

Report of the Alcohol Task Force

Kenyon College

March 2017

I. Introduction, Charge, and Members

In September 2016, President Decatur charged a group of students, faculty, trustees and staff to “set forth a series of recommendations on what strategies Kenyon College should employ to address the high-risk practices and behaviors related to the presence and consumption of alcohol on campus.” In keeping with our charge, this report also aims “to enhance the safety of Kenyon students while being mindful of the restrictions created by state law... and imagine a community that emphasizes individual accountability and responsibility for others, and how those ideals might be achieved.”

The members of the Alcohol Task Force are:

Meredith Harper Bonham '92, Vice President for Student Affairs (co-chair)

Jeff Moritz '86, Trustee (co-chair)

Mike Durham, Interim Co-Director of College Counseling

Marla Kohlman, Professor of Sociology

Emma Mairson '17

Edgar Martin '17

Jordan Potter '19

Wade Powell, Professor of Biology

Dave Suggs, Professor of Anthropology

Wendy Webster P'18, Trustee

The committee met regularly (at first bi-monthly, and then weekly) over a period of six months to review policies and procedures related to alcohol (specifically in the Kenyon College Student Handbook), examine existing data on alcohol use at Kenyon; identify and review national data and promising best practices on how to address excessive alcohol consumption on college campuses; and gather student and staff input on the current alcohol culture and what changes we might envision for the sake of future students. For the latter, we actively promoted opportunities to hear what students, faculty and staff think about Kenyon's alcohol culture. We met with First-Year Council, Student Council, Greek Council, Kenyon Student-Athletes, “Alphabet Soup” (representatives from Peer Counselors, Sexual Misconduct Advisors, Discrimination Advisors and Beer & Sex), Campus Safety Office, Athletics, Custodial Staff, and Student Affairs. In addition, we held three open forums for members of the College community to speak with us, and administered an online survey for those who could not attend.

The following report represents what we heard from the campus community, and what we believe are the issues both nationally and at Kenyon. We acknowledge that the negative behaviors associated with alcohol use are not necessarily unique to Kenyon, although there may be certain aspects that are particular to our campus culture. While there is an obvious detrimental impact on the individual student who over consumes alcohol, there are repercussions for the broader community as well. Most, if not all, reports of vandalism, property damage, and physical altercations at Kenyon involve alcohol. Alcohol is also a factor in many sexual misconduct/Title IX cases. Given the nature and developmental challenges of young adults (18-22 year olds), it is unrealistic to attempt to eliminate the unintended consequences of acute intoxication completely. However, it is our intent that the strategies set forth here will serve to lessen them. In our recommendations, we also focus on enhancing student accountability and transparency in the College's response to policy violations in an effort to encourage informed and responsible decision-making around alcohol consumption.

II. Research and Background

There is a large body of research on national collegiate drinking patterns that presents us with something of an initial paradox. At the same time that colleges nationwide struggle with controlling student binge drinking, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) sponsored "Monitoring the Future" study conducted by the University of Michigan indicates that we are at 35-year lows in terms of the volume of alcohol consumed by college students (and at lows in terms of episodic heavy drinking ["binge drinking"]); additionally, it indicates 35-year highs in terms of the number of students who abstain from alcohol use.[1] Henry Wechsler's often cited and repeatedly used measure of "binge drinking" ("5 drinks *on one occasion*") has been criticized for being so time vague as to be of questionable validity.[2] Additionally, while that body of research indicates that 40% of collegians have engaged in such drinking behavior over a two week period, logic demands that we take stock in the majority of them (60%) who have *not done* so. These realizations have led some researchers to claim that the body of research as a whole has led to "problem inflation." In short, while there is every reason to be concerned about problematic drinking on college campuses, we should not lose sight of the reality that on any given night the majority of students who choose to drink do so moderately and consume less than previous generations did. That sober realization also resolves what appears to be paradoxical in this generation of students "drinking less but with greater danger" -- on any given night, a normally moderate drinker can enter the ranks of risky, episodic drinkers.

