Drinking Alcohol

When asked, many college students say they consume alcohol in moderation, if at all. Out of the students who do drink alcohol, most do not report binge drinking*. In fact, a nationwide survey of representative college students indicates the number of students who drink heavily is small.

*The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks in a row for males, and four or more drinks in a row for females.

Why does it seem like everyone is drinking?
The behaviors of a few people can sometimes lead to the attribution of those behaviors to an entire group of people. The following explains this concept:

You go to a party with 90 people present. Seventy of the 90 people are drinking. Of those 70 people, only 10 drink heavily and engage in the following behaviors: two are making out, two are fighting, two are passed out on the ground, two are shouting at each other, one is vomiting on the carpet and the last one decided to go streaking. These 10 people leave a lasting memory and they end up dictating the impression of the party. The following day if someone is approached with the question, “Hey, how was the party?” replying “It was great, 20 people stayed sober” is just not a likely response. Instead, someone is more likely to recollect those 10 drunken individuals and say, “Everyone was trashed out of their minds” (even though in reality, only 10 people were). This can lead to the generalization that when college students party, everyone gets drunk.

What is Alcohol?
Alcohol is a drug that is manufactured with the use of yeast and a variety of fruits and grains. It is characterized as a depressant drug because it slows down the body’s nervous system. When consumed, alcohol is absorbed from the stomach into the blood stream, and it is quickly carried to the brain, liver and nearly all major tissues and organs of the body.

One serving of alcohol is:
- 12 oz. bottle of beer, wine cooler or malt beverage
- 5 oz. glass of wine
- 1.5 oz. of 80 proof distilled spirits (one shot)

Alcohol Statistics
- Approximately 25% reported academic consequences because of their drinking
- 1,825 students between the ages of 18 and 24, die every year from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes
- 599,000 were unintentionally injured during drinking
- More than 696,000 were assaulted as a result of drinking
- 97,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape
- 400,000 had unprotected sex while under the influence of alcohol
- Over 150,000 developed alcohol related health problems
- 11% reported being involved with police or campus security due to alcohol related violations

Why do some students choose not to drink?
Many college students may choose not to drink alcohol because they are aware of the negative consequences that may be associated with the use of alcohol.

Why do some students choose not to drink?
The are a number of reasons why people consume alcoholic beverages. Some reasons may include:
- Enjoyment
- Reduction in inhibitions
- Means to cope with difficult emotions
- A way to escape from problems
- To have a “good time”
What are the behavioral changes that occur in response to alcohol consumption?
Behavioral changes that occur in response to alcohol consumption include a decrease in inhibitions, the ability to use judgment, fine motor coordination and reflex responses. As one’s blood alcohol concentration (BAC)* rises, these impairments increase and functions such as voluntary response to stimulation, sensation, movement and self-protective reflexes decrease. In addition, impairments in breathing and heart function as well as comatose and death may result.

*BAC is the ratio of alcohol present in the blood to the total volume of blood, expressed as percentage.

What increases risk of intoxication?
The risk of intoxication increases with the rate at which alcohol is absorbed by the body. The number of drinks required for intoxication varies from person to person. The variation is due to the differences in individual alcohol absorption rate factors which include:

- **Amount of alcohol content in a drink:** High alcohol concentration leads to a higher level of intoxication.
- **Type of drink:** Carbonated drinks increase intoxication because alcohol is absorbed into the small intestine faster.
- **Speed of consumption:** The faster a drink is consumed, the higher the BAC from a given amount of alcohol.
- **Presence of food in the stomach:** Drinking on an empty stomach results in faster alcohol absorption.
- **Body Composition:** The higher the percentage of body fat, the higher the BAC.
- **Gender:** Women have less dehydrogenase, the enzyme that breaks down alcohol, and higher levels of estrogen which increases the rate of intoxication.
- **Drug Use:** Mixing alcohol with many over-the-counter, prescriptions, and illegal drugs can cause nausea, drugs, vomiting, headaches, convulsions, liver, lung and kidney damage, as well as certain life-threatening complications such as hemorrhages, blood clots, and difficulty breathing.
- **Drinking history and body chemistry:** Genetic makeup and individual characteristics influence the rate of intoxication.

