

Alcohol Awareness Counters the Party Myth

By CAROL AGAIN

MIZZOU was once called the No. 1 party school in the country, prompting a score of protests from students who said their universities were more deserving of the distinction. Apparently, those "rivals" had a valid case. The consensus is that students here drink no more than students on other campuses. But they are learning to drink smarter.

"We've got to somehow help young people stop and think," says Sharon Pope, assistant director of student development/special programs. "We can either address the issue after a problem is in place, or try to prevent negative behavior with information and education."

Campus policy prohibits alcohol on University-owned or -supervised property, but "we're not going to kid ourselves and pretend it's not out there," says Tom Ramey, associate director of residential life/Greek life. "In my mind, education is the only answer. Banning alcohol from society or from any segment of society is not a solution. Maybe it's a Band-Aid solution, but it's not a real solution."

At Mizzou, students and administrators agree that more viable solutions to potential alcohol abuse lie in a number of alcohol awareness programs with goals of developing responsible attitudes, not prohibition. "The more realistic we are, the better," says Ann Thompson, a junior from Raytown, Mo., who is president of the Residence Hall Association. "We

should be saying, 'If you're going to drink, drink responsibly.'"

RESPONSIBILITY is a dominant theme of the Alcohol Education Program in the Office for Student Development. Now in its sixth year on Campus, the program reaches 1,500 students annually with topics such as "Alcohol with a Rock 'n' Roll Twist," exploring alcohol themes in songs and the prevalence of alcohol in society. Jeff Bessey, alcohol education intern and a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology, conducts the programs at the request of residence halls, fraternities and sororities.

Another Alcohol Education Program topic clarifies responsible drinking, combating an anything-goes attitude. "Students know what responsible behaviors are," Bessey says. "We just help them to put it in words."

THE UNIVERSITY Police Department also will discuss responsible and irresponsible drinking behavior with students, as well as Campus policy on alcohol. In addition, the department is preparing a slide program on alcohol-related crimes, such as driving while intoxicated, says crime prevention officer Steve Monticelli.

Knowledge about alcohol and alternatives to drinking are topics of other Alcohol Education programs. "Everyone in their life has had a good time not

associated with alcohol," Bessey says. "If we can draw those memories out and say this is another way to feel good about yourself, the group realizes it's possible to have a good time without being drunk."

The program reinforces many students' attitudes. The Greek Alcohol Awareness Association has sponsored non-alcohol parties, including a pledge picnic in September. "Parties such as the pledge picnic stress that activities can be fun without drinking," says Jan Anderson, a senior from Knox City, Mo., who chairs the association. "As one person put it, you can have fun and then go home and remember everything you did."

THE RESIDENCE HALL Association also sponsored a non-alcohol party this fall, attracting 350 students who devoured White Castle hamburgers in a Campus park.

"At other parties, a lot of the focus is not on alcohol," Thompson says. "Students demand entertainment, such as music or a sports activity, and you can't pour down beer while you're dancing or playing racquetball."

Simply sitting with a keg of beer is boring, she continues. "Students go to parties to meet and interact with people. If they want to get drunk, they can do that alone."

While a party may not focus on drinking, Thompson says students are



"Don't let alcohol abuse make you a sitting duck" was one message during Alcohol Awareness Week on campus, which featured a non-alcoholic happy hour attended by nearly 1,000 residence hall students. The week also included a slogan contest; the three winners appear on Page 16.

aware of potential problems when alcohol is served. "We encourage moderation, such as mixing weaker drinks and decreasing or eliminating alcohol content near the end of a party," she says.

A NON-ALCOHOL happy hour during Alcohol Awareness Week, sponsored by the Association of College and University Housing Officers in October, reinforced responsible behavior. "Students realized that drinks can taste just as good without alcohol," says Kim Dude, assistant director of residential life programs. Hors d'oeuvres were served to encourage students to serve food at their own parties, which slows the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream. In addition, Dude says, the happy hour was entertaining, so the primary focus was not on drinking. "It was a fun example of how to be a

responsible host."

ANOTHER FUN, non-threatening way to make a point during Alcohol Awareness Week involved a life-size duck who distributed bookmarks that identified drinking problems. The bookmarks termed those who abuse alcohol "sitting ducks."

Anderson believes that many students who abuse alcohol have bowed to peer pressure. "I think freshmen feel peer pressure to drink more than upper-class students, which is why it is important for the older members of fraternities or sororities to present a good image," she says. "We want them to start off with a good attitude toward alcohol and the organization."

Response to the Greek Alcohol Awareness Association, which empha-

sizes moderation in drinking, indicates that many students are concerned about alcohol, Anderson says. More than 100 people signed a list showing interest in the group during a fall Activity Mart on Campus, and Anderson reports that 99 percent of those are serious about becoming involved in the association. The group alternates its twice-monthly meeting locations between fraternities and sororities and hopes each house will elect a representative to attend all meetings.