Quite a bit of the current research on college students and drinking behavior is focused upon university settings with a more elaborate and influential Greek presence than that which currently exists at Kenyon. Even so, some of these studies point to important factors for our consideration in revising our party and drinking policies including gender, race, and class inequalities among students. The motivating factors for drinking varies substantially based upon these factors in combination with students' individual experiences of college life. [3]

Research by Thomas Vander Ven [4] underscores these findings while also calling attention to what he has termed “drunk support” in seeking to understand why some students make a consistent practice of binge drinking. Drunk support refers to the emotional and practical care students render to a drunk friend during, and in recovery from, binge drinking episodes. This includes: attending to a drunk or sick friend while they are vomiting, consoling an emotionally distraught co-drinker who is upset about a relationship or feeling aggrieved by the actions of other drinkers, and providing physical reinforcement when one’s friend gets into a fistfight.[5] Drunk support, then, changes the perception of negative events incidental to binge drinking into mutually beneficial, bonding experiences. This social support, most significantly, is experienced as rewarding for both students: the one who provides the requisite aid and the student who receives it.

Of course, such operational confounds in the extant research on alcohol use and abuse among college students will then have repercussions with regard to interventions aimed at reducing the risky drinking that does occur. The NIAAA and National Institute for Health (NIH) in conjunction suggest that the most effective interventions combine educational and interventional programming that “target individual students, the student body as a whole, and the broader college community.”[6] As the NIAAA notes, given the variation in environmental factors impacting student alcohol use nationally, no single mix of programs will work for all. It is important, then, that we remain mindful of the need to emphasize solutions that meaningfully engage with the very real experience of student desire to provide support for one another as an integral part of the college experience. It is up to us to recommend a blend that we believe will be most appropriate for Kenyon.

The ATF also gathered information about what we do currently at Kenyon to address excessive alcohol consumption, based on the intervention framework suggested by the NIAAA and the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Misuse (HEDAOD). The NIAAA recommends colleges employ the College Alcohol Intervention Matrix (CollegeAIM, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/CollegeAIM/) to make informed choices among the many potential interventions available to address alcohol-related problems on campuses. Basically, CollegeAIM is a planning tool that measures an intervention’s effectiveness, relative costs, barriers to implementation and the amount and quality of research on that intervention. Administrators can compare interventions and determine which mix best suits the needs of their institution. CollegeAIM recognizes two types of strategies: individual and environmental.

Individual-level strategies are designed to change students’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to alcohol so that they drink less, take fewer risks, and experience fewer harmful consequences. Interventions include education and awareness programs, cognitive-behavioral skills-based approaches, motivation and feedback-related approaches, and behavioral interventions by healthcare professionals.

Environmental-level strategies are designed to change the campus community environment in which student drinking occurs. They seek to affect the behavior of the overall student population by addressing the factors that accommodate or promote under-age and high-risk drinking. The

HEDAOD recommends environmental interventions that create opportunities for substance-free activities and a healthy normative environment, develop and enforce campus policies, and limit the availability and marketing of alcohol.

While the ATF found many aspects of CollegeAIM useful, not all of the strategies and/or analysis of their effectiveness translate to Kenyon. For instance, College AIM individual-level strategies generally aim to assist students identified as problem, at-risk, or alcohol-dependent drinkers. While these students are of concern at Kenyon, high-risk drinking is often the result of acute binge drinking which is just as likely to include students who are not habitual drinkers.

Kenyon's overriding environmental-level goal is to promote a community that empowers students to develop responsible attitudes and behaviors concerning alcohol and to make healthy lifestyle choices. The College's current alcohol programs and policies are implemented cooperatively by the Cox Health and Counseling Center, the Office of Residential Life, the Office of Student Engagement and Campus Safety. Individual-level and environmental-level programs include online and in-person training and interventions, counseling, and group education efforts.

[1] *Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use 1975-2015, Vol 2 (College Students and Adults, Ages 19-55)*. NIAAA and NIH, 2015.

