

**REPORT OF THE CHANCELLOR'S TASK FORCE  
ON THE PREVENTION OF ALCOHOL ABUSE  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST**

**SUBMITTED TO  
CHANCELLOR JOHN V. LOMBARDI  
FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION**

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**The Task Force dedicates this report and its continued work  
to the memory of**

**JENNIFER LEE**

**1971-2002**

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ON THE PREVENTION OF ALCOHOL ABUSE**

The context in which this report is written and presented is of considerable importance. Initiated by the University Health Council and supported by the Faculty Senate, the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse Task Force was appointed by Interim Chancellor Marcellette Williams to address the issues of alcohol abuse on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. The suggested timeline of January 15, 2002 for the report was impossible to meet because of the magnitude of long-standing alcohol-related issues and the need to continue discussing complex problems with various constituents (e.g., students on and off campus, key administrators and faculty, et al.). This document, then, is the first report with the intention of producing another report in the 2002/03 academic year.

With the changes in administration, it is crucial that alcohol abuse and its harmful consequences on campus and in the neighboring community be identified in its true perspective: namely, a major impediment to achieving the teaching, research and public service mission of the University. It is vital that the new administrative team provide necessary resources for continuing the work of an ongoing task force and implementing the long and short-range recommendations advanced here.

Alcohol abuse is a deeply ingrained public health problem at colleges and universities in the United States. For example, each year 1400 students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related injuries, 500,000 are injured while under the influence of alcohol and more than 150,000 develop an alcohol-related health problem. Additionally, there are tens of thousands of instances of rape and assault, unsafe sex, attempted suicide, academic underachievement, drunk driving and vandalism that result from alcohol abuse. (See Appendix A for a summary of the national impact of alcohol abuse. *A Call for Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIH Publication #02-5010, April, 2002). Leaders of colleges and universities who are even minimally effective in attacking alcohol abuse and its consequences on their campuses realize that they cannot wait until the wider public health problem is solved. The local campus environment resulting from a risky alcohol culture not only makes abuse potentially destructive for individuals, but it also creates unfortunate opportunities for serious negative consequences for all members of the learning community. Uncivil behavior resulting from events on our campus such as the Superbowl celebration, "Hobart Hoedown," and Spring streaking is usually initiated by students who have abused alcohol. This is also true of recurring instances of assault, vandalism and other aberrant behavior on campus.

Why is preventing alcohol abuse on our campus so important? Young adults between 18 and 24 years of age are still in the high energy and high learning curve periods of their development. For a significant number, their education is the most important investment of their lives and the campus environment is a powerful determinant of their academic and personal success. Alcohol-related distractions disrupt the learning process not only for the individuals directly involved, but also for their fellow students. Further, the consequences of alcohol abuse may distort the reputation of the University and detract from the positive accomplishments of its students, faculty and staff.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst recognizes the importance of a clearly stated mission. In addition, each unit of the institution seeks objectives that support the overarching mission of the University. It is reasonable to conclude that, if our mission includes the promotion of civility and the creation of a productive learning community, the alcohol culture on our campus must be a responsible one that does not hinder the accomplishment of these ends.

Even a modest level of alcohol abuse can have a disproportionately negative effect on civil discourse and behavior. Any publicly-supported institution of higher education sets itself on a dangerous course if it fails to take effective action to solve alcohol-related problems. Unfortunately, too often alcohol abuse is dismissed as a rite of passage. It will not, however, be dismissed in a cavalier fashion by the woman who is raped, nor by the parents of a young person who dies as the result of an alcohol-related accident, nor by the passengers in a near-fatal automobile accident. No rite of passage conveys a right to inflict serious harm on others. Nor does it convey a right to dissipate institutional resources.

The work of this Task Force is far from complete. Beginning at high administrative levels, leaders on the Amherst campus must acknowledge that alcohol abuse and its consequences are a major problem. Solving this problem will require making it a top priority for meaningful action. Again, adequate resources and sustained commitment at all levels of the University community are needed to ensure positive results. In particular, serious effort must be invested in thoughtful discussions among students, staff, faculty and members of the local community so that the folly of the current situation is explored and clear paths to more civil behavior are discovered.

The Prevention of Alcohol Abuse Task Force strongly recommends that:

- *The Chancellor continue the Task Force on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse. The membership of this Task Force includes administrators, faculty, staff, community leaders and students. The Task Force is charged to make recommendations for changing the negative aspects of the alcohol culture of our community, and to report to the Chancellor periodically on the progress being made to reduce alcohol abuse and the related negative outcomes.*

- *Effective September 2003, at least one residence hall be designated for incoming freshmen and other students who prefer to live in an alcohol-free setting.*
- *Effective September 2003, the designation of Greek residences as campus-approved housing for traditional-aged first-year students be rescinded.*
- *Effective February 2003, an evaluation of the effectiveness of student enforcement of laws prohibiting underage alcohol use in residence halls be initiated.*
- *Effective February 2003, the existing alcohol policies be reviewed and edited to ensure concise language that fosters clear understanding and effective implementation.*

**MOVED:** That the Faculty Senate endorse the five recommendations of the Prevention  
**10-03** of Alcohol Abuse Task Force, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 03-011.