

Proposed Alcohol Education Curriculum

❖ I. Introduction

The introductory session will set the direction and tone of the course. Of great import to this course is the establishment of an environment where there is no perceived stigmatization for those may choose to consume or not consume alcohol. Presentation of any material should serve to frame the overall arc of the course. The session should involve:

- Pre-test of knowledge and behavior
- Explanation of the necessary cooperation of class and home
- The chemistry of alcohol
- Introduction of alcohol types and origin

❖ II. History of alcohol use in the United States

This module deals with the history of American alcohol use from the colonial period through the present. Provided with a history of alcohol use, the students can place the present education course and a lowered drinking age in a historical context. Doing so should have the effect of deepening their understanding of the present stigmatization of alcohol use due to drunken driving and reinforce those drinking behaviors historically deemed safe. Topics include:

- Early American use patterns
- Fermentation vs. distillation as processes
- Temperance movements
- Prohibition
- The Vietnam Era
- National Minimum Drinking Age Act

❖ III. International comparison of drinking norms

Americans approach and consume alcohol in ways both similar to and different from countries around the world. This class would discuss these differences and what effects they have on the American concept of drinking, and the behaviors visible in the history of alcohol use in America. Material from the International Center of Alcohol Policy (ICAP) on drinking norms of countries is a good place to begin a comparative analysis. The international comparison class should cover:

- “Wet” and “dry” cultures
- Integrated and Unintegrated cultures
- Comparative rates of drinking, unsafe drinking, drunken driving, alcohol-related accidents
- Legal drinking ages in other countries (contexts and consequences) and other important laws

❖ IV. What is drunkenness?

The fourth class will explicate the nature of drunkenness. While this is a topic that can be presented both scientifically and more subjectively, and perhaps should have a healthy sampling of both, its purpose is to provide an understanding of what drunkenness is popularly conceived as. Specifically this should include:

- Blood Alcohol Concentration levels and corresponding states of impairment
- Science behind drunkenness
- Sensations of drunkenness
- Physiological effects of drunkenness (hangover)

❖ V. Drunken driving

The drunken driving section is one of the more important components of this curriculum. Because drunken driving is the primary reason the drinking age was standardized at 21, this is an opportunity to take preventive measures against drunken driving behavior. By acknowledging that these young adults will likely consume alcohol this section can facilitate the adoption of designated drivers, and a zero tolerance of drunken driving. We recommend integrating law enforcement in the development and presentation of material including:

- Review of statistics
- What makes drunken driving unsafe
- Law enforcement techniques
- “Real world” examples—case studies
- Alternatives to drunken driving

❖ VI. Negative drinking outcomes

Section six details the common and very real side effects of irresponsible drinking. This module intends to not only inform students of what are commonly considered negative drinking outcomes, but also to begin constructing an alternative perspective on drinking. Because under the reformed drinking age students of this course are unequivocally viewed as adults, it is important for them to realize that they are culpable for their actions and the effects of their actions on those around them. This session should address:

- Alcoholism
- Violence
- Academic failings
- Alcohol and women (sexual assault, pregnancy and drinking)

❖ VII. Responsible drinking, Moderate drinking, “Binge” drinking

Continuing from the previous section’s discussion on the outcomes of irresponsible drinking, this module is designed to have students begin to think of the underlying symptoms of unsafe drinking, and in what ways safe and

responsible drinking is different. The session will inherently rely on the established definitions of drinking behavior, but will also move toward a qualitative definition of responsible drinking derived from the opinions of the students. This section must be cognizant of:

- Common public health definitions and constructs
- Drinking setting
- Drinking motivation
- Drinking age
- Quantity of consumption

❖ VIII. Alcohol and the brain

Alcohol and its effects on the brain represents another very important topic covered in this course. This section details both the acute and long-term neurological effects of alcohol on the brain. With that knowledge of how alcohol affects brain functioning students of this course can then make informed decisions on their own drinking habits, or if they choose to drink at all. Modeled on the AlcoholEdu program, which was developed in cooperation with neuroscientists, this section should detail:

- Basic neurology and adolescent brain development
- Effect of alcohol on the brain
- Heavy episodic drinking/moderate drinking
- Healthy effects

❖ IX. Difference between young adults and older adults

Continuing from the previous section, this class explicates more clearly the neurological differences between young adults and adults that contribute to the varying effects of alcohol in the brain. These effects, both short- and long-term, merit considerable attention so to develop the students' broader conceptualization of responsible drinking paradigm. As we repeatedly assert, only with full understanding of alcohol can one make informed judgments toward its use. This section relies heavily on recent neurological scholarship and at the minimum should discuss:

- Short-term effects (including less-impaired motor skills, less sedated, more impaired in memory encoding, resulting in blackouts)
- Long-term effects (including early use and alcoholism, mental deficits – volume of hippocampus, lower memory scores)

❖ X. What is a “standard drink?”