[2] For example, 5 drinks over the course of "one occasion" lasting 7 hours is hardly the cause for concern that 5 drinks over the course "one occasion" lasting 1 hour would be. For criticism, see Hoover, E. "Binge Drinking: Henry Wechsler has Defined the Student Drinking Problem, for Better or Worse." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2002, 49 (11), p. 11A and Inter-Association Task Force on Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse Issues. IATF Proclamation. (www.iatf.org/procla.htm).

[3] Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton, *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015; University of Delaware Center for Drug & Health Studies, "Binge Drinking and Other Risk Behaviors among College Students," 2016. (<https://www.cdhs.udel.edu/content-sub-;site/.../CRBS%202016%20Report.pdf>); Kristie S. Gover, "Ethnic Differences In Alcohol Use: A Comparison of Black and White College Students in a Small Private University Setting" (2010). UNF Theses and Dissertations. Paper 422. <http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/422>.

[4] Thomas Vander Ven, *Getting Wasted: Why College Students Drink Too Much and Party So Hard*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.

[5] Vander Ven, pp.164-181

[6] <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/collegefactsheet/Collegefactsheet.pdf>

III. Themes Identified by the Task Force

The Alcohol Task Force (ATF) held public forums on January 25, 26, and 29, 2017. We also listened carefully to the perspectives of several campus constituencies in smaller meetings (listed in Section I: Introduction). Several themes emerged repeatedly, often from both student and employee groups. These themes, listed below, shaped discussions about our

understanding of drinking culture at Kenyon and our recommendations for revising Kenyon's alcohol policy. We also note that many of the themes are consistent with national trends identified through our research.

General Observations:

- Alcohol is prevalent at Kenyon, with binge drinking a significant concern. The impact of excessive alcohol consumption includes sexual misconduct, vandalism, medical traumas, and long-term health effects.

Motivations to drink:

- Alcohol is a "social lubricant;" its use is promoted by Kenyon's work hard/play hard ethos.
- Younger students take advantage of the social acceptability of drinking in college, coupled with their newfound freedom.
- Many students self-medicate with alcohol as a form of stress relief.
- Isolation and lack (quantity and quality) of late night entertainment options promote drinking as a popular diversion.
- Alcohol is easily obtained regardless of age.
- We received conflicting messages about the level of pressure (direct or otherwise) to drink. Among students who choose to drink, however, there is clearly pressure to drink excessively.

Drinking culture observations:

- There are three categories of drinking events: pregaming in rooms, small events (often in apartments), and large registered parties.
- Comfortable spaces conducive to casual socializing with alcohol are difficult to identify, especially for groups of more than 20. Apartments are too small, and south campus lounges tend to be too large or too formal.
- Hard alcohol plays an especially dangerous role in Kenyon's drinking culture. This danger is exacerbated for students who take prescribed psychotropic medication (a significant and growing segment of the student body). We heard reports of some students skipping medication in order to drink excessively, and others on medication who will consume alcohol despite the dangers.
- Students find it difficult to consume excessive amounts of alcohol at large parties; however, "pre-gaming" with hard liquor is a significant concern. Pregaming also occurs before nonalcoholic parties and events. Thus, such events can also pose an alcohol-related health and safety risks.
- Policies on the possession, consumption, and serving of alcohol are unclear and at times inconsistent.
- Greek organizations feel a great deal of responsibility to host large events with alcohol.
- FIPG regulations (the insurance held by national Greek organizations) conflict with Kenyon policies, e.g. Kenyon does not allow BYOB events, while FIPG requires either BYOB or the use of third-party vendors for events .

- There is a lack of accountability – to peers and the community – when students violate policy or drink dangerously (e.g. to the point of getting “Good Sammed”). There is tension in the community on how policies should be structured to balance accountability/punitive action and public health and safety.
- Current sanctions and education for policy violations are not always effective in improving future conduct.
- Students value the respect and support they receive from Campus Safety officers.
- Students display a lack of awareness of the impact that excessive drinking has on our custodial staff, as well as Campus Safety officers, and on their fellow students.

