

Drinking on College Campuses

A Communities Approach

by Don Waiski, Deputy Police Chief, Winona (Minnesota) Police Department

Colleges and universities throughout the United States have been plagued by problems associated with alcohol. Binge drinking, deaths, crime and general disruption to the community are common results of alcohol abuse in "college towns." Communities and academia have attempted to deal with this problem for years with little success. Winona, Minnesota has taken a proactive, aggressive and targeted approach to this problem and it's working. This article will outline our efforts to reduce negative effects of alcohol within a college community.

Winona is a community of 27,000 residents located in southeastern Minnesota. It ranks as one of the highest per capita ratio of liquor license to population in the State of Minnesota at 1:752. Two universities are located within the city limits.

Winona State University (WSU) is a public four-year university with a student population of 7,400 students. Currently, 2,600 students reside on campus. Many of the other students reside within a four-block radius of campus in residential rental property. WSU is located in the center of the city surrounded totally by residential housing. Winona State University is a dry campus.

St. Mary's University is a private, four-year university located near the western city limits. Its location is somewhat secluded with over 80% of the students residing on-campus. Alcohol consumption and possession is allowed on campus.

The downtown area has ample liquor establishments that are within walking

distance of the WSU campus. Drink specials and happy hour prices are common throughout the week. With the number of students living in rental units close to the university, problems with loud parties, criminal damage, public nuisance and other quality of life crimes were common.

In 1998 the Winona Police Department implemented the Community Policing Philosophy. Meetings were held throughout the community to gain citizen input on crimes and problems they wanted dealt with. Through surveys it became evident that alcohol and crimes associated with it were a top priority. The police department then began to develop a plan to deal with this problem.

Beginning in 1998 a number of programs and projects were implemented. Continual adjustment and review of programs were made. The value of gaining assistance and cooperation from other agencies and groups became readily apparent. Even in the initial stages it was evident that no one agency could attack this problem alone.

Certain groups met many of the programs with resistance. Liquor retailers, students and landlords objected to specific programs directed toward them. Organizations that normally didn't work well together realized that this problem affected everyone.

Organizations that have taken part and/or assisted included the Winona Police Department, Winona State University, St. Mary's University, city government, landlords, citizens, students and others. An alcohol task force was formed in the late

1990s to develop a direction along with what was taking place with the police department.

It also became apparent that a number of traits were present within the groups and/or representatives of specific institutions. These included leadership, commitment and persistence.

As a result of our efforts, crime in the City of Winona has decreased by 30% over the past four years. Many programs and events associated with binge drinking have been eliminated. City government, university officials, law enforcement and citizens have commented on the noted improvements-

Problems still persist, however, to a lesser degree. With persistence, leadership and hard work improvement will continue.

I will outline those programs implemented by Winona to deal with problems associated with alcohol. This program also involved continual review and adjustments to deal with unexpected events and problems.

Neighborhood Police Patrols

Uniformed police officers were placed in the residential areas surrounding campus. These officers were assigned to foot patrol. The purpose of these patrols was to strictly enforce all alcohol related offenses. Visibility was also a major determining factor of placing officers on foot patrol. Numerous arrests were made for public consumption (alcohol), loud parties, disorderly conduct, and damage to property, etc

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To better use the officers at peak times these officers would generally patrol up to two months prior to graduation and several months after school began. Officers were also used in the downtown area when appropriate.

In 2002 Winona State University donated \$3,000 to the Winona Police Department to offset police overtime in dealing with this problem.

Alcohol Compliance Checks

In 1998 the Winona Police Department began implementing alcohol compliance checks of liquor establishments. A consistent and aggressive approach has been implemented using underage decoys to enter liquor establishments in an attempt to purchase alcohol. Employees serving minors are arrested. The license holder (owner) is referred to the city council for fines and possible suspensions of their liquor license.

The city council has taken a very proactive approach to fines and license suspensions for bars that serve minors.

Bar Checks

The police conduct random bar checks of bars within the city. Many of these checks involved 10-15 police officers entering a designated location. Once inside all patrons who appear to be under the age of 21 are carded.

This practice has been very successful for the department and has resulted in numerous arrests of minors.

Public Facilities — Monitoring

Winona has an abundant park system with facilities used for various reasons. A number of groups have used these facilities for parties and the sale of alcohol. In many cases student organizations would rent and then hold their party.

A new application process was implemented to curb the unlawful use of these facilities. Once an application is made to the City of Winona for the use of a facility a copy is immediately sent to the police department. Persons and organizations that have violated city policies concerning the use these facilities are prohibited from applying again.

The application process must include the name(s) of party organizers, organi-

zation, if alcohol will be present and if so how much and number of people expected. There are also limits as to the number of persons for kegs allowed. There are a number of other restrictions and requirements that must be met prior to approval.

This has dramatically reduced the number of parties where minors attend and "all you can drink" activities occur.

