remained relatively consistent over time. In 2004, 80.8% of students reported that they drank alcohol.

Figure 1. Percentage of students who drink



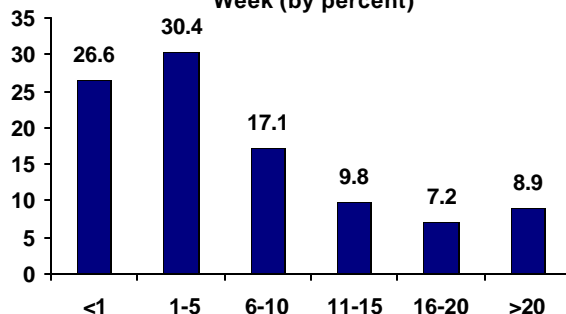
¹ The web is utilized to account for students for whom local phone information was unavailable.

Non-minority students, off-campus residents, students of legal drinking age, upper class students, and members of fraternities and sororities were more likely to be 'drinkers' than their respective counterparts.²

Quantity of Consumption

Students were asked several questions pertaining to the volume of alcohol they consume.³ On average, students consumed 7.80 drinks per week. Fifty-seven percent typically consumed less than 6 drinks per week. (See Figure 2.) Interestingly, when asked how many drinks they consume during a weekend, the average increased to 8.18.⁴

Figure 2: Number of Drinks Consumed in a Week (by percent)



Half of the respondents indicated that, on average, they consumed less than 5 drinks when 'partying' in both 2003 (50.7%) and 2004 (50.4%). As depicted in Figure 3, the average number of drinks consumed when 'partying' for all respondents was 5.02 in 2004 (compared to 4.87 in 2003).

In addition, when comparing student subgroups, significant differences emerged.⁵ Men, non-minority students, off-campus residents, students of legal drinking age, and members of fraternities and sororities consumed more drinks when 'partying' than their respective counterparts. (See Figure 3.)

² Significantly different at the .001 level.

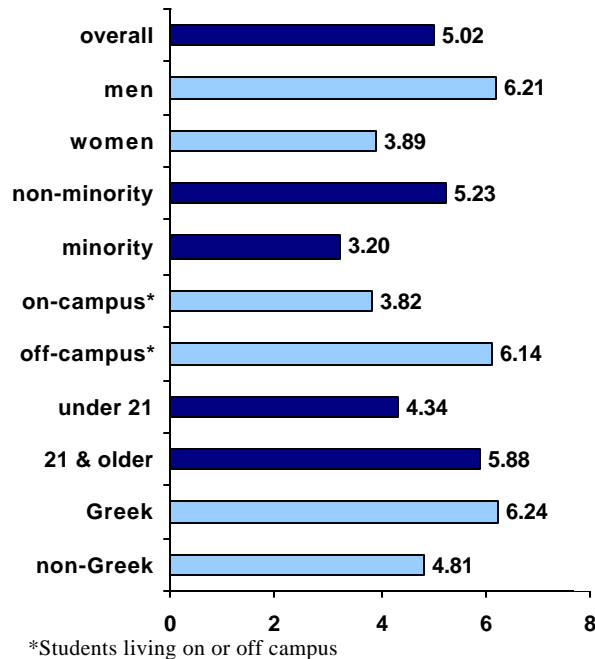
³ In previous Pulse reports, the data presented were based only on "drinkers." In this report, the findings are based on all respondents.

⁴ The discrepancy may be a result of varying interpretations of the definition of a "week."

⁵ Significantly different at the .001 level.

