

USATODAY.COM

Home

News

Travel

Money

Sports

Life

Tech

Weather

Join USA TODAY

 in | Become a member

 Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Your

Health

Fitness & Food

Family & Parenting

Sex & Relationships

Mind & Soul

Your Look

Relationships

Relationships

OwnIt

In collaboration with  BlogHer

Your

WEconomy

Your

Your BeautyLife

Your

SleepMatters

Your

Family & Friends

Search

GO

Your Life

Health

Fitness & Food

Family & Parenting

Sex & Relationships

Your Look

Essentials:

Your Life Main



College drinking is liberating, and a good excuse

Vid

Breast cancer
Cancer
Depression

By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY

Updated 3d 3h ago

Heart disease

Obesity 46

Recommend

180

82



Fitness & Food

Recipes

Reprints & Permissions

Gadh
stran
Libya

Diet & Weight Loss

Colleges trying to stem the tide of student drinking have focused on the evils of

Family

intoxication and all the trouble that can ensue when students drink too much. But new

Pregnancy & Baby

psychological research suggests that the downsides of excessive drinking aren't bad

Children's Health

enough to make students stop.

Pets

Sex & Relationships

Relationships

Marriage

Beauty

"They intend to get intoxicated," says psychologist E. Scott Geller, director of the Center for Applied Behavior Systems at [Virginia Tech](#).

"We have shown in several studies that their intentions influence their behavior. If they intend to get drunk, it's difficult to stop that."

Geller, who has been studying alcohol awareness since the mid-1980s, notes that education hasn't worked.

"We thought if we could demonstrate to students that their performance deteriorated under alcohol, they would be convinced that their alcohol consumption has put them at risk," Geller says. But "knowing that one is impaired, physically and even emotionally, did not seem to reduce alcohol consumption."

Researchers even tried using Breathalyzers at parties and bars to show students their blood alcohol content.

"It actually encouraged them to drink more," says Geller, whose research team presented findings earlier this month at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Washington, D.C.

W
If

U

4

clas
Adve

Mo:

Stor

Bil

Ba

Jol

Ma

Ea

Vide

Ra

Ire

Ra

Mo:

Ads by Google

Buy Books

Buy/Rent Books from Chegg & Save Trees. Find Books Online Today!

www.chegg.com

Enter Canada With A DUI

Canadian Immigration Lawyer Criminal Inadmissibility Solutions

www.DuiCanadaEntry.com

Daniel Webster College

Prepare for your future with a degree from DWC

www3.dwc.edu



by Suzy Parker, USA TODAY

On 'alcohololidays'

Researchers at Virginia Tech have been studying "alcohololidays," which is their term for a "nationally celebrated festival or holiday that is strongly associated with or defined by high rates of alcohol consumption." In studies of more than 1,200 students on St. Patrick's Day, 678 on Halloween and 105 on Cinco de Mayo, they found that:

- Students in costumes who reported celebratory motives had higher BACs blood alcohol levels than those without a costume or celebratory motive.
- Those who drank relevant themed drinks (such as green beer on St. Patrick's Day) had significantly higher blood alcohol BACs than those who drank other beverages.
- Students drinking themed beverages were significantly less aware of their current level of intoxication.

"I think everybody's aim is to get drunk on the weekend," says Brandie Pugh, 22, a senior at [Ohio University](#) in Athens. "It's not about the taste of the alcohol. It's about the effects of it. It's about the lowered inhibitions."

Colleges need to "acknowledge and reckon with" alcohol's appeal, says Laina Bay-Cheng, an associate professor of social work at the University at Buffalo-State University of New York, who also presented research at the meeting. In focus groups with 97 young people ages 14 to 17, she found that when teenagers drink, they think they can blame their actions on alcohol.

Students in her studies described alcohol as emboldening and said it offers "liquid courage," a phrase other researchers also have cited.

Drinking allows young women to "act out being sexually assertive, carefree, liberated," she says, and can be an excuse for their sexual behavior.

"If you have sex, you're a slut, and if you don't, you're a prude — but drinking allows you to do both," she says. "You can go out, get drunk, have sex and the next day say, 'I'm still a good girl.'"