Repercussions of alcohol abuse at Kenyon:

- Acute alcohol poisoning
- Chronic problem drinking
- Compromised academic performance, athletic performance and social relationships
- Legal issues for policy and law violations
- Sexual misconduct
- Vandalism

Several recommendations emerged repeatedly in the various campus forums:

- There is a need for more late-night food options.
- There is a need for alternative late-night weekend activities and spaces for students to congregate without alcohol.
- More and better education efforts are necessary, especially with first-year students. Clear expectations and peer education are crucial.
- Simplify, clarify, and communicate social events policy.
- The current accountability policy includes both formative and punitive elements, however this policy should be altered to increase perceived and tangible effectiveness.
- While the need for a culture shift in peer interventions and accountability surrounding dangerous drinking is critical, specific recommendations on how to facilitate this change were notably absent.

In our ATF discussions, we kept the community’s recommendations in mind as we crafted our own, as enumerated in the next section of recommendations.

IV. Task Force Recommendations:

A. Education, Programming, and Training

With the CollegeAIM framework (described in Section II: Research and Background) in mind, *we recommend that Kenyon approach excessive alcohol consumption on campus as a public health issue.* As such, multi-faceted educational programming is a key component in promoting students’ responsible choices concerning drinking. Informing students fully about the physical,

emotional, social and legal implications of consuming alcohol will promote more responsible choices. We recommend the College take the following actions to further these goals:

- Clarify Good Samaritan Policy and launch an educational campaign (joint effort among Housing/Res Life, Health & Counseling, and Student Rights and Responsibilities).
 - Education campaign should be widespread, reaching new students, continuing students, faculty, and staff.
 - Specifically address education/restorative justice for repeat offenders.
 - Apply a consistent system of follow-up measures, including student meetings with the dean of students and the substance abuse counselor, and communication with parents.
- Escalate role of Beer & Sex advisors.
 - Clarify Beer & Sex advisory position:
 - Continue as a student-run initiative but work with College administrators to ensure consistency and integration with other initiatives and departments.
 - Implement enhanced training for Beer & Sex advisors
 - Explore [Certified Peer Educator/BACCHUS training](#)
 - Extend Beer & Sex advisors' visibility and influence beyond Orientation by including in First-Year Experience and continuing in subsequent years.
- Continue current alcohol education programming for new students, initiated before arriving on campus.
 - Communicate with parents (of first-year and transfer students) about discussing alcohol usage with new students.
 - Continue administering "Think About It" as a requirement for first-year and new transfer students:
 - Reinforce messages through student-designed posters strategically placed around campus.
 - In consultation with the Admission Office and Athletics Department, consider implementation of behavioral contracts for prospective students regarding alcohol consumption.
- Introduce "bystander intervention" education as part of First-Year or Extended Orientation, in conjunction with the Title IX Office.
 - Explore implementation of the [Green Dot](#) bystander intervention program.
 - Involve student leaders, including sports captains, in messaging disapproval of binge drinking, i.e. "we don't do that at Kenyon."
 - In partnership with Student Council and Greek Council, introduce educational programs for first-year students on appropriate guest/party behavior (how to be a good guest, how not to be an ugly drunk).
- Involve Campus Safety and Custodians in education efforts.

- Charge the Office of Student Engagement to create a more robust and effective party training process, with appropriate assessment measures.
- Explore additional training for new students as part of First-Year Experience, possibly through CA meetings and/or Beer & Sex conversations.
- Initiate, expand and improve wellness programming
 - Charge the Cox Health and Counseling Center with creating more opportunities for programming and education on stress relief, effective time management, health education, etc.
 - Implement BACCHUS training for all “Alphabet Soup” advisors and counselors, any other interested students.
 - Raise the profile and visibility of the majority of Kenyon students who drink responsibly, or do not drink, by initiating a social norms campaign. Emphasize peer to peer message that severe intoxication is not socially acceptable behavior and negatively impacts themselves and the Kenyon community.
 - Increase support in the Athletics Department for intramural athletic opportunities.
 - Increase student-generated social activities, especially late-night (game nights, movie nights, Nerf guns in the labs, etc.). Promote as “activities or gatherings” not “parties.” Encourage influential groups often associated with social events (i.e., Greeks, sports teams) to sponsor.
- Have the Office of Housing and Residential Life partner with the Substance Abuse Counselor to expand Wellness and/or Substance Free Housing options.
 - We believe that the College should be vocal in its support of students who wish to abstain from a campus drinking culture, or to seek alternatives for even one evening. Such housing makes the statement that the college supports students who do not want to get involved in the campus drinking culture.

