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NEWS

Bingeing plagues state

by Kailey Bender

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Wisconsin ranks as the most prolific alcohol consumer in the nation, despite falling from The Princeton Review's party school rankings earlier this year.

A report released by the UW Population Health Institute found Wisconsin has the highest rates in the nation of drinking among high school students, underage teenagers and adults.

Amanda Jovaag, a researcher at the UW Population Health Institute, said the study only analyzed alcohol abuse at a state level, and unsure of how UW specifically fit into the report.

However, she said the study showed the age group 18 to 25 — the age of most college students — has one of the highest rates of alcohol dependence and abuse.

The report also said Wisconsin's rate of underage binge drinking has risen significantly from 2003 to 2005 and currently ranks as second-highest in the nation.

Binge drinking, according to the report, is considered consuming five or more drinks in a row on one or more of the past 30 days.

Jovaag said the report is relevant to UW, as it is the largest university in Wisconsin.

"Recognizing that this university is in the state that has the greatest problem with alcohol abuse seems important," Jovaag said.

Madison City Council President Mike Verveer, District 4, said binge drinking is an issue the Madison city government and UW administration have been talking about for many years.

"Ten years ago, the university received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson foundation to try and help curtail student drinking," Verveer said. "These things are still in place on campus."

As a result of the grant, Verveer said the UW recreational sports facilities, student unions and libraries are open later at night and on weekends, all in an effort to provide alternatives to house parties.

UW senior Ann Dalee said there is more to do on the UW campus than just drink alcohol.

"There is definitely a drinking culture on campus, but there are tons of other things you can do on a Friday night," Dalee said. "Madison has lots of concerts and other events going on every weekend that don't involve drinking."

Jovaag said there are some solutions to Wisconsin's problem with alcohol abuse. He said one issue that could be looked at is the state beer tax — Wisconsin has the second lowest beer tax in the country. The tax has not been raised since 1969.

“Raising the tax will reduce the affordability of alcohol,” Jovaag said. “Eighteen-to-25-year-olds tend to buy less alcohol as the price goes up.”

Jovaag added students under 21 need to be reminded that consuming alcohol under any circumstance is illegal.

“Individual communities should be enforcing laws that are already on the books — underage drinking is already illegal,” Jovaag said. “Violators of the laws should be punished.”

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