



CENTER FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Alcohol and Responsibility: Which Way Forward? (Group #2) **Discussion Report from forum held on April 21, 2008 during the Spring 2008 Community Issues Forum**

Introduction:

In picking a topic to discuss at the public deliberation forum involving the capstone class and the community there were many factors that went into the decision making process. The first thing that our group wanted to consider was picking a topic that would relate well to the students. This was important because we wanted the students to be excited and engaged in the topic of conversation. Another factor we considered was what would interest the community members who would be attending the forum. With these two thoughts in mind our groups decided to discuss issues related to alcohol. We felt that running a forum on alcohol would be especially useful in Fort Collins, because of the high population of college students. College students tend to be recognized as a group that consumes large amounts of alcohol and as a result the Fort Collins community and CSU's campus is affected by alcohol use. As a group we had observed the prevalence of alcohol use and we felt that new solutions needed to be addressed. This also seemed like a topic that would have exigency in the community because the citizens of Fort Collins are affected by alcohol too.

Now that the issue of alcohol had been decided on, we needed materials to use during the forum. Our group already had a National Issues Forum backgrounder on alcohol, which had been used in the 2007 capstone forum. Because the use of this backgrounder had proven successful in 2007 our group decided to use it again. A few alterations were made to the discussion by adding new follow-up questions and modifying the title slightly. By changing the title from "Alcohol: The Toxic Spill" to "Alcohol and Responsibility: Which way Forward" our group felt that we had given a more positive spin to the forum. Then as a group we added local statistics and made a few alterations to the overview page so that it would be more relevant to the audience. Once all the alterations were complete our group had all the material we needed to run the forum.

Participants in the Forum:

Overall our forum was primarily comprised of students. We did have one community member, a police officer, and a teacher in attendance. Several people left before the end of the forum so out of the fifteen surveys we collected 12 were CSU students and 7 of those were in capstone. There was a greater diversity in political affiliation of members with 3 republicans, 3 democrats, 4 independent/moderate, and 5 N/A or blank answers.

We invited a representative from AA, but he was unable to come. Because of this the voice of recovering addicts was not heard, as well as those who have come face to face with the law in regards to alcohol consumption. Several students stated that they had received punishments for drinking, but none to the severity of an alcoholic. Also, the “parent” voice was absent and due to the student majority the discussion centered more on their needs and desires. We did have greater diversity in our forum than last year’s and I would encourage that community members continue to be invited because it adds to the discussion. This topic was hard because it had to be split into two groups given the size so there were additional community members in the other group.

Overall the group was unbalanced given the large number of students, however the presence of three non-students did enrich the discussion.

The Process:

We began our forum by welcoming the participants and introducing ourselves. We gave a quick introduction to the topic, “Alcohol and Responsibility: Which Way Forward?” We showed an informative video created by NIF (National Issues Forum), giving a detailed explanation of each approach. After the video, we split the group in half as we had too many members. We do this to create a more personal environment, when there are too many people it is hard to hear everyone’s voice. Once we split up the group each moderator (Meghan, Elise, and Brittany) introduced themselves. We gave a quick explanation as to why we were there and why we were interested in this topic. We then proceeded to open up the floor for anyone who wanted to give their personal stake to express why they were drawn to this topic. After we heard from everyone, we jumped into the first approach, followed by the second and third approaches. We had great conversations regarding the appreciations and concerns for each approach. The three approaches consisted of: 1. Demand Citizen Responsibility. 2. Treat the Public Health Epidemic. 3. Educate for Societal Change. During each approach we had a “note-taker” capturing everyone’s ideas on paper.

After we discussed all of the approaches we had a time of reflection, followed by a Post-Forum questionnaire. After we had a couple of minutes to recap a few of the main points of the forum we preceded with, “dotmocracy.” Each participant was given five dots and they placed a dot on our easel paper by the ideas they thought were the most important.

After talking with many of the Capstone students, I received great reviews. Many of the students as well as community members were pleased with the process of this forum and thoroughly enjoyed the forum!