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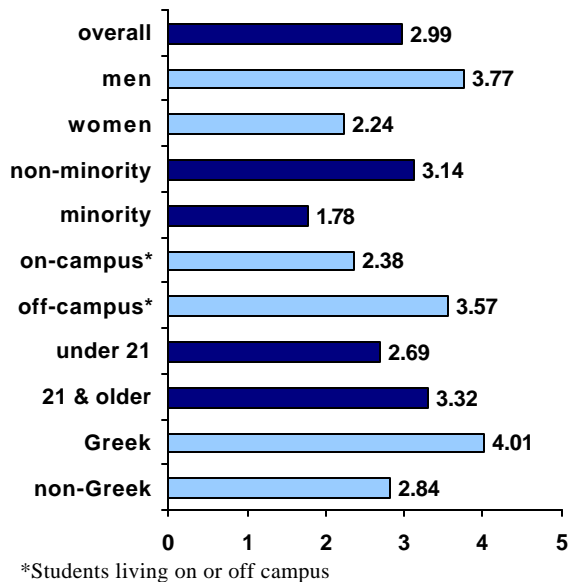
Figure 3. Average Number of Drinks Consumed when 'Partying'



Students who drink averaged 1.69 drinks per hour when 'partying.' Furthermore, 30.8% reported having one or less drinks per hour, and 36.0% reported averaging one or two drinks per hour when 'partying.'

Students were asked about the number of drinks they consumed when 'partying' when they were in high school. (See Figure 4.) The data suggest that the differences between subgroups existed before students arrived at Penn State.

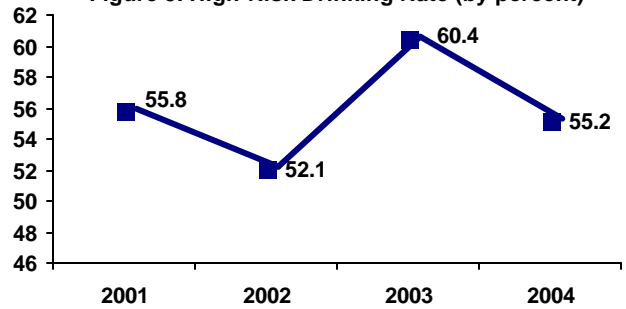
Figure 4. Average Number of Drinks consumed when 'Partying' in High School



⁶ High-risk drinking, or binge drinking, is defined as having 4 or more drinks in a row for women and 5 or more drinks in a row for men at least one time over a two-week period.

The high-risk drinking⁶ rate in 2004 was 55.2%, a decline from 60.4% in 2003. (See Figure 5.) Nationally, the high-risk drinking rate in 2001 was 44.4%.⁷

Figure 5. High-Risk Drinking Rate (by percent)



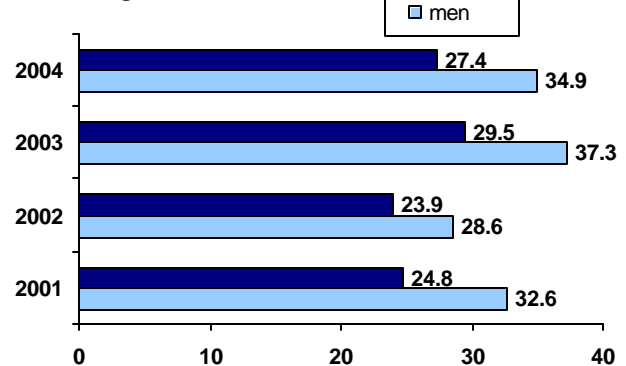
When comparing student groups, the following groups were significantly more likely to be high-risk drinkers than their counterparts:

- Non-minority students (57.5%) were more likely than minority students (38.1%),
- Off-campus residents (65.5%) were more likely than on-campus residents (44.4%),
- Students of legal drinking age (61.8%) were more likely than students under 21 (50.1%),
- Members of fraternities and sororities (76.8%) were more likely than non-members (52.0%).

Although the difference between the high-risk drinking rate between men (57.2%) and women (53.3%) was not significant, on average, men binge drank more frequently than women.

The percentage of frequent high-risk drinkers, or students who reported having binged 3 or more times during a two-week period, decreased slightly since 2003 but was still higher than what was reported in 2001 and 2002. (See Figure 6.) Nationally, the percentage of men who reported being frequent high-risk drinkers was 25.2% and the percentage of women was 20.9% (based on data from 2001).⁸

Figure 6. Percentage of Frequent High-Risk Drinkers



⁷ Weschler et al. (2002). Trends in college binge drinking during a period of increased prevention efforts. *Journal of American College Health*, 5, 203-217.