While we understand the resource implications of several of the above recommendations, we believe that investing in staff training and professional development to better understand student alcohol use, together with educational programs for students, will yield positive results. We also recognize that, as young adults, students may make errors in judgment and that our programming needs to compel responsibility for behavior harmful to property, an individual, or the community.

B. Social Spaces and Events

The ATF heard repeatedly that it would be a good idea to create a greater variety of social options for students at Kenyon. We support the creation of more nonalcoholic events, and spaces for such events, as well as opportunities for students who are of legal drinking age to drink responsibly. To that end, we make the following recommendations:

- Assign the new communal space behind Farr Hall as “hang out” space to encourage non-alcohol events such as coffeehouses, trivia nights, etc.

- Further develop Peirce Pub as a venue for late night food and entertainment, pending the construction of a new bar.
 - Charge the Office of Student Engagement with working closely with students to establish usage guidelines.
 - Encourage student organizations to program events in Peirce Pub, where alcohol is being served.
- Reinvigorate Social Board to engage with students on conceiving and executing fun, alcohol-free events.
 - Encourage opportunities for students to create medium sized gatherings – for more impromptu, less strictly registered, closed events.
 - Bring alternative late night food options to campus (i.e. food trucks).
 - Encourage use of the KAC for late night programming.
- Support the Office of Student Engagement’s efforts to fund alcohol-free events hosted by student organizations at the beginning of each semester (i.e. “Early Bird Funds”), and more Kenyon-sponsored events that encourage 21+ students to drink responsibly (i.e. wine and painting nights, beer tastings):
 - Permit BFC funds to sponsor events where there might be alcohol served in a responsible fashion.
 - Promote use of third party vendors where alcohol is being served.
 - In partnership with the Alumni Engagement and Career Development Offices, reframe Senior Soiree as a preparatory event for life after Kenyon; encourage faculty and staff participation.
- Create incentives for Greek organizations to hold late-night (after 10 pm) alcohol-free events on weekends for their “campus contributions” requirement.
- Institute party training for apartment-dwellers in order to familiarize them with policy and Campus Safety officers.
- Have social hosts create “party tips” and include with invitations to social events with alcohol.
- Explore the possibility of a future social space where large parties may be held, to discourage large parties in residence halls.

C. Alcohol Policy and Student Handbook

Members of the ATF heard repeatedly that students feel confused about the College’s policies on alcohol, which at times is contradictory or at the very least unclear. The following recommendations to change policy language in the *Student Handbook* aim to provide clarity and enhance student accountability, as well as promote safer drinking practices at the College.

Recommended Policy Changes Section A: Alcoholic Beverages:

- Combine Sections A (alcohol) and K (drugs) to form one section.
- Add introductory section that states College's intent, goals and expectations of policy and student behavior.
- Add section that details counseling, education and prevention program descriptions and contact information for Cox Health and Counseling Center personnel.
- Add section explaining the Good Samaritan Policy.
- Add language that clearly prohibits possession of alcohol anywhere in any first-year residence halls (Mather, McBride, Lewis, Norton or Gund), including inside rooms. Only residents (e.g. CAs) who are of age may possess alcohol in their rooms.
- Incorporate policy language to reinforce current prohibition against possession of alcohol in any residence hall hallways, restrooms or lounges, or beyond the immediate vicinity of a campus apartment areas.
- Administering alcohol to individuals against their will and/or without their knowledge is illegal and should be expressly prohibited in the policy.
- Operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs is illegal and should be expressly prohibited in policy. Incorporate enhanced College penalties in those incidents where the DUI involve an accident with injuries to others, or other exceptional factors.
- Those games involving alcohol that promote abuse and excessive alcohol consumption should be discouraged. With that in mind, we seek to control those gaming behaviors which are particularly problematic, and ask that Student Affairs consult with students on refining this section of the policy. At a minimum, the College should prohibit activities and paraphernalia that encourage the rapid consumption of alcohol (e.g., keg stands, funnels, and other activities based on speed and/or volume).

