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Sent: Friday, December 11, 2009 4:57 AM
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Subject: Re: Basu: Don't dismiss college drinking as harmless (DSM Register)

Hopefully all have had the opportunity to read the excellent two part story in the December 3 and 4 Iowa State Daily regarding the hit-and-run accident in Ames on December 3, 2005 which resulted in the death of ISU student Kelly Laughery as a result of being struck by an auto driven by another ISU student, Shanda Munn, who was intoxicated. That tragedy, as well as the recent Drake incident, underscore the particular risks associated with drinking off campus, at house parties and other totally unsupervised venues. While I appreciate the perils of underage drinking generally, I think it is far worse when policies lead to increases in students driving while intoxicated and engaging in alcohol consumption in places where there is no supervision whatsoever.

Bob Downer

----- Original Message -----

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Sent: Wed Dec 09 10:24:05 2009
Subject: Basu: Don't dismiss college drinking as harmless (DSM Register)

December 9, 2009

Basu: Don't dismiss college drinking as harmless

REKHA BASU
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As if we hadn't had enough anecdotal evidence of a serious problem, a new report by the state Board of Regents shows a sharp rise in student drinking at Iowa's public universities. It should serve as a community-wide wake-up call.

At the University of Iowa, police made 145 arrests for drunkenness in the third quarter of the year, And those didn't include arrests for other liquor law violations or criminal offenses committed under the influence.

It's tempting to shrug off college drinking as a mostly benign expression of burgeoning freedom that goes with social interactions and sports. But those of us who do that need to start dealing with our own denial about how intrinsic a part of college cultures heavy drinking has become - and with what consequences.

A hazing incident at Drake University last month left a student poisoned with alcohol and a fraternity shut down. Three female Drake students under the legal drinking age have reported drinking at a bar on separate occasions within the past six months and later being sexually assaulted. Legally or not, 83 percent of college students drink, many heavily, causing alcohol abuse to be considered the biggest problem for campuses around the country. And University of Iowa officials say high-risk drinking there far exceeds the national average.

Students referred for treatment also show far more alcohol in their systems than at any other time, according to a recent guest column by Wallace Loh and Tom Rocklin. Loh is executive vice president and provost. Rocklin is interim vice president for student services. They've been designated by the university president to address the problem, and should be commended for their openness.

As parents, most of us did some drinking in college when the legal age was 18, so we tend to think today's 18-year-olds can handle it, even if they're underage. But a few drinks handled responsibly are a far cry from drinking and blacking out, or drinking as part of some ritual - like doing 21 shots on turning 21 - or waking up after drinking to find you were raped. More than 97,000 students between 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

That's a tricky subject because of the tendency to impugn rape victims who were drinking. Some readers, including Drake President David Maxwell, took issue with a recent Register headline about Drake women alleging assaults after drinking. He felt it implied that the drinking made them not credible or suggested they had brought the assaults on themselves.

The point is well taken, but if we're to make a dent in a serious problem, we need more public discussion on the relationship between alcohol and sexual violence.

The U.S. Justice Department says one in five college women will be the victim of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault. The incidence is greatly under-reported and offenders go unpunished in part because of the role of alcohol, according to a recent investigation by the Center for Public Integrity. Victims can be reluctant to press charges and some prosecutors won't even take the cases if the women were drinking.

There are encouraging signs that universities are finally addressing the problem of alcohol abuse on multiple levels. But since this requires a cultural shift, it has to involve all of us. Parents especially need to listen because according to the U of I, half of incoming students are heavy drinkers when they arrive.

From drunk driving to assault, a young person doesn't have to be drinking to be affected by the actions of peers who are.

College-age drinking is expected to spike upward during the upcoming holidays. Let's talk to our kids - but maybe first to ourselves.