

A Case for

COLLEGE PREVENTION

RETURN ON INVESTMENT



Alcohol use continues to be an important health and safety concern on college campuses. According to the 2025 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, **26.7% of young adults ages 18-25 reported binge drinking in the past month**. Binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks for males or four or more drinks for females on the same occasion (SAMHSA, 2026).

Alcohol-related harm extends beyond the person who is drinking. **More than half (53.5%) of surveyed college sophomores and juniors reported experiencing at least one harm related to someone else's drinking**, including academic, physical, and sexual harms. Researchers estimate this represents nearly 6 million U.S. college sophomores and juniors, highlighting the broader impact alcohol can have across campus communities (Yeh, 2025).



ECONOMIC COSTS OF COLLEGE DRINKING

In a 2010 study, the societal cost of underage drinking in the United States was estimated at **\$24 billion annually**, accounting for **9% of the total cost of alcohol misuse nationwide** (NIAAA). For a campus of 5,000 underage students, this equates to approximately **\$2,160 per student** annually, resulting in an estimated total **annual cost of \$10.8 million**, or about \$207,692 per week (NIAAA, 2010). These figures likely underestimate current costs, as inflation and increases in healthcare, legal, and property damage expenses since 2010 may have increased the financial burden.

ACADEMIC AND RETENTION IMPLICATIONS

Alcohol use adversely impacts academic performance and retention rates. Heavy drinkers are more likely to miss classes, perform poorly on exams, and report lower sleep quality, all of which contribute to academic underachievement (Singleton & Wolfson, 2009). A 2022 study found that **students were more likely to skip class after heavy episodic or high-intensity drinking**. On weekdays, they also spent **less time on schoolwork following heavy drinking** (Allen et al., 2022). Institutions may face significant financial losses from reduced retention; For a university with 10,000 students, including approximately 2,500 first-year students, and annual net revenue of \$5,000 per student, a 5% decrease in first-year retention could represent approximately **\$625,000 in lost annual revenue**.

REPUTATION

College drinking can have broader implications for an institution, including its **reputation and the way students perceive campus life**. College rankings and review sites can amplify these perceptions. The Princeton Review's 2027 college rankings, for example, are based on surveys of more than 172,000 students and include rankings related to campus life, quality of life, and the social scene (The Princeton Review, 2026).

The Princeton Review specifically evaluates student perceptions of **beer and hard liquor use on campus**, demonstrating how drinking culture can become part of the public picture prospective students and families encounter when researching an institution (The Princeton Review, 2026).

In recognition of the importance of college drinking prevention, colleges and universities have been required to comply with the Federal Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, which

specifies that, at minimum, colleges must adopt a series of programs to prevent drug and alcohol misuse by students. For many colleges, a cornerstone of this effort is primary prevention that targets incoming students with alcohol prevention messages.

A program like **Alcohol Wise** helps set the tone for a healthy campus by demonstrating to students, parents, and the broader community that the institution is proactively addressing alcohol-related risks.

INVESTING IN PREVENTION CAN HELP INSTITUTIONS ADDRESS ALCOHOL-RELATED RISKS **BEFORE THEY BECOME MORE COSTLY** ACADEMIC, HEALTH, SAFETY, AND RETENTION CONCERNS



After taking **Alcohol Wise**, students will be able to:

- Identify high-risk and low-risk drinking patterns
- Refute common misconceptions about drinking norms
- Understand the factors that affect BAC
- Identify personal risk factors for drinking and alcohol dependence
- Know how to access campus resources

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