Pugh says she has observed that sentiment on campus. "I was drunk so I hooked up with that guy.' 'I was drunk so I missed my class this morning.' 'I was drunk so I got in a fight.' If it's something they're not proud of, it gives them an excuse."

Alcohol makes students more social and "creates a world of adventure," says Thomas Vander Ven, author of *Getting Wasted: Why College Students Drink Too Much and Party So Hard*, out earlier this month.

"Because so much can go wrong, interesting, exciting, funny things happen when you have many people intoxicated together," says Vander Ven, an associate professor of sociology and anthropology at Ohio University, which just this month was named the nation's top party school in an annual list by *The Princeton Review*.

Si

Top
cor

Mo:
At I
afte



Hel



You

He surveyed more than 400 students around the country from 2003 to 2009, conducted 25 interviews and did more than 100 hours of field research.

His conclusion: The campus environment provides so much social support that even when students have bad experiences drinking, the help they get from friends afterward is seen as a positive.

Researchers at the University of Washington-Seattle cite similar findings in a study of 500 students in the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* in May. Social benefits of drinking include a "boost of courage" and increased chattiness, they say, which outweigh negatives such as hangovers, fights or unwanted hookups.

"Part of the thrill of it is you don't know where the night is going to take you," says Ohio University senior Holly Ningard, 20.

For more information about [reprints & permissions](#), visit our [FAQ's](#). To report corrections and clarifications, contact Standards Editor **Brent Jones**. For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Posted 3d 18h ago | Updated 3d 3h ago



You might also be interested in:

[Kirstie Alley 'proud' of her new body](#) (USATODAY.com in LifeLine Live)

[Wendy's restaurants sells Arby's chain, changes name](#) (USATODAY.com in Money)

[Earthquake rocks East Coast](#) (USATODAY.com in News)

[Marriage, divorce rates higher in the South, lower in Northeast](#) (USATODAY.com - Your life)

Selected for you by a sponsor:

[How to Count Calories in Order to Lose Weight](#) (eHow)

We've updated the [Conversation Guidelines](#). Changes include a brief review of the moderation process and an explanation on how to use the "Report Abuse" button. [Read more](#).

What Do You Think?

To leave a comment, you need to sign up.

[Sign up](#)
[Log in](#)

34 comments

Sort: Oldest to Newest

Score: 18



MyOpinion01

9:55 PM on August 21, 2011

Report Abuse

No, you can't "get drunk & have sex" and still be a 'good girl'.
That makes you a hoe.

 1 reply



joe2cool

Score: -4

10:29 PM on August 21, 2011

Report Abuse

What happens at the party,
Stays at the party.

 2 replies



JAKE671

Score: -16

11:34 PM on August 21, 2011

Report Abuse

THESE IDIOTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR PUTTING
BARACK OBAMA IN THE WHITE HOUSE (HIC).

 2 replies



MidAgeWIMan

Score: 8

11:42 PM on August 21, 2011

Report Abuse

This is proof the 21 drinking age isn't working. It seems like there's less of a problem with binge drinking in Europe, where there is no drinking age. These kids parents could threaten to cut them off if they abuse alcohol, but then they could qualify for more federal financial aid to make up what Mommy and Daddy were giving them. Besides, parents with prohibitionist attitudes seem to have kids who go away to college and drink the most. Dry campuses won't work either. The college students would just smuggle their alcohol in, or make their own. I think what would work would be to return the drinking age to 18, and to encourage young people to take a "gap year" after high school, where they can get the partying and binge drinking out of their system.



mauimom

Score: 19

12:24 AM on August 22, 2011

[Report Abuse](#)

This reminds me of birth control verses abstinence: If they're going to have sex/drink anyway, then the focus should be on responsible behavior while doing so. I was not crazy about my son drinking at school, but at least he took the free bus or walked when he went out, or they had a designated driver (who got free non-alcoholic drinks). Also, we had lots of conversations, even once he started college, about the importance of condoms to prevent not only having sex with everyone your partner has had sex with (so to speak!), but also 18 years of responsibility for a life before he was ready and with the right person.

