

Dazed and Confused? Be in the Know when it comes to Alcohol

By: Serra Dittel-Payne

For many of you incoming freshmen, this will be your first time away from home, living in a brand new, exciting environment. There will be new people to meet, new things to do, a newfound freedom; a chance to be the person you always wanted to be. With this freedom, comes important choices to make, such as: what to major in, what professors to take, who to hang out with, and most importantly, will you go to that party?

Drinking at college has almost become a sort of rite of passage and part of the college “experience.” At the New Mexico State University (NMSU) campus, about 80 percent of students reported they had drunk alcohol in the last year, with approximately 46 percent reporting binge drinking within the last two weeks. The Wellness, Alcohol, Violence Education (WAVE) Program at NMSU defines *binge drinking* as the pattern of drinking that brings your blood alcohol content (BAC) to 0.08 grams or above. For women, this is consuming four drinks within a two hour period and for men, five drinks within two hours.

As students are figuring out where they fit in on the social spectrum and experiment with alcohol for the first time, many individuals establish long term drinking habits. The college environment can intensify the negative consequences of drinking, especially with underage drinking. Some of these consequences can include:

- **Hangovers.** Hangovers are never fun and often result after a night of heavy drinking. Sometimes they can be so severe that students end up missing class the next day. At NSMU, approximately 27 percent of students had missed a class as a result of drinking.
- **Poor test scores.** Last year, according to the WAVE’s 2014 CORE Survey, 27 percent of NMSU students received a poor test score as a result of drinking.
- **Dropping out of college.** Letting alcohol control your school schedule and continually getting bad grades can have some devastating consequences. Alcohol is a factor in 28 percent of college drop outs.
- **Drunk Driving.** Drinking alcohol increases your odds for drunk driving. At the NMSU campus, 28 percent of students reported driving under the influence. Drunk driving can result in serious injury or loss of life.
- **Poor Decisions/Judgments.** 33 percent of NSMU students stated that they later regretted decisions they made during a night of drinking. This could range from getting into an argument with a significant other/friend, to deciding to hook up with someone you normally would never have considered sober. Alcohol inhibits the brain from making rational decisions, which results in poor decision-making.

According to the WAVE’s program specialist, Meg Long, the biggest risk for freshman is their lack-of awareness on how much they are drinking. Many students are unaware of how much they have had, and this can get them into dangerous situations. The more a person drinks and the more alcohol is in their system, the less control they have over their decisions. It is important to be aware of drinking limits as well as recognizing side effects of drinking too much.

So, how do you protect yourself and others from these negative consequences? Be in the *know* about alcohol. Here are some life-saving tips from the NSMU WAVE Program for the next time you head out with your friends:

- **Always use a designated driver.** Students reported in the 2014 CORE Survey that 70 percent of NMSU students have never driven under the influence, and that 66 percent served as a designated driver at least once within the last year. NMSU students have it right; designated drivers are the safest way to make sure you and your friends get home safely. Can't find a DD for the night? The **Crimson Cab** is available and free for NMSU students, and will pick you up and take you anywhere in Las Cruces. Just call **(575) 524-TAXI (8294)**.
- **Set a drinking limit.** Set a limit that does not encourage binge drinking. Binge drinking can lead to blacking out, passing out or alcohol poisoning. Thirty percent of students reported having some sort of memory loss as a result of a night of heavy drinking. To ensure this does not happen to you, alternate drinks with non-alcoholic drinks to slow down the process of becoming drunk. Keep track of the number of drinks you have as the night goes on. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to keep track when playing drinking games. Sometimes cheating at drinking games can be a good thing!
- **Utilize the buddy system.** Sexual assault is an issue that affects both men and women. Using the buddy system can help to safeguard each other. Never leave your buddy somewhere before you know they are safe. Be accountable for each other! It is also important to never leave with a person whom you just met, because you never know where the night could lead. Exchange numbers and meet up while you both are sober.
- **Keep an eye on your drink.** Never leave your drink unattended to protect yourself from date rape drugs. Avoid drinking from punch bowls or pitchers, since they are easy to drug and difficult to keep track of how much you are drinking.
- **Never hesitate to call for help.** If someone is showing signs of alcohol poisoning (shallow breathing, clammy skin, vomiting, blacking out and/or passing out) call 911 immediately. The sooner help is called the more likely someone's life can be saved. Never try to give the person a cold shower, coffee or allow them to sleep it off.

Your undergraduate experience is supposed to be an exciting time in your life, so don't let negative experiences with alcohol take away from the best times of your life. The WAVE Program is always available to answer any questions and guide you through navigating college life. Visit the WAVE office in Corbett Center or on Facebook (NMSU WAVE Program) or go to www.nmsu.edu/~wave.Guide, to see a publication dedicated to the ins and outs of NMSU. Stay Safe!