

Running Head: ALCOHOL USE AT LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Alcohol Behaviors and Attitudes: Liberty University

Lucas E. Vannoy

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2006

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

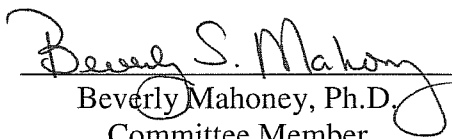
This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.



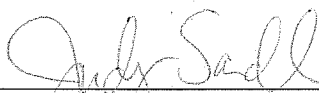
Norman Reichenbach, Ph.D.
Chairman of Thesis



Charles Detwiler, Ph.D.
Committee Member



Beverly Mahoney, Ph.D.
Committee Member



Judy R. Sandlin, Ph.D.
Asst. Honors Program Director



Date

Abstract

The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) is an ongoing, multi-year study that has included to date over 14,000 students at 120 four-year colleges throughout America which accesses alcohol attitudes and behaviors. The purpose of this research is to extend that study by altering the instrument used in the CAS, making it more relevant to Liberty University students. Few institutions, if any, which were studied previously, strictly prohibit alcohol use for all students. Therefore, the research will also assist in determining if Liberty University policies against drinking alcohol are stringent enough to discourage the act. The binge drinking rate of Liberty University students, 10.7%, is significantly lower than the national average of 44.1%. Male students at the school binge drink more often than females, commuter students more often than residents, students older than 21 more often than students under 21, upperclassmen more often than underclassmen, and students with a low grade point average more often than those with a high grade point average. Overall, the abstaining rate of Liberty University students, 50.3%, is significantly higher than national average, 19.2 %. Thus, the strict alcohol policies of Liberty University are effective in deterring students from following national trends.

Alcohol Behaviors and Attitudes: Liberty University

For centuries, alcohol consumption has been a moral and social dilemma for many individuals. Recently, the issue has been thrust into the spotlight. The very institutes of higher learning of our nation, which shape the leaders of tomorrow, have fallen under alcohol's influence. Colleges and universities across the country can no longer ignore or deny the influence of alcohol on college students in America. Research completed throughout the last decade has brought much needed attention to the breadth of the problem and its tragic effects upon America's college population. Less than 20% of college students abstain from alcohol use, while over 40% are labeled as binge drinkers (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo & Lee, 2000). Yet many high school students wait with anticipation until they are released to the freedoms of college only to fall under the clutches of alcohol. The party scene seems to lure so many students away from the ultimate purpose of college: to complete an education. The effect of alcohol is extensive. Many educators, parents, and students realize this, but they do not actually realize the extent of this effect. How much does alcohol truly affect the lives of our country's college population?

Many people would simply say, "It's just a couple drinks to relax," and yes, that is the truth for many Americans. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that to enjoy a drink occasionally is not harmful to adults, moderate drinking – up to two drinks per day for men and one per day for women is not harmful (National Institute, 2001). The facts show, however, that a significant number of adults are not drinking simply to relax. Research from 2001 shows that 14 million Americans,

one in every 13 adults, currently abuse alcohol (National Institute, 2001). This number should be of concern, since heavy drinking increases the risk of liver, esophagus, throat, and larynx cancers, while it can also cause liver cirrhosis, immune system problems, and brain damage. Also, alcohol-related problems cost society approximately \$185 billion per year. In human terms, the costs cannot be calculated (National Institute, 2001). The facts about alcohol cannot be ignored; its influence is far reaching and crippling.

The consumption of alcohol plagues college campuses across America. College is an obvious catalyst for alcohol use. Statistics show young adults who do not go to college drink less than those who do (Witmer, 2004). According to Witmer, 12 million undergraduate students consume four billion cans of beer or 55 six packs each a year. The college years do indeed shape the latter years of a person's life, more than 35% of adults with an alcohol problem were binge drinkers by the age of nineteen (Witmer, 2004). Donna Shalala, former Secretary of Health and Human Services, shared in 1994 that just over 67% of college students had used alcohol within the past thirty days, while only 61% of those who do not attend college had used alcohol within that same time period. The age range of 18 to 21 is the period of heaviest alcohol consumption in America (Shalala, 2004). Though many would not deny alcohol as a problematic area amongst college students, statistics expose the problem as truly alarming. The problem is much more widespread than most could imagine.

To determine exactly how widespread this epidemic has become, Henry Wechsler, Ph.D. initiated The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS). The CAS examines key issues in college alcohol abuse, including the tradition of

heavy drinking on college campuses, the role of fraternities, sororities and athletics, the relationship of state alcohol control measures and college policies to these issues, and the role that easy access to alcohol and low prices play (Harvard School of Public Health, 2002). The study is an ongoing survey of over 14 thousand students at 120 four-year colleges. Each student was given a 20 page questionnaire, which questioned their background, history of alcohol use, current alcohol use, and perception of alcohol use at their campus. The survey was completed on a nationally representative sample of college campuses on four separate occasions: in 1993, 1997, 1999, and 2001. The results of the CAS have been published in over 40 articles (Harvard School of Public Health, 2002). Those reports provide ample information on the prevalence of alcohol use among college students.

