



Collegiate Substance Use in Louisiana

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Substance use and abuse remain a pervasive problem on college campuses across the United States. Research indicates that substance abuse in college may lead to a wide variety of problems such as death, injury, assault, sexual abuse, risky sexual behavior, academic problems, health problems, suicide, drunk driving, vandalism, and arrests (Hingson et al., 2009). Colleges as well as state and local entities must consistently measure substance use trends and related consequences in order to effectively address the epidemic of collegiate substance abuse.

To assess the extent of substance use among college students throughout Louisiana, the Office of Behavioral Health and the Louisiana Higher Education Coalition to Reduce Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (LaHEC) partnered together for a biennial, statewide administration of the CORE Alcohol and Drug survey. This data brief provides a snapshot of the CORE, which most recently surveyed almost 10,000 students from 35 colleges across Louisiana in April 2011.

Alcohol

The CORE survey defines binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks in one sitting within the previous two weeks. Students from Louisiana colleges reported much lower rates of binge drinking in comparison to a national sample of almost 57,000 students from multiple U.S. colleges. Louisiana binge drinking trends remained relatively stable around 36% for college students from 2007 to 2011, whereas national binge drinking rates declined from 46.6% in 2006 to 43.9% in 2010. Louisiana college students also showed lower rates of ‘current drinkers’, which characterize students that drank alcohol within the past 30 days. The rate of current drinkers slightly fluctuated among Louisiana college students over the past six years as evident by an increase in 2009 followed by a slight decrease in 2011. National rates of current drinkers decreased steadily from 2006-

2010, but still remain almost 8% higher than Louisiana rates.

	2006 - National	2007 - LA	2008 - National	2009 - LA	2010 - National	2011 - LA
Binge drinking	46.60%	36.00%	46.10%	36.60%	43.90%	36.00%
Alcohol use within last 30 days	71.80%	62.00%	71.70%	64.10%	69.20%	62.60%
Tobacco use within past 30 days	26.20%	27.00%	24.80%	28.00%	23.30%	25.00%

Tobacco

The CORE survey defines ‘current tobacco use’ as using a tobacco product (smoke, chew, or snuff) within the previous 30 days. Findings indicated that Louisiana college students reported higher rates of tobacco use than their national counterparts in all three survey administrations from 2007-2011. Louisiana tobacco use reached its peak level at 28% in 2009, but decreased to 25% in 2011. National rates have consistently declined from 26.2% in 2006 to 23.3% in 2010.

Marijuana and Other Illegal Drugs

The CORE survey defines ‘current marijuana use’ as using marijuana (pot, hash, hash oil) within the previous 30 days. Both Louisiana and national trends indicate increasing rates of marijuana use. Louisiana college students reported lower usage rates than the national averages, but these rates have increased each survey administration from 2007-2011. The 2011 administration reflected the peak level of use among Louisiana college students at 16.3%, indicating an increase of over 3% within the last six years. National results showed an even grimmer picture of marijuana use among college students with rates steadily climbing and a peak level of 18% in 2010.

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The CORE survey also measures use of illegal drugs other than marijuana in the previous thirty days. These drugs may include: cocaine, amphetamines, sedatives, hallucinogens, opiates, inhalants, designer drugs, or steroids. Louisiana findings indicated stable trends at approximately 8%. National rates, however, declined from 6.3% in 2006 to 5.5% in 2010. Alarming, the Louisiana rates from 2007-2011 were consistently higher than the national averages.

Similar to national results from 2010, the most commonly reported drugs used by Louisiana college students in 2011 were marijuana (16.3%), amphetamines (4.9%), and sedatives (2.4%). Even though marijuana usage reflected a lower rate in Louisiana, amphetamine and sedative use nearly doubled the national rates.

