

**Preventing Binge Drinking among
University of Georgia Students**

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February 27, 2009

Introduction

Each year in the United States, 1,700 college students aged 18 to 24 die from alcohol-related injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). Such accidental injuries are the leading cause of death among people 15 to 24 years old (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005). In light of these alarming statistics, many universities across the U.S. have taken significant steps in recent years to combat high-risk alcohol consumption. These efforts often aim to reduce binge drinking—the practice of drinking five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women within two hours (National Center for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2004). Binge drinking is particularly prevalent among college students under the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA). In fact, about 90 percent of alcohol consumed by people under 21 is consumed while binge drinking (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005). Moreover, Wechsler et al. (2000) has found that underage college students, though drinking on fewer occasions, drink more per occasion than their peers of legal drinking age. Because of this behavioral difference and the coercive enforcement options that the MLDA permits, many university policies to reduce binge drinking target underage students.

The University of Georgia, located in Athens, Georgia, is a large, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division One university. Its 34,000 students comprise about one-third of the Athens-Clarke County population. UGA students face many opportunities to engage in risky drinking behavior. During six to seven weekends each fall, thousands of tailgaters flood the campus to attend home football games, often drinking on-campus for many hours prior to the game. The downtown area's proximity to campus and concentration of over 40 bars and clubs, as well as a thriving fraternity and sorority scene, also provide UGA students many outlets to drink.

Efforts to curb binge drinking at UGA almost universally target underage students. From 2001 until the present, Athens-Clarke County significantly increased enforcement of the MLDA. Over the same time period, UGA has increased enforcement of the MLDA on campus, stiffened penalties for students caught violating the MLDA both on and off campus, and increased educational programs targeting underage students. Survey data taken concurrently with these policy changes and reported in this paper show that increased enforcement of the MLDA is correlated with a large decline in underage drinking rates and a slight decline in underage binge drinking rates.

However, binge drinking remains a significant problem among UGA students. Many underage students who choose to drink continue to binge. Students of legal age binge drink at even higher rates, and, Perhaps most importantly, UGA students continue to perceive a heavy drinking culture even though many underage students abstain from drinking. Athens and UGA should further combat binge drinking by implementing a tiered penalties structure based on blood-alcohol content for underage drinkers? and public drunkenness violations and by launching a sustained social norms campaign to combat prevalent misperceptions about UGA's drinking culture. This paper will describe the underage drinking policy changes in Athens and UGA from 2001 until the present, assess their effectiveness based on survey data over the same time period, and suggest further policy changes to reduce binge drinking.

Underage Drinking Policy: 2001-Present

Underage drinking policy encompasses both regulations and enforcement. Underage drinking regulations are the laws and policies that prohibit, punish, and deter persons under 21 from purchasing and consuming alcohol. Underage drinking enforcement is the policy or

strategy that enforcement agencies pursue to ensure regulations are followed. At the state and local level, underage drinking regulations have remained unchanged from 2001 through/to the present. However, the University of Georgia has significantly strengthened its Alcohol and Drugs Policy by requiring harsher punishments for students convicted of underage drinking. Underage drinking enforcement also increased dramatically over the same time period, both locally in Athens-Clarke County and on the UGA campus. This section discusses underage drinking regulations made prior to 2001, changes in underage drinking regulations from 2001 to the present, and changes in underage drinking enforcement from 2001 to the present.

Underage Drinking Regulations Prior to 2001

Georgia statute, Athens-Clarke County ordinances, and UGA policies regulate underage drinking for UGA students. Section (§) 3-3-23 of the Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) prohibits any person under 21 years of age from purchasing, attempting to purchase, or knowingly possessing any alcoholic beverage. It also restricts persons under 21 from misrepresenting their age or using false identification to obtain alcoholic beverages, prohibits any person from knowingly furnishing alcoholic beverages to persons under 21, and outlaws purchasing or acquiring alcoholic beverages on behalf of underage persons (The last part of this sentence seems very wordy. Could you shorten it somehow?). Persons selling alcoholic beverages are required to request proper identification from a customer when reasonable doubt exists as to whether the customer is 21. Failing to request identification can be used as evidence to show that an alcoholic beverage was knowingly sold to an underage person. These regulations have remained essentially unchanged since the legal drinking age became 21 in 1981.

Figure 1: State Penalties for Violating § 3-3-23 of the O.C.G.A		
	First Conviction	Second or Subsequent Conviction
Selling Alcohol to Underage Persons	Misdemeanor	Misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature
Underage Possession of Alcohol	Misdemeanor punishable by not more than six months' imprisonment or a fine less than or equal to \$300, or both AND six month driver's license suspension -OR- Probation with a comprehensive rehabilitation program followed by charge dismissal	Misdemeanor AND one year driver's license suspension
Misrepresenting Age or Using False Identification to Obtain Alcohol	Misdemeanor -OR- Probation with a comprehensive rehabilitation program followed by charge dismissal	Misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature
Purchasing or Acquiring Alcohol on Behalf of an Underage Person	Misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature	Misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature

Section 3-3-23.1 of the O.C.G.A. sets penalties for violating §3-3-23, which are outlined in Figure 1. In addition to these punishments or sentences, the court may order convicted persons to complete a DUI Alcohol or Drug Reduction Program. These punishments have remained unchanged from 2001 to the present. The most recent change, in 1998, increased the punishment for purchasing or acquiring alcohol for an underage person from a misdemeanor to a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature.

The Code of Ordinances of Athens-Clarke County explicitly upholds Georgia statutes regulating the drinking age. Sections 6-3-14 and 6-3-5 of the Code forbid any person to knowingly furnish alcoholic beverages in a manner that violates state law or to falsely misrepresent one's age to purchase or acquire alcohol. These ordinances, enacted prior to 2001, have been in effect from 2001 to the present.

Some state and local laws are also designed to deter underage drinking. These laws both impose additional penalties on persons who use false identification to obtain alcohol and restrict the issuance of liquor licenses in an attempt to decrease alcohol sales to underage persons.

Section 16-9-4 of the O.C.G.A. restricts the manufacture, sale, or distribution of false identification documents. Specifically, it forbids the knowing possession or manufacture of a false identification document, as well as the possession or use of an identification document issued to another person. Persons under 21 who violate these provisions in order to obtain entry into an age-restricted facility or to purchase an age-restricted good are guilty of a misdemeanor upon the first conviction and guilty of a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature upon the second or subsequent conviction. (this doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense in the context of this sentence) Section 3-3-23 of the O.C.G.A. allows retailers who have been presented with a false identification to write down the information contained on the identification or seize the identification and, in both instances, report the information to a law enforcement officer. The regulations governing false identification have not changed from 2001 to the present. (Just to explain why I'm crossing out the "until"s- it's a somewhat final word, normally used in the context of "until now," implying a very current change)

(Needs an intro sentence to explain why you're telling us this- something about liquor licenses, perhaps?) Section 3-3-2 of the O.C.G.A. delegates the power to grant or refuse liquor licenses to local governments; section 6-3 of the Code of Ordinances of Athens-Clarke County governs liquor licenses in the county. Since 2001, the basic framework of Athens' liquor-licensing ordinance, like the state underage drinking regulations, has not changed. However, the County Commission has enacted changes in underage drinking regulations through slight amendments to §6-3. These amendments, along with changes in UGA's Code of Conduct, constitute the changes in underage drinking regulations from 2001 to the present.

Changes in Underage Drinking Regulations: 2001-Present

From 2001 to the present, the Athens-Clarke County Commission has enacted a number of amendments specifically designed to deter licensees from selling alcohol to underage persons. In an attempt to deter underage drinking, UGA has also amended its Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs, which prohibits students under 21 from possessing and consuming alcohol.

In November, 2001, the Athens-Clarke Commission amended the Code of Ordinances to hold liquor licensees accountable for their businesses' sales to underage individuals. Prior to this change, only employees who sold directly to underage persons were prosecutable ("Tougher ordinance puts kick in enforcing underage drinking law," 2001). As a result of the amendment, licensees who either directly or indirectly consent, permit, or acquiesce to violations of state or local code, whether or not the violation is committed by an employee, are subject to the suspension, revocation, or probation of their liquor license, as well as a maximum \$1,000 fine per violation.

From 2002 to 2004, sanctions for violating the UGA policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) often included alcohol education and research, reflection, and assessment assignments. The specific policy is described in the Division of Student Affairs' 2002-2004 Biennial Review (2005):

If a student is found in violation of conduct regulations regarding AOD, the student may be given a sanction which challenges him/her to examine the impact that alcohol or other drugs have had on their behavior. A number of students are referred to the Prime for Life program sponsored by the Office of Health Promotions to learn more information about the psychological and physical effects of alcohol and other drugs and to examine their own behaviors. (p. 9)

This policy was first changed in February, 2005, when the President's cabinet approved a parental notification policy that allowed the Office of Judicial Programs, under limited circumstances, to notify parents of their student's violation of the AOD policy. In May, 2006, the parental notification policy was expanded to allow for notification following all violations of the

AOD policy. In the same month, UGA amended its AOD policy to include the following minimum sanctions:

1st offense – Alcohol awareness class and probation for the remainder of current semester and for the next 2 semesters (Fall and Spring semesters only) enrolled at the University. Probation extends through summer terms and/or any institutional breaks.