Student action and peer group attitudes can enhance the effectiveness of alcohol awareness programs, says Chancellor Barbara S. Uehling, who meets with student leaders each year to discuss alcohol. "Prevention of alcohol abuse is a good tactic for the Campus," Uehling says. "Our attempt ought to be to help

students to make good choices."

Jim Irvin, director of counseling services, agrees that student leaders can influence their peers' attitudes. "Alcohol is part of the social system of society in general to a large extent, but among students it is intense in terms of peer pressure and ways to address certain issues, such as stress. We have some responsibility to put alternatives in front of them."

ALUMNI provide role models, too, Irvin adds. "I think alumni can help students gain a perspective of the drinking issue. On football weekends, some alumni are demonstrating to undergraduates that it must be appropriate to take alcohol into the stadium, to frequent the bars before and after the game, and to focus activities on alcohol rather than on the real reason for being there — the game."

As part of this year's Homecoming activities, the Alumni Association's Student Board distributed alcohol awareness buttons to student participants.

The counseling director also says that while the University must maintain some regulations, the more responsibility given students, the more responsible they become.

The difference between a drink and a drunk is "u."

— Michael Kresin, freshman

The Intrafraternity Council, which has proposed that fraternities be allowed to serve alcoholic beverages at some private functions, agrees. "We're really trying to deal with something responsibly," says council President Hopie Brooks, a senior from Memphis, Tenn. "When something supposedly doesn't exist, it's hard to deal with it."

Adds Kevin Sweeney, council chief justice and a senior from Jefferson City, "The proposal deals with the issue in a positive manner, rather than in a negative, reactive manner."

If the proposal is approved, fraternities would be required to sponsor alcohol-awareness seminars and participate

Don't handle the throttle after handling the bottle.

— Tony Ferrara, sophomore

in other related activities.

Some fraternities already have such programs. Kappa Sigma's alcohol awareness committee is one of the fraternity's strongest, says chair John McReynolds, a junior from North Brook, Ill. Provided through the chapter's national organization, My Brother's Keeper stresses responsibility and suggests approaches to dealing with alcohol-related problems. The fraternity hopes to sponsor a local and a national speaker on alcohol, perhaps inviting other houses to participate.

Sigma Alpha Epsilon also has an alcohol-education program that is geared to its pledges, who attend Greek Alcohol Awareness Association meetings.

Besides educational programs, the intrafraternity proposal also would require that intoxicated persons not be served, and that non-alcoholic beverages be as available and accessible as alcoholic drinks.

Through its program on assertive behavior in drinking situations, the Alcohol Education Program gives tips on graceful ways to decline alcoholic drinks. Thompson, who says soft drinks are plentiful at parties she attends, credits the program with making it easier for students to say no to alcohol. "I have heard a lot of people say they don't like beer and would prefer soda. It used to be that if you said you didn't like beer you were un-American, uncollegiate."

In fact, "maybe now it's more prestigious to say I know when I shouldn't have any more, or this is my limit because I'm driving," she says.

Scott Snadely, a sophomore from Cameron, Mo., says, "It makes a party better if people don't feel like they need to have an alcoholic drink in their hand. It makes it more comfortable for everybody." Snadely notes that his fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, has increased its efforts to provide alternate beverages.

Anderson says that students can

have several reasons for declining an alcoholic drink, including school responsibilities. "The job situation is so competitive and tight, you have to have a very good grade point average and be involved in Campus life," she says. "You just can't go out every time a friend asks."

Thompson says she has noticed a trend back to the traditional weekend party, as opposed to spur-of-the-moment weeknight outings. Many students reserve one weekend night for studying, she adds. "If you party every night, you're overlooking lots of opportunities. If you party too much, you won't make it here or anywhere."

In addition to academic difficulties, alcohol abuse can lead to behavior problems. Campus administrators say that most student violations of UMC rules and regulations are alcohol related.

Don't look for an answer in a bottle — you may forget the question.

— Patty Faber, junior, and
Clare Coonan, sophomore

NOW, VIOLATORS who had been drinking at the time of their offense have the option of attending an alcohol education workshop instead of or in addition to other sanctions. "We're taking a direct approach that represents a real breakthrough in our thinking," Pope says. "We're saying we believe you need to learn about alcohol abuse and think about what you're doing and how it affects your life."

Students' evaluations of the workshop have been positive. "The benefits I received helped me and in all probability would help others, too," one participant wrote.

Pope is gratified by the workshop's results. "In our society, we have middle-aged and elderly people who still haven't stopped to think about their use of alcohol. Some students now could be forming non-thinking, irresponsible attitudes. We try to help them form good habits now so they don't pay for it the rest of their lives." □