



Alcohol Task Force

What was the ATF?

The Alcohol Task Force (ATF) was a single-year task force chartered by the VSA in the fall of 2011 to perform a comprehensive self-study of drinking on Vassar's campus. The ATF was composed of administrators, faculty, and students and was co-chaired by VSA VP for Student Life Charlie Dobb '12 and Director of Health Education Renee Pabst.

What research did the ATF do?

The ATF, in cooperation with the Drug and Alcohol Education Committee (DEC), utilized three separate studies. It used data from the DEC's semi-annual campus-wide survey on alcohol and other drug use. In addition, it used data from a series of five focus groups conducted with students across class years and facilitated by trained peers as well as an original tracking study which asked a sample of students to track various behaviors relating to alcohol use daily for a two-week period.

What did the ATF find out?

The ATF had quite a few findings, which cannot all be completely discussed here. For additional information, please read the summary memo available on this page. Major findings include an unusually strong influence of students in perceived positions of authority on other students (sometimes in the form of initiation or hazing), dissatisfaction with the diversity of programming available on campus, and a consistent pattern of students normalizing dangerous drinking behaviors including memory loss (black or brown outs).

What are the ATF's recommendations?

Again, the ATF made a wide range of recommendations which can be seen in more detail in the accompanying summary memo. Highlights include developing training and awareness campaigns to combat hazing, developing VSA programs to incentivize creative and diverse programming, having administrators and students partner to develop a consistent message regarding drinking that student receive from the moment they set foot on campus through graduation that emphasizes safety and responsibility, and capitalizing on students' academic commitment by bringing this important conversation into the classroom and increasing faculty engagement with this issue on campus.

What's being done with the ATF findings already?

The ATF's data have already been presented to the Committee on College Life (CCL) and the VSA Council. From those conversations, the VSA and Dean of the College division have already partnered to charter a programming board with \$15,000 in funding to bring diverse new programming to campus. The charter can be downloaded from this page. Applications for the co-chairs will be available soon. The position will offer a great opportunity to proactively engage this issue. In addition, next year's Fall Leadership Conference will feature a presentation on the ATF findings as well as increased hazing prevention education.

What are next steps?

Research was the first step, but the findings now need to be implemented. The ATF sincerely hopes that administrators, faculty, and students will all read this report and respond both separately and through partnerships. Students in particular, if you have any comments or ideas about how to implement some of these recommendations or respond to this data in a new creative way, reach out to the VSA, either through your designated reps or by contacting the VSA VP for Student Life as indicated below. The VSA is eager to fund responses to these data and it is important that potential solutions to these issues come from students!

Who can I talk to for more information?

Either of the co-chairs would love to hear any feedback or responses. They can be reached at vsastudentlife@vassar.edu and repabst@vassar.edu.

In addition, if you would like to discuss anything at all about alcohol or other drugs, would like assistance with alcohol or other drug dependency or are concerned about a friend, resources are available on campus. Please reach out to healtheducation@vassar.edu for resources.

Where can I get the report?

From this page, you can download the ATF's summary memorandum issued to various offices, as well as a presentation given by the ATF to the CCL and VSA Council and the VSA's charter of the Programming Board. The complete data sets may be available upon request to either of the e-mail addresses above.

Acknowledgements

The VSA would like to thank Renee Pabst for her service as a co-chair of the ATF. In addition, it would like to thank Randy Cornelius, Chair of the Psychology Department, Jeff Carter, Head Athletic Trainer, and Terry Hanlon, Assistant Director for Residential Wellness Programs for their service on the ATF. Finally, the VSA would like to thank Dean of the College Chris Roellke for his generous financial support of the project.

Alcohol Task Force (ATF) 2011-2012: Preliminary Findings

A Partnership Between the Vassar Student Association and Office of the Dean
of the College

Prepared for the Vassar Student Association
April 1, 2012

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MEMORANDUM

FRM: Charlie Dobb, VSA VP for Student Life
 Renee Pabst, Director of Health Education

TO: Catharine Hill, President
 Chris Roellke, Dean of the College
 Jonathan Chenette, Dean of the Faculty & Chair of the Committee on Curricular Policy
 Janet Gray, Professor of Psychology & Director of Science, Technology, and Society, in her capacity as Chair of the Faculty Policy and Conference Committee
 Jeff Carter, Head Athletic Trainer, in his capacity as Chair of the Drug & Alcohol Education Committee
 Teresa Quinn, Assistant Dean of the College for Campus Activities
 David "D.B." Brown, Dean of Students
 Ed Pittman, Associate Dean of the College for Campus Life & Diversity
 Joanne Long, Dean of Studies
 Ben Lotto, Dean of Freshmen
 Belinda Guthrie, Associate Dean of the College, in her capacity as Title IX Coordinator
 Luis Inoa, Director of Residential Life

CC: Michael Moore, incoming VSA VP for Student Life

RE: Alcohol Task Force (ATF) Findings & Recommendations

DTE: April 17, 2012

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2011, the Alcohol Task Force was chartered as a joint student, faculty, administrator self-study of alcohol on campus. The Task Force used a variety of methods in addressing this task, including campus-wide surveys, focus groups, and a two-week behavioral tracking study. From its research, the Task Force has identified six specific topics for further conversation, most striking among them the profound impact of perceived student superiors on other students' drinking habits including a culture of initiation, a problematic dissatisfaction with available campus programs, concerning trends of students normalizing irresponsible and dangerous drinking behaviors including memory loss, and a consensus that the College must settle on a consistent safety oriented message regarding drinking. The Task Force makes a wide variety of recommendations, central among them collaborative efforts to educate and reduce incidents of hazing, incentivizing diverse programming on campus that is not music or dance focused, develop a consistent official message on drinking, and improve the integration of alcohol and wellness conversations into the academic environment that students have great respect for.

Introduction

The Alcohol Task Force (ATF, sometimes hereinafter the "Task Force") was chartered by the Vassar Student Association (VSA) in the fall of 2011 with the charge of

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