The CAS is at the forefront of research due to three qualities of the study: thoroughness, consistency, and accuracy. When surveying the numerous students, a drink was defined as, “either a 12-oz can/bottle of beer, a 4-oz glass of wine, a 12-oz bottle/can of wine cooler, or a 1.25 oz shot of liquor straight or in a mixed drink” (Wechsler, Molnar, Davenport & Baer, 1999, p. 248). The study focused on a course of action called binge drinking which for the purposes of this study they define as consuming five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more drinks for women during the two weeks preceding the survey. Drinkers were classified into three categories: nonbinge drinkers were those who consumed alcohol in the past thirty days, but did not binge in the two weeks preceding the survey, infrequent binge drinkers were those who binged one or two times in the past two weeks, and frequent binge drinkers

were defined as those who binged three or more times in the past two weeks (Wechsler et al., 1999). The results of the 1993, 1997, and 1999 surveys will be considered, evaluating characteristics that influence drinking such as gender, race, age, etc.

In the 1993 CAS, 140 colleges were surveyed (Wechsler et al., 2000). For all college students, the median weekly consumption was one drink for women and two drinks for men, while the mean number of drinks per week was found to be 5.1. Frequent binge drinkers consumed an average of 17.9 drinks per week, infrequent binge drinkers an averaged 4.8 drinks per week, while the combination of drinkers who did not binge drink as well as those who did not drink at all only averaged 0.8 drinks per week. The data show frequent binge drinkers consumed a majority of the alcohol, 68%, while comprising only 19% of the total sample. The infrequent binge drinkers consumed 23%, and accounted for 24% of the sample (Wechsler et al., 1999). Binge drinkers as a whole represent less than half of the college population (44%), but they account for almost all (91%) of the alcohol consumed by college students. When statistics are considered across all students in all colleges, the median number of drinks (1.5) consumed per student during a week is very small. The frequent binge drinkers who consume 68% of the alcohol raise the average number of drinks per week, to 5.1 (Wechsler et al., 1999). Clearly alcohol consumption is a problem at colleges and universities. Even more alarming is the number of frequent binge drinkers. Almost half of all college students are classified as binge drinkers and are consuming large amounts of alcohol.

The trend continues when evaluating the data from the following surveys. In 1997, the CAS included 130 of the original 140 colleges surveyed in 1993 (Wechsler et

al., 2000). The proportion of binge drinkers dropped only slightly from 44.1% in 1993 to 42.7% in 1997 (Wechsler et al., 2000). Although the two results compare closely, what was found to change significantly was the number of abstainers, which rose from 15.4% to 18.9%, and the number of frequent binge drinkers, which rose from 19.8% to 20.9%. This increase in the extremes is called a polarization effect. The total percentages of groups compare, but when taking a deeper look at the data show a change in the subgroup numbers (Wechsler et al., 2000).

The same survey given in 1993 and 1997 was again completed in 1999. In that survey, 128 schools of the original 140 were sampled (Wechsler et al., 2000). When comparing subgroups of frequent binge drinkers a few differences are notable from the 1999 survey. Gender is a significant factor in determining frequent binge drinkers with 50.7% of males being found to be frequent bingers, while only 40.0% of females were categorized into the same group. Among race, the highest percentage of binge drinkers was white 49.2%. When comparing the location of residence, those living in a fraternity/sorority were by far more inclined to binge 78.9%, while only 44.5% of dormitory students binged (Wechsler et al., 2000).

The proportion of binge drinkers did not change among most student subgroups between 1993 and 1999, with two notable exceptions. Binge drinking decreased among dormitory residents and increased among students living off campus (Wechsler et al., 2000). The trend of increased abstainers, 18.9% to 19.2%, and increased frequent binge drinkers, 20.9% to 22.7%, continued in 1999, as college students continue to grow more polarized in that regard. Disgust or concern at the more extreme forms of drinking may

be driving some students away from the drinking scene entirely. The majority of students on American college campuses, 56% are not binge drinkers. They either don't drink or drink but do not binge (National College Alcohol Study, 2000). Although a majority of students do not binge, the number is only slightly over half.