Analysis/Summary of Discussion:

Analysis and Summary: Approach One

When discussing approach one, which suggested stricter law enforcement as a potential way to solve the problem people mainly focused on DUIs and arrests. The group generally agreed that the laws on DUIs should be strict because many people have multiple DUIs and are still able to drive. The group also emphasized giving people alternatives to driving because Ramride and cabs are ineffective and too expensive. A main tension was whether or not stricter laws would help or hurt the cause, because many people felt that stricter laws would cause more rebellion. Additionally, the group thought that the bar on campus and advertising on campus could be increasing the problem. The group said society should have proactive versus reactive responses to educate and help people. Overall, it seems that the group thought stricter law

enforcement could be the answer for DUIs, but not for the overarching drinking problem.

Analysis and Summary: Approach Two

When the group discussed approach two, which suggested treating alcohol as a health epidemic most of the focus was placed on responsible drinking and finances. The group agreed that alcohol is glamorized by society so that people think that it is “cool” to drink, which is part of the problem. Another part of the discussion talked about how everything today is advertised in excess. The group said that emphasis should be placed on responsible drinking, which means no binge drinking and drinking at the right time and place. Everyone agreed that alcohol on its own is not the problem and people should still have the right to drink. One individual suggested creating a drinking permit, like a driving permit to teach responsibility while at home with parental influence. Despite people’s support of responsible drinking, most of the group felt treating alcohol as a public health epidemic would be too expensive.

Analysis/ Summary: Approach 3

During this approach there was a sense of common ground regarding ending the medias push for “excess” in this society, which could end the stigma and solve the problem. We also found common ground regarding people needing guidance about right vs. wrong. I also found a common concern that education in college regarding binge drinking is too late and forcing education will be ineffective. It seemed as though there was a consensus in the idea that the media has a lot to do with the problem of glamorizing the drinking lifestyle. There was a push for educating people earlier on in life and the concern that education in college is too late. There was definitely more common ground for appreciations in this approach versus the concerns. From what I gathered many of the participants appreciated this approach and had many insightful ideas with a lot of common ground!

Notes from the Discussion:

Approach 1: strengthening alcohol control laws; increasing law enforcement

Appreciations-

- Stricter laws would be really good idea. Ex boyfriend has 3 DUI’s and its just a huge problem out there. Everyone drinks and drives and has DUI’s. Money’s not an issue because parents pay it, but spending more time in jail would help and stop problem sooner. *1
- Many people have multiple DUI’s. Other countries and states are extremely strict on this; Colorado is just a slap on the wrist. We need this because there are less DUI’s in those places.
- If you’re willing to drink and drive, you’re willing to give up your right from there on out. Stricter law will deter people from doing this. *2
- In Europe, first time he lived there it wasn’t strictly enforced, second time it was. There, they have other alternatives to driving, here we don’t as much. We can do this hand in hand, but we need to give people other alternatives to driving.
- RamRide is a great thing that keeps students form drinking and driving. If there was something similar across the country it would work great.

- Need a proactive response versus a reactive response. It starts with parents, they need to educate kids what's acceptable and what's not. *2
- Distance from high schools should be enforced.
- Liquor stores need to be strict with who they sell to and those who sell to underage should be shut down.
- Increase sales tax on liquor.*2

Concerns-

- Ram Ride actually doesn't work as effectively as it should. They get over loaded and backed up. Cabs are way too expensive, the Dingo takes forever. Its really a problem about transportation than anything else- need to get people to and from safely. Sometimes there's no alternative so you have to take that risk. *1(Tension here)
- Law enforcement plays a key role. Stricter laws, the verdict is still out on it. Example, the war on drugs, still don't know if its been effective. Need to have more emphasis on personal responsibility and alcohol as an abused drug as a whole. The fact you pass a law doesn't mean much. Needs to have weight and has to be enforceable.
- Problem = Transportation. *10
- Agree with previous. There are no cabs either. Need to take into account different perspectives. Not an issue of enforcement but more of an attitude. Attitude is much different in Europe and much more effective.
- Have to take them back to their mess and make them clean it up. They're just sitting in jail for a night. We have to actually TEACH them (Proactive Vs. Reactive). *2
- ***Astonished alcohol's advertised in school newspaper, kids are persuaded by the ads. Also, the fact that its sold in the Skeller on campus is perpetuating it. If they care about the kids more than the money, they should not sell it and perpetuate it. *5
- There's a problem with the fact students are over drinking, not the fact there's a bar on campus.
- Ankle bracelets used to be a fad, kids would sport them and it became a trend. Amazing he was the only one ok with the fact that he wasn't arrested. Stricter laws may make it "cool" for kids to get arrested. *1
- At Perdue, cops would stand outside the bars as students would leave the bars. And would pick up the kids as they were walking home. What would be the reason?
- PD does what community wants. We have to do follow constitutional and legal. Citizens want proactive DUI law enforcement because the community demands it. Take cues from citizens. Public Intoxication is legal in Colorado. *2
- Take away business from businesses with stricter sales laws. Should not limit number of accessible liquor stores.*3
- Even if prices increase it may not be a deterrent. *1

