

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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## Survey explores drinking

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Abusive drinking is the greatest substance abuse problem facing colleges and universities today, according to the results of a two-year study released last week by Columbia's Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA).

While the use of alcohol among non-college students declined in the last year, the amount of alcohol consumption among college students has remained the same. The study, however, revealed several trends, including that among university students who do drink, an increasing percentage report drinking to excess. In addition, alcohol

abuse is cited as a factor in an overwhelming number of violent acts on campuses, including rape.

The study revealed that 90 percent of all reported campus rapes occur when alcohol has been consumed either by the attacker, victim, or both.

The number of college women who drink excessively has risen by more than three times in the past 20 years.

Of those college women who were polled, thirty-five percent said they drink to get intoxicated, compared to only ten percent in 1977.

One out of every three students reported that they drink primarily to become intoxicated.

In the fall of 1992, CASA convened a commission, comprised of university administrators, students, educators, parents, and legal and health care professionals around the nation to examine the frequency and effects of substance abuse on college campuses; to study existing data and programs; to meet with experts in the field; and to conduct interviews with students

and administrators.

Most of the data and conclusions in the study were drawn from earlier report, including the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, a study of 58,000 college students conducted every two years by the Core Institute at Southern Illinois University, according to visiting Professor at the Columbia School of Public Health Jeffrey Merrill, who as CASA vice president for research and policy oversaw the study.

In their final report on the study, members of the commission said they believe alcohol abuse not only affects problem drinkers, but has a "ripple effect" on entire college communities by worsening medical and mental health problems, playing a part in many incidents of violence, and facilitating poor academic performance.

The commission criticized colleges and universities for failing to effectively address the issue of alcohol abuse on campus.

According to the report, institutions of higher learning often avoid laying down strict policies or bans on alcohol use out of fear of legal ramifications that

may hold them accountable if alcohol abuse results in death or injury.

Merrill said students who drink now face increasingly serious consequences with the high association between alcohol-related violent incidents and the threat of AIDS. The study's data reflect these trends: Sixty percent of college women with sexually transmitted diseases were drunk at the time of infection.

"AIDS is very much associated with unprotected sex and unprotected sex is much associated with alcohol abuse," Merrill said.

Peter Libman, coordinator of the drug and alcohol prevention and education programs through the Health Education and Wellness Division of Columbia's Health Services (Healthwise), said the goals of alcohol educators at Columbia include acting as a resource for students, providing information on the risks of drinking, and informing students who do choose to drink how to do so in a "low risk", or responsible manner.

Libman said the prevalence of violence on college campuses

stems largely from the effects of alcohol, such as lowered inhibitions and a decreased ability to both judge social interactions and to communicate and negotiate verbally.

For example, students tend to use condoms and other contraceptives with less frequency when they are under the influence of alcohol than when they are sober. As a result, students are more likely to become infected with sexually transmitted diseases while intoxicated, Libman said.

Columbia graduate and undergraduate students who were interviewed said they found the figures concerning the increasing number of college women who drink to excess to be accurate, stemming largely from the changing role of women in society.

“This was not news to me. It was sort of the whole Saturday night experience,” Tracey Chambers, Law ’94, said. “It’s college and most women I know that did that in college stopped doing that when they graduated.”