

AGGIE life

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DRINKING

Reasons for alcohol use differ among students

By John LeBas
THE BATTALION

Students at Texas A&M are no strangers to alcohol.

According to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, there are about 73 active wine and beer retailer permits in Bryan-College Station.

These businesses are typically bars and pool halls, visited nightly by A&M students. And of course, one of the things students do at these establishments is drink.

Many students who chose to drink do so responsibly. Yet alcohol causes enough problems to raise concerns over underage drinking, driving while intoxicated, dependency and other issues.

Dr. Dennis Reardon, coordinator of the Alcohol and Drug Education Program in the Department of Student Life, said about 90 percent of Aggies drink throughout the school year, and most of them do not ever have a problem with alcohol.

Reardon said freshmen especially, however, should be aware of how alcohol may negatively affect them.

The most dangerous time for a student is the freshman year," Reardon said. "Freshmen are pushed into an environment where alcohol is readily available. It's not so much peer pressure, but a way to fit in with a group."

Natalie Gallagher, a freshman general studies major, said she does go out and drink with friends, but primarily drinks because she likes the taste of alcohol.

Gallagher, who drinks about three or four times a week, said she may

grab a drink after class or stay sober for weeks.

"I only drink when I like the taste — not for the sake of drinking," she said.

Gallagher said she is not concerned with the legal drinking age, even though she is 19. It hasn't stopped her from buying or drinking alcohol, which she partly attributes to growing up in Laredo.

"I buy all the time, or I can have a friend buy," she said. "I'm not scared. Growing up in Laredo, if you can ask for it, they'll give it to you."

Gallagher said because several dorms are located within easy walking distance of the Northgate bars, minors may be more encouraged to drink.

"I'm not complaining — I like it, because that's how I grew up," she said. "But if the University wanted to control it, they should have thought a little harder before they built housing."

On the other hand, these students usually do not have to drive home from Northgate after drinking.

Reardon said that driving while intoxicated is a big problem and part of why alcohol laws are so rigorously enforced here.

"In this age group, you are most likely to die in an alcohol-related accident," he said. "We're concerned about it because we know from a national survey that Texas A&M is ranked high with students who are likely to drive after they've been drinking. We talk about the age law as if it were sacred, and it is because it has to do with delaying the likelihood for a young person to be involved in accident."

Anyone who has tried to convince a



Evan Zimmerman, THE BATTALION

Students socialize and relax over a pitcher of beer, which is a common scene at local bars and pool halls.

drunk to hand over his or her keys can identify the various reasons intoxicated persons fail to compromise. The possible consequences of driving drunk may not even deter an individual from getting behind the wheel.

A Student Life Alcohol and Drug Education Program pamphlet compiled from data from the Brazos County Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Channing L. Bete's "What Everyone Should Know About Alcohol" and Wisconsin Clearinghouse's "The Party's Over: Helping Your Guests Get Home Safely," points out the price of drunk driving.

DWI offenders spend 72 hours in jail. The crime goes on their permanent records. Towing fees, bond, fines, court and attorney costs, probation and insurance premium increases may run upwards of \$17,000. Treatment, jail sentences and liability may push this cost even higher.

Beyond this, death or injury may result from a drunken driving accident. One person is killed in Texas every eight hours in such wrecks. A person is injured every 16 minutes.

People who have been drinking may consider themselves OK to drive. But one drink can impair reflexes and concentration. As few as four drinks may seriously affect a 180-pound man's ability to drive.

"More Aggies will die an early death because of alcohol than will achieve graduate degrees."

— DR. DENNIS REARDON
coordinator, Alcohol and Drug Education Program

While such an intake may not make a person "legally" drunk — with a blood alcohol content of 0.10 or higher — it is up to a police officer to decide if a person is intoxicated.

Intoxication is partly defined by law as "not having the normal use of mental or physical faculties by reason of the introduction of alcohol, a controlled substance, a drug, or a combination of two or more of those substances in the body," and a person in this state may be charged with DWI.

To avoid a drunken driving situation, the Department of Student Life urges Aggies to watch out for their friends, do not drive drunk or ride with someone who is drunk, and designate a driver.

Gallagher agreed on the importance of designating a driver.

"I've driven drunk, and it's the scariest thing I've ever done," she said. "There are times when the driver is the least drunk, but I'll always try to find someone sober. Drunk driving is the stupidest thing."

This is also the logic behind Designate a Bus Transit, a program being developed in part by Matt Kenyon, a senior biomedical science major.

DAB Transit, slated to begin operations next fall, will bring any College Station or Bryan resident to and from clubs, bars and most apartment complexes in the area so they do not have to drive drunk.

While the program is still in the preparatory phase, Kenyon said such a transportation system will cut down

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Evan Zimmerman, THE BATTALION

Lisa Tramuto, a junior business analysis major, and Amy Howard, a junior finance major, drink beer at Dudley's Draw.

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