

Drug trends contradictory

By Melanie Brandert
Staff Reporter

Hallucinogens such as LSD are making a comeback, and numbers showing a decline in marijuana use at UNL may be misleading, according to a drug education coordinator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

A University Health Center student health survey from 1985 to 1993 showed that the number of students who have tried hallucinogens increased from 6.2 percent in the latter 1980s to 8.5 percent in the early 1990s. The survey showed that the number of students who have tried marijuana has been declining since 1990, from 40 percent to 27 percent in 1993.

Dave Bower, a drug and alcohol education coordinator at the health center, said that although the survey showed a decrease, he had talked to students who said marijuana use at UNL was increasing.

"By word of mouth, I find that more students may be using marijuana more than people realize," he said. "It's not that the survey is incorrect, but it deals

with around 300 students per year. We're trying to get a feel for what students say is going on through that."

One UNL student, who asked to be identified only as Curt, said he thought the number of people who used marijuana had stayed the same or increased slightly in the past few years. However, he said, its use has become less taboo.

Many of the people he knows who use marijuana don't necessarily think it's unhealthy.

"All of the pot-smokers I know are pretty health-conscious," he said.

"It doesn't do your lungs any good, but I think alcohol causes a lot more long-term problems," he said, because the lungs regenerate themselves if a person quits smoking.

Curt said marijuana was the most common illegal drug used by UNL students, followed by LSD.

Bower said he thought students were using marijuana and LSD more because they were cheaper than most illegal drugs and easier to obtain.

David Hunnicutt, education director at the Nebraska Council to Prevent

Drug and Alcohol Abuse, said marijuana use was declining ten years ago but had started to increase within the last couple of years.

"I think it might be that 10 years ago, there was a lot of pressure (to crack down) on marijuana use, then the shift focused on alcohol," he said.

However, Curt said he thought a bigger concern was increased experimentation with LSD among UNL students.

"If (people who use LSD) don't think it's unhealthy, they should," he said. "It actually changes your brain. It mimics a neurotransmitter." This causes LSD's hallucinatory effect and can cause flashbacks.

However, Hunnicutt said marijuana could have hidden dangers.

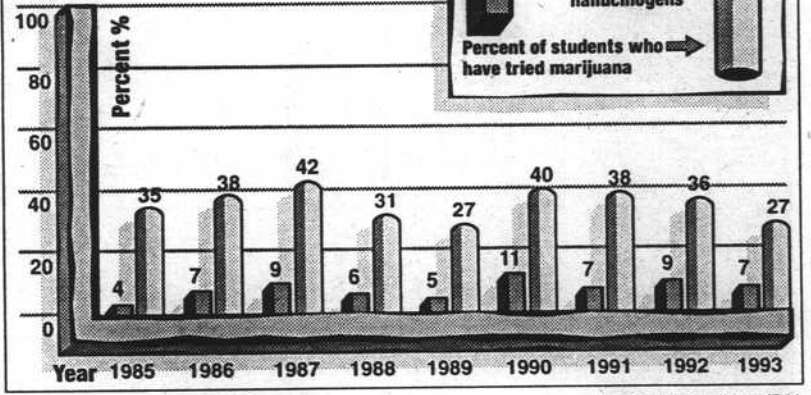
It is difficult to know beforehand how potent marijuana is, because the concentration of its active ingredient, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), can't be controlled for dosage as beer can. Also, a user would not be able to detect if the drug had been altered.

"With smoking pot, you don't know if it has been laced with anything," he said.



Student Drug Use

A University Health Center student survey from 1985 to 1993 shows the percent of students who have tried marijuana and hallucinogens. The percent of students who tried these drugs is displayed above the year.



Source: University Health Center

Aaron Steckelberg/DN

Binge drinking has its consequences

By Melanie Brandert
Staff Reporter

Two alcohol prevention officials disagree on recent trends regarding alcohol consumption among college students, but both acknowledge that binge drinking is still a serious problem.

David Hunnicutt, education director at the Nebraska Council to Prevent Drug and Alcohol Abuse, said there had been a decrease in the number of college students who drank frequently, but the trend had remained steady for binge drinking, the ingestion of five or more alcoholic drinks at least once a month.

He said people had underestimated the seriousness of binge drinking in Nebraska. Although 43 percent of college students are binge drinkers nationwide, Hunnicutt said, that number is closer to 50 percent in this state.

"Binging is the real concern," he said. "They don't think it is as serious here as other areas."

Dave Bower, drug and alcohol education coordinator at University Health Center, said binge drinking had increased at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln over the past couple years. Citing UHC student health surveys, he said eight of 10 UNL students drank, and about half of students regularly drink to get drunk.

Peer pressure is one of the main reasons for the increase, Bower said.

Also, students don't realize what high-risk drinking can do to their bodies, both physically and mentally, he said.

"That's what they (students) perceive as being fun," Bower said. "They want to drink a lot of drinks and see what happens later. They feel like they're indestructible."

Bower said the number of male UNL students who engage in heavy drinking, the consumption of 60 or more alcoholic drinks a month, has doubled. For women, it has tripled.

According to the 1991-92 Nebraska Behavioral Risk Factor Survey from the State Department of Health, people ages 18-24 were more likely to be heavy drinkers (6 percent) than older Nebraskans (3 percent).

"With that kind of high risk alcohol



Bret Gottschall/DN

use comes negative consequences that students must experience," Bowers said.

Sarah Teten, an undeclared graduate student at UNL, said she knows drinking is bad for her. Teten goes to the bars about three nights a week and usually has two to six drinks or more.

"I like to be active and do healthy things, but I abuse my body," she said. "I think it's affordable right now, but maybe not."

However, according to Hunnicutt, the consequences can be costly.

"There's really a lot at stake," Hunnicutt said. "Drinking was a joke at the time (when 'Animal House' was popular in 1979), but the rules really

have changed."

Businesses may decide not to hire someone who is a problem drinker.

Alcohol also plays a factor in the number of those who contract a sexually-transmitted disease.

Hunnicutt said he thought stiffer penalties for drinking and driving — as well as alcohol awareness and education — would help decrease the number of college-age binge drinkers.

"We have to hold people accountable for the decisions they make, and that means enforcing campus policies," Hunnicutt said.

Establishments that serve or sell alcohol to college students also should

be held accountable, said Brian Baker, a traffic safety coordinator for the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department.

According to the health department's survey, young adults tended to report more incidents of drinking and driving each month than older adults.

Drinking and driving does not occur as much in Lincoln as in some other cities, Baker said, because of UNL's proximity to the bars.

The increase in the number of reported drinking and driving incidents also means that college students continue to ignore the facts and potential consequences.

"It's more important for them to take chances and suffer the consequences of becoming intoxicated," he said. "(But) it doesn't affect themselves. It affects those around them."

One solution Baker suggests is to force downtown drinking establishments to provide responsible service of alcohol to college students.

"If we can increase the responsibility of those who sell alcohol, off- and on-sale, together with education and increased enforcement, (there will be) enhanced laws and enhanced practices by the judicial system to more speedily and severely punish offenders."

"Everybody has to play the part."