

CLOSING TIME

Bar owners attest to binge drinking problem

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any one evening spent at the bars, or, in some cases, even drink that much while spending time at home.

For Damien Wright, a sophomore English major, the only time he has partaken in "binge drinking" was on his bar crawl.

Since his crawl March 5, Wright has been back to the bars only three or four times.

"For one thing, it's expensive," he said. "I don't enjoy it that much on weekends, just because there are too many people and it's too crowded.

"I just end up sitting with my friends anyway, which I can do anywhere and not spend a dollar on beer."

Wright didn't think of binge drinking when he was at the bars watching people.

"There are always one or two who are hammered and being obnoxious and falling all over the place," he said. "For me, binge drinking is reserved for the home."

But unlike Wright, many UNL students do spend their weekends frequenting the numerous taverns lining the streets throughout downtown.

Most of them don't think they are binge drinkers.

The bar culture

The excursion into the promised land called O Street on a Friday night is an experience in itself.

Line upon line of students high on the vibe of the weekend wait outside in the rain or under a clear, moonlit sky to enhance their moods with the help of a cheap drink, a cheap shot or a pitcher of Old Style.

Julie Riviera, a senior fashion merchandising major, and Jill Krohn, a senior business management major, braved the spitting rain and cold wind Friday to wait in line outside Woody's Pub, 101 N. 14th St.

"The main reason I go to the bars is to socialize with friends," Riviera said, laughing.

"You're full of shit," Krohn responded, also laughing.

Both Riviera and Krohn expected to drink an estimated six drinks while at the bar Friday, but also said they would probably only drink that much on a weekend night.

Riviera said when she thinks of a binge drinker, she visualizes "those old guys at Iguana's," and Krohn added "someone who drinks a case."

Both girls have been able to legally drink for two years, and Riviera did have a bar crawl, because, she said, it was tradition.

Ryan Reuter, a senior agriculture education major, estimated that he goes to the bars twice a week on average.

"I'd say that I drink about 10 drinks when I go out," Reuter said.

Reuter, who was attending a bar-hopping bachelor party Friday night, didn't consider himself a heavy drinker.

"I go pretty much for the social part," he said. "My professors read this so I'm not going to say how many drinks I've had tonight."

Reuter wasn't sure why binge drinking has garnered so much attention lately.

"I think for some people, the idea of binge drinking is a problem, but for the most part, I'd have to say I don't think it is."

Todd Mausbach, owner of The Brass Rail, 1436 O St., said he sees about five to 10 students per weekend night who qualify as "intoxicated."

"We don't let those people in the door," Mausbach said. "We don't need to take a chance letting someone on the borderline in the door because we have 50 more people waiting outside in line," he said.

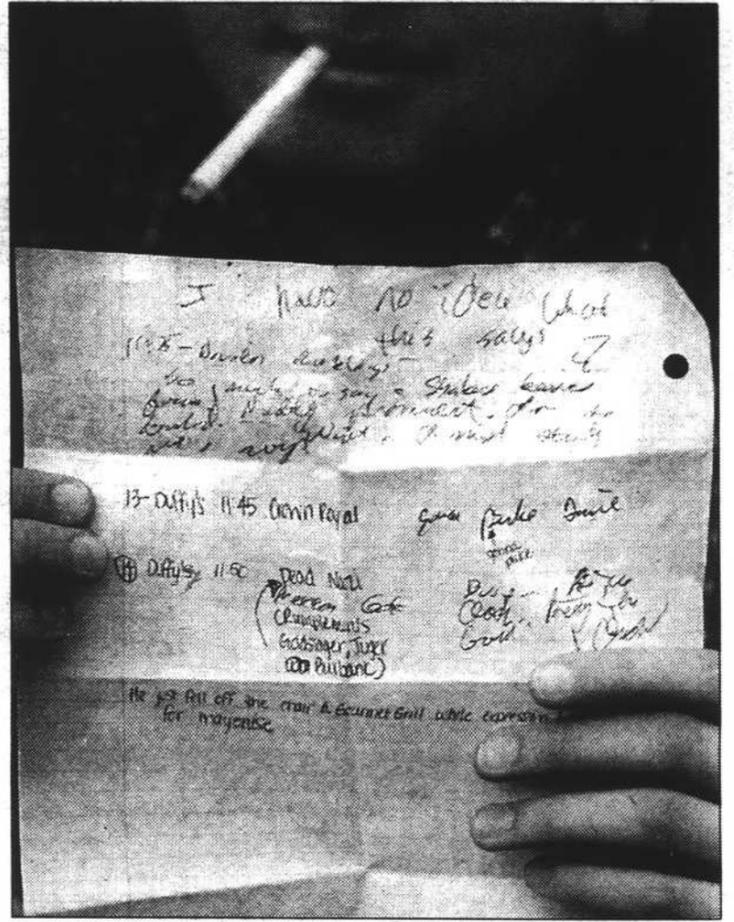
Reg McMeen, owner of Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St., said that within the last month his establishment has turned away more customers than usual on weekend nights.

He said about six to seven patrons per night have been turned away at the door for being too drunk, and about three to four drinkers inside the bar have been asked to leave because of intoxication.

Those numbers, McMeen said, were up from an old average of about three or four people being asked to leave or being turned away.

"It's been bad lately," he said. "I have no idea why."

