Alcohol on Campus: Friend or Foe?

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College and alcohol have become interrelated terms. The effects of the two have led to much discussion and research as to how to prevent alcohol abuse and support a non-drinking environment. So why do so many college campuses countrywide house 'pubs' or establishments that sell alcohol in student centered structures? Is it ethical to support alcohol on college campuses knowing that it can affect student learning? Is this the climate we hope to foster in our institutions of higher learning, that alcohol is an important part of student services?

Effects of alcohol are felt in all aspects of the student experience. Alcohol does not only affect those who drink, but also has great effect on students around those who are drinking. In Daniel Ari Kapner's (2003) look at, 'The Scope of the Problem' he cites that 1400 students a year die from alcohol related incidents, many students lives are interrupted or upset by drunken students needs or insults, and that alcohol is often the cause of assaults and vandalism on campus. As an answer to the previous question, institutions of higher learning are in existence to promote learning; alcohol on campus impedes learning for students and goes against the ethic of care and community.

On the other hand, alcohol-producing companies may donate funds toward programs for alcohol awareness and alcohol abuse prevention along with their libations. 'Pubs' could also be an important part of revenue for the departments that run them. Thus administration, ethically speaking, could use the rights approach, meaning that the student has the right to choose to drink (Markkulla Center for Applied Ethics, 2003). We can educate them on the responsibility of using alcohol, and then provide them with a choice. By offering students this opportunity they are building valuable character traits such as, respect, responsibility, caring, and citizenship (Hanson & McNeil, 2002).

"The majority of college students continue to consume and abuse alcohol on campus, despite alcohol awareness programs and, in many states, a legal drinking age of 21" (Gonzalez, 1991) (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992, pg. 58). We can argue choice and preach education, but the bottom line is that institutions have to step up to the plate and truly promote, support, and validate an environment that fosters learning and the development of well rounded, critically thinking, participating citizens.

Environment plays a crucial role in a student's life. As institutions we should seek to form a campus climate that excludes alcohol as an extra-curricular function on campus and infuse education and awareness in our classrooms and part of student organization's responsibilities. Send a message that alcohol has its place, just not on campus!

Administration should remember the virtue approach to ethics when making decisions about alcohol on campus. What kind of message are we sending to students? Are we promoting ideals of self- control, prudence, civility, and decency (Markkulla Center for Applied Ethics, 2003)? Is alcohol necessary at events? Do we need bars on campus? Should alcohol be a part of campus life? There seems to be a conflict of interest when a substance that in no way adds to academic growth, nor the building of community and citizenship, is a prevalent part of the college experience. By including alcohol directly on campus, in a place that caters to student's needs, and including it as part of college functions validates its life force in the college experience.

Clearly making a statement that alcohol is neither part of nor tolerated on your campus won't make drinking or the abuse of alcohol go away; but it will provide a campus climate that focuses on education and community. The decision to exclude alcohol from an institution will model behavior that is responsible and ethical. "A coherent, clearly articulated, and consistently expressed philosophy about alcohol and other drug use can encourage responsible, health-enhancing behavior" (The Influence of College Environments on Student Drinking, pg. 10, n.d.).

In conclusion, alternative resources can be developed to make up for lost monies from the establishments and alcohol companies that fund programs on campus. If some monies are lost, it does not outweigh what is gained, a campus with an ethic of justice, critique, care, and community (Papalewis, 2004).

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