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Alcohol 101 Now A Required Course As Colleges Battle Binge Drinking

Online AlcoholEdu class explains health and safety consequences of drinking.

By Brandee J. Tecson

In an effort to curb binge drinking by college coeds, more universities are requiring incoming students to complete an online alcohol-education course before setting foot on campus.

AlcoholEdu, a program used on more than 450 campuses nationwide, teaches students about health issues and consequences related to alcohol use. The two-and-a-half hour course includes alcohol-related studies, video clips and three confidential surveys that will gauge the student's success rate after completing the program.

In September 2001, Villanova University was the first in the nation to require all 1,650 incoming freshmen to complete a mandatory alcohol-education course.

Now 130 colleges and universities nationwide — including University of Southern California, Syracuse University, Princeton University and University of California at Berkeley — have the same requirement.

"We've researched numerous educational methods when it comes to drinking, and AlcoholEdu has been the most effective means of providing this type of

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Alcohol-related incidents kill nearly 1, students in the U.S. per year
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comprehensive alcohol education," Dessa Bergen-Cico, Associate Dean of Students at Syracuse University, told MTV News.

Syracuse, which has used the program for three years, is one of the many universities requiring all incoming freshmen to complete the online course prior to their arrival on campus. A score of 70 percent or higher is necessary to pass, and if students are unable to reach that score after taking the test a second time, the university will provide individual or group education as needed for students, Bergen-Cico said.

"I think binge drinking [defined by the Harvard College Alcohol Study as five or more drinks consumed on one occasion] is a very big problem on college campuses, particularly for first-year females," Bergen-Cico explained. "And it's not so much the drinking, but the consequences that come with it."

Counselors at Syracuse have found that much of the binge drinking done by college students could be attributed to a lack of basic knowledge about blood-alcohol levels and an ignorance of the repercussions associated with high-risk drinking, including increased sexual assault and STD risks.

Close to 1,400 college students die annually in the U.S. in alcohol-related incidents, the NIAAA reports. Alcohol is also linked to more than 1 million assaults and injuries every year.

Another key problem is that many students are unaware of how much alcohol they are actually chugging down. "When most kids go to a party and they drink out of those big red cups, they don't get that cup may be holding up to several shots of alcohol," Bergen-Cico said.

This fall marks the first time that the University of California at Berkeley is requiring all undergrads new to the campus (not just freshmen) to take the online course. The test is tailored to individuals based on their current alcohol use, so a student who does not drink will take a different course than a student who drinks regularly.

Incoming students must register online using their student ID number and answer a few questions regarding their current alcohol use. AlcoholEdu will tailor the program to that particular student's situation.

The course is being used by UC Berkeley as part of the school's focused effort to address alcohol usage by its student body. A 2003 survey of Berkeley coeds found that 79 percent of all students reported drinking alcohol in the past semester, 61 percent of those said they got drunk, and 21 percent said they had been binge drinking at least once in the past two weeks.

In May, UC Berkeley made headlines for banning alcohol at all fraternity and sorority events.

Greek organizations are also starting to require new members to enroll in the AlcoholEdu course. In September 2002, Kappa Alpha Theta, one of America's largest sororities, announced that it would start mandating alcohol education for all

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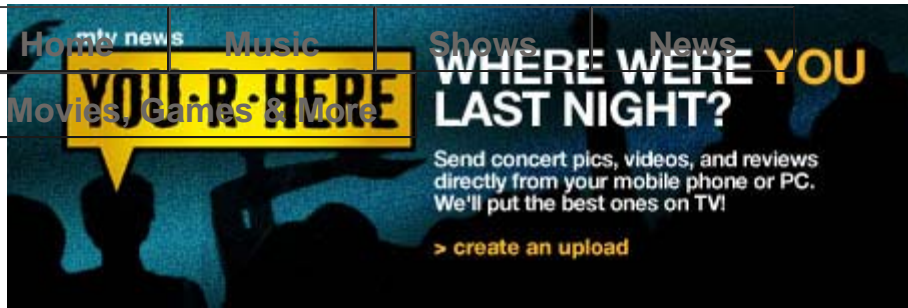
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of its 12,000 members in more than 120 chapters across the U.S. and Canada. Other Greek organizations have since followed suit, including fraternities Delta Phi, Sigma Nu and Alpha Tau Omega.

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