

## **Report of the Commission for the Responsible Use of Alcohol**

The Commission for the Responsible Use of Alcohol was formed in early fall 2005, with two faculty co-chairs, two student co-chairs, and representatives from several key constituencies within the university. The Commission included the following members:

Dr. Carol Fischer, Co-Chair  
Faculty (Accounting)

Mr. Joseph Lepsch, Co-Chair  
Student (J/MC)

Fr. Peter Schneible, O.F.M., Co-Chair  
Faculty (Biology)

Ms. Erika Mattoon, Co-Chair  
Student (Accounting)

Ms. Lana Benatovich  
Trustee

Ms. Mary Monterville  
School of Education

Ms. Connie Horan  
Admissions

Mr. Spencer Peavey (left 3/1/06)  
Director of New Students

Ms. Linda K. Jewett  
Alumnae

Fr. James Vacco  
Friary

Mrs. Ann Lehman  
School of Business

Mr. George Solan  
VP-Student Life (Ex Officio)

We have met with university personnel who work with students directly affected by alcohol issues, as well as with an industry expert from Phoenix House and representatives from the Cattaraugus County Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. We have also accessed resources available from the internet from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and several other organizations actively working to reduce high risk drinking by college students.

### **Need to Change the Culture**

Consistent with virtually all of the organizations that we have consulted, we believe that the best approach to addressing the alcohol problem is to work to change the campus culture. We do not wish to be known as a “party school,” whether through the Princeton Review or word-of-mouth. Through a variety of initiatives, we will try to create a university culture that supports personal, academic, and spiritual growth in a healthy environment.

Although some people advocate banning alcohol entirely on campus, we have discussed this issue at length and believe that a dry campus is not the answer. In addition to discouraging *irresponsible* and *high risk* drinking, we believe that it is important to

promote *responsible* drinking. Society is not “dry,” and our students need to learn to socialize and deal with alcohol in a responsible way.

It is the consensus of the commission members that we need to work to change the culture on campus by promoting responsible behavior, including allowing drinking in moderation and in an appropriate setting by students of legal age. The university cannot and should not allow underage drinking: it is illegal. Our focus is on education, enforcement, and offering attractive alternatives to encourage our underage students to behave responsibly.

### **Importance of Multiple Approaches to the Issue: Education, Enforcement, and Community-Building**

Virtually all of the research that we have reviewed suggests that a single-focused effort is unlikely to be successful at curbing problem drinking by college students. Thus, we have developed a series of recommendations aimed at addressing this issue in several different ways. We need to educate all members of the university community, enhance enforcement efforts, and continue to work to build a strong, supportive community that values each individual.

### **Importance of Focusing on Freshmen**

A January 25, 2006 article in USA TODAY highlighted the importance of focusing our efforts on freshmen. The article, entitled “In College, First Year is by Far the Riskiest,” reported that “a USA TODAY analysis of 629 deaths of four-year college and university students since January 1, 2000, finds that freshmen are uniquely vulnerable,” accounting for more than one-third of the undergraduate deaths, although representing only 24% of the students at those institutions. Further, given the small size of our university and the large percentage of students who live on campus, our students develop very close relationships with one another in a very short time. While this provides many benefits, it also poses challenges when trying to change the culture. We believe that focusing on freshmen affords us the greatest opportunity to truly effect change.

### **Importance of Collaboration and Cooperation between Academics, Student Life, and Students**

High risk drinking affects every aspect of a student’s life, from residence hall life to the classroom. The impact is felt by roommates, classmates, faculty, staff and residence life professionals. Thus, the most effective approaches to addressing high risk drinking involve both academics and student life. While individual employees from these areas have worked together on various initiatives in the past, we envision a much closer relationship, requiring faculty, staff and students to recognize and address the overlap between academics and student life. We also anticipate a joint “ownership” of this process of transforming the campus culture, as no one group can accomplish this without the support of the others.