Approach 2: Public Health Epidemic

Appreciations-

- Alcohol needs to not be glamorized by society.
- The problem is that its cool to be drunk. Have to make an excuse not to drink because people keep asking why. It seems so cool to get smashed and society plays the role in

- excessive drinking. *2
- Not necessarily the legality, but if it's the right time or the right place; more socially appropriate at times than others.
- Needs to be emphasis on anti-binge drinking. Don't know when it started, but a while ago, it became less popular to be seen in public smoking. It would be nice to for the same to happen with binge drinking. *3
- Not alcohol on its own that's the problem; it's the education and what constitutes binge drinking and its effects.
- Media glamorizes it. We need to focus less on the media. *1
- The pressure on our generation is unbelievable and that's part of the reason for binge drinking. A lot of it comes from the media.
- We advertise everything to excess. One more shot, one more shot, etc. Doesn't need to be "drinking is horrible" but wasted, passed out, puking, is not "cool."
- Lowering the drinking age would be effective.
- It used to be more of a social thing and attitude was completely different, when drinking age was 18. RA's had keg parties. Back then, they didn't have to problem with it as we do now.
- Drinking Permit- like a driving permit. Go through classes younger to become educated, and learn how to drink responsibly. Bars would only serve until certain time at night. If have a permit, buy a few drinks until time limit runs out. Makes alcohol less taboo and make it more of a privilege. *4
- 18-20 parents have more control over you still and will educate you.
- Can still have fun w/o drinking. *2
- Cliché, however, you can fight in war when 18 and die, but can't drink? When tie the words, it put connotation to how you should be when you're drinking. *2
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Concerns-

- What's the definition of "problem?" *1
- Its taboo in this society, so not as recognized as a societal problem, in college, which is the area it needs to be addressed. *1
- This again is reactive; by the time you are an alcoholic, its reactive and too late. Need to spend money to prevent. *1
- The pressure in our society (college) contradicts even the education your parents give.
- Agree, when turn 21, have to get smashed. Had wine when younger at home with dinner, so it wasn't "so forbidden" that it wasn't as much of a rebellious thing.
- We're not just selling a product, we're selling a lifestyle (social pressure). *3
- There is a level of immaturity. A lot of drinking starts in high school.
- Expensive to do medical screening.
- If you let 18-20 year olds buy alcohol, which sparks a problem for them buying alcohol more for those under 18. Sparks a whole new fire because of immaturity. Responsibility needs to lie with those who are providing alcohol to those under 21. Even parents need to be responsible.
- What about 18 year olds who are still in high school?
- There is not one responsible thing about drinking. You can have lots of fun when you're not drinking. The term "responsible drinking" is an oxy moron.

- Inconsistent to be able to be charged as an adult at 18 and can't drink. That environment causes the rebellious binge drinking.

Tensions: Approach One and Two

- Stricter enforcement and laws could help problem OR it could cause people to rebel against the system and drink more.
- We want to stop drunk driving but there is a lack of alternative transportation.
- Punishments may be a deterrent BUT where is the educational value?
- CSU needs to be more responsible when consuming alcohol BUT that doesn't mean we want to take away personal rights.
- The drinking age could be too high causing binge drinking, BUT if it were lowered it may cause whole new problems like even younger people drinking and more DUIs.
- Society encourages drinking on one hand and then on the other says that drinking is a serious problem. What should people believe?
- Treating alcohol as a public health epidemic could increase education and change media in positive ways, BUT where is the money and how will societal pressure change?

Common Ground: Approach One and Two

- Excessive alcohol use and alcoholism are extremely negative and something needs to be done to stop these problems.
- Drunk driving is very harmful and society needs to work towards eliminating it.
- Alcohol should be consumed responsibly at the right time and right place.
- Media glamorizes alcohol use, which could increase drinking problems.
- Education is ineffective because it has bad timing and methods.

Societal norms and expectations increase the problems people have with alcohol.

