

# Year One College Alcohol Profile

## WHY FOCUS ON FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS?

First-year students typically have the greatest misperceptions about the amount of drinking that takes place in college. These students tend to think that everyone drinks in college and that it's normal for everyone to drink at very high rates. Institutions of higher education need to pay special attention to incoming students in order to correct these misperceptions and prevent high risk drinking being seen as normative behavior on campus.

Even if your college has higher than normal rates of drinking and binge drinking, chances are students believe it's even higher than it is. Educating first-year students about the drinking behavior of their peers can be very effective in shaping their own choices about alcohol use. It is also important to inform new students about the community standards regarding alcohol use, including: the institution's policies, consequences related to the use of alcohol, and local laws pertaining to alcohol, as well as how the local law enforcement monitors the use and sale of alcohol.

## WHAT IS THE YEAR ONE CAP?

In the fall of 2009, the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) began using the Year One CAP as a web-based **prevention** tool for incoming students to complete prior to coming to campus. UNL continues to see below average drinking rates amongst first-year students, as a result the university has very low drinking norms available to feed back to incoming students. First-year students often have great misperceptions about the amount of drinking that takes place amongst their peers. Because the actual drinking levels amongst first-year students at UNL was so low entering students would benefit from knowing that most of their peers are not drinking at high-risk levels.

The Year One CAP is a great tool to communicate the real drinking culture at your campus to incoming students whose perceptions may be largely skewed **IF** your actual drinking rates amongst first-year students are low. It would not be beneficial to tell incoming students that 80% of their peers binge-drink on a regular basis. However, even if your student population has an above average drinking rate there may be other norms that you could feed back to students that would allow you to positively influence their perceptions. For example, if 75% of your first-year students report having used alcohol in the last 30 days you may not want to advertise this with incoming students. At the same time these same students may report only drinking four times a month or three drinks per occasion which would be positive feedback for incoming students. This information can be beneficial for incoming students who are abstainers and for students who only drink occasionally, or only have a few drinks per occasions.

The Year One CAP is a social norms based prevention program option for incoming students. Reviews of social norms interventions by NIAAA have found that web-based normative feedback interventions like the Year One CAP are the most effective social norms interventions for reducing student drinking and drinking related harms. How it's used on your campus will depend on what is actually going on on your campus and the normative messages you want to send to your entering students.

## HOW DOES THE YEAR ONE CAP WORK?

Year One CAP is administered prior to the start of the fall semester or term. Schools can consider whether they wish to make the Year One CAP mandatory as a condition of enrollment for all students or select groups such as those living in campus housing. Incoming students are sent a letter from a senior administrator letting them know that they will receive an email directing them to the Year One CAP and stating that they are expected to complete the CAP prior to coming to campus.



In 2009, UNL began using the Year One CAP and had a 92% response rate in the fall, in 2010 only an email to students was sent and we saw a drop in response to 67%. So it appears that parents may have reinforced the expectation in 2009 since the letter was more public than the email sent in 2010. Notifying parents of this expectation either directly or indirectly may increase response rates if the Year One CAP is not mandatory. Additionally, booster CAPs can be provided. UNL administers a booster Year One CAP toward the end of the spring semester both to provide students with reinforcing feedback for abstinence and low risk drinking patterns as they head into their second year and to provide brief motivational feedback to students who may be exhibiting problematic drinking. The spring CAP also is used to collect data for analyzing how student drinking patterns have changed during the first year and to examine issues such as uptake for future programming.

Students taking the CAP are asked to input basic demographic information about themselves: gender, age, racial/ethnic identity and information about their current drinking patterns which includes the days of the week that they consume alcohol and how many drinks they have per occasion. After students complete the intake information they receive immediate web-based motivational feedback about their drinking and comparisons of their personal drinking to student norms. There is separate feedback for abstainers and drinkers. Also, normative feedback is provided separately for male and female students using gender specific norms. This feedback provides social norms messages about the reality of alcohol consumption on the college campus that they will soon be attending. The Year One CAP also contains valuable information about the institution's alcohol and drugs policy that many students may not be aware of. Additionally, information is provided about local laws related to alcohol that may be different from the communities that students are coming from. Schools can also choose to add other information about community standards or the enforcement of laws that students should be aware of. Knowing that the community is committed to addressing alcohol issues and that law enforcement is committed to enforcing laws can also impact student's decision about their behavior.

Schools that utilize the Year One CAP have full control over what information is provided in the feedback sections to students. The Year One CAP can also be customized to include the colors and logo(s) of the institution that is utilizing the program.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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