

CESAR FAX: April 2, 2007 (Vol. 16, Issue 13)

New Report Makes Recommendations on How to “Take the ‘High’ Out of Higher Education”

Only one-fifth of administrators at U.S. colleges and universities believe that the school bears primary responsibility to prevent alcohol abuse and drug use among their students, according to a recent report from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. The two most frequently mentioned barriers to implementing more effective substance use prevention policies and programs were that student substance use is seen as a normal rite of passage (37.8%) and limited financial resources/funding (34.3%). The report concludes that “institutions of higher education have an obligation to take on the problem of student drinking, smoking and other drug use and abuse...”(p. 2) and makes several recommendations:

Change the Prevailing Climate. Set clear substance use/abuse policies and enforce them in consistent and predictable ways. Target additional prevention services to times of high-risk substance use (e.g., freshman year, weekends, athletic events, spring break). Hold Friday morning and afternoon classes and exams. Currently, only 21.3% of administrators say they hold classes and exams on Friday or Saturday mornings.

Engage and Change Attitudes of Students and Their Parents. Educate students and their parents about school substance use policies as well as the signs and symptoms of substance abuse. Engage students through evidence-based peer education strategies. Report all substance use infractions of students under age 21 to parents or legal guardian.

Address the Needs of High-Risk Students. Identify high-risk students (e.g., Greeks, freshmen, athletes, high school users) and target science-based services to them. Routinely screen all students for substance abuse problems and provide appropriate services.

Monitor Progress and Improve Results. Monitor rates of student substance use and related mental health problems and adjust prevention and intervention efforts accordingly. Scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of services, modifying those that do not seem to be working.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, *Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America’s Colleges and Universities*, March 2007.