

FBI



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Under the Influence: The Binge Drinking Epidemic on College Campuses

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, thank you for the invitation to discuss the very serious issue of binge drinking on college campuses. Recent tragedies involving college students in my own community have prompted my department to work even more closely with university officials on several fronts to help curb what is a serious national public health and safety problem.

While I have three universities within my jurisdiction, I would like to limit my testimony this morning to providing you with an overview of the close working relationship my department has forged with Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut.

Well before the current academic year - a year during which three Quinnipiac students were killed in alcohol related accidents, an officer was seriously injured when struck by a student driving under the influence, and a number of injuries occurred to individuals as a result of alcohol-related accidents - my staff and I began meeting with Quinnipiac's management team, including its president, Dr. John Lahey. Through an open exchange of data and ideas, we have developed what I feel is a model for university and law enforcement relations as it pertains to alcohol abuse by college students. And yet, despite our educational and enforcement efforts, we were unable to avoid three families having their lives irreversibly changed when they lost a loved one. I am, however, convinced that without the proactive steps we have taken in the areas of education and enforcement, even more fatalities might have resulted.

EDUCATION

I would like to share with you some of the programs currently in place as well as some additional measures that, together, we can take to address this national crisis. In addition to a strict alcohol policy that is clearly and prominently printed in the Student Handbook, Quinnipiac University

has developed extensive educational programs on its campus. Each year begins with entering freshmen attending a mandatory program on alcohol awareness during orientation. The program educates new students about the University's policies and procedures and how alcohol can negatively impact their lives during their years at Quinnipiac. This effort continues for first year students in what is called the Clusters Program, designed to help students understand the effects of alcohol while informing them of University resources and information for those in need of help. The University also extends alcohol awareness and education programs into the residence halls that house 3,000 of Quinnipiac's 4,600 undergraduates. In addition, the Hamden Police Department's Street Crime Unit along with our community police officers present alcohol-related programs to students at the University continually throughout the academic year. Guest speakers, including panels of representatives from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Alcoholics Anonymous make very focused presentations about the dangers of binge drinking. These educational programs are provided continuously with special emphasis during National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week.

The Office of Student Affairs has developed a relationship with an outside agency, Atlantic Health Services, which provides the University with a professional who conducts alcohol assessments. The assessment serves as a blueprint for treatment and on-going intervention if necessary. Atlantic Health trains the University's Residential Life staff including Residence Hall Directors and Resident Assistants.

I would emphasize that alcohol consumption is no worse on Quinnipiac's campus than on any other campus in America. Quinnipiac statistics mirror those in the recent report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism that reveals binge drinkers account for nearly 70% of all the alcohol consumed by college students.

ENFORCEMENT

In my opinion, the Quinnipiac University administration deals assiduously and cooperatively with our department and responds with disciplinary action in the most effective manner of any college or university I know. This extends especially to students who violate the alcohol policy. A monetary fine, three hours of Alcohol Education Class and two hours of community service directly related to alcohol education and awareness are the first line of sanctions imposed by the University. If a student is involved in a second violation, the fine is doubled, a mandatory alcohol assessment is performed, three hours of Alcohol Education Class is required and parental notification is undertaken by the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. Both Dr. Lahey and I feel strongly that parental notification is essential in these cases and we applaud Congress for amending the privacy laws to allow such notification. Equally important is the fact that incidents of alcohol abuse off-campus are also dealt with in a swift and effective manner. When students of legal drinking age were arrested last year for running a party that included under-aged students at their off-campus, privately owned home, Dr. Lahey and his staff were quick to dismiss them from the University. This is particularly important inasmuch as these problems seemed to have escalated in our Town since students have been moved off-campus. The recent relocation of senior students to off-campus housing certainly seems to have a direct correlation to the increase in alcohol-related accidents.

