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Awareness and Action Campaign

# Alcohol Abuse at Arizona State University

Cohort #11

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## Introduction

Arizona State University prides itself in being one of the largest, most inclusive universities in the nation, providing multiple programs that help students with disabilities, mental health, and other stress factors that can evolve throughout a student's college experience. However, ASU lacks the resources that directly pertain to alcohol use and abuse on campus. Although ASU has taken on some initiative of alcohol education and prevention such as the Everfi Courses that freshmen take coming into their dorms, these resources do not resonate with students effectively. This can cause an issue for students as they do not see enough specific resources available to them later on in their college careers. There are resources but not necessarily how to directly deal with the consequences that come from alcohol use and more specifically, alcohol abuse.

ASU currently provides resources for counselors, however, not specific to alcohol usage. The counselors tend to be more generic and are not focused on the direct issues of binge drinking and alcohol abuse. Students can feel judged by their peers and family when discussing their problems, resulting in students feeling more stressed, having higher rates of anxiety, and struggles with their schoolwork. Therefore, the importance of having a specific alcohol abuse counseling service tied in with an anonymous hotline would allow students to feel more comfortable and confident while utilizing an ASU resource.

Although 47.2% of students that attend ASU do not drink, a majority of them do engage in underage drinking. (Alcohol Livewell, ASU). The spike in drinking tends to occur when students move to college and are given more freedom to make their own decisions without parental supervision. This often becomes a problem when it comes to academics as well. “The effects of alcohol in college often continue beyond a party or a bar: About 1 in 4 students also reported academic consequences from drinking, such as lower grades or missing class entirely” (Robert Ewing). This shows once again how it is beneficial to implement a better structure for students dealing with addiction to alcohol because it not only affects their body, but their minds and schoolwork.

## **Main Issues**

In order to make ASU a dry campus, there are steps that must be implemented in order to ensure this goal. The university provides hotlines for drug abuse as well as a few anonymous alcohol resources that provide outside assistance such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon (Alcohol Live Well, ASU). However, there are no programs set in place on the ASU campus for those who abuse alcohol. With the amount of students attending ASU, these programs are not enough nor do justice to the crisis. Alcohol can be very accessible to students as “College campuses, sometimes even those that are designated as “dry” or are situated in a dry community, are rife with alcohol and other substances. Alcohol tends to flow freely at parties.” (Affordable Colleges Online). Therefore, other implications need to be set in place to allow for students to feel safe and comfortable seeking help from ASU.

## The Inside Look from ASU Freshman

We wanted to take a look at what other ASU students thought about the amount of alcohol abuse resources on campus. We asked them the following questions, **1.** If there was an anonymous hotline available would you use it? **2.** Do you think ASU has a lack of resources specifically for ASU students? **3.** Have you heard of anyone utilizing an ASU resource for alcohol abuse?**4.** How do you feel about using ASU counseling services in general?

4. The first person we interviewed was an anonymous female age 19. Her response to “if there was an anonymous hotline available would you use it? She said “I would use an anonymous hotline because I would feel less judged and more free to express my issues with alcohol. I think some students are nervous to schedule counseling appointments in fear of punishment or judgement, so an anonymous hotline would be really great.” She continued on to say, “ASU does not have any specific known resources related to alcohol abuse, I have only seen counseling for substance abuse which is great but I agree that there should be more specific outlets.” We then asked her, have you heard of anyone utilizing an ASU resource for alcohol abuse, and why would you prefer these resources to be anonymous? She responded, “I haven't encountered anyone who has used any resources at ASU for alcohol abuse and i'm not sure students are aware of what ASU offers. It's kind of hard to find the resources because it's not really broadcasted, so students have to find it themselves.” When asked the last question, this student said she feels ok about using the counseling services. She knows they are available but hasn't utilized them. This student's response to the questions asked shows that ASU doesn't have specific counseling services and that students will actually benefit from an anonymous hotline. Her statements confirm that students would feel more comfortable utilizing specific services for alcohol abuse.

The next student we interviewed was an anonymous male age 19. When he was asked question one he responded with, "If there was an anonymous hotline I think myself and other students would feel more comfortable. I would feel less judged and intimidated by talking with people who work for ASU." In response to question two he stated, "I think ASU has a lot of good resources I just think they are hard to find and the only time ASU talked about alcohol usage was at the beginning of freshman year." We then finished the interview with question three and his response was, "I don't know anyone personally who has used an ASU resource but that may be because they are scared." When asked the last question he responded with, "I feel kind of nervous to go because I wouldn't want my friends to know I am having issues." The interview with this student was successful. His response to our questions was pretty similar to the anonymous female and this shows that even though ASU does have good resources, they need to expand and make ones specifically for alcohol abuse.