Sometimes you have to accept the fact that kids are going to make their own decisions, and they may not be decisions that you like or agree with. Best to grit your teeth and keep lines of communication open and remind them to at least be smart about those things.



The Mick

Score: 8

5:01 AM on August 22, 2011

[Report Abuse](#)

"We thought if we could demonstrate to students that their performance deteriorated under alcohol, they would be convinced that their alcohol consumption has put them at risk," Geller says. But "knowing that one is impaired, physically and even emotionally, did not seem to reduce alcohol consumption."

Clearly, they didn't bother asking present or past college students why they drank so much. Personally, when there was a weekend keg party in the dorms that I was invited to, I expected to drink to excess and escape from the hard work and worries I had dealt with the previous week.

Since I not only drank with students, but drank with people like Physics Nobel Prize Winner Glenn Seaborg (discoverer of Plutonium) and Chemistry Nobel Prize Winner Henry Taube

(breakthroughs in ceramics) as well as my own research advisor Jerry Kresge (discoverer of how energy effects certain unusual chemical reaction rates), I would never have been convinced that occasional alcohol "deteriorated" my performance as a scientist. How it deteriorated my performance while drinking was immaterial.

 1 reply



frieswiththat

Score: 30

11:58 AM on August 22, 2011

[Report Abuse](#)

Who in the hell needs a study to figure out that college students intend on getting drunk?

 1 reply



forever-con

Score: 1

12:38 PM on August 22, 2011

[Report Abuse](#)

joe2cool

10:29 PM on August 21, 2011

What happens at the party,
Stays at the party.

+++++

joe2cool, agree but you would think that this would be the one rule that kids would keep. But today, because of cell phones, you have texting, pictures, videos that all can be uploaded. And as you know, once on sites like Facbook, your not going to get rid of them.

For my kids, son and daughter, I knew they were going to drink at school. I just pleaded with them to be careful what actually shows up on sites. It was to try and protect them as they went out after school to try and get jobs. Most companies are monitoring social sites and doing Google searches on potential employees.

 1 reply



rogerb

Score: 0

12:38 PM on August 22, 2011

Report Abuse

One thing these studies never go into, and touched on by The Mick, is that college is hard, stressful work, and binge drinking is a way to blow off steam.

I would be much more calm and relaxed (after the hangover settled at least) following a bout of drunkenness.

That was the reason to get drunk: blow off steam and relieve the stress, in a social setting. Something that no other activity seemed to accomplish.

(though personally I only got hammered once a month or two, with some lighter drinking in between).

Next



Ads by Google

Buying A Breathalyzer?

Check Here First. We Have Product Reviews and Rankings For All Models

www.Breathalyzer.net/Reviews

Health Care Degree

Earn your MBA in Healthcare Management Online at NEU.

OnlineMBA.Neu.Edu/Healthcare-Mgmt

There are thousands more.

USA Today Your Life

Your Life USA Today

Search



- Health
- Alternative
- Alzheimer's
- Autism
- Breast cancer
- Cancer
- Cold & flu
- Dental
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Kids' health
- Men's health
- Mental health
- Women's health

[Fitness](#)
[Exercise](#)
[Family fitness challenge](#)
[Food](#)
[Recipes & cooking](#)
[Diet & nutrition](#)
[Safety](#)
[Family](#)
[Babies](#)
[Daycare](#)
[Pregnancy](#)
[Special needs](#)
[Teens & young adults](#)
[Relationships](#)
[Dating](#)
[Marriage](#)
[Mind & Soul](#)
[Doing Good](#)
[Spirituality](#)
[Education](#)
[Health Care](#)
[Hospitals](#)
[Government](#)
[Doctors & nurses](#)
[Pets](#)
[Cats](#)
[Dogs](#)

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Travel](#) | [Money](#) | [Sport](#) | [Life](#) | [Tech](#) | [Weather](#)

Visit our Partners: [USA WEEKEND](#) | [USA TODAY LIVE](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) |

[Contact us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Pressroom](#) | [Developer](#) | [Media Lounge](#) | [Jobs](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Reprints/Permissions](#) | [Priv](#)
[Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Site Index](#)

2011 USA Today, a division of **Gannett Co. Inc.**