The surveys given at the same 119 colleges in 1993, 1997, and 1999 have shown similar rates of binge drinking over the past six years (Wechsler et al., 2000). Two of five students were found to be binge drinkers, and the proportion of binge drinkers remained similar for almost all subgroups of students in all types of colleges, and the same types of students who had the highest rates of binge drinking in 1993 and 1997 continued this trend in 1999. The students most likely to binge drink were fraternity or sorority house residents and members of Greek organizations and students who were white, male, and were binge drinkers in high school. The students least likely to binge drink were African American or Asian, aged 24 years or older, married, and who were not binge drinkers in high school (Wechsler et al., 2000). Rates that did change concerned place of residence, where binge drinking decreased among students living in a dormitory and increased among students living off campus.

Certain trends exist in which specific subgroups of those surveyed do indeed have higher probabilities of consuming alcohol. Students who live on campus or who live independently off campus tend to drink more than those who live off campus with their parents (Harford, Wechsler & Muthen, 2002). Harford et al. (2002) drew from the findings of the CAS (Wechsler et al., 2000), but examined specific relationships within the study in more detail than the CAS. The sample used was restricted to students

between ages 18 and 22, who were unmarried, and had used alcohol in the past month. Compared with students living at home with parents, students residing in dorms or off campus without parents reported significant increases in the growth trajectories for heavy drinking (Harford et al., 2002). It was even reported that the change in residence is “time-specific” to the increase in alcohol consumption of those students. Although these results are not surprising, they do give good reason to include the place of residency within future surveys and help to focus the attention on those living without their parents.

Another factor, along with place of residency, influencing the consumption of alcohol is the religiosity of individual students at college. Research shows those who are more religious tend to refrain from drinking more often than those not concerned with religion. One study has found a consistent, modest inverse relationship between religiosity and drinking (Galen & Rogers, 2004). Those who are members of more conservative religions, which prohibit alcohol use, do indeed have low rates of consumption and high rates of abstention.

Intrinsic religiosity is quite predictive of personal alcohol use and it is defined as an “internalized and meaningful integration of the religion into one’s personal identity,” while extrinsic religiosity is “a more utilitarian approach to religion” (Galen & Rogers, 2004, p. 469). Their findings show individuals with an intrinsic religiosity have heightened expectations of how alcohol will affect them, proving to be a protection against beginning to drink. Factors such as frequency of church attendance, frequency of prayer, and religious fundamentalism all played a role in the lack of consumption of alcohol, but the idea of intrinsic religiosity was the best predictor of low alcohol

consumption. Although the overall proportion of complete abstainers was 18.5% in the entire sample, the proportion of complete abstention was highest in the Conservative Protestant denomination (48.1%), compared with Moderate Protestant (12.5%), Catholic (14.1%), and no denomination (18.2%). The study suggests that religion may reduce alcohol use via cognitive beliefs about alcohol. The fact that Conservative Protestants, despite having a 48% abstention rate, had the highest expectations of negative self-perception indicates that negative expectancies are being acquired, possibly through their experience within religion (Galen & Rogers, 2004). Religion and faith are significant factors deterring individuals from joining the masses who drink alcohol in college.

The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study is not the only study on the widespread problem of alcohol consumption among college students. The National Advisory Council (NIAAA) recently released a statement that defined binge drinking as “the consumption of sufficient alcohol to reach a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08%” (Beirness, Foss & Vogel-Sprott, 2004, p. 600). This corresponds to five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women (5+/4+) in a two-hour period. The 5+/4+ measure of the CAS has been a topic of debate since this level of alcohol consumption may not necessarily produce an advanced state of intoxication and that a BAC of 0.08% is a better measure of binge drinking (Beirness et al., 2004).

Data collection was performed to compare the conflicting definitions of heavy drinking from the CAS versus the NIAAA. A total of 28.3% of the students interviewed met the CAS conditions of a heavy drinker; their mean BAC was 0.079% (Beirness et al., 2004). Less than half of those considered heavy drinkers by the CAS reached the 0.08%

BAC considered to be a heavy drinker by the NIAAA standard. The results of these data cast doubt on the validity of the 5+/4+ criteria to define a heavy drinker (Beirness et al., 2004). Regardless of the discrepancy in defining binge drinking, the NIAAA study still found a large percentage of students interviewed at random times during a weekend evening were found to have a positive BAC reading, thus agreeing with the CAS that alcohol is a significant problem on college campuses.

Alcohol use is a significant and alarming phenomenon occurring across America's college campuses. One of the first battles to win is to refute the perception of incoming students, who think everyone at college drinks alcohol. Heavy drinking such as binge drinking is highly visible, which would cause it to be assumed to be common (Wechsler et al., 1999). When interviewed, Henry Wechsler shared that because many freshmen want to form a larger group of friends, they join the highly visible activity of heavy drinking (Facing Up to our Campus Drinking Problem, 1997). College students need to realize that getting drunk does not need to be a rite of passage, and hangovers are not a prerequisite for graduation (Shalala, 2004).