## **The Resolution**

Our team intends to implement a counseling service with counselors that specialize in alcohol abuse treatment and therapy as well as including an anonymous hotline for students to call when in desperate times. We want to achieve four steps. One being, create a specific counseling service for alcohol abuse. Two, hire therapists that specialize in alcohol abuse for the counseling service. Three, pave the way for students struggling with alcohol abuse to seek help by ending the stigma against counseling. Four, create a hotline that is anonymous specifically for alcohol abuse. These services would ensure that students do not feel alone while enduring their problems. Although universities across the nation have counseling services, these services are often too generalized and students can feel too uncomfortable looking for support as they can be

afraid of judgment and punishment. Additionally, there are broad alcohol hotlines that the general public can call when needed, but including a hotline that ASU directly provides can allow students easier access and feel more comfortable talking to someone who understands the stress of schoolwork and a college environment, especially with a school as large as ASU. Developing a private practice for counseling takes around 2-3 years, however, due to ASU already having a strong foundation with counseling programs, this timeframe can easily be shortened to around 1-2 years (Counseling Today). Alcohol abuse can be directly tied to one's mental health. Someone who struggles with mental health may find that alcohol helps relieve them of their struggles, on the other hand, someone who abuses alcohol can contribute to higher anxiety, depression, and personality changes (Sober Recovery). These factors are important as a program for alcohol abuse can be connected to the already existing programs for mental health provided by ASU allowing for less time and materials. An annual salary for a substance abuse counselor in Arizona is \$53,438 (Indeed). This annual salary already corresponds with what ASU pays their mental health staff, \$41-71k. While looking for other universities that may have done what we are proposing we found that many just have substance abuse resources rather than ones that completely focus on alcohol abuse. There have been many general studies and articles about alcohol anonymous hotlines and alcohol counseling but none have necessarily been so specific to have been done at a University.

## **Why Are our Solutions Needed at ASU?**

We know that ASU has many helpful resources for students struggling with addiction and substance abuse, but while looking for a specific counseling program related to alcohol abuse we didn't find much. Adding a counseling service that only focuses on alcohol abuse and adding an

anonymous hotline could greatly benefit students. Creating more helpful resources for students can help mentally, physically, and academically. A majority of students are living on their own for the first time and don't know how to reach out for help, especially for something that is illegal for underage students. Creating an accessible anonymous hotline can help prevent these students from feeling ashamed and scared. We know that ASU wants to help students succeed and see them flourish on campus and this is why we are proposing a new counseling program just for alcohol abuse and an anonymous hotline tied in with that. According to Chadron State College, "overall, 40 percent of students with diagnosable mental health conditions did not seek help. 57 percent of them did not request accommodations from their school" (Chadron state College). These statistics show that even though ASU may offer counseling services it may not be as accessible, effective, or as specific as we think and this may turn students away from seeking help.

## **Conclusion**

Although there are many general resources that students can look to such as national hotlines, campus counseling, or off-campus alcohol counselors, having a direct ASU hotline with students and counselors behind the phone as well as having counselors specialized in alcohol recovery will be beneficial to ASU students as students would feel more comfortable knowing that these students and counselors understand the pressures of a college atmosphere, stress factors, and triggers. A more specific program for alcohol therapy provided at ASU would allow counselors to focus on a smaller number of students; building stronger relationships and understanding of the student's problems during an overwhelming process. Additionally, an anonymous hotline will help students feel less judged, more comfortable in seeking help, and

less pressure of facing potential legal consequences. A hotline would provide a safe place and valuable resources that students can look to when trying to get through a moment of crisis, especially when a student feels too uncomfortable or embarrassed to talk to their family and friends. ASU is a very strong community that is full of students who want to succeed academically. We believe that with our proposed solutions it can not only benefit the students who are struggling but also others involved in the community. These solutions will give students a sense of relief knowing that they have somewhere specific and anonymous to go to if they are in need of help with alcohol usage. Alcohol usage is very prominent not only on ASU's campus, but campuses all over the country. We need to give students the right resources in order for us to thrive as an ASU community.

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