	2006 - National	2007 - LA	2008 - National	2009 - LA	2010 - National	2011 - LA
Illegal drugs other than marijuana within last 30 days	6.30%	8.30%	5.60%	8.30%	5.50%	8.00%
Amphetamines within the last 30 days	3.00%	4.80%	2.40%	5.10%	2.70%	4.90%
Sedatives within the last 30 days	2.00%	3.20%	1.70%	3.00%	1.50%	2.40%

Consequences of Collegiate Substance Use

In addition to measuring substance use behavior, the Core survey assesses the consequences associated with alcohol and drug use. One question, in particular, asks about

the prevalence of a number of consequences in the previous year as a result of drinking and/or drug use. These consequences and findings are listed on the graph below. As evident from the graph, consequences among Louisiana college students were typically lower than the national averages. However, Louisiana students reported 'driving while under the influence' at much higher rates than the national comparison group. Furthermore, the 2011 Louisiana results showed a slightly higher percentage of students 'who performed poorly on a test' and 'missed a class' due to substance use.

	2006 - National	2007 - LA	2008 - National	2009 - LA	2010 - National	2011 - LA
Been in trouble with police, residence hall, or other college authorities	13.70%	8.10%	13.30%	8.00%	11.80%	8.00%
Driven a car while under the influence	26.90%	33.00%	22.30%	33.20%	21.30%	27.20%
Got into an argument or fight	32.20%	27.80%	31.20%	29.30%	29.40%	25.50%
Seriously thought about suicide	4.50%	4.00%	4.20%	4.20%	4.00%	4.00%
Been hurt or injured	16.10%	10.70%	16.30%	12.00%	15.50%	11.50%
Been taken advantage of sexually	10.00%	8.40%	9.50%	8.00%	8.20%	7.20%
Performed Poorly on a test or important project	22.00%	20.50%	20.80%	20.10%	19.40%	19.90%
Done something I later regretted	37.20%	29.40%	36.00%	30.80%	33.60%	28.40%
Missed a class	30.10%	27.00%	28.10%	27.20%	25.70%	27.00%
Had a hangover	62.50%	55.50%	62.00%	57.70%	60.20%	55.70%

Interpreting the Results

How do we make sense of the differences between Louisiana and national results? This poses a very difficult question to answer. One may assume that Louisiana campuses may implement more prevention resources or programming due to the lower rates of alcohol and marijuana use. However, CORE results from 2011 indicated the opposite. Louisiana college students consistently reported lower percentages than the national comparison group when asked: 1) Does your campus have alcohol and drug policies, 2) Does your campus have an alcohol or drug prevention program, and 3) Do you believe your campus is concerned about the prevention of drug and alcohol use?

A possible explanation involves students' perceptions of their peers' substance use. Research has consistently demonstrated the effects of misperceptions on alcohol and drug use among college students. A typical college student tends to overestimate their peers' alcohol and drug use, which is likely to result in their increased use. These misperceptions were reflected in the national and Louisiana CORE survey findings.

Louisiana results indicated that 86% of students believe that the average student on campus uses alcohol once a week or more as compared to the national average of 89%. This slight difference in perceptions may explain some of the lower rates of alcohol use among Louisiana college students. Similarly, misperceptions may also explain the elevated rates of illegal drug use (other than marijuana) among Louisiana students. In comparison to the national average of 53.2%, over 62% of Louisiana college students reported that they believed the average student on campus uses some form of illegal drug at least once per week.

Prevention Planning

Prevention professionals should take caution in interpreting the state-level results of the CORE survey. The problematic areas identified in the statewide sample may substantially differ from the problems on individual campuses. Some colleges or regions may need to target amphetamine abuse, while others may prioritize binge drinking. Thus, campus-

level and regional data from the CORE survey, as well as other sources (campus police statistics, etc.), should be considered throughout the strategic planning process to reduce problems associated with collegiate substance use.

This data brief is brought to you by the Louisiana Center Addressing Substance Use in Collegiate Communities (LaCASU), the Office of Behavioral Health, and the Louisiana State Epidemiology Workgroup. To find data related to substance use and abuse, please visit the State Epidemiology Workgroup Online Data system at www.gov.state.la.us/lasocialindicators.