Landlord Tenant Ordinance

It became apparent that certain rental property was causing the majority of problems, i.e., noise, loud parties and other alcohol-related offenses. Certain landlord were not being held accountable for their property and/or renters. In 2000 the City of Winona implemented a Landlord Tenant ordinance at the urging of the police department.

Upon the first violation, the City of Winona sends the registered landlord a warning. On the second violation the city sends another warning and requires the landlord to inform the city in writing how they plan on dealing with the problem. The third violation requires the landlords to evict the occupants. If the landlord fails to take action they are brought before the city council and face a fine and suspension of their rental license. It should be noted that if the landlord attempts to evict and the court refuses to grant the request the city is unable to take further action against the owner.

Moratorium on Liquor Establishments - Downtown

The Winona City Council enacted a policy to prevent the establishment of any additional liquor establishment in the downtown area.

House Parties

The Winona Police Department periodically sends decoys into house parties that advertise all the beer and/or alcohol you can drink. Violators are arrested along with minors within the residence.

A recent case involved a younger looking officer who entered a house party. Unfortunately, the officer was about a half-hour early. The organizer of the party told the undercover officer that he was early and they wouldn't be serving for another

half hour. The organizer was decorating the house when the officer initially arrived. The officer volunteered his services and assisted in decorating the house for the much anticipated party. A half-hour passed, the officer was served and the organizers were arrested.

Keg Ordinance

Winona City Code now requires that any person wishing to possess two or more half barrels of beer in a residentially zoned area must first gain approval from the Winona City Council. This ordinance was enacted to help prevent the large-scale parties where it was common to confiscate 4 - 5 half barrels. The ordinance was upgraded in June 2002 that now requires liquor retailers to keep records of all half barrels sold and requires those purchasing half barrels to maintain registration stickers on them.

Arrest Information

The Winona Police Department provides both universities with arrest information concerning their students who have violated local liquor laws. The university then takes disciplinary action against students for their behavior off campus (alcohol related).

Party Flyers at University

Another common form of advertisement is for party organizers to post notices within residence halls. It is the policy of Winona State University that no notice may be posted without the approval of the university. Residence Life Staff is well aware of the problems associated with students returning from parties and their subsequent behavior on campus.

Residence Life Staff will notify local law enforcement or campus security when parties are posted providing the location and time of the party.

University Actions

As indicated Winona State University is a dry campus. Students violating the alcohol policy are subject to discipline by Residence Life Staff or the campus Judicial Officer. Generally, two alcohol violations will result in the student's expulsion from the residence halls.

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Campus Security also maintains a zero alcohol tolerance. Security will refer all cases they come in contact with to the appropriate university authority.

Some activities that encouraged or resulted in binge drinking at off-campus facilities were abolished.

Alcohol and Drug Counselor

Winona State University recently hired one full-time person to deal specifically with alcohol and drug related problems on campus.

Transportation

With the use of student fees, bus transportation will be made available to students frequenting the downtown area. This will hopefully reduce the number of incidents from intoxicated students walking back to campus through residential neighborhoods.

Alcohol Prohibition in Parks — Certain Times

Due to the number of parties and alcohol-related offenses, the possession of alcohol in city parks after 10:00 p.m. is prohibited. Possession of alcohol within certain distances of select buildings in Lake Park is prohibited at all times.

Liquor Store Surveillance

The police will periodically make random surveillance checks of off-sale liquor stores for potential violations.

Miscellaneous Laws and Ordinances

Several other ordinances that are currently in place prohibit loud music after 10:00 p.m. All occupants of a liquor establishment are required to have a valid identification in their possession at all times.

Education

University students who violate local liquor laws are generally required to attend Alcohol 101 as part of their punishment. In addition to this the university offers a number of programs and services designed to reduce binge drinking.

The university is also taking steps to organize and offer more activities for students on campus to reduce binge drinking and other problems associated with it.

Alcohol Task Force

The City of Winona also developed an alcohol task force to identify the problem and provide possible solutions to alcohol-related issues. All agencies were represented and provided positive suggestions to Winona's problem.

Proposed Projects

The community is always searching for ways to reduce problems associated with alcohol and binge drinking. Some items that are currently being dealt with are drink specials at liquor establishments, continuing the moratorium on downtown liquor establishments, increase in fines and jail time for alcohol-related offenses, to name a few.

Conclusion

Winona's approach involves much more than enforcement. A sustained cooperative effort by all agencies is required. Problems still exist; however, positive results can be seen. Dealing with a problem that has festered for years is hard work. It involves dedication, commitment, leadership and persistence by all agencies involved. Communities throughout the United States are unique. Solutions in one area don't necessarily work in others.

Many universities on one hand attempt to deal with problems associated with alcohol and at the same time invite advertisements that encourage the use of alcohol. This type of approach is counterproductive and sends mixed messages.

It is imperative that the entire community needs to be involved in dealing with binge drinking and negative effects associated with it. Cooperation, dedication and persistence are required elements in combating this problem. Obviously, there is no one quick solution and communities must be motivated to tackle a problem that takes time, commitment, dedication and leadership.

About the Author

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