2nd offense while on probation – suspension from institution for current semester and 1 subsequent semester (Fall or Spring semesters only). Summer suspension may not be substituted for a Fall or Spring semester and will be included if suspension is initiated during Spring semester. (UGA Division of Student Affairs, 2007, p. 16)

Updated slightly since 2006, the current AOD policy provides similar minimum sanctions. Students found in violation for the first time of the restriction on possession of alcohol receive probation for six months and must take an alcohol awareness class. First-time violators of the restriction on consumption, use, distribution, and possession of alcohol receive probation for twelve months and must take an alcohol awareness class. A second offense while on or off probation results in suspension from UGA for the current semester and one subsequent semester. (University of Georgia, 2008). These minimum sanctions apply to all students convicted of underage drinking regardless of whether the violation occurred on or off campus. Since 2006, UGA has also required completion of an online alcohol course for all incoming students under 23 years old.

Following this strengthening of UGA policy, the Athens-Clarke Commission further amended the liquor license ordinance. Effective January 2008, no licensee except restaurants will allow any employee under 21 to sell or handle alcohol. Further, no licensee will allow any employee under 21 to serve as a doorperson, and no licensee will allow any employee who has been convicted of providing alcohol to underage persons within the previous five years to sell alcohol or serve as a doorperson. Complementing the increase in underage drinking regulations from 2001 to the present was a substantial increase in enforcement, discussed in the next section.

Changes in Underage Drinking Enforcement: 2001-Present

Local and state police are responsible for enforcing the Georgia laws and Athens-Clarke County ordinances outlined above. The University of Georgia Police enforce Georgia law and Athens-Clarke County ordinances on the UGA campus. The Office of Judicial Programs in the UGA Division of Student Affairs is responsible for enforcing the University's Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs, which is applicable to University students regardless of where violations occur. The internal policies that guide state, local and UGA police enforcement strategies are not a matter of official public record. However, announced changes and trends indicate that local and UGA police have significantly increased enforcement of underage drinking laws since 2001.

In 2001, Athens Police began sending undercover agents to monitor liquor licensees' compliance with underage drinking laws ("Underage drinking study shows Athens businesses are failing," 2001). Initially, businesses were informed of their performance in these compliance tests, but subsequent undercover operations resulted in citations. These operations have continued steadily since 2001. Notably in 2005, downtown establishment Flanagan's Bar and Grill was fined \$1,000 and had its liquor license suspended for 22 days (Quigley, 2005a). In August 2007, Athens Police Chief Jack Lumpkin stated that doormen who allow underage people into bars would be cited "as a party to a crime" (Aued, 2007).

In addition to increasing seller-side enforcement, Athens and UGA police have taken a tougher line against underage buyers. In April 2005, Athens Police began arresting students for underage drinking instead of simply issuing a citation. Beginning January 1, 2006, UGA police adopted the same policy (Quigley, 2005b). Naturally, these measures have significantly increased the number of underage drinking arrests. In 2006, police arrested three times as many people for underage drinking than they did in 2004 (Shearer, 2007). These changes in underage

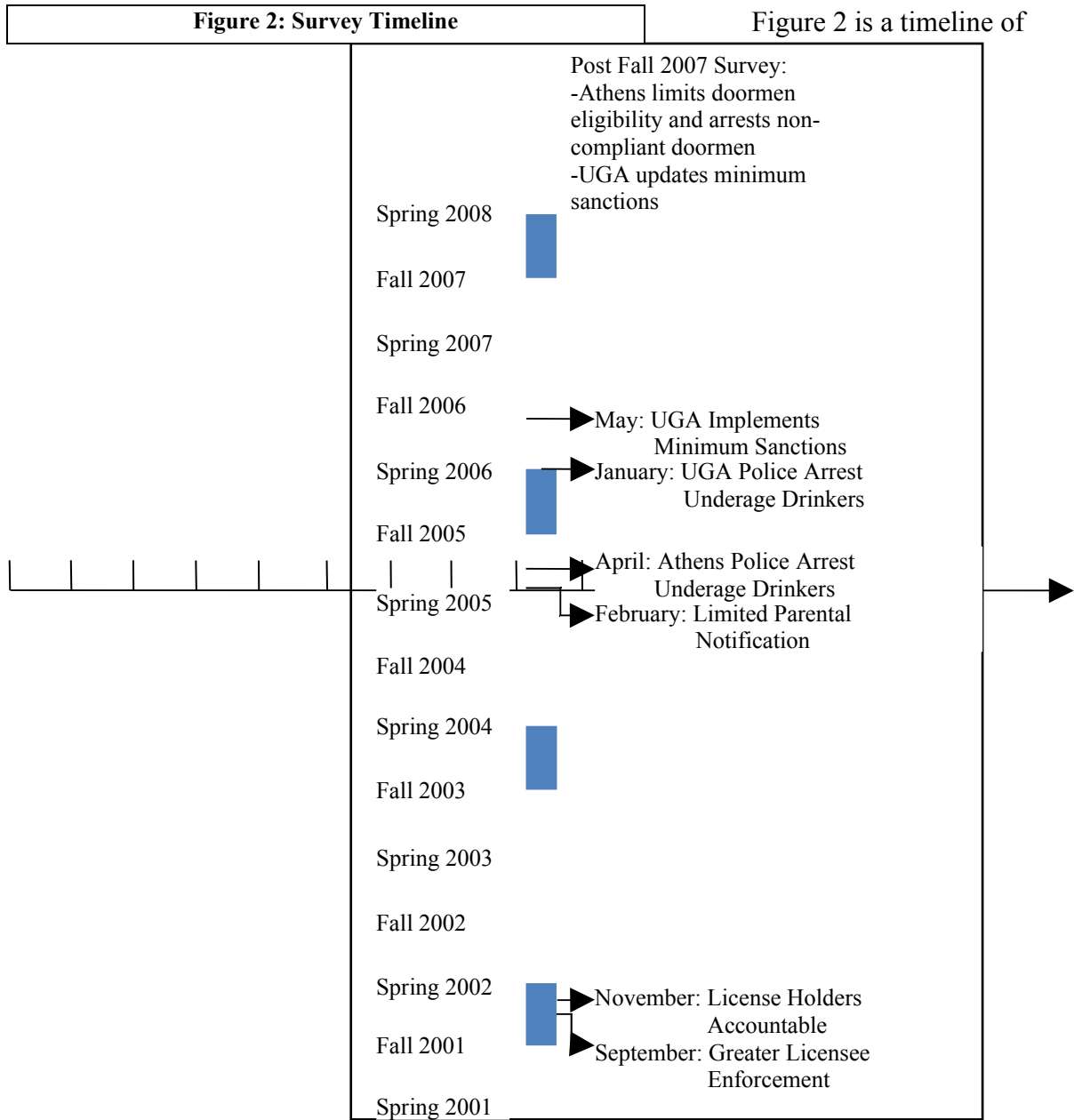
drinking policy from 2001 to the present appear to have affected underage drinking behavior.

The following section assesses the impact of these policy changes in light of survey data reporting underage drinking behavior over the same time period.

Underage Drinking Policy Assessment

National College Health Assessment (NCHA) data has been collected at UGA during the fall semester of odd numbered years since 2001. NCHA is an email-based survey that collects data on drug use; sexual health; weight, nutrition, and exercise; mental health; and personal safety and violence.¹ For the Fall 2001 survey, 521 students comprised the sample; 326 comprised the Fall 2003 sample; 530 comprised the Fall 2005 sample; and 629 comprised the Fall 2007 sample. These survey data show the changes in drinking behavior among UGA students from Fall 2001 to Fall 2007. Analyzing these trends side-by-side with the policy changes described above provides some indication of the changes' effectiveness. This section discusses the survey data as they relate to general drinking behavior, drinking habits and consequences among drinkers, and drinking perceptions.

¹ For more information about the NCHA, see <http://www.acha-ncha.org/overview.html>.



underage drinking policy changes since 2001. The blue shaded regions represent periods of survey collection. Reference this timeline to assess which survey year shows the effects of specific changes.

General Drinking Behavior

The policy changes from 2001 to 2007 are correlated with a substantial increase in the number of underage students who choose not to drink. In particular, the April 2005 announcement that Athens Police would arrest underage drinkers was followed by an almost two-fold jump in the rate of underage students who report abstention from drinking. The abstention rate among underage students changed very little from 2001 to 2003 (16.1 percent to 17.4 percent, respectively). In Fall 2005, the rate of underage abstention nearly doubled to 28.7 percent. This increase held for 2007 (30.4 percent abstained), suggesting a lasting behavioral shift. Over the same time period, of-age students reported constant abstention rates. Notably large gaps between underage and of-age student abstention appeared in 2005 and 2007. This disparity between age groups suggests that changes directly affecting underage students, such as strengthened MLDA enforcement, are responsible for the increase in drinking abstention among this group.