Additionally, most of the members of our commission are not in roles that have direct responsibility for the recommendations that we are making. It is therefore critical to bring personnel from these areas (e.g., residence life, health services, counseling, and

student activities) into this process through the creation of subcommittees to work on various proposals. These subcommittees must be staffed with personnel with the expertise and administrative responsibility to implement change. Another very important issue is the involvement of students in this process. Our commission has two student members, who have made important contributions to our work. In addition, the commission has interviewed a handful of students (from student life and MERT), and has informally consulted with a limited number of other students. However, we recognize that the only way to achieve success is to involve more students in the process. If students help to formulate detailed recommendations, they are much more likely to meet the needs of current and future students.

### **Need for Student Spaces**

An issue that came up repeatedly during our discussions was the lack of attractive, comfortable student spaces on campus. While this is addressed to some extent in a few of our specific recommendations, it is not a primary focus of this report. Nevertheless, the frequency with which this issue rose to the surface suggests that it has a pervasive effect on the campus culture. Our students need better study spaces in the library (especially places where groups of students can work together), in the residence halls (to promote healthy socializing), in the academic buildings (to facilitate group projects and collaboration with faculty), and in the Reilly Center and dining facilities. Some of these needs have been addressed with the addition of the Richter Center and the planned renovations to the residence halls and dining hall. However, we believe that these efforts must continue. If we want the students to come out from behind closed doors, where they drink to excess in isolation, we need to give them plenty of convenient, comfortable, and attractive spaces to gather.

## **LONG-TERM GOALS**

The following long-term goals emerged throughout our discussions. Several of these are supported by one or more of the short-term goals, which are described in more detail in the following section.

### **1. Lower the incidence of high-risk drinking behavior and the legal and academic problems related to it.**

This is our over-arching long-term goal. To this end, we believe that we need to educate all members of the university community about the risks associated with drinking, and to emphasize the fact that alcohol-related emergencies should be viewed primarily as medical emergencies and not disciplinary problems. The first four short-term goals support this objective. We also believe that we need to offer more alternative non-alcoholic programming. This issue is addressed in short-term goals 7, 8, and 9.

**2. Provide training for students/faculty/staff about alcohol-related issues as a constitutive part of overall education.**

We believe that all members of the university community should be involved in educational efforts to increase awareness of the prevalence and dangers of high-risk drinking behavior on campus. This can be achieved both through increased publicity (such as the campus-wide distribution of our final report) and through specific educational programs. It is particularly important to offer professional development opportunities for faculty and staff who are involved in advising student organizations and active in residence life and/or student programming initiatives. These individuals should be familiar with current research and best practices for addressing substance abuse issues among college students. Some of these programming options are addressed in short-term goal number 6 below.

**3. Integrate alcohol-related training into the structure of Residence Life and Health Services. Establish a (hopefully full-time) administrator to oversee this program and obtain funding for it.**

It is our understanding that the student life strategic plan recommends the addition of a staff position in the counseling area to coordinate substance abuse prevention activities. We believe that it is important for this position to be created and for the person who fills the position to coordinate with health services in developing programming for residence life and other areas of the university. Some of the training that we believe is needed is referred to in short-term goal number 5 below. This person could also serve as the “point person” for questions related to alcohol and substance abuse initiatives on campus, and administer activities associated with the maintenance and dissemination of the University’s alcohol policy.

**4. Work with the local community (including bar owners and alcohol distributors) to address the alcohol culture of society.**

In changing the campus culture, it is especially important to offer new, attractive alternatives to drinking so that our students do not make the common claim that “there is nothing else to do.” We believe that it is important to allow students of legal age to drink in a responsible manner and to support and encourage this by providing appropriate programming. But we also recommend a much stronger emphasis on increasing programming options for non-alcoholic events so that students learn that they can have fun without alcohol. The existing university and local community Good Neighbor Committee is working on this through their efforts to improve “town-gown” relations. In addition, Short-term goals number 7, 8, and 9 address this issue.