Our country also suffers from an identity crisis. False identification is the first step in securing alcohol. Students who have attended Quinnipiac's Alcohol Education classes this year have shared the following information:

Most students have fake ID's

Most have purchased ID's in New York for \$40-\$60

Most can purchase alcohol with this ID and are not carded once they are known by package store personnel

This information is not unique to Quinnipiac. The sophistication of fake ID operatives is staggering. Standardization of licenses or a state or federal identification card, and the ability of issuing jurisdictions to share information is imperative. Furthermore, technological advances that would allow clubs, bars and package stores to scan a standardized license would provide a foolproof method for insuring that only students of age would be able to buy alcohol. One of my officers alone has made 12 arrests for possession of alcohol by a minor at package stores in the first five months of 2002. He seized 8 fake ID's and referred two of the stores to the Liquor Control Commission. Additionally, our officers continue to check local drinking establishments and on two recent occasions at one small local bar, 32 individuals were arrested on February 13, 2002, charged with possession of liquor by a minor; and on March 24, 2002, another 44 individuals were arrested on alcohol-related charges and all were students.

A fake ID was found in the possession of a Quinnipiac student who was killed in an alcohol related motor vehicle accident last month when his car, traveling at excessive speed, hit a tree and became airborne twice.

Our work is not done. A number of my officers have attended the Quinnipiac University Alcohol and Drug Task Force meetings on five occasions recently to discuss the possible expansion of University imposed sanctions for students who are arrested with fake ID's in unannounced raids. The University has recently implemented shuttle bus service to nearby downtown New Haven, a popular spot for college students. The shuttle service is solely funded by the University and is used extensively by students, particularly during extended weekend hours. This "safe ride" program was implemented immediately following another fatal accident. This time a 21 year old female Quinnipiac student who was returning to campus after being with friends at a New Haven nightclub, was killed when the Ford Explorer she was riding in flipped several times and ejected her out of the vehicle. Ironically, she was the only one in the vehicle of legal drinking age.

Checkpoints have been proven as an effective deterrent to DUI. Increased funding for personnel and vehicles would allow local law enforcement officials to expand checkpoints as they are not only a means to apprehend and enforce, but also a manner in which we can continue to educate students about the dangers of drinking and driving. These stops provide officers with the opportunity to speak with students and utilize the chance to further impress upon them the seriousness of driving under the influence. Our checkpoints in the Town of Hamden have actually been welcomed by Quinnipiac students. On one recent weekend, we found that 85% of the cars we stopped in a University neighborhood had designated drivers, a practice many adults should consider. Unfortunately, binge drinking does not only take lives strictly as a result of motor vehicle accidents. On November 20, 2001 a 20 year old Quinnipiac student who had just left a keg party at an off-campus private home was attempting to cross Whitney Avenue, a busy

state thoroughfare, when he was struck and killed by a motor vehicle. The blood alcohol level of the student pedestrian was .19% while the driver's was .000%.

The Hamden Police Department, in conjunction with Quinnipiac University, intends to implement additional programs in an effort to combat this problem such as expanding the Safe Ride program; offering the Police Department's availability as a means for transportation with no questions asked when an individual may have to drive under the influence to get back to their housing; and we are attempting to work with the local taxi companies to establish a reasonable/reduced fare to transport students under these conditions as well. These programs would be considerably more effective and widespread with assistance of grant money.

In addition, the Town of Hamden's Department of Police Services has reached an agreement with Quinnipiac University whereby, beginning in the Fall semester, 2002, two police officers will be specifically assigned to the college campus seven days a week for two different shifts. They will be used in a similar manner to school resource officers and will interact with students and administrators in an effort to continue to educate and eradicate these alcohol-related issues.

Let me close by saying that I am not here today advocating prohibition. We cannot kid ourselves about the widespread abuse of alcohol by under-aged students and our ability to completely eliminate consumption. We will continue to strive to reduce alcohol consumption, eradicate binge drinking, eliminate DUI cases and, most important, save lives. This will be accomplished with the continued assistance of a supportive Quinnipiac University administration. Additional educational programs and enforcement efforts by the University and Town of Hamden Police Department will be effective tools in this fight. I urge my colleagues throughout the country to form a campus/community coalition with the colleges and universities in their communities to increase awareness of binge drinking and promote personal responsibility among college students, the ultimate solution to this national problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Committee.

This concludes my testimony and I welcome questions from the