Introduction

Alcohol and other drug use and abuse continue to be a critical issue that colleges and universities struggle with across the country. In a 1989 Carnegie Foundation study, college presidents viewed alcohol abuse as their number one campus life problem. This view has not changed, and a number of presidents are directly involved in addressing the abuse and its consequences (Wechsler, 1995). Former President of the University of Vermont, Dr. Judith Ramaley believes, “Underage drinking and excessive drinking have negative effects on everything we’re trying to do as a university. They compromise the educational environment, the safety of our students, the quality of life on campus, town/gown relationships, and our reputation” (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2002). Furthermore, the U.S. Surgeon General and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have identified high-risk drinking among college students as a major health problem.

The Ohio State University dedicates time and resources toward alcohol and other drug use primarily through its comprehensive prevention plan to address the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, which is led by the OSU Student Wellness Center. This plan blends individual and environmental programs through collaboration with the diverse resources of the campus and community. OSU strives to build a safer, healthier campus by nurturing academic and social development through: 1) student assistance for alcohol and other drug problems, 2) alcohol and other drug prevention education, 3) involvement of faculty and students, 4) prevention-oriented policies, 5) a late night programming initiative, 6) social norms marketing campaigns, 7) property owners, beverage distributors, and campus collaborations, and 8) assessment activities. One of the most successful educational initiatives put forth by Student Wellness targets first-year students. Through the First Year Success Series, Student Wellness staff and volunteers reached out to over 3000 first year students through a variety of educational sessions during the Fall of 2002.

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding alcohol and drug use, consequences of that use, and perceptions of the campus environment among Ohio State’s undergraduate students. As part of the report, comparisons are made to national norms along with longitudinal comparisons between data collected in 2000 and 2002 at Ohio State. The study also examines various subgroups of Ohio State students such as men and women, white students and students of color, on-campus and off-campus residents, and students under 21 and those of legal drinking age. Differences between and among class ranks are also examined. By identifying usage patterns and high-risk subgroups, intervention strategies can attend to the most acute problem areas.

The report findings come from data collected through the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, developed by the Core Institute at the Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The survey is designed for use with the university student population to assist institutions in obtaining a common “core” of baseline information about alcohol and other drug use. This mail survey was administered by the Center for Survey Research of the OSU College of Social and Behavioral Sciences for the Student Wellness Center and the Office of Student Affairs Assessment in Spring of 2002. A total of 934 undergraduate students were randomly selected, and 456 (48.9%) surveys were completed.
Overall Findings

Despite many efforts at OSU, evidence suggests that there has been a slight increase in alcohol use and an increase in high-risk drinking.\(^1\)

- There has been an increase in the percentage of students who drink in high school. In 2000, 60.8% of students had reported trying alcohol by the age of 17; in 2002, 73.0% of students reported using alcohol by the age of 17.
- In 2002, 81.3% of the undergraduate sample reported having used alcohol in the 30 days prior to completing the survey. This compares to 72.1% of the national sample and to 76.4% of the 2000 sample.
- In 2002, the average number of drinks consumed per week by the respondents was 6.36 compared to 6.16 in 2000.
- Although we had seen a gradual decline in the past, there was an 8.6% increase in the high-risk drinking rate\(^1\) for all students in 2002 compared to 2000 (52.8% compared to 44.2%).
- Moreover, the high-risk drinking rates\(^1\) of all groups of students increased as well – most notably, women increased by 11.7%, students of color increased by 10.6%, students of legal drinking age increased by 10.6%, and seniors increased 11.1%.
- Although the overall rate of frequent binging\(^2\) only increased slightly (from 22.0% in 2000 to 24.3% in 2002), the following groups had an increase of 5% or higher: seniors (+10.8%), sophomores (+7.3%), off-campus residents (+6.8%), women (+5.7%), students 21 and older (+5%).

Despite the increase in high-risk drinking\(^1\) of first-year students (from 42.0% to 50.6%), all other indicators point to a decrease in the prevalence and quantity of alcohol use by freshmen.

- The frequent binge-drinking rate\(^2\) for first-year students decreased from 26.1% to 16.0%.
- The percentage of freshmen who indicated they drank weekly over the last year decreased from 51.1% to 33.8%.
- The percentage of freshmen who used alcohol frequently\(^3\) in the last 30 days decreased from 17.0% to 7.4%.
- The average number of drinks first-year students consumed during a week decreased from 7.15 to 4.21.

Related to these decreases are corresponding decreases for on-campus residents.

- The frequent binge-drinking\(^2\) rate for on-campus residents decreased from 28.6% to 20.3%.
- The percentage of on-campus residents who indicated they drank weekly over the last year decreased from 50.8% to 41.0%.
- The percentage of on-campus residents who used alcohol frequently\(^3\) in the last 30 days decreased from 18.4% to 14.9%.
- The average number of drinks on-campus students consumed during a week decreased from 7.83 to 4.87.
While there are positive trends for first-year students and on-campus residents, concerns are raised about the increase in alcohol use by women.

