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U of M researchers find little action on recommendations aimed to curb college drinking

Minneapolis/St. Paul (July 20, 2010) – Few colleges and college communities have taken steps to implement recommendations to reduce college student drinking, according to a new study released today by researchers from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Alcohol consumption by U.S. college students remains a major issue despite a report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) that detailed the problems associated with student drinking. That report, released in 2002, also outlined strategic recommendations based on the best available science that were designed to help colleges curtail the problem.

Toben Nelson, Sc.D., lead author of the study, said the latest research found that only half of the 351 colleges surveyed offered brief intervention programs with documented evidence of effectiveness for students at high risk for alcohol problems. Only a small number (33 percent) of colleges reported that they collaborated with their community on effective alcohol control strategies such as compliance checks to monitor illegal sales, responsible beverage service training, restrictions on alcohol outlets or interventions to address access to low-cost alcohol.

Nearly all colleges offered educational programs, even though the NIAAA report found that by themselves these efforts are ineffective. More than one in five college administrators said they were not familiar with the 2002 NIAAA recommendations.

The latest research – funded by the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – will appear in the October 2010 edition of the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, and comes less than 12 months after University of Minnesota researchers published findings that showed colleges previously identified as "heavy-drinking" have shown little improvement in curbing the binge drinking habits of their students.

"In 2002, there was a great deal of research available to show that heavy drinking was a problem on college campuses. The NIAAA recommendations were designed to help colleges and college communities address that problem," Nelson said. "Unfortunately, what we've found is that little progress in the implementation of the recommendations has been made since they were released."

Nelson identified a number of possible reasons for the lack of implementation, including strained relationships between communities and college campuses over student drinking, a lack of resources, and staff who are either untrained in the development of community partnerships, or who lack the authority to take meaningful steps forward.

According to co-author Traci Toomey, Ph.D., a contributor to the development of the 2002 NIAAA recommendations, the latest findings are a source of frustration. "We certainly would have hoped to see more progress among colleges, considering that the NIAAA identified strategies and actions that could lower drinking on college campuses more than six years prior to this study."

Binge drinking across college campuses remains a problem with a host of associated risks. According to the NIAAA, nearly 600,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol each year, and 97,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. Nearly one in four college students report academic difficulties that result from their drinking.

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