This class signals a transition from a more factual explanation of alcohol to more practical knowledge of alcohol culture. Stemming from research that shows college-aged individuals overestimate the amount of liquor in a standard drink, this session is designed to provide a consistent measure of alcohol contained in mixed drinks. Indirectly this will improve students' ability to judge the amount of

alcohol they have consumed, but it will also raise awareness of the marked differences of alcohol content in beer, wine, and distilled alcohol. This education need not occur during, or more likely after, an initial drinking experience. It should contain information regarding:

- Normal drinking measures
- Amount of alcohol in beer, wine, mixed drink
- Effect of consumption (quantity and time)

❖ XI. How much do people drink?

Utilizing information from both the initial pre-test on drinking behaviors and also surveys of drinking behaviors of these students' immediate future drinking environments—workplaces, colleges and universities—this session seeks to capitalize on the effects of social norms marketing. Research has consistently shown that providing accurate information about young adult drinking rates has the effect of reducing irresponsible drinking in an age group that often overestimates the drinking rate of its peers. With this information the class can analyze the often misleading and suggestive alcohol marketing techniques that may falsely suggest different drinking norms. The course should cover:

- Social norming drinking expectations and behavior
 - i. Survey class on drinking perceptions
 - ii. Show actual drinking levels and patterns
 - iii. Discuss discrepancy between perception and reality
- Misleading alcohol marketing techniques

❖ XII. MADD-created module

We leave a class available for design and presentation by MADD. Without such participation we believe that students would not be satisfyingly exposed to the debate surrounding alcohol use. At the least, the class should provide information regarding:

- Origin and history of MADD
- The movement to reduce drunken driving (legislation, social action)
- Accomplishments of MADD

❖ XIII. Alcohol laws and penalties

With the understanding that this alcohol education course is meant to follow the political actions of this paper, and that such political action would have significant impact on the laws pertaining to newly enfranchised drinkers, we recommend a class detailing specifically these changed laws. Moreover, because the reformed laws contain integral mechanisms for limiting the transfer of alcohol to high school students, and marginalizing unsafe drinking norms of 18-20 year-olds, we want to make these changes as clear as possible. Coupled with the previous discussions on irresponsible drinking outcomes, this session is designed to

effectuate an understanding of the consequences associated with unsafe drinking. Such laws include:

- Underage possession laws
- Drunken driving laws
- Furnishing to a minor
- Public intoxication/open container
- Party registration
- Dram shop laws

❖ XIV. Alcohol and choice

This last class is designed to coalesce the material presented in the course into a single framework of responsible drinking. The overarching behavioral changes this course seeks to foment will be presented. Thereafter, we envision a broad discussion on how and why one should make safer drinking decisions.

- Making the decision that is right for you
- Class discussion on responsible drinking

❖ XV. Final Examination

The final examination will be representative of the material covered in the course. It will test deeply but fairly the substance of the program, and will represent a real barrier to obtaining a license for those who do not take the course seriously.

Outside-the-Classroom Sessions (3 hours each)

In order to involve the community in the alcohol education of newly enfranchised drinkers the program requires four outside-the-classroom educational sessions. These are designed to provide alternative perspectives on drinking than those that can be provided in the classroom. By exposing students of the program to the acute ramifications of irresponsible alcohol use, we believe these extensions of the classroom can ground the material of the course in demonstrable real-world events. Such events could include the following:

1. Visit to court (drunken driving case)
2. Spend an evening in a safe-rides van
3. Community forum on drinking
4. Interview a recovering alcoholic or attend an AA session

At the conclusion of the course, and upon passing the final examination, the student would receive a license, entitling him/her to all the privileges and responsibilities of adults in the purchase, possession, and consumption of alcohol.

Enrollment in the course would be optional: those wishing to earn a license to drink could enter the program any time after turning 18 and completing high school, while those who

choose not to enroll must wait until age 21 to purchase and possess alcohol. Both groups would be allowed to consume alcohol in the presence of their parents or legal guardians, enabling parents to allow supervised drinking without fear of violating the law. By making completion of high school a prerequisite for the course, we are in some ways striking an imperfect compromise. Though we acknowledge that many high school seniors will turn 18 with months left until the conclusion of the school year, we believe that preventing alcoholic beverages from reaching younger high school students is of more dire concern than abiding completely by the age of majority, and our proposal does allow young adults as soon as they turn 18 to consume alcohol in the presence of their parents. In a world of competing priorities, we view this as a reasonable course of action.