## SHORT-TERM GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Establish a separate phone number for calls to MERT (Medical Emergency Response Team) and clarify the roles of Residence Life and Security when MERT is called.

#### Rationale:

At present, to call MERT (Medical Emergency Response Team) students have to call security. We feel that this may inhibit students from calling when it is needed because they fear they will get in trouble (especially if they themselves have been drinking). Members of MERT, who have experience with community emergency service providers, support our recommendation that a dispatcher receive the emergency calls, gather information from the caller and relay it to the MERT personnel

#### Recommendation:

- Establish a separate phone number for calls to MERT. Most likely the number would still go to the security office, but when the security dispatcher answers this line he/she would identify self as the MERT dispatcher and not security.
- Personnel from MERT, Residence Life and Security should clarify their respective roles when MERT is called. This discussion would be especially important if a “Good Samaritan Policy” (#2 below) is adopted.

### 2. Consider adopting a “Good Samaritan Policy” to encourage students to seek help for someone who is in need of medical attention.

#### Rationale:

We are concerned that students hesitate to seek help for another student who is in trouble as a result of alcohol misuse because they fear the punishment. The potential ramifications are very serious – to both the student who is experiencing a medical crisis and the student who chooses *not* to seek help for a friend. Some universities have instituted a “Good Samaritan Rule” that gives immunity to a “helping” student under specific circumstances. We believe that such a rule could encourage students to help one another when they are in trouble. Further, we believe that such a policy is consistent with our stated objective that we want to encourage responsible drinking because we care about the physical and emotional well-being of our students.

#### Recommendation:

- Form a group of students and representatives from student life to research existing *Good Samaritan* policies to determine how they have been structured and how well they have worked.
- Obtain advice from legal counsel concerning the liability implications of such a policy.
- Formulate a recommendation for a “Good Samaritan Policy” tailored to our needs at St. Bonaventure University.

### 3. Put emergency phone numbers and a summary of the “Good Samaritan Policy” on student ID cards.

**Rationale:**

If we want students to seek help when they need it, we have to make that information easily accessible. Since most students carry their i.d. cards with them at all times, we believe that printing emergency phone numbers and a brief summary of the Good Samaritan Policy will ensure that students know how to seek help and are encouraged to do so.

**Recommendation:**

- Update the template used for student identification cards to include the phone numbers of security and MERT. This would most likely be possible effective fall 2007, as we currently have a supply of unused cards that should last through the 2006-07 academic year.
- When finalized, include a brief summary of the Good Samaritan Policy on the back of student identification cards (assuming there is sufficient room).

**4. Develop and install in key locations permanent posters that (1) list emergency phone numbers, (2) explain the Good Samaritan Policy, and (3) encourage students to seek assistance in dealing with alcohol-related medical emergencies.****Rationale:**

This is another recommendation aimed at encouraging students to seek help when they need it. We envision these posters mounted in a Plexiglas display in the residence halls and other key locations at the University. In addition to providing emergency contact numbers, the posters will reinforce the existence of the Good Samaritan Policy and provide reminders that only trained experts can treat medical emergencies arising from alcohol misuse. The intent is to help students help each other by seeking help when a situation requires professional intervention.

**Recommendation:**

- Ask personnel in health services and public relations to work together to design appropriate posters.
- Display the posters prominently throughout the residence halls and other areas of campus where students are likely to socialize.

**5. Establish Residence Halls and/or Floors that are for Freshmen Only.****Rationale:**

With the understanding that changes to the campus culture can occur only incrementally and with the support of multiple facets of the institution, we strongly feel that the best approach is to recognize that the first changes begin with freshmen. This is the group of students least likely to be invested in or inculcated by the existing campus culture and that the institution is most likely to affect in terms of behavior and information.

