

Does College Create an Environment for Binge Drinking?

Two college students discuss their college lives with drinking

By Alexandra Johnson

As incoming first-year students prepare for a new chapter in their lives, anxiety and excitement overcome them. Little do they know that these four years are where they'll learn valuable life lessons and different responsibilities.

College is a brand new start for many students: a possibility to make new friends, a journey to finding a passion, and much more. But, along with this energetic and exciting journey comes finding responsibility, living with no parental restriction, and freedom.

So, what do most students do with this feeling of unrestricted freedom?

Drink.

According to the Alcohol Rehab Guide, around 80 percent of college students experiment with alcohol, and 50 percent of those college students binge drink.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define binge drinking “as consuming five or more drinks on an occasion for men or four or more drinks on an occasion for women.”

This so-called “binge drinking” has influenced undergraduates and graduates to ponder their sobriety.

Sofie Foppiano, a fifth-year student at UNC-Chapel Hill and unaffiliated with Greek life, explained that many of her friends came into college with much more prior experience with drinking, especially with their parents, whereas she did not.

“I don't think colleges teach you how to drink. I think that restriction of getting in trouble for drinking made me overconsume when I went to college,” she said.

However, the unrestricted thrill of binge drinking in the first two years of college caught up with Foppiano.

“I'm just tired of feeling so terrible the next day. I think drinking makes me more anxious, so you don't go into REM (Rapid Eye Movement) when you drink. I'm already a bad sleeper, so my quality of sleep when I drink is even worse,” Foppiano said.

She is now doing somewhat of a “dry November,” even though she’s drunk once or twice.

“I’m trying not to beat myself up for drinking. It’s a learning process. I was wasting time on a Sunday being hungover. My anxiety gets so bad from being hungover that I can’t even sleep that night. It bleeds into the week, and I feel like I’m never on track,” she said.

Foppiano used time in November to prohibit drinking in totality and practice drinking in a healthier, more social way. The way she drank in November correlates with how she wants her relationship to be with alcohol post-college.

“A lot of me drinking while in college has been so go-go-go. I wasn’t slowing down. I think it was social and not thinking about what was best for me. I’ll still drink, but alcohol limits me from doing everything I want to do. Unless drinking is during a great experience, I feel like it’s not worth it,” she said.

Although Foppiano feels this way about drinking and sobriety, not every college student resonates with her.

Noah Gottlieb, a sophomore at UNC-CH, does not think about sobriety when it comes to college drinking.

“For me, sobriety hasn’t seemed like something I needed to consider. But, I understand and empathize with others who choose to be sober,” Gottlieb said.

Gottlieb stated that he believes he does partake in binge drinking. As a sophomore in a fraternity, it’s hard not to.

“I don’t think drinking is ever too much for me. I’m pretty good at pacing myself,” he said.

According to Gottlieb, pacing himself entails preparation outside of drinking, like drinking healthy amounts of water, eating somewhat healthy, being cognizant about how intoxicated you might be, and knowing how another drink may affect you.

For students who consistently drink in college, these four years will likely be the most they will drink in their entire life. When students graduate, get jobs and become busier, drinking usually becomes less prevalent than in college.

“I think that the college environment partially encourages you to drink more, but I think I’ll drink a lot less when I’m out of college,” Gottlieb said. “My body is in a place where I can drink more right now, and when I get out of school, I won’t be able to. I don’t think I’ll have the desire to drink as much as I do now.”

With that being said, is the college environment responsible for binge drinking?

Although their opinions on sobriety differ, Foppiano and Gottlieb agreed that they would not be drinking at all or as much outside of college.

Every student is different, whether that relates to their mental and physical health, their values and their relationship with drinking. Sobriety inside and outside of college is challenging but possible. If you’re not feeling the consequences of drinking that some students and people experience, then sobriety may not be in the picture.

“I won’t drink the amount outside of college that I ever drank in college,” Foppiano said. “The feeling of going to bed and waking up sober is incredible.”

<https://www.alcoholrehabguide.org/resources/college-alcohol-abuse/#:~:text=The%20college%20years%20are%20some,alcohol%20in%20too%20little%20time.>