



Photo by Tom Gessner.

Fathom plays forum for alcohol issues

Alcohol.

Neither the issue nor the controversy is new.

The same questions are raised and answered by the same silence. Discussions cover similar topics and opinions are based on common deficits of knowledge.

With this issue of Fathom we hope to clear up some of the confusion and to approach an old problem with new angles.

We're not pretending we discovered the alcoholic issue or that 1979 is the first year it has been a major topic of conversation. Nor are we assuming that these eight pages of newsprint will comprehensively cover the subject.

We will assume the stories will help 1979 UNL stu-

dents be more informed about the problems and policies here that deal with alcohol.

There is a mountain of data on the subject and a similar stack of recorded controversies. From that plethora of information we have attempted to extract that which we think pertains to the situation on the UNL campus.

We are not taking an editorial stance on the issue, but are merely fulfilling a need we see for purveyors of information.

Our goal is to add new bits of information to the continuing conversations and to give people, both students and faculty, the chance to reevaluate their positions on the issue.

Wine and roses concentrated in college days

By Mike Sweeney

Students in a 1976 UNL psychology class received a difficult assignment at the beginning of their five-week course: stop drinking.

The 24 students enrolled in "Psychosocial Aspects of Alcoholism" signed agreements to abstain from alcohol for two weeks and keep diaries describing their reactions. The students were asked to attend parties or social gatherings as normal.

When instructors Steve B. Blum and P. Clayton Rivers collected the diaries, they said they were surprised by the results. Students wrote of feeling pressure and even hostility because of their abstinence. Several reported having a drink in their hands before remembering their contract.

Of the 24 students in the class, 11 asked for copies of the agreement to take to parties to justify their abstinence.

Alcohol is such an integral part of many college parties that hosts as well as guests often feel ill at ease when someone doesn't drink, according to Peggy Brown, planning coordinator for the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism and Drugs.

"PEOPLE FEEL insecure if you're not drinking, if you say 'no thank you, I'm having 7-Up,'" Brown said.

Many college students drink because it's the accepted thing to do at a party, she said. But students also drink because of stress, peer pressure and loneliness.

The significant use of alcohol among college students is reflected in statistics showing people in their teens and early 20s to be the chief users and abusers of alcohol.

In a 1974 study by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 27 percent of 18- to 20-year-olds—the largest percentage of any age group—said they had some type of drinking problem.

Further questioning indicated 9 percent of college males and 1 percent of college females had experienced more than one blackout, and 10 percent of the men and 3 percent of the women reported drinking before breakfast more than once.

In Lincoln, 19- to 24-year-olds accounted for 44.7 percent of the arrests for driving while intoxicated between the months of January and September, 1979. A total of 633 people were arrested, up from 559 people arrested during the same period last year.

"IT APPEARS like we've got a growing problem," said LCAD research analyst Ron Dade.

The college campus atmosphere contributes to the high drinking rates, Brown said.

College students often are living away from home for the first time, and their social life may be uncomfortable, she said.

Alcohol helps desensitize people and make them less nervous about their new surroundings, she said.

Living away from parents and the support they provide isolates students and makes them more susceptible to peer pressure, she said.

"Peer pressure in college is every bit as viable as it is in junior high, except people in college have no parental support to fall back on," Brown said.

The UNL administration tries to assume the parent's role, Brown said, but "the administration isn't home when you come home late."

Brown said many young people may turn to alcohol because of loneliness.

Studies have shown that people are loneliest during their senior year of high school and freshman year of college. Their loneliness prompts drinking, she said.

ONCE COLLEGE students begin drinking, they tend to abuse alcohol, according to Duke Engel, outpatient supervisor for

the Lincoln General Hospital Independence Center.

"Most young people drink abusively. That's the norm," Engel said.

Engel said young drinkers may continue to abuse alcohol until they feel emotional or physical pain.

Many college-age drinkers use alcohol experimentally, and most "haven't got their hands in the fire yet."

Most students reduce their drinking after they have been hurt by it, but the alcoholic student keeps coming back for more punishment, Engel said.

Engel, who occasionally speaks about alcoholism on the UNL campus, said he once gave a program at a fraternity where he listed the symptoms of alcoholism.

"One guy said, 'If that's the list of symptoms, half the guys in this house are alcoholics,'" Engel said.

"The symptoms for adults are the norms for the college campus," he said.

Those symptoms include a preoccupation with alcohol, inappropriate behavior when drinking and blackouts, he said.



"THE KEY IS—does the use of alcohol lead to repeated and significant trouble," Engel said.

Although many students display the symptoms, most are not alcoholics, he said. They are only alcohol abusers who will grow out of their alcohol problems.

Nevertheless, a person doesn't have to be certain someone is an alcoholic to point out a drinking problem, he said.

"You'd do the same thing if you saw somebody lose 20 pounds, or if someone was depressed and not going to class," Engel said. "Professionals don't have to diagnose alcoholism to work with it (alcohol abuse)," he said.

Counselors have been diagnosing the problem at an earlier age, Engel said.

When he began working at the Independence Center several years ago, the average patient was about 40 years old, he said. The average has dropped to slightly more than 30 years, he said.

Independence Center counselor Gary Wise said three of the 16 people he works with go to college, and four more are college age.

Engel also said he knows a lot of college students who seek treatment at the center.

Although they were unable to determine how many college students were treated at the Independence Center, records show 335 people sought treatment from September 1977 to September 1979, indicating an average of 14 people a month. Of this number, 256 were male and 79 were female.

MARGARET EAGER, psychiatric social worker at the University Health Center, said she sees a lot of cases where alcohol is part of a student's problem although she couldn't predict the amount of drinking on campus. She diagnoses alcoholism about two times a year, she said.

Both Engel and Brown said the university's policy prohibiting alcoholic beverages on campus has no effect on student drinking habits.

Engel said only changes in drinking attitudes, and not rules or laws will change college drinking patterns.

"I almost think the issue of drinking on campus is trite," Brown said. "If they (the administration) are that concerned, why don't they have alcohol education programs in the dorms?"

If UNL dropped campus alcohol restrictions, campus concern about alcohol would be focused not on changing the rules, but rather on alcohol abuse, she said.

"They'd have to judge it on its own merits," she said.

She said the administration presents a mixed picture to the students. Many use alcohol while admonishing students to keep it out of the dorms, she said.

"The (student's) comeback to that is 'How do you drink in your home? This is my home,'" Brown said.