**Recommendation:**

- We recommend freshmen residence halls and/or floors for both the 2006-2007 academic year and for subsequent academic years.
- We also recommend that these freshmen residence halls be staffed by RAs with demonstrated talents and skills in the areas of programming and community building and who themselves have developed healthy and appropriate attitudes toward alcohol.
- We suggest using graduate counseling students to serve as RAs or to assist the residence life staff as needed.
- Finally, although not directly related to freshmen residence halls, we recommend that only students at the sophomore level or above be considered for RA positions. Since freshmen are still adjusting to campus life, even during their second semester, we believe it is inadvisable to place them in a position of authority and responsibility before they have had an opportunity to earn the respect of their peers. We recognize that Student Life is ultimately responsible for selecting RAs and may, in unusual circumstances, determine that a freshman is the best person for the position. However, we believe that upperclassmen should be actively encouraged to apply for RA positions and that the University must commit sufficient resources and support to make the position of RA both financially and personally rewarding. A freshman should be appointed only if there is no suitable upperclassman for a position.

## **6. Develop programming related to alcohol to address the freshmen during orientation and continuing throughout the academic year.**

### **Rationale:**

Appropriately targeted and on-going alcohol programming must be developed within the residence halls, and within the institution and amongst other interested parties including parents, university professionals and members of the greater Allegany community.

### **Recommendation:**

Specifically, we suggest the following:

- Student-targeted alcohol programming should not be limited to a single, large group event occurring during Welcome Days. In addition, small group programs should be presented throughout the year with some emphasis on programs for two specific populations: freshmen and students with alcohol-related violations.
- Because our students arrive on campus more likely to have engaged in alcohol-related activities, we must direct our educational initiatives at not just our students but also their parents. Primarily, our responsibility is to make parents aware of the situations that students may find themselves involved in and to provide resources for parents to initiate sensitive conversations with their sons/daughters and resources for parents to turn to when they believe their son/daughter is in need of additional support. The emphasis would be on educating parents to influence their children in positive ways.
- Develop programming initiatives to make university professionals, (including faculty, academic advisors and others), aware of the pervasiveness of the

problems. Ensure that these groups are also aware of initiatives developed to address the issues and available university and community resources.

**7. Establish a facility where alcohol is served on the east side of campus, and restrict the use of the Rathskeller to non-alcohol related social events, except for special occasions.**

**Rationale:**

The campus bar (Rathskeller) is currently located on the west side of campus, where most of the underclassmen reside. The Francis Café is located on the east side of campus, where most of the upperclassmen reside. Since most legal aged students live on the east side of campus, it seems logical to locate the campus bar on the east side. The use of an existing facility (the Francis Café) would make this possible without having to locate or construct a new space. However, to make this an attractive option to legal-aged students, we propose significant renovations and programming upgrades to the Francis Café. The Rathskeller is currently under-utilized. Since most of the students who live on the west side of campus are under 21, non-alcohol related events would be well-suited to the Rathskeller. However, given its size and central location, we still envision the Rathskeller as the appropriate cite for limited programming that includes serving alcohol to legal aged patrons.

**Recommendation:**

- Create a task force comprised of students and representatives from dining services and student life to create a detailed proposal for the renovation of the Francis Café. Based on our discussions in the commission and with current students, we suggest the following considerations:
  - The renovation should include new furnishings and amenities that will appeal to the students (possibilities include large screen televisions, pool tables, video games, comfortable lounge-type seating, etc.).
  - Francis Cafe currently serves as a dining facility for students on the east side of campus. It offers healthier meal options such as wraps, sandwiches, salads, etc. We believe that the function of the dining facility should remain intact, with the addition of alcoholic beverages (at certain times of the day). This would ensure that the same meal options still be available to students.
  - A sound system would most likely have to be put in place as part of the Francis Cafe renovations. Since Francis is a residence hall, this will require special care to ensure that students living in this building are not subject to loud music or noise. This will probably require additional insulation or other renovations to maintain a reasonable noise level outside of the café.
- Establish two student programming advisory groups: one each for the Francis Café and the Rathskeller. These groups would assist the Campus Activities Board by recommending programming throughout the semester, and with publicity and assessment.