While drinking habits of students across secular college campuses have been extensively studied and excessive use of alcohol has been documented, similar studies have not been conducted on campuses of Christian schools. My goal was to conduct such a study using a questionnaire similar to the CAS questionnaire to measure alcohol usage and attitudes toward alcohol among students at Liberty University, an evangelical Christian university.

Methods

Instrument

A modified version of the questionnaire the College Alcohol Study created to measure alcohol use and binge drinking of college students was utilized (Harvard School of Public Health, 1994). The questionnaire was reduced from the original 125 questions to approximately 50. The questions selected focused on personal alcohol attitudes and behaviors rather than assessing areas such as student activities and other personal behaviors included in the Harvard instrument. The questionnaire also included questions regarding student life, extracurricular activities, school policies, personal alcohol use, and perception about alcohol use within the university (Appendix 1).

Subjects

Students taking Personal Health (Health 216) at Liberty University in the Spring Semester of 2005 were given the survey instrument. This course was chosen because of the diversity of students who take this course, including students of each gender, classification (freshman through senior), and housing status (on campus versus off campus) at Liberty University. Only fully completed surveys where the directions were properly followed were used for further analyses ($n = 187$).

Procedure

The subjects of the study were asked to read and respond to the instrument in order to determine their alcohol attitudes and behaviors. Before taking the survey, each student was informed that the survey was anonymous. Directions were read to all students to inform them on how to properly complete the survey.

The responses of each student were then tallied with all other student responses using Microsoft Excel. For comparisons between subgroups of the Liberty University population, data were compiled into contingency tables and then analyzed with chi-square analyses. For example, drinking behaviors were compared between males and females.

Drinking patterns of students were grouped into four drinking behaviors. Abstainers are students who have not consumed alcohol in the past year. Nonbinge drinkers are students who have consumed alcohol in the past year but had not binged in the previous 2 weeks. Occasional binge drinkers are students who are male and have consumed 5 or more drinks one or two times in the past two weeks or are female and have consumed 4 or more drinks one or two times in the past two weeks. Frequent binge drinkers are students who are male and have consumed 5 or more drinks three or more times in the past two weeks or are female and have consumed 4 or more drinks three or more times in the past two weeks (Wechsler et al., 2000).

Responses regarding demographic information, the student's view of school policies, personal alcohol use, and the perception of alcohol usage on campus were summarized as percentages and then tabulated. The data for Liberty University were also compared to the national drinking results given in the Harvard School of Public Health 1999 College Alcohol Study.

Results

Composition of Student Samples

The majority of students taking the survey instrument were women (60.4%), white (73.3%), less than 21 years of age (64.7%), and resided on campus (64.2%). The respondents were also composed primarily of freshmen (30.5%) and students describing themselves as “B students” (52.9%) (Table 1).

Student Drinking Behavior

As measured by the Harvard College Alcohol Study criteria, just over half of the student body (50.3%) were abstainers, a large portion (39.0%) are nonbinge drinkers, 6.4% of students are occasional binge drinkers, and 4.3% are frequent binge drinkers (Table 2). The drinking behaviors were further divided into subgroups of the student body (Table 2). There was a statistically significant difference in drinking behaviors according to gender ($\chi^2(3) = 8.03, p = 0.045$), with males more commonly being binge drinkers (17.6%) than females (6.2%). A statistically significant difference in drinking behaviors also exists with regard to age ($\chi^2(3) = 9.68, p = 0.022$). Fewer students over the age of 21 abstain (36.4%) than students under 21 (57.9%). By academic year, the highest percentage of students who are binge drinkers are juniors (20.6%). More seniors non-binge drink (52.3%) than students from any other academic year. A statistically significant difference in drinking behaviors also exists in regard to living location ($\chi^2(3) = 10.2, p = 0.017$). More resident students refrain from alcohol (57.5%) than their commuter counterparts (37.3%). Finally, a statistically significant difference exists in the drinking behaviors of students according to grade point average ($\chi^2(6) = 15.2, p = 0.019$).

Table 1

*General Characteristics of Liberty University Student Samples taking the
Modified CAS Instrument during the Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)*

| Characteristic | % |
|-----------------|------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 39.6 |
| Female | 60.4 |
| Ethnicity | |
| White | 73.3 |
| Black | 12.8 |
| Spanish | 2.7 |
| Asian | 7.0 |
| Native American | 1.1 |
| Other | 3.2 |
| Age | |
| < 21 years | 64.7 |
| ≥ 21 years | 35.3 |
| Year in School | |
| Freshman | 30.5 |
| Sophomore | 27.8 |
| Junior | 18.2 |
| Senior | 23.5 |
| Living Location | |
| Resident | 64.2 |
| Commuter | 35.8 |
| Grade Average | |
| "A" Student | 21.4 |
| "B" Student | 52.9 |
| "C" Student | 25.7 |