The same jump in abstention rates from 2003 to 2005 is evident in responses to similar survey questions. The proportion of underage students reporting drinking zero hours the last time they "partied" shows a similar increase between 2003 and 2005 rates. Furthermore, of-age students demonstrate a steadier pattern of zero drinking hours with notably lower rates. The proportion of underage and of-age students reporting drinking zero drinks the last time they partied follows a similar trend.

This trend suggests that policy changes since 2001 have noticeably curbed underage drinking. Because the major increase in abstention rates occurred between Fall 2003 and Fall 2005, the data suggest that the Athens Police Department's decision to arrest underage drinkers instead of simply issuing citations greatly affected underage drinking rates. This result is consistent with other studies. The MLDA law has been found to be the best way to decrease

alcohol use and its negative consequences among youth (Wechsler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002). Ensuring the law's enforcement is, therefore, likely to further decrease alcohol use.

However, further research is necessary to address why the change in Athens Police policy correlates with a significant increase in abstention rates between 2003 and 2005 while UGA's minimum sanctions, implemented between 2005 and 2007, do not. Because most drinking among UGA students occurs off campus rather than on, it is logical that the UGA Police decision to arrest underage drinkers had little effect on abstention rates (Quigley, 2005b). UGA's minimum sanctions were perhaps not perceived to significantly worsen the costs of an underage drinking arrest. In other words, students perceived the costs of an arrest as similar to the costs of an arrest plus minimum sanctions. Because underage students who choose to drink were already willing to risk the costs of an arrest, the marginal added costs of minimum sanctions were not enough to overcome the threshold necessary to motivate abstention. Nevertheless, the increase in abstention rates from 2001 to 2007 indicates that underage UGA students change their drinking behavior in response to changes in legal incentives. Thus, future policies to decrease underage drinking should incorporate an increase in the legal costs of violations.²

Binge Drinking Behavior

The policy changes from 2001 to 2007 also correlate with a small reduction in binge drinking rates. The proportion of underage students who reported drinking five or more drinks in one sitting during the two weeks preceding the survey—an indication of binge drinking—remained constant from 2001 to 2003 (43 percent to 40 percent). In 2005, however, this rate dropped to 31.7 percent; it then fell even lower to 25.5 percent in 2007. Among of-age students, the rate of binge drinking over the survey periods remained noticeably higher and steadier,

² See Appendix A for full results.

suggesting that changes affecting only underage students are responsible for the drop in binge drinking rates.

The reported number of alcoholic drinks consumed the last time the respondent “partied” support this conclusion. Among underage students who drank at least one drink the last time they partied, the average number of drinks for that occasion was 5.74 in 2001. This average declined to 5.69 in 2003 and 5.29 in 2005. In 2007, this average dropped below the five drink threshold to 4.73, approximately a 20 percent decline from 2001. Among of-age students, this average held steady over the survey period (6.08 in 2001, 5.44 in 2003, 5.69 in 2005, and 5.55 in 2007).³

These data suggest that legal incentives dissuade some underage students from binge drinking. Students likely think that they are more conspicuously drunk after binge drinking, increasing the probability of an underage drinking arrest. Some students might choose not to binge drink in order to decrease the likelihood of being arrested. However, a large proportion of students continue to binge drink despite more stringent enforcement. Half of underage students who drink consumed more than 4.73 drinks the last time they partied. These students appear indifferent to legal incentives. Such students are likely to drink in higher quantities and are therefore more vulnerable to negative outcomes from their drinking. The data show that policy changes have not affected students who drink in quantities that make them prone to such extreme consequences as fighting or rape due to alcohol consumption.

Underage drinkers experience constant rates of negative consequences from drinking over time, despite changes in underage drinking policy. Underage drinkers and of-age drinkers report little or inconsistent change over time in physically injuring themselves, physically injuring another, fighting, doing something they later regretted, forgetting where they were or what they did, being forced to have sex, and having unprotected sex as a result of drinking. In

³ See Appendix B for full results.

each survey period, for most of the drinking consequence metrics, of-age drinkers report slightly more occurrences than underage drinkers.

The consistent frequency of negative drinking consequences over time suggests that underage drinking policy changes have done little to curb the extreme drinking levels among some students. While enforcement changes have been successful among some students, additional changes that look beyond enforcement are necessary to further decrease binge drinking among underage students. This finding is consistent with those of Wechsler et al. (2002), which shows that MLDA laws limit underage students' drinking behaviors by decreasing the opportunities for these students to drink and limiting their drinking to fewer occasions. But, as Wechsler et al. (2002) noted, stiff penalties do not deter some students, who invest energy in avoiding apprehension rather than improving their drinking behavior. One must look to the drinking culture on campus to explain and perhaps change this behavior.⁴

Drinking Perceptions

Leppel (2006) has found that binge drinking behavior is related to drinking norms in a college community. When students perceive binge drinking as deviant behavior, they are less likely to binge drink, but when students perceive that binge drinking is the cultural norm, they are more likely to binge. These findings are consistent with a wide body of national research (Perkins, 2005). Moreover, Perkins et al. (2005) has found that a student's perceptions of his or her campus drinking culture predicts his or her alcohol consumption levels more strongly than demographic factors often associated with drinking behavior. In light of this research, survey data showing that UGA students perceive a drinking culture that promotes both frequent drinking and binge drinking deserves special consideration. Across all four surveys, when asked "how often within the last thirty days do you think the typical student at your school used alcohol,"

⁴ See Appendix C for full results.

underage and of-age students responded with “1+ days” or “used daily” between 95 and 100 percent of the time. Astoundingly, between 40 and 60 percent of underage and of-age students reported that the typical UGA student drinks alcohol daily. When asked to estimate the proportion of UGA students who drink alcohol, both the average of-age and underage respondent estimated between 74 and 78 percent in all four surveys. These estimates are larger than actual drinking rates, which declined below 70 percent for underage students in 2007.

Estimated drinking quantity also remains higher than the actual quantity, but the perceived quantity of drinks consumed is declining among underage drinkers. In 2001 and 2003, the average underage respondent estimated that the typical UGA student drank 6.3 and 6.2 drinks the last time he or she partied. In 2005 and 2007, this average declined to 5.2 and 5.1 respectively, slightly less than a 20 percent decline. Among of-age respondents, average respondents never reported fewer than 5.9 drinks. While the decline in binge drinking perception among underage drinkers is an improvement, binge drinking remains the perceived norm at UGA, a norm out of line with actual drinking behavior. This misperception is evident at many colleges across the country. In an analysis of the largest national database of its kind, Perkins et al. (2005) found that almost 75 percent of college students overestimate the quantity that their peers drink when they party. Combating these misperceptions may reduce actual drinking quantities. A number of studies based on programs at specific schools demonstrate "that when schools do achieve reductions in misperceptions, the effect is a significant decline in students' high-risk drinking and its negative consequences" (Perkins, 2005, p. 477).⁵ The next section will discuss the inherent challenges of using surveys to determine future policy changes.

Survey Challenges

⁵ See Appendix D for full results.

Three challenges to this method of policy assessment require acknowledgement. First, the survey results fail to provide sufficient data to conduct a complete policy analysis. Only one survey, in Fall 2007, takes into account all of the major policy changes while allowing sufficient time for these changes to affect the student body. Future surveys must be analyzed to address this challenge, but current survey data provide the most accurate picture available of underage drinking at UGA. Furthermore, the significant change in some data points between 2003 and 2005 and the continuance of this change in 2007 suggests that these data reflect long-term trends in alcohol consumption more than short-term effects of policy changes.

Second, the survey results fail to show that the policy changes caused changes in drinking behavior. Factors other than the policy changes also influence drinking behavior. For example, the academic standards necessary to gain admission to UGA rose every year over the survey period. These improvements might have matriculated students less likely to consume alcohol. However, such gradual trends do not fully account for the spike in some data points between 2003 and 2005. Furthermore, trends evident among underage students are not evident among of-age students, even though the quality of students over 21 likely improved as well.

Finally, email surveys do not always produce a representative sample of students; however, the sample size for each survey is adequately large to make measured generalizations about the student body as a whole.

Policy Recommendations

The alarming statistics at the beginning of this paper make it clear that reducing underage drinking, and binge drinking in particular, is a vital public health concern. About 600,000 students aged 18 to 24 are unintentionally injured each year due to alcohol; even more students

suffer assault from another student who is under the influence. More than 97,000 students are victims of sexual assault or date rape each year due to alcohol, and many more students have unprotected sex under the influence. The consequences of high-risk drinking also extend to the classroom. About 25 percent of college students report academic problems due to alcohol (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2007). Based on these statistics, UGA students are the largest stakeholders in policies to reduce binge drinking.

Public officials and UGA administrators also have a significant stake in reducing irresponsible drinking, which threatens public safety and the learning environment. Last year, about 2.1 million students nationwide drove under the influence of alcohol. About 11 percent of student drinkers report damaging property under the influence. And, more than half of administrators from schools with high drinking levels report a moderate or major problem with alcohol-related property damage (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2007).

