

Panel meets at UNL to discuss high-risk drinking solutions

■ Educators, retailers and law enforcement convene for strategy sharing sessions.

By Melanie Mensch
Staff writer

Drinking was the issue, not the activity, at a symposium last Tuesday where retailers, police officers, legislators, educators and students discussed policies and practices to create a safer alcohol environment in Nebraska.

Held in the Nebraska Union auditorium, the conference entitled "Creating a Low-Risk Drinking Environment in Nebraska" had a three-fold purpose, said Linda Major, project director of NU Directions.

"We wanted to engage and facilitate discussion about the problems here locally, the current research on alcohol trends and the leading policies and practices in other cities," she said.

Co-chaired by Dr. James Griesen, vice chancellor of student affairs, and Tom Casady, chief of the Lincoln Police Department, the symposium was funded by a \$10,000 grant awarded to NU Directions by the Woods Charitable Foundation.

Major said she was pleased with the "real diversity" of the discussion from the 112 attendees from around the nation.

"Nebraska hasn't had a symposium on this issue for at least 10 years," she said, "so it was a chance for people to share and to think about what direction we want to go in the future."

High-risk drinking can be a problem in Nebraska, especially in the college community of Lincoln, Major said.

Eighty percent of UNL students over 21 said they drank in the past month, compared to 71 percent of students underage. However, more than half of underage students were likely to drink more than their older peers. Also, obtaining alcohol is easy, according to 88.6 percent of UNL students, Major said.

"The data clearly shows that young adults think it's OK to drink before they step on campus," she said. "We're looking to bring in a combination of practices and policies that we believe will work hand in hand that will help reduce this kind of thinking."

Speakers at the symposium brought a variety of solutions to the table. Participants discussed policies like limiting the amount of alcohol sold, enforcing zoning and social provision laws, creating liability laws, and mandating server training programs.

Dr. Traci Toomey, professor at University of Minnesota and a symposium speaker, said the key was to raise awareness and promote responsibility with drinking.

"Sometimes we have these laws on the books, but no one is following them because they don't know they're there," she

said. "We want to change the norms and change the policies. We need to affect when and how alcohol is sold."

Also, they talked about organizing non-alcoholic events, distributing more food and retail shops in areas laden with bars, and restricting hours of operation for liquor outlets.

Tom Casady said he was impressed with the idea of a "coffeehouse-bar setting," which is popular in New Zealand, where a large selection of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and food are offered.

"How do we discourage high-risk drinking and encourage low-risk drinking?" he asked. "We need to change the social environment. There's lots to do in this town, it's not just alcohol with college students standing shoulder to shoulder in a bar. College students have a lot of disposable income, which they can spend on more than just pitchers of beer."

Casady also said other communities served as great examples mixing retail shops and bars, creating an ambience where drinking was not the focus.

These ideas will be compared and contrasted by an NU Law student who will be hired to draft models of legislation, Major said. The symposium will reconvene in October to discuss the information and search for ways to make it a reality.

"It's been a long time, if ever if this level of expertise has gathered together," she said.

ExecuTrain of Nebraska
Technical Center

Saturdays this fall for UNL students, staff, and faculty...

Microsoft MCP Certification offered on campus at UNL!

Call now for more information about this exciting partnership between the College of Business Administration, Microsoft Corporation and ExecuTrain.
Kathy Hall, 484-7773

UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES...

...can change your life in an instant. Perhaps you would like to consider the possibility of creating an adoption plan for your child. Our case workers can answer your questions confidentially. If you would like to visit with us, please call today.


4800 Valley Road, Ste. 514 • Lincoln, NE 68510
(402) 483-7879 • 800-390-6754

Bring in this coupon and with any purchase... We'll give you the

SHIRT OFF OUR BACK!!

FREE T-SHIRT!

Limit one coupon per person per day
Limit is \$3.99 Value
Expires 9/15/00
4690 Leighton Ave. • 467-1550

 **Dollar Days!**
Two BIG Days!

July 28th & 29th

Choose from selected shirts, skirts, pants, dresses, tops, shorts, and much more for just \$1.00!

- 1700 South 17th • 4555 Vine Street
- 3910 North 27th • Edgewood Shopping Center
- 512 Grant Ave., York • 1820 North 6th, Beatrice

ARE YOU 19 TO 55?

- men and women
- smokers and nonsmokers
- availability: weekend stays

MDS Harris
Together, We're Making Lives Better

EARN UP TO \$1,120
Call 474-PAYS

ASSIST MEDICAL RESEARCH