Table 2

Liberty University Student Patterns of Alcohol Use during the Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)

| Characteristic | Prevalence (%) | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|----------|------------------|----------------|
| | Abstainer | Nonbinge | Occasional Binge | Frequent Binge |
| | | Drinker | Drinker | Drinker |
| Entire Student Body | 50.3 | 39.0 | 6.4 | 4.3 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 50.0 | 32.4 | 12.2 | 5.4 |
| Female | 50.4 | 43.4 | 2.7 | 3.5 |
| Age | | | | |
| < 21 years | 57.9 | 33.1 | 6.6 | 2.5 |
| ≥ 21 years | 36.4 | 50.0 | 6.1 | 7.6 |
| Year in School | | | | |
| Freshman | 54.4 | 38.6 | 5.3 | 1.8 |
| Sophomore | 55.8 | 32.7 | 9.6 | 1.9 |
| Junior | 47.1 | 32.4 | 8.8 | 11.8 |
| Senior | 40.9 | 52.3 | 2.3 | 4.5 |
| Living Location | | | | |
| Resident | 57.5 | 32.5 | 7.5 | 2.5 |
| Commuter | 37.3 | 50.7 | 4.5 | 7.5 |
| Grade Average | | | | |
| "A" Student | 67.5 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 2.5 |
| "B" Student | 48.5 | 43.4 | 5.1 | 3.0 |
| "C" or Lower | | | | |
| Student | 39.6 | 37.5 | 14.6 | 8.3 |

As grades improve, the percentage of students who drink decreases. More “A” students abstain (67.5%) than “B” students (48.5%) or “C” students (39.6%).

Rationale for Drinking/Not Drinking

The reasoning behind student drinking behaviors is summarized in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 lists reasons for not drinking alcohol, while Table 4 lists reasons for drinking alcohol. All students were asked why they chose to abstain when they did, and only students who consumed alcohol in the past year were included in Table 4. The reason most students listed “very important” as a reason not to drink was “I’m going to drive” (59.9%), with the second most common reason being, “I don’t want to lose control” (47.6%). Interestingly, students listed “Drinking is against my religion” only 27.3% of the time and “Drinking is against my values” only 36.4% of the time. Conversely, the reason students listed as “very important” to drink most often was “To have a good time with friends” (17.4%), followed by “To relax” and “To celebrate” (10.9%).

Drinking Style

The majority of students responded that it was very easy to obtain alcohol (32.1%) (Table 5). Only 8% of students found the task difficult or very difficult. The type of alcohol students consume when bingeing is listed in Table 6. Students most commonly chose to drink beer (52.2%).

Student Perception of School Policies

Most students feel that alcohol use at the university is a minor problem (50.3%) (Table 7). The vast majority of students think the school policy restricting alcohol use is

Table 3

Liberty University Student Reasons for Not Drinking Alcohol, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)

| Reasons | Prevalence (%) | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Very Important | Important | Somewhat Important | Not at all Important |
| Drinking is against my religion | 27.3 | 23.0 | 26.7 | 23.0 |
| Drinking is against my values | 36.4 | 22.5 | 19.3 | 21.9 |
| People in my family have alcohol problems | 27.8 | 15.0 | 14.4 | 42.8 |
| I'm not old enough to drink legally | 25.1 | 19.3 | 9.1 | 46.5 |
| I'm going to drive | 59.9 | 19.3 | 2.7 | 18.2 |
| It costs too much money | 20.3 | 17.1 | 25.1 | 37.4 |
| I don't like the taste | 17.6 | 16.0 | 23.0 | 43.3 |
| My friends don't drink | 15.0 | 15.5 | 18.7 | 50.8 |
| I don't want to disappoint someone I care about | 36.4 | 26.2 | 17.1 | 20.3 |
| I'm going on a date | 16.6 | 18.7 | 13.9 | 50.8 |
| It is bad for my health | 34.8 | 25.7 | 18.7 | 20.9 |
| It interferes with studying | 30.5 | 20.3 | 20.3 | 28.9 |
| It interferes with athletics | 33.2 | 18.2 | 16.6 | 32.1 |
| I don't want to lose control | 47.6 | 24.1 | 8.6 | 19.8 |
| I recently drank too much | 12.8 | 8.0 | 9.6 | 69.5 |
| I've had problems with alcohol | 11.2 | 7.5 | 10.7 | 70.6 |
| Fear of getting caught | 16.0 | 20.3 | 16.6 | 47.1 |