Other stakeholders include bars and retailers, who incur additional costs due to increased seller-side enforcement policies like restrictions on eligible doormen.

Finally, society as a whole depends upon an educated work force that demands many healthy college students.

Based on the policy assessment above, Athens-Clarke County and UGA should sustain current enforcement policies in order to address these concerns. However, they must do more to promote lower risk choices. Half of underage students at UGA who drink consume more than 4.7 drinks when they party. Half of students 21 and older who drink consume 5.5 drinks when they party. The assessment suggests two policies to further combat high-risk drinking: increasing legal sanctions for excessive drinking and launching a social norms campaign to counteract misperceptions about UGA's party culture.

The change in reported drinking behavior from 2001 to 2007 suggests that legal sanctions are an effective way to influence students' drinking behavior; however, current legal sanctions do little to deter binge drinking. Underage students are just as guilty of underage drinking after one drink as they are after six. Once a student is willing to accept the costs of one drink, there is little legal disincentive deterring them from drinking excessively. To address this, the Athens-Clarke County solicitor should seek higher sanctions for underage drinkers arrested with a blood alcohol content (BAC) above .08 gm (grams per 100 milliliters of blood). To extend the benefits of this policy to of-age drinkers, the solicitor should also implement the same tiered structure for public drunkenness violations. Increasing the costs of exceeding a BAC of .08 gm, the level associated with binge drinking, directly links a legal disincentive to binge drinking (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2004). This disincentive is correlated with a reduction in underage and binge drinking in the data analysis.

Data on rates of driving after drinking suggest that a tiered punishment system based on BAC deters risky behavior. In Georgia, the legal limit for driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol for people over 21 is a BAC of .08 gm. Legal drinkers face no punishment for driving after drinking a quantity of alcohol that results in a BAC less than .08 gm. However, they may receive a DUI citation when driving with a BAC over .08 gm. Across all four survey years, an average of 11.6 percent of legal drinkers and drivers report driving after five or more drinks in the past month. A much larger proportion of legal drinkers and drivers—an average of 59.4 percent across all four survey years—report driving after drinking any alcohol whatsoever. This large gap is consistent with a successful legal disincentive linked directly to BAC. Further supporting this trend is the large statistical difference between the rate of legal drinkers and drivers who drive after drinking any alcohol and the rate of underage drinkers and drivers who

drive after drinking any alcohol. Underage drinkers, who may receive a DUI citation with a BAC over .02 gm, report driving after drinking any alcohol at a rate of 26.7 percent averaged across all four survey years, a rate less than half of the rate for legal drinkers and drivers.⁶ This natural experiment in the context of DUI laws should inform underage drinking enforcement.

The solicitor should use his power to negotiate plea bargains with defendants arrested for alcohol violations to implement a tiered penalties structure. Based on a field sobriety test conducted upon a defendant's arrest, the solicitor should offer the defendant the appropriate plea. The solicitor should publicize the plea options and the conditions under which they are available. To avoid discrimination charges, the solicitor should implement this plea structure without exception. Defendants should also be well-informed of their rights, including the right to a full trial in which the outcome falls outside the solicitor's ambit.

A tiered punishment system is not without challenges. Successful implementation requires close coordination within the solicitor's office to ensure that sanctions are applied in a predictable and consistent manner. Some might also argue that a BAC-based punishment system discriminates against persons of lower body weight and women who have a higher BAC per standard drink. However, BAC provides the most objective, standardized measurement available to determine sobriety, and a high BAC indicates risky drinking behavior, regardless of the raw number of drinks a person has consumed.

Additionally, UGA should implement a sustained, long-term social norms campaign to counter common misperceptions about students' drinking habits. Such a program, consistent with Leppel's (2006) and Perkins' et al. (2005) recommendations, would change UGA's drinking culture—a necessary step to reduce risky drinking behavior. The basic framework for such a campaign is already in place. The John Fontaine, Jr. Center for Alcohol Awareness and

⁶ See Appendix E for full results.

Education in the University Health Center (UHC) makes many resources publically available for students who wish to learn more about alcohol-related issues. Among these resources are online self-assessments like e-CHUG, a tool that provides students with individual feedback on their reported drinking habits, including how their habits compare to those of other students.

Establishing a student-led, evidence-based marketing effort would increase the number of students who use such existing resources within the UHC. While the UHC currently invests substantial resources in marketing, additional marketing that specifically targets students' misperceptions of their peers' drinking habits and links students to resources like e-CHUG is necessary. Such a marketing effort should seek to address students of all ages in order to reduce the risky habits prevalent among both underage and of-age students.

Educational programs should also include portions that address the false perception that UGA has a culture that promotes binge drinking. Such segments should be included in regular programs presented to first-year students, athletes, fraternities and sororities, and other student organizations. Finally, UGA should reconsider its policies allowing on-campus events where conspicuous alcohol consumption occurs. Allowing alcohol consumption at on-campus tailgates prior to home football games, for example, sends a counterproductive message to students developing their sense of UGA's drinking culture.

A number of challenges exist to such a social norms campaign. First, changes in UHS practices require additional resources, which might not be available during times of tight budgets. Second, the success of a marketing campaign is difficult to measure. Determining whether a marketing campaign is directly responsible for a decline in drinking culture misperceptions requires significant research. Finally, football tailgating at UGA is a tradition that

will not die easily. However, UGA administrators who are serious about reducing underage and binge drinking should reexamine policies that allow such practices to take place.

Conclusion

Despite the effectiveness of strong enforcement strategies, binge drinking remains a significant problem at the University of Georgia. UGA students, administrators, and the Athens community at large have a stake in promoting responsible drinking decisions among UGA students. Based on an analysis of policy changes to date, overcoming misperceptions about UGA's drinking culture and directly linking legal sanctions to binge drinking are necessary parts of a program to reduce high-risk drinking habits.

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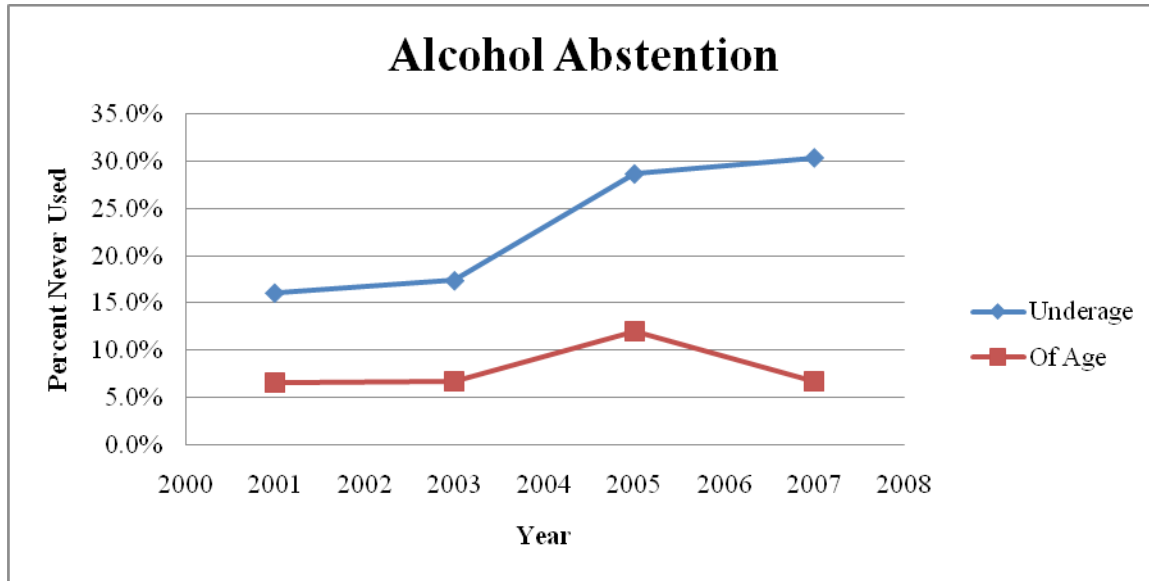
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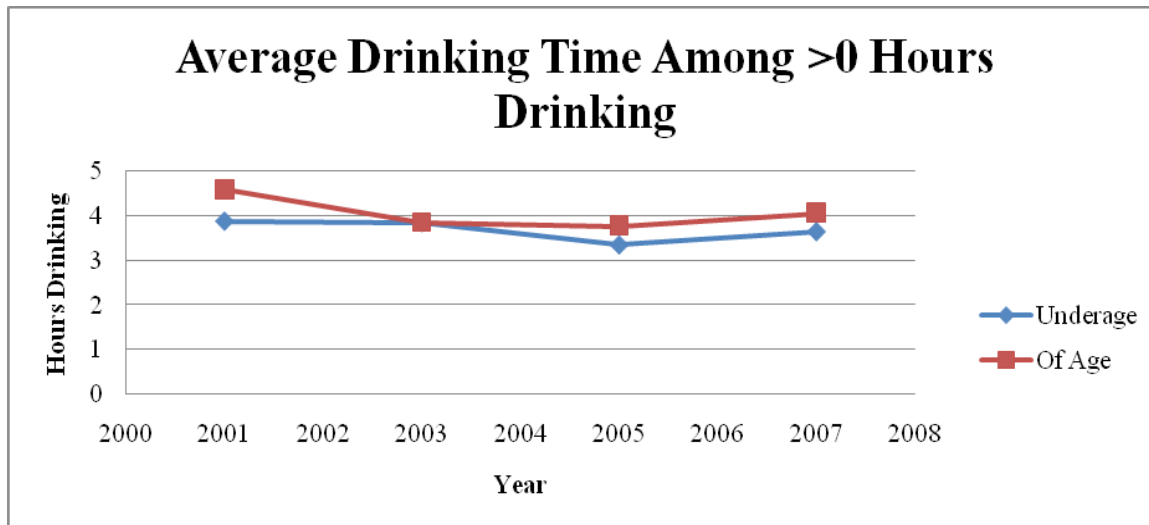
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Appendix A

Within the last thirty days, on how many days did you use: Alcohol (beer, wine, liquor)?