- Evidence suggests that women’s high-risk drinking behavior is steadily increasing over time. Women’s high-risk drinking rate increased 11.7% between 2000 and 2002. Furthermore since 1996, there has been a 21.7% increase.
- In addition, women’s frequent binging rate increased from 16.6% in 2000 to 22.3% in 2002.
- Women were more likely to have used alcohol, to have used alcohol within the last year, and to have used alcohol within the last 30 days than were men. Moreover, in 2002, the percentage of women who used alcohol within the last year and within the last 30 days increased by approximately 6% from 2000.
- The average number of drinks women consumed per week increased from 4.29 in 2000 to 5.02 in 2002.

Overall, the rates of other drug use have remained either constant or dropped slightly.

- Tobacco use has declined; in 2002, 44.2% of students reported having used tobacco in the last year compared to 50.0% in 2000.
- Marijuana use has remained relatively consistent with approximately 34% of students reporting that they used marijuana within the last year.
- Evidence also suggests that the use of hallucinogens has declined with 9.4% in 2002 indicating that they had used hallucinogens compared to 15.7% in 2000.
- Also, a lower percentage of students in 2002 indicated that they had used designer drugs within the last year compared to students in 2000 (6.1% compared to 10.8%).
- Of note, students of color reported a notable increase in the use of marijuana. In 2002, 42.4% reported that they had used marijuana compared to 28.4% in 2000. Similarly, in 2002, 15.6% reported using marijuana within the last 30 days compared to 7.5% in 2000.

Students experience a variety of direct and indirect academic, social, and physical consequences as a result of alcohol and drug use.

- Consistent with the findings in both 1998 and 2000, the data demonstrate an inverse relationship between alcohol use and academic success as measured by GPA. Students with an “A” average are the least likely to use alcohol frequently or to engage in high-risk drinking behavior.
- Related to GPA, binge drinkers (especially frequent binge drinkers) are much more likely to miss a class or do poorly on a test or project as a result of alcohol or drug use. For example, 80.2% of frequent bingers reported having missed a class, and 55.6% reported performing poorly on an important test or project as a result of drinking or drug use. For non-bingers, only 14.0% and 10.6% respectively reported similar difficulties.
- High-risk drinkers are also more likely to experience physical consequences and risks such as having a memory loss, driving under the influence, being hurt or injured, and being taken advantage of sexually.
- Socially, binge drinkers also experience a number of consequences such as having done something they later regretted, being criticized by someone they know, and getting in trouble with authorities.
Furthermore, students experience secondary effects of drinking - consequences experienced as a result of others’ drinking.

- Almost 62% reported that students’ drinking interferes with their lives on or around campus.
- Thirty-nine percent (39.0%) of OSU students responded that other students’ drinking interferes with their studying, compared to 28.1% of the national sample.
- OSU students were also more likely to respond that other students’ drinking made them feel unsafe (29.4%) and messed up their physical living space (34.9%) than what was found nationally, with differences of more than 13%.

Students continue to perceive alcohol use to be higher than reported behavior and to view alcohol as an important part of the social life at OSU. At the same time, students were more likely to believe that OSU had active prevention efforts and policies.

- In comparing actual behavior to perceptions of alcohol use, students reported a higher perception of use than reported consumption. Almost 96% (95.6%) reported that they thought students used alcohol weekly. In reality, only 52.7% of the respondents reported that they used alcohol that frequently.
- Approximately 80% of OSU students surveyed agreed that alcohol breaks the ice and that it enhances social activity. These percentages are noticeably higher than the national data (at 72.5% and 71.7% respectively) and higher than the OSU 2000 data (at 73.2% and 72.8% respectively).
- Over 93% of students believed that alcohol is a central part of the social life for male students and fraternities; 83.0% believed that it is a central part for female students; 87.9% for sororities, and 74.6% for athletes. Overall, the perceptions of the role of alcohol in the social lives of students remained consistent between 2002 and 2000. However, the percentage of students who believe that alcohol is a central part of the social life for alumni increased from 39.0% in 2000 to 45.4% in 2002.
- In 2002, most students (82.6%) stated that the campus has alcohol and drug policies (an increase of 8.2% since 2000), and 50.2% thought that the policies were enforced in (an increase of 11.4% since 2000).
- In 2002, 71.7% believed that OSU is concerned about the prevention of drug and alcohol use, up from 58.0% in 2000.

For further information or a complete report contact: The Office of Student Affairs Assessment, 614/247-6220 or go on-line to http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/assessment/
Also, contact the Student Wellness Center at 614/292-4527.

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i In the Core Survey, **high-risk** or **binge drinking** is defined as having five or more drinks in one sitting during a two-week period.

ii **Frequent binge drinkers**, as defined by Harvard’s School of Public Health, are those students who reported having binged three or more times during a two-week period.

iii **Frequent use of alcohol** is defined as having used alcohol on 10 or more days over a 30-day period.