Table 4

Liberty University Student Reasons for Drinking Alcohol, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=92)

| Reasons | Prevalence (%) | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Very Important | Important | Somewhat Important | Not at all Important |
| To get away from problems | 5.4 | 7.6 | 21.7 | 65.2 |
| To relax | 10.9 | 15.2 | 34.8 | 39.1 |
| To get drunk | 2.2 | 7.6 | 9.8 | 80.4 |
| To have a good time with friends | 17.4 | 25.0 | 32.6 | 25.0 |
| Nothing else to do | 1.1 | 6.5 | 25.0 | 67.4 |
| To celebrate | 10.9 | 35.9 | 34.8 | 18.5 |
| To help get work done | 0.0 | 1.1 | 6.5 | 92.4 |
| I like the taste | 6.5 | 26.1 | 33.7 | 33.7 |
| As a reward for working hard | 4.3 | 6.5 | 18.5 | 70.7 |
| To fit in with friends | 0.0 | 4.3 | 25.0 | 70.7 |
| To feel more comfortable around opposite sex | 1.1 | 6.5 | 9.8 | 82.6 |
| Everyone else is drinking | 1.1 | 4.3 | 20.7 | 73.9 |
| Because its cheap | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.4 | 94.6 |

either enforced or strongly enforced (92%). The majority of respondents agree with the way the school is dealing with alcohol use (59.9%) and the majority of students (54.5%) also agree that the current school policy restricting alcohol use is the correct policy in addressing alcohol use. Only a small portion, 6.4%, of the respondents did not know the school's policy against alcohol consumption.

Table 5

*Liberty University Student Difficulty in Obtaining Alcohol,
Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)*

| Difficulty | % |
|-------------------------|------|
| Very Difficult | 0.5 |
| Difficult | 7.5 |
| Easy | 30.5 |
| Very Easy | 32.1 |
| Don't Know, Don't Drink | 29.4 |

Table 6

*Type of Alcohol Consumed by Liberty University Students
when Binging, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=23)*

| Type of Alcohol | % |
|-----------------|------|
| Beer | 52.2 |
| Wine Coolers | 13.0 |
| Wine | 0.0 |
| Liquor | 34.8 |

Table 7

Liberty University Student Views about School Policies and Programs, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)

| Student View | % |
|--|------|
| Do you think alcohol use is a problem for students on your campus? | |
| A Major Problem | 7.5 |
| A Problem | 32.1 |
| A Minor Problem | 50.3 |
| Not a Problem | 10.2 |
| In your opinion, how strongly does your school enforce its alcohol policy? | |
| The Policy is Strongly Enforced | 47.6 |
| The Policy is Enforced | 44.4 |
| The Policy is Weakly Enforced | 6.4 |
| The Policy is Not Enforced at all | 0.0 |
| Don't Know School's Policy | 1.6 |
| Do you agree with the way your college is dealing with student alcohol use? | |
| Agree Strongly | 15.0 |
| Agree | 59.9 |
| Disagree | 20.3 |
| Disagree Strongly | 4.3 |
| Which of the following do you think should be your school's policy about student drinking? | |
| The Current Policy | 54.5 |
| A Policy which Imposes Greater Restrictions | 16.6 |
| A Policy which Imposes Fewer Restrictions | 22.5 |
| Don't Know the School's Policy | 6.4 |

Student Perception of Alcohol Behaviors of Student Body

Student perception of alcohol use among other students was measured to compare to the actual drinking behaviors of the student body (Table 8). Most students (21.2%) think 60-69% of the student body abstains from alcohol use, while the highest number of students (17.4%) feel 20-29% of the study body drinks more than they should. When comparing their individual alcohol use to other Liberty University students (Table 9), the largest portion of students (40.4%) feel they drink much less than most and compared to their friends, 41.5% feel they drink much less than most.

Comparison to National Alcohol Behaviors

Liberty University student alcohol use was significantly different from national rates in 1999 (Table 10, Figure 1) ($\chi^2 = 138$, d.f. = 3, $p < 0.001$). The abstaining rate of Liberty University students (50.3%) is much higher than the national abstaining rate (19.2%). And the overall binge drinking rate of Liberty University students (10.7%) is much lower than the national binge drinking rate (44.1%).

Table 8

Liberty University Student Opinion of Drinking of Other Students, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)

| Student Opinion | % |
|---|------|
| What proportion of the following do you think are at your school? | |
| Abstainers | |
| 0% | 1.6 |
| 1-9 % | 2.7 |
| 10-19% | 6.5 |
| 20-29% | 12.5 |
| 30-39% | 7.6 |
| 40-49% | 12.0 |
| 50-59% | 12.5 |
| 60-69% | 21.2 |
| 70-79% | 13.6 |
| 80-89% | 8.2 |
| 90-100% | 1.6 |
| Students who drink more than they should | |
| 0% | 1.1 |
| 1-9 % | 13.0 |
| 10-19% | 13.6 |
| 20-29% | 17.4 |
| 30-39% | 14.7 |
| 40-49% | 14.7 |
| 50-59% | 9.8 |
| 60-69% | 7.1 |
| 70-79% | 6.0 |
| 80-89% | 1.6 |
| 90-100% | 1.1 |