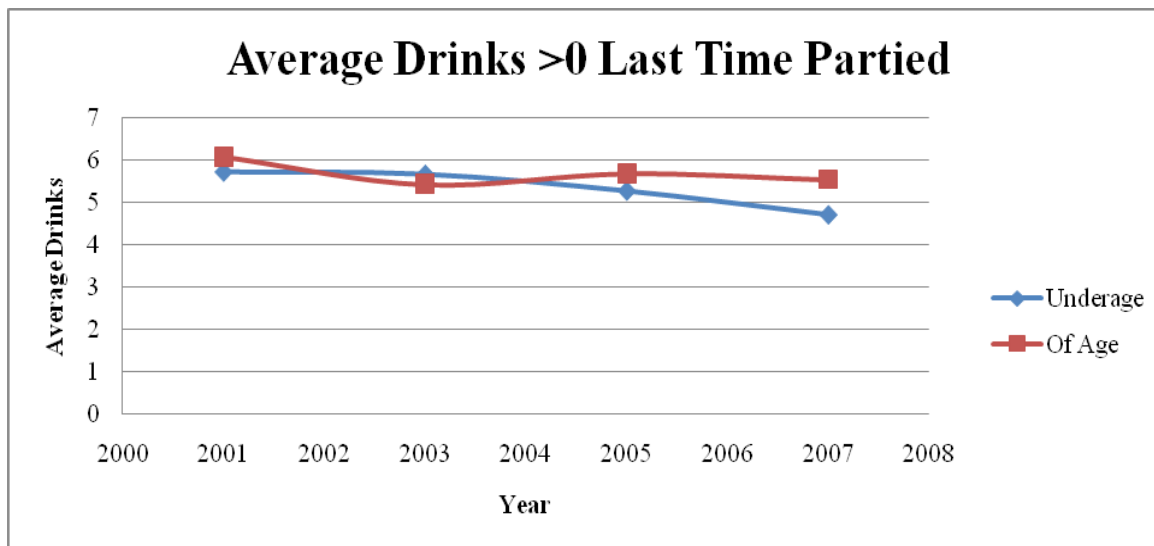


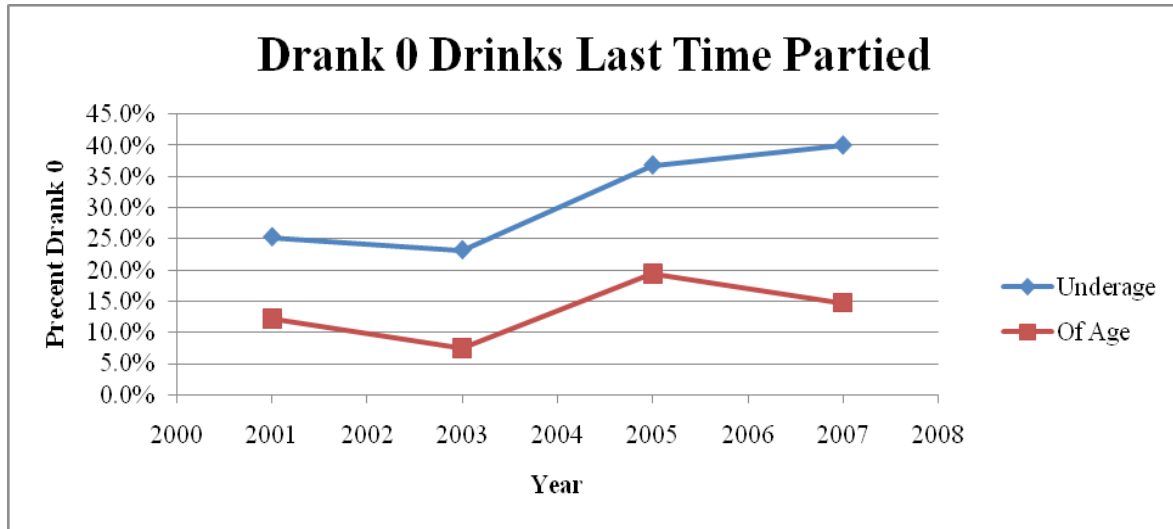
The last time you "partied"/socialized, how many hours did you drink alcohol?



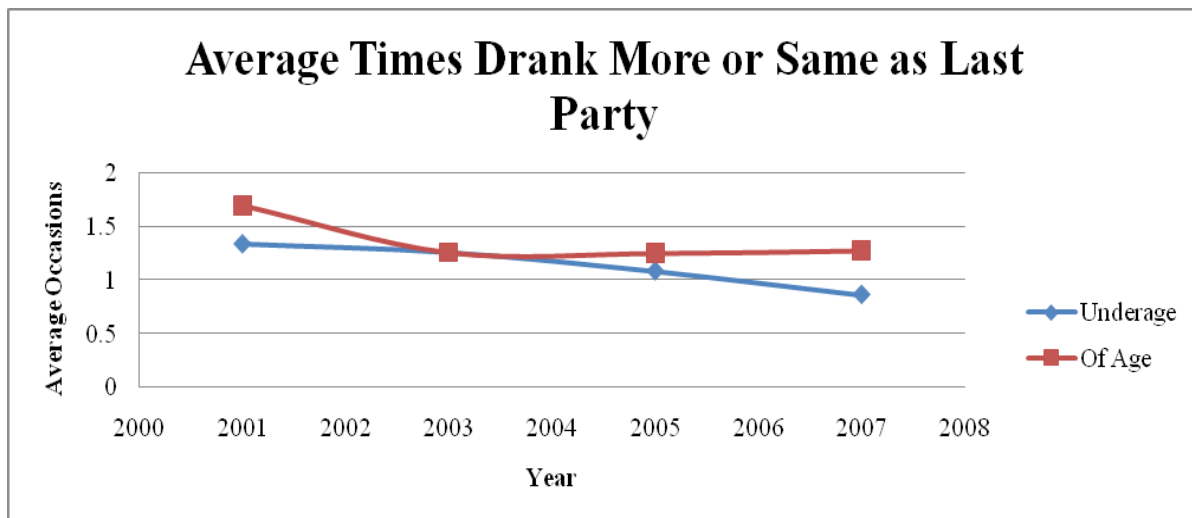


The last time you "partied"/socialized, how many alcoholic drinks did you have?



