

THE TEXAS ORATOR



ABOUT

ARCHIVE

IDEAS

PODCAST

MERCH

CONTACT

JOIN

Arts Campus Culture Domestic Affairs Economy Education Environment Foreign Affairs Health Law Satire Tech

HOME > CAMPUS > THE IFC'S HARD LIQUOR BAN: GOOD INTENTIONS, BAD LOGIC

The IFC's Hard Liquor Ban: Good Intentions, Bad Logic

BY WES DODSON on OCTOBER 23, 2018 • (0)

On Wednesday, Oct. 3, the Texas Interfraternity Council (IFC) passed a ban that prohibits the consumption of hard liquor at fraternity events in all of the 26 fraternities at UT. The proposal follows a similar prohibition by the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), set to go into effect next fall, that bans alcohol products over 15 percent ABV. If approved, the UT IFC ban would take effect this fall, a year before the national prohibition.

The policy, enforced by an IFC judicial sanction, seeks to curb problematic hard liquor use. Banning hard liquor at fraternity events, proponents suggest, will decrease binge drinking and cut down on alcohol-related hazing. While this argument has a seductive logic, America's history of Prohibition provides a strong counter-argument. Prohibition-era evidence tells us that, if approved, this ban would be largely ignored by large fraternities, punish those who already consume alcohol responsibly, and, worst of all, endanger the lives of the students that it aims to protect.

To illustrate why this ban will be largely ineffectual, let's compare two lists. First, these are activities currently banned for most or all fraternity members: hazing, the consumption of beer, the consumption of hard liquor, and the consumption of drugs. Second, these are activities in which fraternity members are known to engage at higher than average rates: hazing, the consumption of beer, the consumption of hard liquor, and the consumption of drugs.

Statistically, most of the undergraduate population is under the legal drinking age. As such, the consumption of any alcohol at a fraternity event is already proscribed for a majority of attendees. The NIC and UT IFC bans are prohibitions of already prohibited activities. If the actual authorities cannot stop these activities, why should we expect the IFC to be successful in its prohibitory aspirations?

Because of the third-party vendor clause which allows third-parties to serve liquor at events, it is more likely that this ban will simply be a compliance cost tax on fraternities. Large frats that typically have higher dues will likely be able to internalize the additional cost of hiring third-party vendors. (If you have ever had your ID checked at a UT frat party, then you have interacted with a third-party). Smaller fraternities less able to internalize these costs will be forced to either raise dues to hire third parties or become a bit more inventive about how they serve liquor.

If this ban is likely to have any significant effect on eliminating hard-liquor consumption at fraternity events, which is not at all clear, it will be in those fraternities who are already the least problematic consumers. Small fraternities and spirit organizations that comply with university policies regarding hazing, dry rushing, and other activities do so in part because they are less capable of enforcing secrecy in their members.

Of the 13 organizations on the organization discipline list, only two, KA and SAE, are considered large fraternities (though this is an admittedly anecdotal definition). Does this mean that the other large fraternities are dutifully complying with the University's stringent hazing policies?



Who We Are

The Texas Orator is a nonpartisan, peer-reviewed political publication that was founded and is maintained by University of Texas at Austin students. We value thorough analysis in our articles and strive to protect the ideals of free speech and unhindered access to information on campus and nationwide. We seek to keep the student body informed of the implications of ever-changing political climates, both domestically and abroad, from a range of voices and perspectives.

We have been indexed as scholarly literature by the UT Libraries and by UT Undergraduate Studies.

We are sponsored by Ramsey's Restaurant of Victoria, Texas, and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Core Texts & Ideas. We are also a member of UT's Civic Engagement Alliance.

Follow us on Twitter

My Tweets

Our Instagram

Likely not. Organizations are placed on the discipline list, by and large, because their own members complain to the University. Larger fraternities that are most able to enforce a culture of secrecy will likely take the same approach to this liquor ban that they do to University hazing policies: We do what we want and our members keep shut about it.