Table 9

*Liberty University Student Comparison of Personal Drinking
Behavior to Other Students, Spring Semester, 2005 (n=187)*

| Student Opinion | % |
|--|------|
| How would you compare your alcohol use to the following? | |
| Students at your school | |
| Much Less than Most | 40.4 |
| Less than Most | 20.2 |
| About Average | 29.5 |
| More than Most | 8.2 |
| Much More than Most | 1.6 |
| Your friends | |
| Much Less than Most | 41.5 |
| Less than Most | 19.1 |
| About Average | 31.1 |
| More than Most | 6.0 |
| Much More than Most | 2.2 |

Table 10

Comparing Liberty University Student Alcohol Behaviors to National College Alcohol Behaviors

| Drinking Category | Prevalence (%) | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Liberty (2005) | National (1999) |
| | n = 187 | n = 13,819 |
| Abstainer | 50.3 | 19.2 |
| Nonbinge Drinker | 39.0 | 36.6 |
| Occasional Binge Drinker | 6.4 | 21.4 |
| Frequent Binge Drinker | 4.3 | 22.7 |

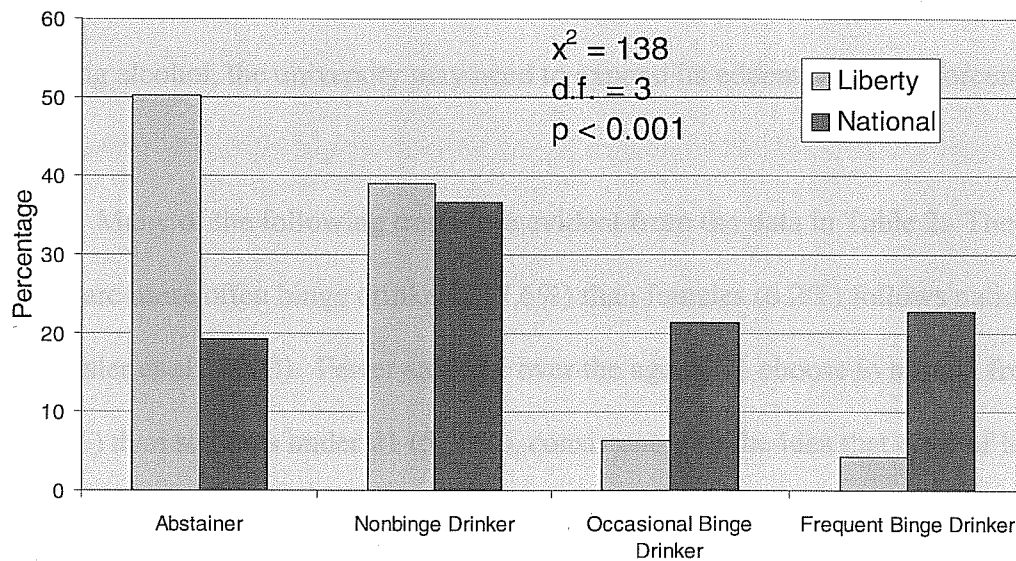


Figure 1. Comparison of Liberty University student (n = 187) alcohol behaviors (2005) to national college (n = 13,819) alcohol behaviors (1999).

Discussion

The results can be viewed positively and negatively. In a positive light, the level of alcohol use is much lower at Liberty University than national averages, only 10% of the student body binge drinks, while almost 45% of the national student body binge drinks. In a negative light, school policy stands against any alcohol use whatsoever, expecting students to abstain from drinking, but just over 50% of the students have had at least one drink in the last year. School policies seem to influence students away from alcohol use, but many Liberty University students still choose to drink. Using the data available, the specific subgroups of students which are drinking the most should be addressed. For example, commuter students could be sent an e-mail voicing the concern of the administration with regard to alcohol use. Furthermore, the university should assess if its enforcement of the drinking policy is adequate. If half of the students are drinking alcohol, the university may need to expand its education and enforcement tactics.

Many of the following trends are evident from the data in Table 2. The fact that males are more often binge drinkers (17.6%) than females (6.2%) follows national trends (Wechsler et al., 2000). Fewer students over the age of 21 choose to abstain from alcohol (36.4%) than students under 21 (57.9%), consistent with the idea that once of legal age, people will choose to drink more often. Accordingly, fewer juniors and seniors abstain (47.1% and 40.9%) than freshmen and sophomores (54.4% and 55.8%). This trend may stem from the age of students or the fact that older students make-up a majority of the commuter students. Fewer commuter students abstain (37.3%) than students who live on

campus (57.5%). This trend is easily explained; resident students are under the direct care of Resident Assistants and are typically supervised more closely. Also, the idea that better students, “A students,” abstain more (67.5%) than “B students” (48.5%) or “C students” (39.6%) might be explained by the fact that they are better informed or that they make better lifestyle decisions.