Approach 3: Educate for societal change

Appreciations-

- Once you get the DUI it's too late and can't go back. It's about preventative measures.
- Spend time, money and effort early on so you don't have to put people back together after broken
- Whole society needs to get rid of social stigma to drink to excess. If people put alcohol in proper context and not make such a big deal of it, and society has put it in its place. Same with credit crisis- our society is buy buy buy, excess, excess, etc. *7
- Have a healthy approach would be more realistic.
- Give awareness/reality that it's possible to die from binge drinking. Important for younger kids to learn what's really happening than sugar-coated media and relying schools to take care of it. Korea drinking age is 18, less DUI, less trouble. Society's role, it's a community thing, not just individual responsibility now. *2
- Health aspect
- Education is important but still personal choice. You're going to drink with peer pressure unless you're made that personal choice. *1
- Can't get drivers license until take the class.
- Truth ads against smoking; 4 year old picked up on it. If we can educate population in this fashion, may help. *1

- Peers influence each other. Same consistency with alcohol; the influence happens in household and where it has to change. Having the influence of what it means to positively influence your buddies.

Concerns-

- DARE program is obviously not working, but something needs to be there.
- Need to put more emphasis on HEALTH aspect of education. There's not one person who doesn't have health drug down with every swig of alcohol. Not a single kid in Utah has been raised in a smoking home and hasn't drunk. They are more fit because of this. If we get alcohol out of our students, our teams wouldn't be losers anymore. Same with caffeine.
- Swimmer at ASU; learned lesson. Coaches punish in academic and social realm. They see students having an issue, as a professor, I get a lot of emails and grade checks. Those working to maintain scholarships work even harder.
- Hasty generalization to say being a losing team is because of alcohol. CU, when biggest party school in country, was number one in country.
- Just because lived in Utah, doesn't mean students stay there. Colorado's not in big 12, and can't recruit. That's why no good.
- Who's teaching us the education? Beer before liquor I thought I'd die. Needs to be a state run alcohol program that gives the information to teach.
- Could be a component of how to get through life, not necessarily an alcohol class. And too late by freshmen in high school. Freshmen orientation, so bombarded they wouldn't listen.
- Education does what it can, but kids will still see as authority figure and will still rebel. Only had thought to drink in excess once got around that group of friends. Parent aspect and personal responsibility has to play into at some point because education can only do so much.*1
- Education is important is good but depends on how its done. When go at it as entirety is bad, its laughable. Has to be approached at a certain level; someone's leveling with you, not talking down to you. *1
- Same as abstinence; its bad don't have sex. If you're not giving proper information to do right thing and responsibly it won't work. Everyone in society has to get on the same page.
- Excessiveness is America's problem as a society. We need to realize all things are ok in moderation.

Reflection

- As community, need to break the tradition of getting smashed.
- We need to support those kind of people
- Have to get people who are willing to give their time, for programs, such as Ram Ride.
- The problem is that people, especially at our age, we aren't going to give our time.
- Remember there are other civic organizations that volunteer and that can be utilized.
- Vail runs buses until 2 am, because community decided that and to pay more for the service. The DUI is extremely low there. Public transportation solves a lot of these issues.

- Sun Dance is a good example. Other bars should do that and have a company bus that drives you to the door.
- Lots of bars charter buses to CSU football games.
- Rides for people should be the ones to pay for the breweries and bars.
- Let the market decide.
- Doesn't do any good to stop drinking because cops pull you over and immediately accuse you of drinking.
- Cops who let "pretty" girls go when they're obviously drunk

Survey Results:

1. Fort Collins should hold people responsible for the harm they cause when they drink.
 - Strongly Agree=11
 - Agree=2
 - Not Sure/Depends=1
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
2. We should treat alcohol abuse as a health problem rather than a crime.
 - Strongly Agree=1
 - Agree=1
 - Not Sure/Depends=4
 - Disagree=8
 - Strongly Disagree
3. Society must stop accepting, and even glamorizing, irresponsible drinking.
 - Strongly Agree=6
 - Agree=6
 - Not Sure/Depends=2
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
4. Fort Collins should use tax dollars to increase transportation for bar and restaurant patrons.
 - Strongly Agree=6
 - Agree=2
 - Not Sure/Depends=2
 - Disagree=3
 - Strongly Disagree=1
5. Education about the dangers of alcohol must start in the popular media.
 - Strongly Agree=8
 - Agree=2
 - Not Sure/Depends=2
 - Disagree=2
 - Strongly Disagree
6. We need to make and enforce stronger laws to control alcohol abuse.
 - Strongly Agree=2