## **8. Establish new campus traditions.**

### **Rationale:**

Our University embraces tradition and uses the perceived threat to tradition to object to proposed cultural changes. Forming new traditions that will positively affect the campus culture requires participation and support from all members of the campus community. A recent example of a successful University-wide event free of alcohol does exist.

Activities surrounding the inauguration of Sr. Margaret as president in fall 2004 included a gala that students, faculty, staff, administration and community members attended. The non-alcoholic event featured food, beverages, and a live swing band. Prior to the event, free swing dance lessons were offered on campus (1) to help staff, faculty, administrators, and students feel comfortable dancing to swing music and (2) to encourage community members to attend the gala. Instituting an annual event like a gala each spring would bring the entire community together to celebrate our tradition while providing an alternative to drinking.

### **Recommendation:**

- Host an event called Founders Day in the spring semester of each year.
  - Provide a budget for the event that covers promotional materials (e.g. posters, ad in BonaVenture, formal invitations, etc.).
  - Form a planning committee to include students, university events, student life, faculty, staff and other key community members.
  - Invite all campus community members to attend.
  - Find ways to promote the event to encourage participation by the various campus groups.
- Establish a new freshman class tradition by hosting an event for freshmen during the first month of the fall semester.
  - Provide a budget for the event that covers promotional materials (e.g. posters, ad in BonaVenture, formal invitations, etc.).
  - Have upperclassmen (orientation leaders, SGA members, class officers, RA's, etc) run the event and model positive leadership skills.
  - This event would focus on getting freshmen to socialize (no ice breaker games) and take advantage of facility spaces e.g. Rathskeller, Richter Center, etc., depending on the structure of the event.
- The University needs to be open to nontraditional social events that appeal to students.
  - Students may prefer comedians, live mike nights, battle of the bands, talent shows, etc. in lieu of a traditional dance.
  - Have students submit recommendations for social events at the beginning of each fall semester.
  - Provide a forum for students to critique events held on campus to help plan future events.

## **9. Establish a separate Student-Run Programming Budget for Non-Alcoholic Events sponsored and run by student groups.**

### **Rationale:**

One of the most common responses when students are asked why they drink so often is that “there is nothing else to do.” We recognize that our student activities personnel work diligently to provide many activities for the students. However, we believe that the students need additional alternatives and that they need to have more of a stake in the success of these programs.

### **Recommendation:**

- We propose that a modest budget (\$20,000?) be set up with funds that student groups can request to support non-alcoholic programming.
- Establish a student-run non-alcoholic events board, with oversight by staff from the student activities area. This group would establish broad guidelines for appropriate programs (e.g., minimum number of students to be served by a program, maximum potential grant, etc.).
- Preference should be given to events that provide non-alcoholic/alternative activities during peak “bar” hours Thursday through Sunday morning (10:30PM-3:30AM). This seems to be the gap in our on campus programming that students complain about.
- Student groups would be invited to submit proposals to the board. At a minimum, each proposal would include a description of the event, a budget, identification of the target audience, and plans for advertising the event.
- The student group would be responsible for implementation, advertising, and all other activities associated with the event. In addition, they would be required to submit a brief report after the event, summarizing actual expenses, attendance, and an evaluation of the program. Programs of any type—social, cultural, educational, athletic, etc.—would be eligible for funding; however, all programs funded through this budget would be designated as non-alcoholic events.

## **REVISION OF ALCOHOL POLICY**

Finally, as we work on the issues that have been addressed in this report, we recommend that a small sub-committee be formed to revise and/or clarify the existing alcohol policy. Although well-intended, we found that there is considerable confusion about the interpretation of the existing policy. There is even some confusion as to what policy is effective.

## **SUMMARY**

The Commission for the Responsible Use of Alcohol is appreciative of the support we have received from various members of the university community. We believe that many of our students will be responsive to our suggestions for changing the campus culture if

we invite them to be involved in the process from the start. While alcohol and substance abuse is a long-standing problem among college students, as a Franciscan University, we feel it is critical for us to promote a healthy environment where the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of our students is a priority.