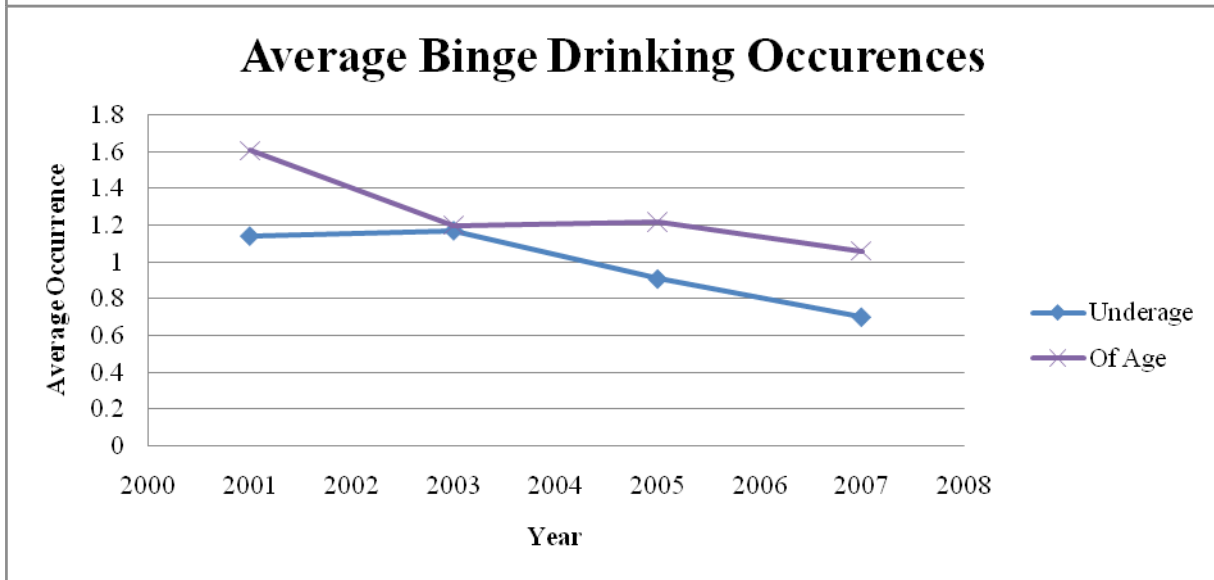
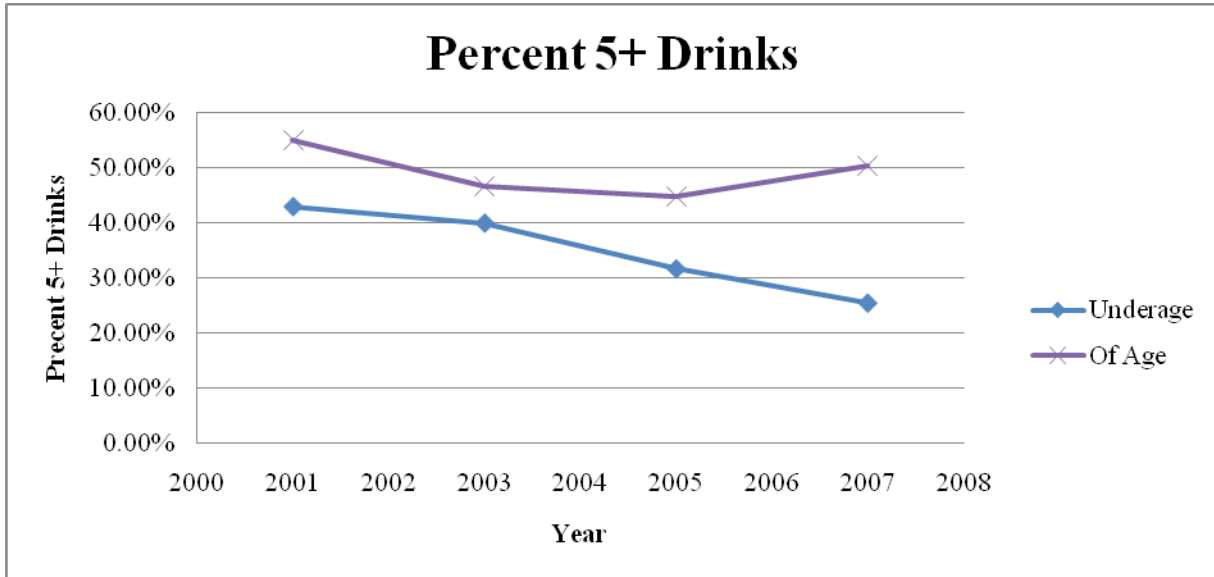


In the last two weeks, on how many occasions did you drink the same or more alcohol as indicated in the above item?



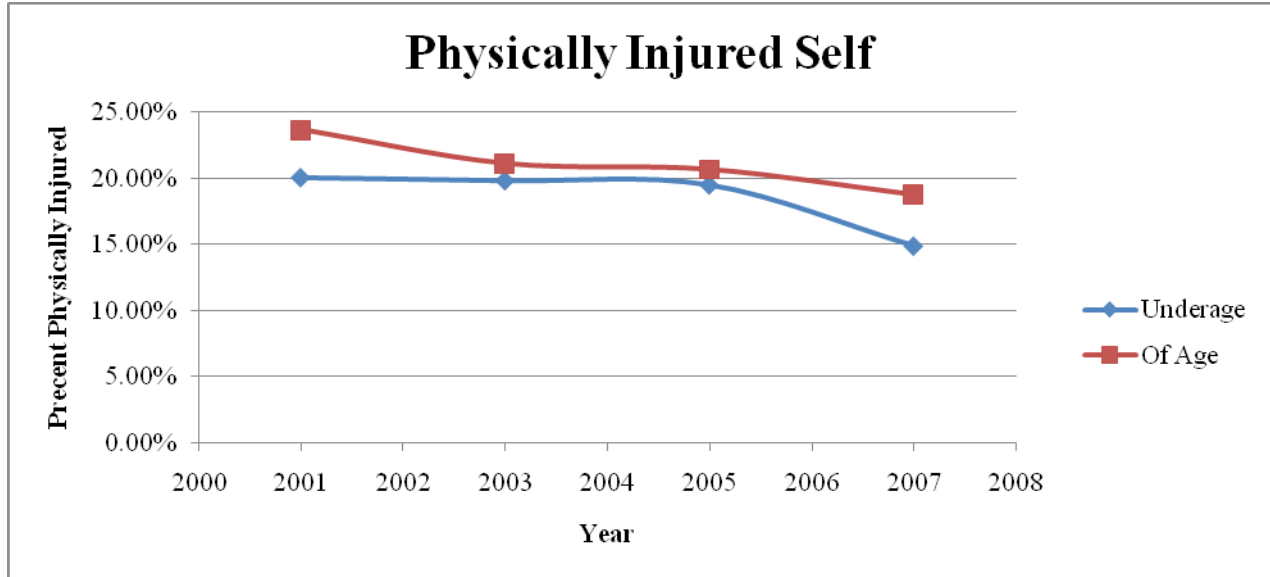
Appendix B

Think back over the last two weeks. How many times, if any, have you had five or more alcoholic drinks at a sitting?

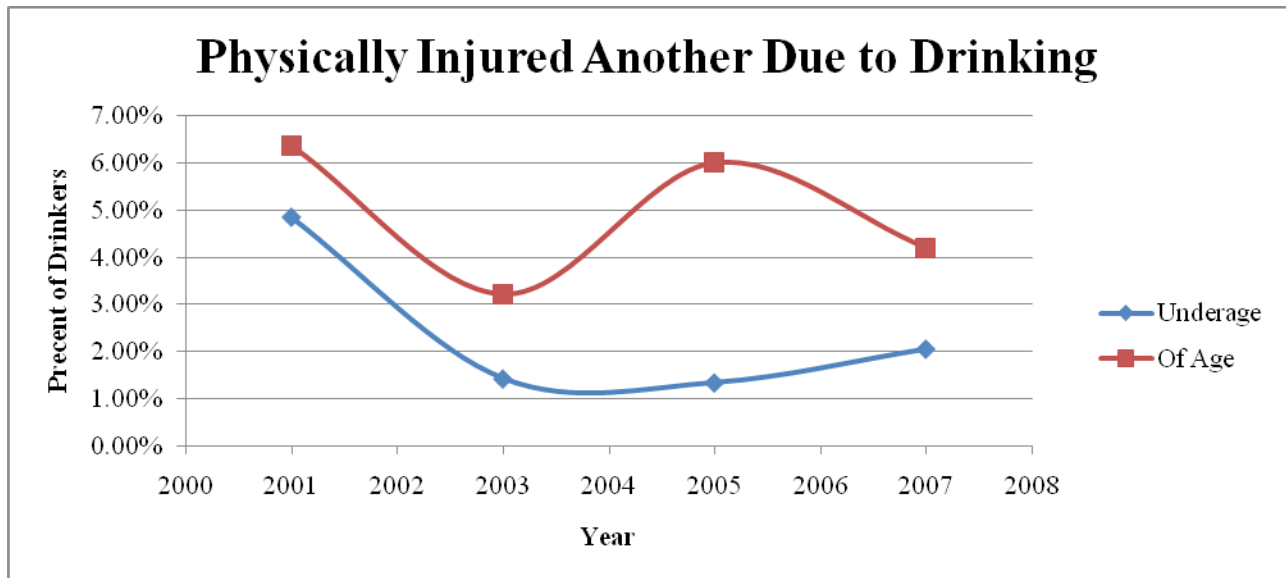


Appendix C

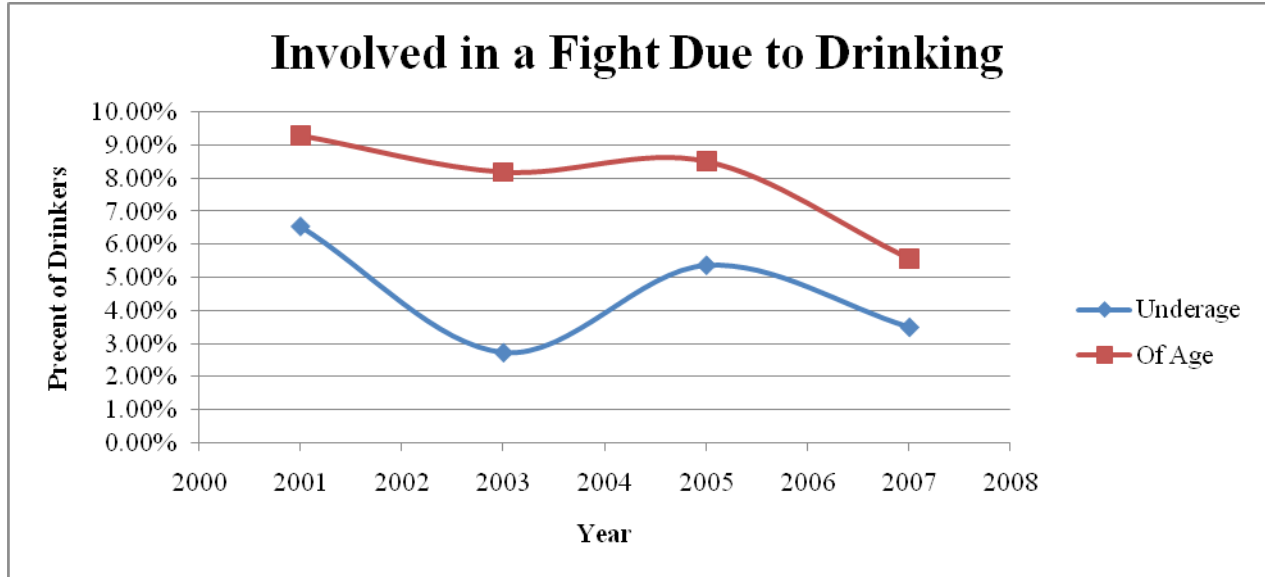
If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Physically injured yourself