Recommended Policy Changes to Section Y: Social Events Policy:

- Add introductory section that states College's intent, goals and expectations of policy and student behavior.
- Expand the current options to allow BYOB and third-party vendor options on campus to facilitate responsible, more "adult-like" consumption of alcohol. Charge the Office of Student Engagement with developing the appropriate procedures and policies. This

change will eliminate current conflicts between College policy and Greek FIPG regulations.

- Social event advertising (including campus email announcements) of events should not mention alcohol or include pictures or references to alcohol. Exception for BYOB or third party vendor events.
- Make clear that at parties with kegs, all beverages must be in clear cups.

General Recommendations on College Sanctions for Alcohol Violations

- Charge the Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities with researching and exploring a clear and concise “point system” for policy violations with escalation of points for severity and number of incidents, and a points forgiveness program to reward positive decision-making.
- Apply concept of restorative justice for violations of policy and cases of severe intoxication.
- Make clear that there will be enhanced accountability for upperclass students who serve alcohol to first-year students during New Student Orientation. For example, we might explore notifying the parents of students found to be in violation of College policy during the first week of the fall semester, in addition to any other penalties that may apply.
- Emphasize that individual hosts will be held accountable for violations of state and local laws and College policies, damage to property (including common areas and bathrooms), occupancy limits, high risk behaviors of guests (invited and uninvited).
- Once policy is defined, initiate a robust education campaign for all students, faculty and staff to encourage consistent understanding and practices.

D. Additional Resources

There are two resource concerns that we heard and discussed at length, and believe them to be worthy of further exploration. Given the financial implications, the ATF encourages more thorough research and consideration of the potential costs and benefits associated with each individual item.

- Charge the Office of Campus Safety with exploring the cost and potential effectiveness of breathalyzers, including a proposed protocol for their use.
- Charge the Dean of Students and Office of Campus Safety to explore whether a space should be designated for monitoring intoxicated students, including identifying other

campuses who have such a space, estimating potential staffing and resource needs, and determining definitively the impact on Kenyon's alcohol culture. Their recommendation should be made to the Vice President for Student Affairs by Fall 2017.

V. Conclusion

In closing, it has been suggested that Kenyon might follow the lead of a few colleges (e.g., Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, Dartmouth) that have banned hard alcohol on their campuses. However, there is little research on the impact of such a ban, and the research that has been done suggests that these bans have a negligible impact on students who drink: "Among students who still drink ... heavy drinking is just as common as among their counterparts at colleges without alcohol bans" (Wechsler 2001). A ban on hard alcohol would create additional problems. It would be difficult to enforce, and we expect there would likely be noncompliance from the student body. Better educational efforts on the impact of hard alcohol on the body, and strengthening bystander intervention education and training would probably have a better effect.

Instead, we recommend that the College's programs encourage alternatives to drinking, teach low-risk practices in alcohol consumption, require accountability, enhance and clarify policies, and support students struggling to make appropriate choices. The timing and delivery of these programs matters; emphasizing peer-to-peer education and directing our programming toward new students is likely to have the greatest impact. Furthermore, we believe that promoting realistic social norms (i.e. that not ALL Kenyon students drink to excess) will encourage students to consume alcohol more responsibly.

Given the numerous recommendations included in this report, we believe it would be prudent for the College to monitor these initiatives to ensure they are effective in achieving their intended goals. We also advocate for a sustained approach moving forward, including the formation of a group that continues to meet regularly in order to assess new approaches as well as determine how to address additional concerns that arise. Ultimately a focused, comprehensive and concerted effort to reduce excessive alcohol consumption at Kenyon will lead to a healthier, safer community for our students.