

# Drinking 101: Colleges use education to fight bingeing

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Every year, thousands of Springfield-area teens welcome college with the luxury of 10 a.m. classes and the freedom that comes from a lack of parental supervision.

At times, though, college freshmen take this new freedom to dangerous heights with binge drinking.

According to Valerie Scarbrough, an alcohol and drug prevention coordinator at the University of Illinois at Springfield, binge drinking is the consumption of four or more drinks in an hour for girls, and five or more in an hour for boys.

Scarbrough said UIS is "lucky" in that, according to campus crime statistics and the number of disciplinary referrals related to liquor law violations, few students binge drink. But other colleges aren't as fortunate.

Jacob Wear, who is going to be a sophomore at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said that students, especially freshman, binge drink "a lot."

"Every time at a party, pretty much," he said.

Mindy Barnard, who also will be a college sophomore, said she sees a similar pattern at her school, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. She said people begin drinking on Wednesdays to jump-start their weekend and continue through Saturday.

Universities, though, don't turn a blind eye. They attempt to educate their students and prevent the problem.

"I know Carbondale really does prepare you," Mindy said.

SIUC students participate in a program that acquaints them with the campus and allows them to talk to upperclassmen about anything, including drinking. Programs also are offered to educate students about drug abuse and alcohol.

"They understand that you're probably going to drink, and you should probably be with friends and people you trust," Mindy said.

Scarbrough said UIS also offers several outreach programs to students, including giving them free food coupons in order to get the UIS prevention name out there.

Female students also are given the opportunity to spend a Friday night and Saturday at Camp CILCA, north of Springfield. Through a grant Scarbrough obtained through the Illinois Department of Education, the girls are educated on how Facebook and MySpace can affect landing a job. They're also counseled about drinking and given safe-sex information.

Scarbrough is working on obtaining a grant to offer a similar program to male UIS students.

Scarbrough says the number of college freshman who binge drink can be attributed to two factors: "Students coming to campus for the first time and are away from parents think that it's part of the college experience," she said, and "a lot of students have already experienced alcohol."

If Scarbrough knows students have a history of drinking, or if she learns they do after receiving alcohol citations, she provides special programming for them that takes their situation into account.

But some students think their colleges could do more.

Jacob doesn't think the U of I offers enough education. He said all he has noticed is a mandatory presentation or a speaker.

"They should probably take more time in promoting non-alcoholic nights that the school hosts, like Illini nights at the Union," Jacob said.

He also believes the effects of binge drinking stretch beyond just those who are doing the drinking.

"Pretty much everyone's affected by it, because people who do binge drink affect their roommates, because they have to take care of them," he said.

While binge drinking tends to be prevalent among freshmen, Jacob believes that it does stop as students get older.

"I don't know if it slows down, but they then become more responsible with it (as they get older)," Jacob said. "Once you get out of college, you realize that you might need to slow down a little bit."

Mindy agreed. She said she's noticed the trend tends to fade as students get older.

"It's kind of like a popular thing, and then it fades away and people get bored with it," she said, "and they're actually 21, so it's not against the rules, which is the main reason I think that people drink."

Allison Midden, who will be a freshman at Scripps College in Claremont, Calif., said she is trying to socialize before she gets there so that she will already have a group of friends.

"I've been talking to a soon-to-be sophomore at my college and asking them both social and academic questions," she said.

Allison's college has yet to offer information to steer her and her peers away from drinking, however. (Some schools, such as the University of Dayton, offer pre-college assessments — such as online surveys about drinking — or provide students with startling facts about alcohol consumption to try to keep them from drinking.)

Whether or not a college offers educational information before students enter college, they attempt to educate as much as possible once students are on campus; many schools also take seriously offenses related to alcohol.

When students receive an alcohol citation at UIS, for example, they must attend a mandatory group session on Saturday mornings that aims to help them rather than scold them.

"It's not 'shame on you;' it's education," Scarbrough said.

"If you're going to drink, drink responsibly."

*Voice intern Sierra Campbell will be a freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

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