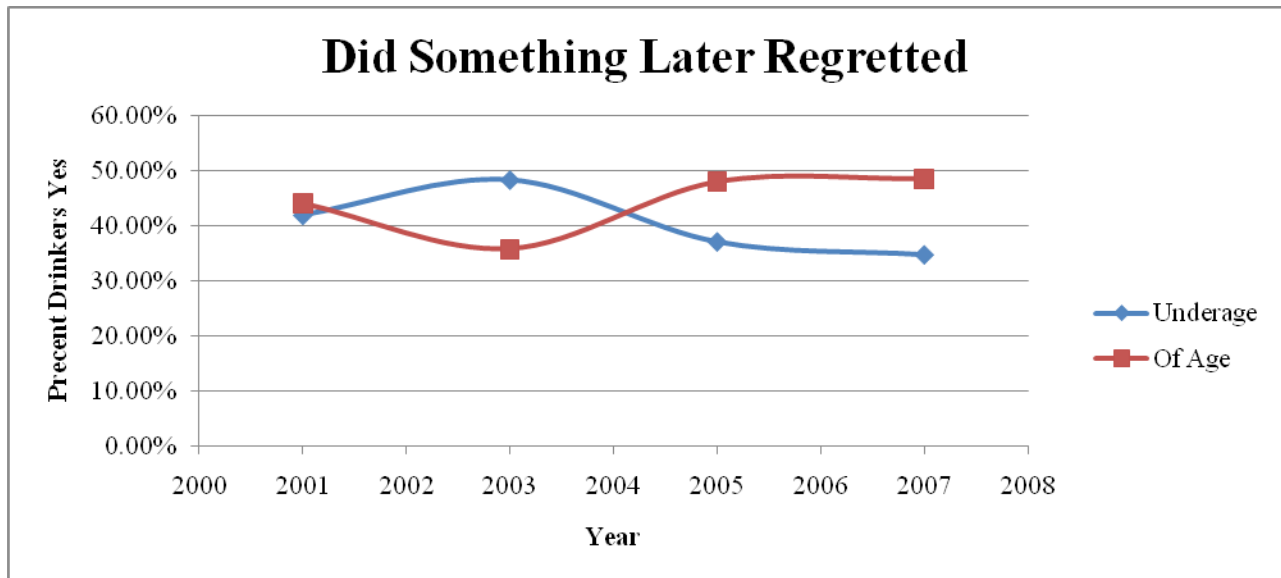
If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Physically injured another person



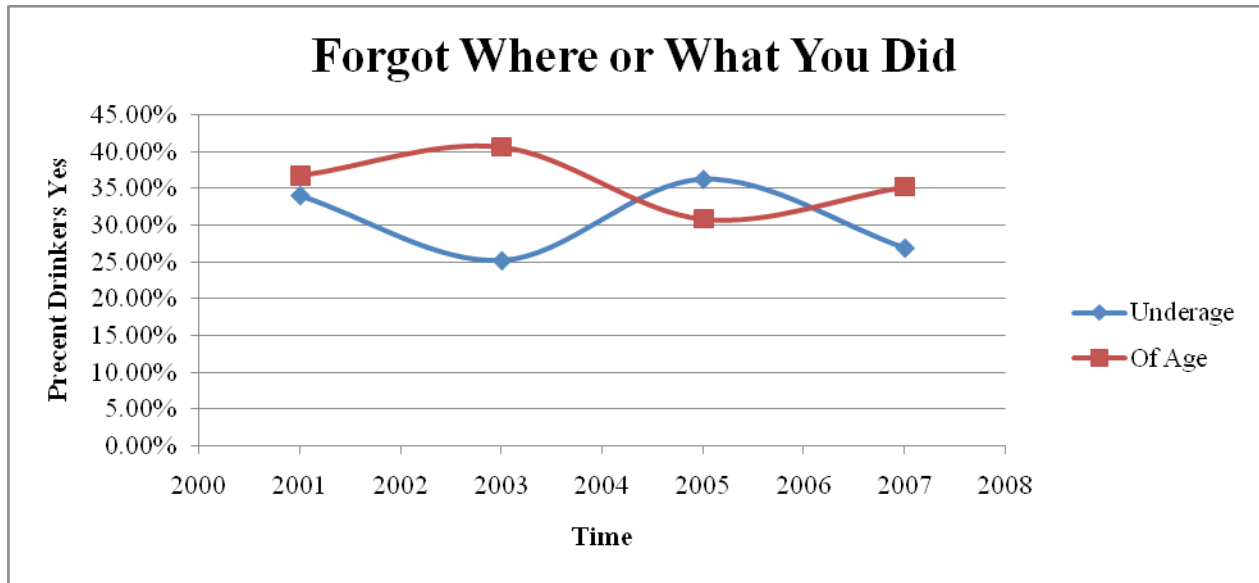
If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Been involved in a fight



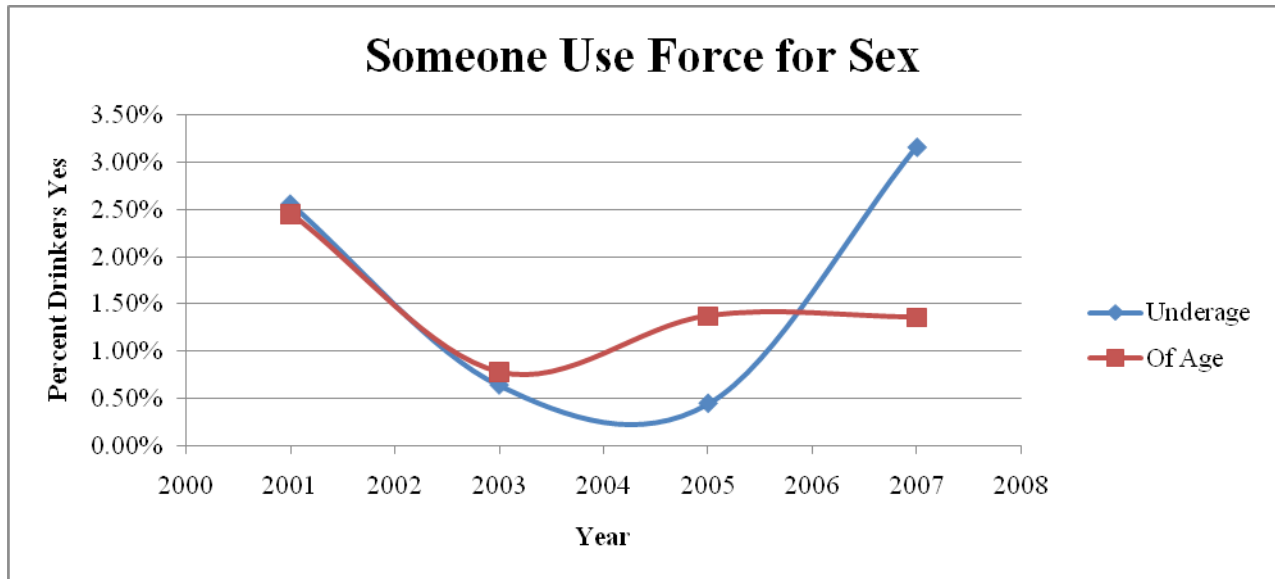
If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Did something you later regretted