⁸ Weschler et al. (2002).

Consequences of Alcohol Use⁹

Evidence suggests that students experience a variety of alcohol-related problems. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

Indirect Consequences

Upon examination of the indirect consequences of drinking (those resulting from other students' drinking), the data suggest an increase in the prevalence of these consequences between 2003 and 2004. For example, in 2004, 60.0% reported that they 'baby-sat' a student who drank too much, compared to 56.5% in 2003. Similarly, 64.7% of students in 2004 had their studying or sleep interrupted because of someone else's drinking, compared to 59.4% in 2003.

Table 1. Percent of Students Experiencing Consequences from Other Students' Drinking

Indirect Consequence	PSU 2004	PSU 2003
Been insulted or humiliated	32.1	27.4
Had a serious argument or quarrel	36.6	32.0
Been pushed, hit, or assaulted	14.7	12.6
Had your property damaged	24.7	22.5
Had your studying or sleep interrupted	64.7	59.4
Had to 'baby-sit' a student who drank too much	60.0	56.5
Experienced an unwanted sexual advance	20.5	16.5
Been a victim of unwanted sexual experience	5.5	3.5

⁹ These questions are used with permission from the Harvard School of Health.

Direct Consequences

While there seemed to be an increase in the percent of students who experienced indirect consequences, the percentage of students who experienced direct consequences (those that were the result of their own drinking) either decreased slightly or remained the same since last year. The percentage of students who indicated that they had had a hangover dropped from 63.3% in 2003 to 59.8% in 2004. Moreover, 29.6% of students in 2003 reported that they missed a class as a result of their own drinking, compared to 25.9% in 2004. In both 2003 and 2004, approximately 17% reported engaging in unplanned sexual activity.

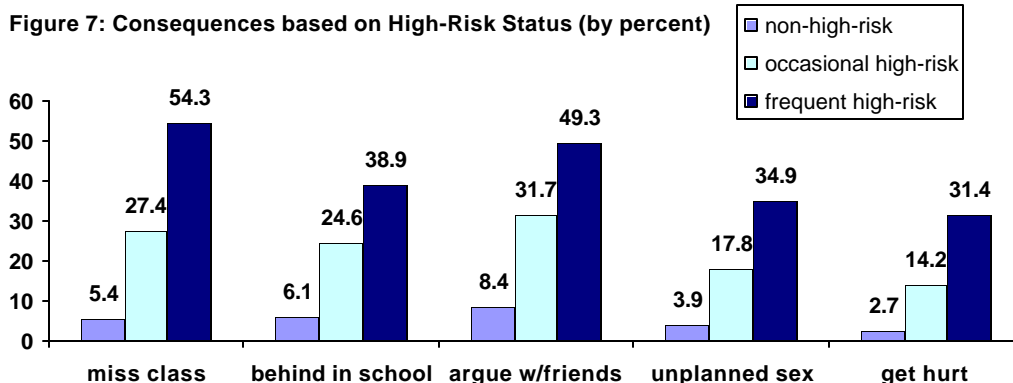
Table 2. Percent of Students Experiencing Consequences from Their Own Drinking¹⁰

Direct Consequence	PSU 2004	PSU 2003
Have a hangover	59.8	63.3
Miss a class	25.9	29.6
Get behind in school work	20.7	23.0
Do something you later regretted	33.2	33.9
Forget where you were/what you did	33.8	35.6
Argue with friends	26.6	29.6
Engage in unplanned sexual activity	17.0	16.9
Not use protection when having sex	6.5	9.2
Damage property	9.3	11.0
Get into trouble with campus/local police	4.4	5.3
Get hurt or injured	14.4	14.7
Require medical treatment for an alcohol overdose	0.6	0.5

¹⁰ In previous Pulse reports, the data presented were based only on "drinkers."