Alcohol prohibition [gave rise](#) to the mafia. Drug prohibition [gave rise](#) to drug cartels. These organizations succeeded, in part, because they could use their considerable power to intimidate members and citizens into silent compliance. Large fraternities that place a high value on using liquor in hazing events and serving it at parties will continue to do so. Small frats, meanwhile, have two options: comply or take action to mitigate the risk of consumption.

Prohibition does reduce [some consumption, especially in the beginning stages](#) as consumers take time to find ways around the regulation. Additionally, consumers who already do not place a high value on the product are unlikely to pay the artificially high price associated with illegal goods.

Prohibition, however, does not [eliminate](#) consumption. Leftover consumption is driven [underground](#). Penalties do not deter dedicated consumers from using, but instead prompt them evade getting caught. Users retreat into ever less supervised areas — safe havens from the prying public eye. The problem with these private “safe havens”? They can be [incredibly dangerous](#).

Many fraternities are dedicated consumers of hard liquor. For these frats, the IFC policy will be less likely to reduce consumption than to change where consumption occurs. Users seeking to reduce their risk of getting caught will shift their drinking from public to private areas. 1920's era Prohibition drove drinking from relatively safe, public bars to sordid speakeasies. The hard liquor ban will move consumption from public parties to private dorm rooms.

Policies that force drinking into private areas make it more difficult to [rely on others to help regulate overuse](#). Fraternities are not known for their vigilant policing of overconsumption, but short of placing a University chaperone at every event, they are our best option.

In many, if not most, fraternities, the administrative officers are also the ones designated to deal with problematic drinking and hard liquor overconsumption. To the extent that these officers will also be the ones interacting with the IFC and this ban, a system of plausible deniability could arise wherein those officers are actually less incentivized to execute those functions.

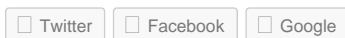
Another way of mitigating risk is to simply decrease the window of time where you can get caught. Instead of nursing a mixed drink, members will resort to slamming shots.

While drinking hard liquor can be dangerous, drinking hard liquor at speed *is* dangerous. Because alcohol takes time to influence your system, drinking quickly often means you cannot accurately assess how intoxicated you will become. Actives pre-gaming in a dorm room or pledges made to take pulls in the basement are at an elevated risk of dangerous, and potentially lethal, alcohol poisoning.

For those who believe that this proposal will have any effect at all on overall consumption, which is possible though unclear, the question still exists: Is some reduction in overall consumption worth the increase in unsafe consumption that arises from consumption being driven underground?

In the [original piece](#), Driscoll expressed his belief that “there is no healthy way to consume hard alcohol.” Whether or not this is true — and the millions of American adults who consume hard liquor responsibly would likely disagree that it is — his proposed hard liquor ban is more likely to encourage unhealthy hard alcohol consumption.

Share this:



Loading...

◀ [La Croix Lake](#)

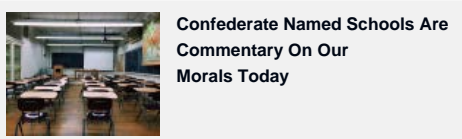
[Ideas — What's in a Name?](#) ▶

Categories: [Campus](#) Tags: [alcohol](#), [fraternity](#), [greek life](#), [ifc](#)

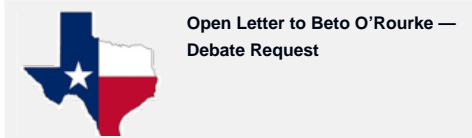
RELATED ARTICLES



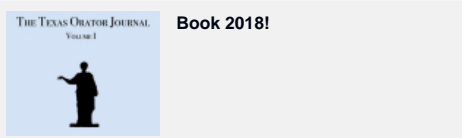
Know Your Rights. Loudly.



**Confederate Named Schools Are
Commentary On Our
Morals Today**



**Open Letter to Beto O'Rourke —
Debate Request**



Book 2018!

Leave a Reply



Email (required)

(Address never made public)

Name (required)

Website

Notify me of new comments via email.