

# Ohio University – Division of Student Affairs Alcohol Response Task Force Report and Recommendations

Submitted to Vice President Mike Sostarich  
November 22, 2005

## I. Charge to the Task Force

Assess the present responses within the Division of Student Affairs to alcohol violations and problems; recommend a response protocol.

## II. Timeline

Complete the charge during Fall Quarter 2005

## III. Members of the Task Force

Tony Camechis, Director, Campus Safety Department  
Jenny Hall-Jones, Assistant Director, Residence Life  
Jeanne Heaton, Director, Counseling and Psychological Services  
Terry Koons, Assistant Director, Health Education and Wellness  
Char Kopchick, Director, Health Education and Wellness  
Patti McSteen, Associate Dean of Student  
Judy Piercy, Assistant VP for Student Affairs and Interim Director, Residence Life  
Malcolm Smith, Interim Director, University Judiciaries  
Mac Stricklen, Assistant Director, University Judiciaries  
Sheila Williams, Clinical Mental Health Counselor, Counseling and Psychological Serv.

## IV. Guiding Emerging Principles

As the task force proceeded through its work, the following principles emerged which guided our recommendations:

1. An environmental change approach is necessary to alter the entrenched alcohol culture at Ohio University. Changing the culture will take time, but can occur if our response is clear, consistent, of consequence, and well-communicated.
2. Presently, our responses have not been assessed nor are research-based. We want to move in the direction of utilizing (or developing) excellent, nationally-recognized programs and conduct research on our programs.
3. Many strategies for self-regulating behavior have been tried, but without success, perhaps due to the type of student population at the university (above the national norm for drinking behaviors). We want to meet students where they are developmentally and help move them forward, but the place of departure is often not where we want them to be.

4. When finding resources that could be adapted to Ohio University, we must remember that our norm for drinking is higher than the national norm. Therefore, we must adapt approaches to meet our needs.
5. Our present response may be enabling high risk drinking because we have drawn lines in the sand and then kept moving those lines. Therefore, we need a firm, clear and consistent structure in our response. We need consequences that are educational and decisive, communicating clear boundaries.
6. Programs offered must be presented in a consistent manner.
7. Consequences must be related to behavior, not just the number of violations.
8. Recidivism is a concern; the greatest number of repeat violations occur from the first to the second violation. We want to provide a stronger deterrent from repetition when a student enters the judicial system at the first incident.
9. Responses must allow for judicial due process.
10. Reducing the anonymity of drinking can be effective; therefore, our responses need to reduce the anonymity of the offender.
11. Communicating the determined response protocol is imperative.

## **V. Response to Recidivism**

The recidivism statistics from University Judiciaries indicate that the number of students who violate three or more times in a given year is quite low. However, there is a sense that students believe they have three chances before suspension will be sanctioned. This perception may not be far from the truth.

The task force believes that a strong impact needs to be felt earlier, particularly when students violate their disciplinary probation. Students who continue to violate the alcohol policy while on probation may: 1) be dealing with a substance abuse problem; 2) not take community expectations seriously; 3) have come to Ohio University with the expectation to party; or 4) believe they will receive another chance.

Allowing a second chance makes sense, but allowing more chances when a student is already on probation appears to be enabling and rings of hollow threats. Therefore, the task force recommends:

1. Judicially suspending students who violate their disciplinary probation with an alcohol violation.
2. Adjust the *Ohio University Student Code of Conduct* to allow “sanctioning only” hearings. Earlier suspensions could result in a significant increase in judicial hearings because students will choose to deny the charge in hopes of not being suspended. Students will be more likely to admit the charge, if they have the option to choose a “sanctioning only” hearing that will address the critical issues of students’ relationship with alcohol and the most appropriate course of action. Also, a sanctioning hearing is less time-consuming than a full hearing.

## VI. Recommended Guidelines for Sanctioning

This sanction recommendation is based upon the following premises:

1. Disciplinary probation should be changed from lengths of “quarters” to “months.” Months are more efficient to determine and make sense to students. The minimum length of probation will be six months.
2. These guidelines are intentionally stronger than those recommended in the past.