Student views concerning alcohol use seem fairly accurate. When asked, “Do you think alcohol use is a problem for students on your campus?” the majority of students described the problem as a minor one, which may or may not be a realistic assessment; 49.7% of the student body consuming alcohol in the past year is not necessarily a minor percentage. Further, when asked to describe the percentage of students who are abstainers, the most common answer was 60-69%, which was slightly higher than the actual value determined from the questionnaire of 50.3%. The most common opinion of students when asked, “what proportion of students drink more than they should?” was 20-29%, which is slightly higher than the actual reported value for students who would fit this category, i.e. binge drinkers (10.7%).

The overall student opinion about school policy is one of satisfaction. Students’ typical responses suggest they agree with the alcohol restriction. When asked, a majority (54.5%) of students felt the current school policy against alcohol is proper, and 59.9% of the respondents agreed the school is dealing with alcohol correctly. But these data expose a possible discrepancy between student opinion and behavior. Practically 60% of the student body feels drinking alcohol is punishable, yet only 50% actually abstain from

alcohol use. Thus, the thought process and actions of approximately 10% of the student body are not consistent.

The principal purpose of the study was to compare the drinking rates of Liberty University students to the national college student body. Liberty University drinking rates are as expected, much lower than national averages (Wechsler et al., 2000). The abstaining rate is much higher (50.3%) than the national abstaining rate (19.2%) and the binge drinking rate (10.7%) is significantly lower than the national rate (44.1%). These two statistics are expected, and reassuring. Students choosing to attend an evangelical Christian university are also choosing to abstain from alcohol more frequently than the average college students. The rates are also expected because students generally choose the college they attend, making it likely they would abide by the policies of the college, and on the whole, this is the case for Liberty University. Students of an evangelical Christian university, Liberty University, abstain from alcohol use significantly more and binge drink significantly less than average American college students.

The findings of this study are important because they document the reality of alcohol use at Liberty University. The current rate of alcohol consumption indicates approximately half of our students are not adhering to school policy. This policy is derived from a value system based upon the Bible. Since only a small percentage of the students choose not to drink for religious or value-based reasons, approximately half of students having a drink in the past year is not so surprising. If student thoughts and actions are consistent, the majority of students must believe alcohol use is not forbidden by the Bible. On the basis of these data, students need additional teaching on the topic of

alcohol. In addition, it will be important to track future rates of alcohol consumption among Liberty University students to see how these rates change over time.

References

- Beirness, D. J., Foss, R. D., & Vogel-Sprott, M. (2004). Drinking on campus: Self-reports and breath tests [Electronic version]. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 65, 600-604.
- Facing up to our campus drinking problem [Electronic version]. (1997). *About Campus*, 2 (2), 4-8.
- Galen, L. W., & Rogers, W. M. (2004). Religiosity, alcohol expectancies, drinking motives and their interaction in the prediction of drinking among college students [Electronic version]. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 65, 469-476.
- Harford, T.C., Wechsler, H., & Muthen, B.O. (2002). The impact of current residence and high school drinking on alcohol problems among college students [Electronic version]. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 63, 271-279.
- Harvard School of Public Health. October 30, 2004. About CAS. *College Alcohol Study*. Available [http: hsph.harvard.edu/cas/About/index.html](http://hsph.harvard.edu/cas/About/index.html)
- National college alcohol study finds significant increase in frequent binge drinkers. (2000). Campuses increasingly polarized around drinking: Drinkers drink more intensely while many students abstain. Retrieved November 7, 2004, from [http: alcoholism.about.com/library/blcas000314.htm](http://alcoholism.about.com/library/blcas000314.htm)
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2001). Alcoholism: Getting the facts. Retrieved November 7, 2004, from <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/facts/alcoholfacts.aspx>

Shalala, D. November 7, 2004. College drinking alert. Message from former secretary of health and human services. Available [http:](http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/alrets/1/blnaa29.htm)

alcoholism.about.com/cs/alrets/1/blnaa29.htm

Wechsler, H., Lee, J.E., Kuo, M., & Lee, H. (2000). College binge drinking in the 1990s: A continuing problem [Electronic version]. *Journal of American College Health*, 48, 199-210.

Wechsler, H., Molnar, B. E., Davenport, A. E., & Baer, J. S. (1999). College alcohol use: A full or empty glass? [Electronic version]. *Journal of American College Health*, 47, 247-252.

Witmer, Denise. College Binge Drinking Epidemic. November 7, 2004. The Effects of Binge Drinking on College Campuses. Available [http:](http://parentingteens.about.com/od/bingedrinking/a/bingedrinking_b.htm)
parentingteens.about.com/od/bingedrinking/a/bingedrinking_b.htm