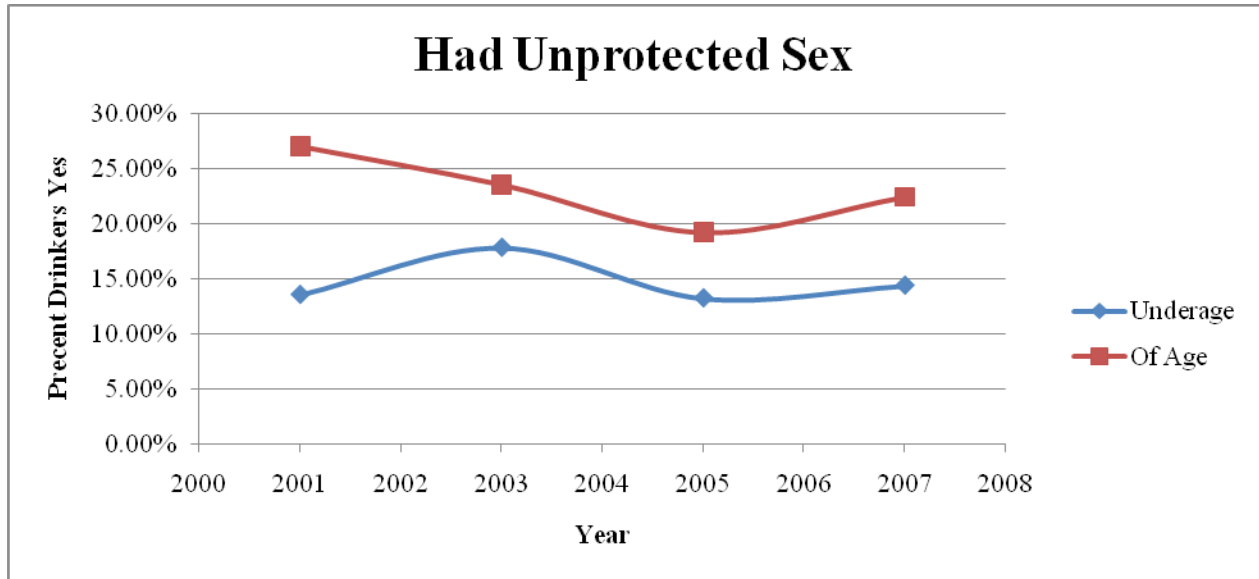
If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Forgot where you were or what you did



If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Had someone use force or threat of force to have sex with you

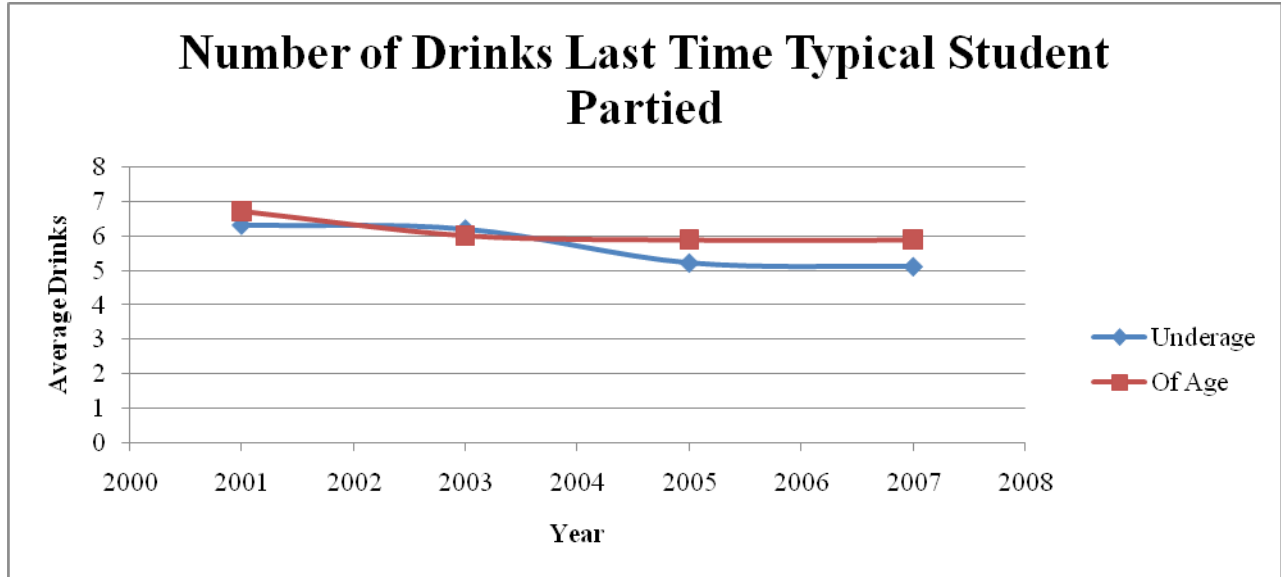


If you drink alcohol, within the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following as a consequence of your drinking? Had unprotected sex

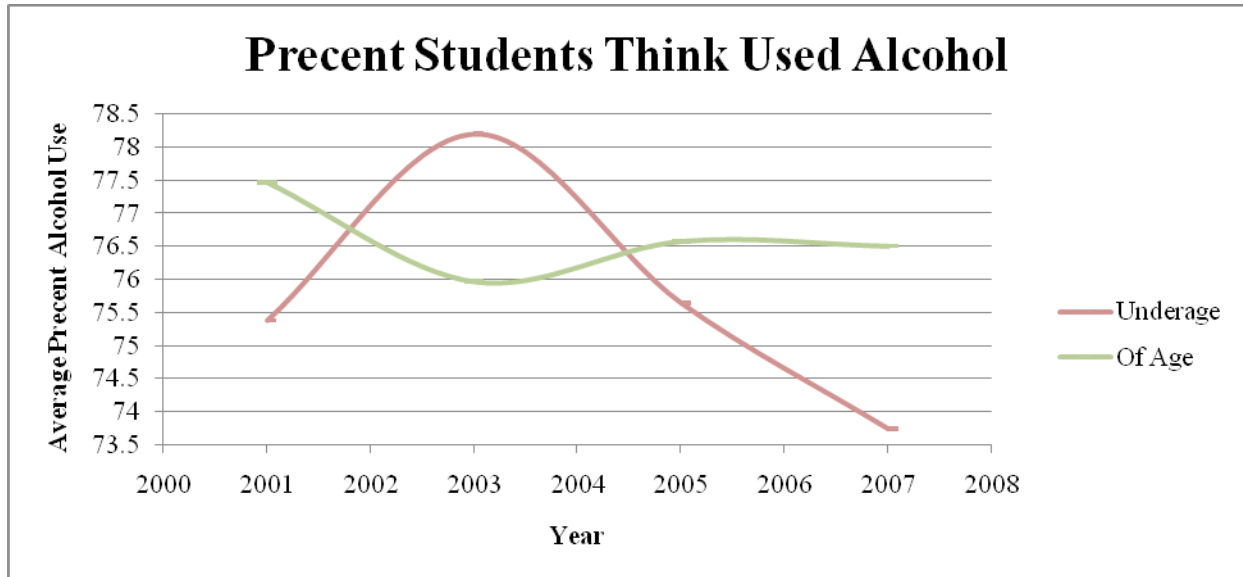


Appendix D

How many alcoholic drinks do you think the typical student at your school had the last time he/she "partied"/socialized?

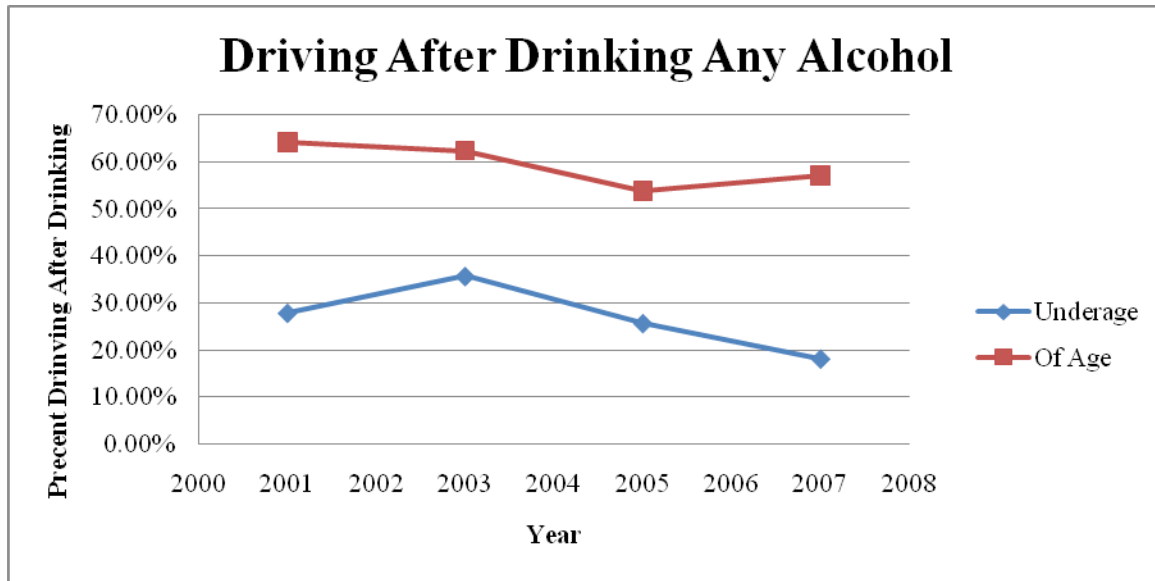


Within the last 30 days, what percent of students at your school used? % Used Alcohol



Appendix E

Within the last thirty days, did you: Drive after drinking any alcohol at all



Within the last thirty days, did you: Drive after having 5 or more drinks