McMeen thought one reason may be because his staff as a whole was more in tune to the signs of intoxication, but he said it mostly stemmed from the heat on local bars to curb binge drinking.



JUNIOR COMPUTER SCIENCE MAJOR DAMIEN WRIGHT still can't decipher some of what he wrote on his drink list near the end of his bar crawl March 5.

But they are responsible for... les and the laws of the state."

Violations for bars that... are steep.

According to the Nebraska Liquor Control Council's violations penalties... result in a bar's license being suspended for a period of 20 days, and a maximum fine of \$1,000.

Successive offenses... doubled fines and longer suspensions and can eventually cause an establishment's liquor license to be revoked.

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Studies look at nationwide 'epidemic'

Forty-four percent of college students engage in binge drinking, one study reveals.

By **BRAD DAVIS**
Senior editor

The crackdown on binge drinking at college campuses across the nation is a response to a culture finally realizing that its young people have a problem with alcohol — some call it an epidemic, experts said.

A 1997 Harvard University national survey and several alcohol-related accidents brought binge drinking into the spotlight, said Sandra Hoover of the American Medical Association.

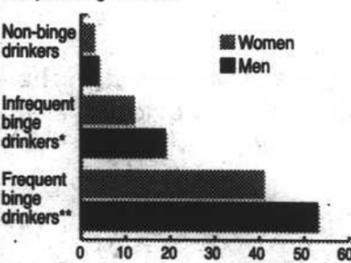
The survey, lead by Henry Wechsler, director of the College Alcohol Studies Program at Harvard, showed that 44 percent of college students engaged in "binge drinking."

Binge drinking, in the survey, was defined as a male having five or more drinks in a row, and as a female having four or more drinks in a row.

On the heels of the 1997 report were two student deaths related to alcohol, one at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, La., and one at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., which sparked a furor of media and university administrator concern.

Hard facts

A 1997 national study of 130 schools showed that more than half of college men, and nearly 40 percent of college women, were frequent binge drinkers.



* Infrequent binge drinkers report binge drinking one or two times during the last two weeks.

** Frequent binge drinkers report binge drinking three or more times during the last two weeks.

Source: Harvard National College Alcohol Study, 1997

JON FRANK/DN

"I think that what happened was that the college alcohol study really brought attention to the range and strength of the problems," said Hoover, who works with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which gave UNL a \$700,000 grant to fight binge drinking.

The Harvard study pointed to the fact, Hoover said, that college students are drinking more frequently just to get drunk.

"I think that's a difference from the past," she said. "The goal is to just go out and get wiped out."

It's difficult to get society to realize the problem of college binge drinking, though, said Ian Newman, a UNL health education professor.

Alcohol is the public's drug, Newman said, and until recent surveys and alcohol-related deaths and accidents, most problems with booze were swept under the rug.

But with an increasing number of people falling out of windows, deaths and sexual assaults all related to alcohol, Newman said, the public is being forced to reckon with the evils of irresponsible drinking.

Debra Erenberg, manager of anti-binge drinking program College Initiative in Washington, D.C., said that as societal norms change and people drink less, it's more obvious that college students are gorging on alcohol.

Societal norms are what many people use to justify binge drinking, some experts said. Students assert that their parents partied while they were in college, so they should be able to as well, Erenberg said.

"It's a message that people get from the media," she said. "Everyone's seen 'Animal House.' Students really feel this is their time to go wild — that they have a right to party heavily."

Newman said heavy drinking is sometimes looked at as a "rite of passage" for college students.

What's not publicized or passed down from parents though, he said, is that not everyone drinks and that there

are consequences to students drinking to excess.

A Nebraska study Newman worked on showed that the drinking culture has changed since the days of current students' parents and grandparents.

It used to be, he said, people drank to excess only on special occasions, such as a wedding or graduation.

"It didn't go on every weekend like it does now."

The risk of excessive drinking has also increased in the past few decades, Newman said. The number of students who have cars on campus, and who drive them after drinking, is just one risk factor that has increased.

"We don't want to take away the opportunity to enjoy life, but something that's killing more than 100,000 people a year appears to be a public problem that deserves addressing," Newman said.

Though putting the cork on binge drinking has gained high-profile media and campus administration attention, Newman said, a culture still exists that supports drinking to excess.

Many college campuses, including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln through the Johnson foundation grant, are struggling to change campus cultures that support binge drinking.

Billboards that advertise booze, cheap drink specials at local bars and a large number of taverns near a campus — UNL has 114 within a mile of City Campus — all support a binge-drinking

culture, Erenberg said.

But it's not just what's on or near campuses that promote the message that it's OK to drink heavily.

Drinking is a part of many younger Nebraskans' lives, Newman said.

Among high school students, Nebraska is one of the top three states of the 25 or so states that keep statistics on drinking, he said.

Newman attributes this high school drinking to certain cultural traditions, the dropping price and increasing availability of alcohol and the lack of things to do.

High school students bring their drinking to the university, Newman said.

"Kids don't come to the university to drink," he said. "They've learned their patterns before."

Statistics also reported in the Harvard survey include:

■ Residents of fraternities or sororities were four times as likely to be binge drinkers than other students.

■ White students were more than twice as likely to be binge drinkers than other racial or ethnic groups.

■ Students who said religion was not very important to them were more than twice as likely to be binge drinkers than others.

■ Students who said participation in athletics was very important or important to them were almost 1½ times more likely to engage in binge drinking.