Consequences of High-Risk Status

In addition, students who engaged in occasional and frequent high-risk drinking were significantly more likely to experience physical, social, and academic consequences as a result of their own drinking.¹¹ (See Figure 7.) For example, 54.3% of frequent high-risk drinkers missed a class and 38.9% got behind in their school work because of their own drinking. For occasional high-risk drinkers, these percentages dropped to 27.4% and 24.6% respectively.



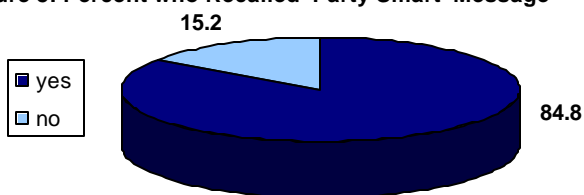
¹¹ Significantly different at the .001 level.

Prevention Efforts

A series of questions were asked regarding students' awareness of the Penn State marketing efforts that focus on 'party smart.'

Overall, 83.4% recalled seeing Penn State materials on student drinking, and 84.8% recalled seeing the 'Party Smart' message that "Most Penn State students have 0 to 4 drinks when they party." (See Figure 8.) These percentages were down slightly from the 87.4% and 90.8% (respectively) from 2003.

Figure 8: Percent who Recalled 'Party Smart' Message



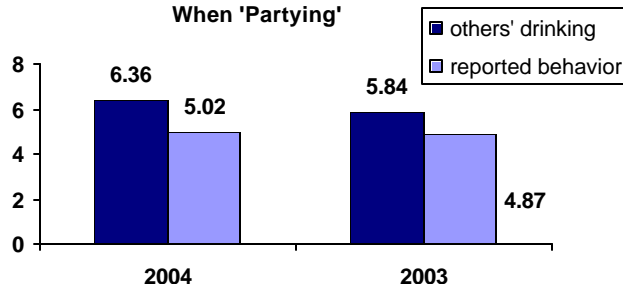
Students remembered seeing these messages through a variety of materials.

- 66.2% HUB posters
- 55.6% CATA bus posters
- 61.9% Posters in other locations
- 19.9% Plastic drinking cups

When asked about their perceptions of others' drinking, students continued to overestimate the overall drinking at Penn State with 73.3% believing that most Penn State students typically consume 5 or more drinks when 'party-ing.' In comparison, 49.7% report that they consume 5 or more drinks when they 'party.' (See Figure 9.)

In addition, students who recalled seeing the 'Party Smart' message believed that most Penn State students averaged 6.23 drinks when 'partying' compared to an average of 7.11 for those who had not seen the message.¹²

Figure 9. Students' Perceptions v. Reported Behavior: Average Number of Drinks Consumed When 'Partying'



Related to the messages on one of the HUB posters and other prevention efforts, students were asked if they were aware of a number of legal or judicial consequences of alcohol-related violations. (See Table 3.) Most students were aware of the possible legal consequences related to public intoxication, DUI, and underage drinking.

Table 3. Awareness of Legal/Judicial Consequences

Alcohol-Related Consequence	%
1 st offense of providing alcohol to minors may result in a fine of up to \$2,500	62.2
Public intoxication is illegal when endangering/annoying others	93.9
1 st offense of DUI may result in a \$5,000 fine	74.5
1 st offense of underage drinking, regardless of whether you're driving, may cause your license to be revoked for 90 days	89.2
Off-campus criminal violations are referred to PSU's Judicial Affairs office	71.9

¹² Significantly different at the .001 level

Resources Related to Alcohol Prevention

Penn State Resources

- Office of Health Promotion - www.sa.psu.edu/uhs/ohpe/ohpe.cfm
- Counseling and Psychological Services - www.sa.psu.edu/caps/
- Commission for the Prevention of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Abuse - www.psu.edu/ATOD
- Student Affairs Research and Assessment - www.sa.psu.edu/sara

Other Resources

- Harvard School of Public Health - www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas/
- Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Studies - www.siu.edu/departments/coreinst/public.html
- Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention - www.edc.org/hec/
- Social Marketing - www.socialnormslink.com or www.socialnorm.org