### Recommended Guidelines

First Offense: Minimum of 6-12 months disciplinary probation; suspension or expulsion if warranted.

Second Offense: Minimum of 12-24 months probation if no violation of probation; suspension or expulsion if probation is violated.

Third Offense: Career probation if no violation disciplinary probation; suspension or expulsion if probation was violated.

On first offenses, incidents that might warrant the lower probation length would be a B-7 (Unauthorized Use of Alcoholic Beverages) for small quantities of alcohol or a low impact on the community (i.e. small quiet gatherings; drinking alone). The higher end of the range would be utilized with more serious incidents such as an A-3 (Mental or Bodily Harm to Self) for intoxication or alcohol poisoning or a B-7 involving larger quantities of alcohol, loud parties, or drinking games.

Note: Students who return after a suspension will return on one year’s disciplinary probation.

## VII. Conditions of Sanction

Presently, one of the greatest challenges of our alcohol response system is that approximately 40 hearing officers are attempting to quickly assess students’ alcohol use and make a judgment as to an appropriate condition of sanction. The condition of sanction is a program, class, activity, or counseling session which will provide information and insight into the student’s behavior – and a hope of assisting students to reduce their high-risk drinking.

The task force recognizes that hearing officers have not had the expertise to make a determination about the plethora of conditions available to assign. The result has been little consistency from one hearing officer to another and a range of conditions that is too wide.

We recommend using an **alcohol audit** during a judicial procedural interview to determine the conditions of sanction. This audit is a screening tool, not an assessment. A low score would place a student into an alcohol education review class and a higher score would result in meeting with a counselor at Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) for an in-depth alcohol assessment with a developed treatment plan.

This process will result in a smaller range of conditions to ensure more consistency among hearing officers. The audit will be developed by the alcohol educators and counselors on the task force.

### **VIII. Recommended Condition of Sanction Classes**

Based upon the audit score, the following conditions of sanction are being recommended:

Lowest Score: Second Chance Program

Lower Range: Prime for Life Class

Mid Range: BASICS Intervention

Highest Score: Alcohol Assessment

#### ***Second Chance Program***

The program goals are: 1) challenge students' thinking about the information in AlcoholEdu for Sanctioning; 2) engage students in thought about their decision-making related to drinking alcohol; 3) discuss OU's culture of drinking where excess has been normalized; 4) review policies and consequences; and 5) begin a plan and provide tools to develop refusal skills related to drinking alcohol or becoming intoxicated.

The program is a two step process. First, students will take the on-line course AlcoholEdu for Sanctioning and, secondly, they will meet in a group setting for discussion. It will be facilitated by interested staff and faculty and will be administered through the offices of University Judiciaries and Health Education and Wellness.

#### ***Prime for Life***

This class is a five-hour program in a group setting, written for college students, and taught by the alcohol prevention staff member in the Department of Health Education and Wellness. Prime for Life is comprised of a review of family history, a review of present use, assessing risk, and a plan for reducing risk. It also includes a three month follow-up. Prime for Life is a nationally-offered program and has research support for effectiveness.

#### ***BASICS***

Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) is a one-on-one intervention strategy based upon motivational enhancement. Students receive two personalized motivational enhancement sessions with the goal of reducing alcohol consumption and the negative consequences associated with excessive drinking. Students are provided feedback about their drinking behavior and given the opportunity to negotiate a plan for change based on the principles of motivational interviewing. BASICS is a nationally-offered program and has research support for effectiveness.

It is recommended that any student who is transported to the hospital for an alcohol-related incident will have a mandatory referral to BASICS even if their audit score is

low. The BASICS program would be administered through Counseling and Psychological Services.

#### ***Alcohol Assessment***

Students who receive a high audit score may be alcohol dependent. It is imperative for these students to meet with a licensed counselor or psychologist at Counseling and Psychological Services to complete a comprehensive assessment of their alcohol use and follow the treatment recommendations of the therapist.