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!
Acute alcohol intoxication (alcohol poisoning) is possible with the overconsumption of alcohol. Signs and symptoms of this life-threatening condition include:

- Unconsciousness
- Slow respiration
- Cold, clammy, pale or bluish skin
- Vomiting while sleeping or passed out
- Not waking up after vomiting
- Strong odor of alcohol

When these symptoms are observed:
- Call 911 or the local emergency number immediately
- Stay with the victim, place them on their side if possible, and monitor his/her airway, breathing, and circulation (ABC’s)

What are the signs of alcohol abuse?
If the following behaviors associated with alcohol consumption occur, one may want to examine his/her drinking habits:

- Failure to fulfill major responsibilities at school, work or home
- An increase in academic problems (e.g., poor attendance, lower grades, and/or recent disciplinary action)
- Drinking in physically dangerous situations (e.g., driving)
- Recurring alcohol related legal problems (e.g., harming someone or getting a DUI)
- An increase in moody behavior (e.g., high temper, irritability and defensiveness)
- Increased frequency in drinking
- Drinking to feel confident or to escape reality
- Belief that no party is fun without drinking
- Secretive about drinking habits
- Drinking alone, to relieve hangovers, or to black out
- Trying to stop or cut back drinking with no lasting effects

If an individual has any of the following symptoms, he/she may have a disease called alcoholism and may need to seek professional help:

- **Craving:** the strong need or urge to drink
- **Loss of control:** Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has already begun
- **Physical dependence:** withdrawal symptoms (nausea, sweating, shakiness and anxiety) are experienced when alcohol consumption is discontinued
- **Tolerance:** a need to drink larger quantities of alcohol in order to get a “buzz”
Tips for creating a responsible and enjoyable party

- Remember, as the host of the party, you are ultimately responsible for your guests.
- Check IDs, guests must be 21 to drink.
- Encourage individuals to designate drivers and give them credit by thanking them for taking the noble responsibility. Do not encourage them to drink.
- Stay alert. Know the alcohol absorption rate factors, watch for behavioral cues in people who may be consuming more than they can handle. Intervene early.
- Serve food and non-alcoholic beverages.
- If someone is drunk, but wants to drive, take their car keys.
- Recognize the symptoms of alcohol poisoning and immediately seek help.
- Set an example for the responsible behavior you expect at your party.

Tips to protect yourself

- Only consume drinks that have been poured, mixed or opened by you or in front of you.
- Hold your drink at all times. Never leave your drink unattended.
- Be careful not to let alcohol and/or other drugs decrease your ability to make sensible decisions.
- Do not leave a social event with someone you have just met or don’t know.
- Make sure at least one other person knows where you are at all times during a social event.
- Trust your instincts. If the way someone acts make you feel nervous, helpless or uneasy, leave his/her presence.

Alcohol and student performance

- Alcohol robs your brain cells of water and glucose (the brain’s food), which you need for studying and test taking.
- Alcohol disrupts your sleep cycle, which can negatively impact class participation, studying, and test taking.
- Alcohol reduces absorption and processing of Vitamin B. You lose even more vitamin B when you consume alcohol because it stimulates the liver, which results in vitamin B loss by way of urine.
- Students need vitamin B to better ensure academic success: Vitamin B helps convert carbs into fuel for energy, metabolize fats and protein, form hemoglobin, maintain healthy red blood cells, as well as help nervous system and brain function.

For additional information please contact:
OU Counseling and Testing Services
Goddard Health Center
(405) 325-2911 or (405) 325-2700
healthservices.ou.edu

The Virtue Center
(405) 321-0022
www.naichelp.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
Hope Line
www.ncadd.org

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholicsanonymous.org

References:
- www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov
- www.unh.edu (The University of New Hampshire)
- www.niaa.nih.gov (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
- http://studenthelath.ucsd.edu/partynutrition.shtml
  (University Counseling Center University of Notre Dame)