Agree=2
Not Sure/Depends=7
Disagree=2
Strongly Disagree=1

7. Laws against drunk driving are too lax.

Strongly Agree=3
Agree=4
Not Sure/Depends=5
Disagree=2
Strongly Disagree

8. There are too few alcohol treatment programs for people who need them.

Strongly Agree=1
Agree=6
Not Sure/Depends=6
Disagree=1
Strongly Disagree

9. Poudre Valley Health System should subsidize educational and rehabilitation programs with tax dollars and personal funds.

Strongly Agree=2
Agree=4
Not Sure/Depends=5
Disagree=2
Strongly Disagree=1

10. Many people are unclear as to when drinking becomes risky.

Strongly Agree=6
Agree=5
Not Sure/Depends=3
Disagree=
Strongly Disagree=

11. Unless prisons provide treatment programs, jailed alcoholics are likely to commit more crimes when they come out.

Strongly Agree=4
Agree=6
Not Sure/Depends=3
Disagree=1
Strongly Disagree=

12. Existing alcohol control laws often lack adequate information.

Strongly Agree=3
Agree=6
Not Sure/Depends=5

Disagree=
Strongly Disagree=

13. CSU should require an in-class alcohol education seminar for incoming freshmen

Strongly Agree=4
Agree=6
Not Sure/Depends=2
Disagree=2
Strongly Disagree=

The answers to these questions provided some valuable insight. In particular the answers to question indicate that few people know when drinking becomes risky and an area of common ground in the forum was the need for more education. The answer to this question illustrate there is clear gap that education can fill. Another interesting question was number 13. We have often heard people complaining about the online class CSU mandates for CSU freshmen, so we wanted to see how they would feel about an in-class seminar. For this question in particular, the lack of diversity in forum participants benefited us. The majority of our participants were students and the majority agreed that CSU should offer an in-class seminar on alcohol education.

Overall the answer to these survey questions were in line with the common ground and tension we found throughout our forum.

What key areas of common ground do you feel was present in your group?

- Problem of excess
- Problem of effect of lowering drinking age
- Lack of good transportation
- Pressure from students and media
- Moderation
- More personal responsibility
- Alcohol isn't the problem – our society's view and media images are the problem
- Laws aren't working, need more education

The major theme for common ground dealt with excess. This was applied to all three approaches and discussed throughout the forum.

What were some key areas of tension or conflict that existed (either between participants, or areas in which you are conflicted or unsure how to move forward)?

- Utah is better and Colorado has drunkards
- One perspective concerning alcohol ads and sports
- Responsibility and alcohol consumption
- Drinking age
- Fallacies generated by a group member
- Athletes and alcohol consumption
- Generational perspectives

The major tension in our discussion dealt with responsibility. The forum began discussing how

to be more responsible when drinking and it was suggested that drinking in itself is irresponsible. This generated a lot of tension and common ground was unable to be created in regards to what responsibility looks like when dealing with alcohol consumption.

What actions would you most strongly support in the community to address the issue?

- Better transportation
- Changing attitude of society
- Responsibility
- Encourage moderation and education about health risks
- Lower drinking age while raising awareness
- Mandate that each drinking establishment have transportation for its patrons to take them home
- More community participation
- Take alcohol off campus entirely and take alcohol ads out of the school paper

The greatest area of common ground in regards to addressing this issue dealt with transportation. Most people suggested that bars and restaurants should be required to provide alternative transportation to their patrons to ensure that people do not drive drunk. The answer in addressing this issue seemed to be combining personal responsibility with the responsibility on the part of liquor retailers.

If you had the chance to speak directly to an important decision-maker on this topic, what is the one message you hope they would receive concerning this issue?

- Don't hesitate to spend money on education preventing alcohol consumption
- Take alcohol out of the RamSkeller and off campus where half the students are underage
- Take alcohol ads out of school paper
- Drinking in excess is a huge problem and until everyone is educated the problem won't subside
- Transportation needs improvements
- Listen to student's concerns
- The present problem is more centered on media and peer pressure than personal choice and responsibility
- You can't make kids not drink
- It's a cumulative problem most started with media

These concerns reiterate common ground stated in previous areas of the forum.