In addition to these above listed conditions of sanction, anyone placed on disciplinary probation who is not assigned Second Chance, will be mandated to attend Bridging the Gap.

#### ***Bridging the Gap Class***

This class was developed at Ohio University and has been in existence for five years. It is typically facilitated by the director of University Judiciaries and is reality and consequence-based. The goals are: 1) review the rationale for community expectations; 2) review specific policies and laws; 3) be clear about consequences; and 4) engage students in an open and honest discussion about civic responsibility. Bridging the Gap will be assigned to students placed on probation in the hopes that they will not re-violate and be suspended. Suspensions for recidivism have declined since the inception of Gap. 95% of the students who completed Bridging the Gap did not come back through the judicial system.

It is the recommendation of the Alcohol Task Force that the university no longer accept court-appointed diversion programs in lieu of our conditions of sanction.

### **IX. Response to Off-Campus Arrests**

The task force endorses increasing the university's response to off-campus arrests. We recommend that all off-campus arrests by the Athens Police Department (or other external law enforcement agencies) be adjudicated through University Judiciaries. This supports our efforts to be respond consistently, not enable high risk drinking, and reduce the anonymity students feel when drinking off-campus.

### **X. Parental Notification Policy Change**

We endorse the revisions to the Parental Notification Policy presented by Malcolm Smith of University Judiciaries. (The revisions have also been endorsed by the Assistant Deans' Council.) The following points were considered by the task force and are being recommended for consideration:

- Extending parental notification to first B-level offenses will be necessary considering the task force's stiffer sanctions for second offenses where probation has been violated.
- Extending parental notification to all students under 21 may help with sophomores who have left other schools for judicial reasons and violate at OU. Parents would be cued that the pattern is continuing.
- We recommend stronger language in the notification letter. The message of the first letter should include the actual sanction and, if the sanction is probation, state that a violation of probation may result in suspension or expulsion.

## **XI. Increase Involvement of Academic Colleges in the Response Process**

There has been an increased commitment by college administrators and faculty to become involved in addressing the alcohol problem on our campus. Presently a copy of the judicial decision letter is sent to academic colleges; approximately one-third of the colleges send a follow-up response to their students.

It is the recommendation of the task force that colleges consider additional interactions with students who violate the code of conduct (e.g., follow-up with students either individually or in a group setting).

## **XII. Resources Required for Task Force Recommendations**

The task force recommendations within this report will require additional resources. The following considerations are being recommended:

1. Additional professional staff will be required at Counseling and Psychological Services to responsibly administer the BASICS and alcohol assessment components of the conditions of sanction recommendations.
2. We anticipate a significant increase in university judicial cases due to processing all off-campus arrests. Additional staff will be needed in University Judiciaries (e.g. graduate hearing officer; clerical support).
3. Institute fines for alcohol violations which will cover services required for the condition of sanction programs

## **XIII. Communication Strategies**

We believe that clarifying an institutional message regarding high risk drinking and alcohol violations is necessary. This message must be consistent and clearly communicated to students and the community. Our recommendations for communication strategies are as follows:

- Pre-College message by the Dean of Students
- Press releases and media campaign
- President's support (letter; First-Year Student Convocation)
- Presentation to key constituents
- Presentation to the Board of Trustees (committee)
- Presentation to Athens Municipal Court
- Bring Admissions Office on-board and discuss messages to be sent during recruitment
- Work with key student organizations and leaders: Student Senate, Council of Student Leaders, tRAC, IFC, Panhellenic, NPHC
- Train key staff: RA and community assistant training, Provost's areas, Athletics, Student Affairs, OUPD.

## **XIV. Assessment**

The task force recommends developing metrics to assess the effectiveness of our response protocol. To that end we recommend:

- Developing a framework for assessment and evaluation.
- Funding a doctoral-level assistantship through Institutional Research to administer the metrics of assessment.

