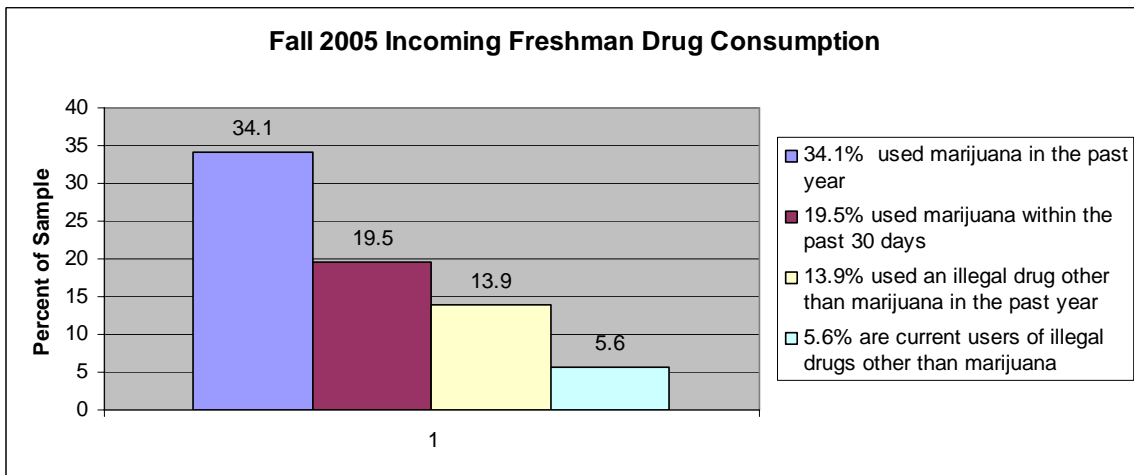
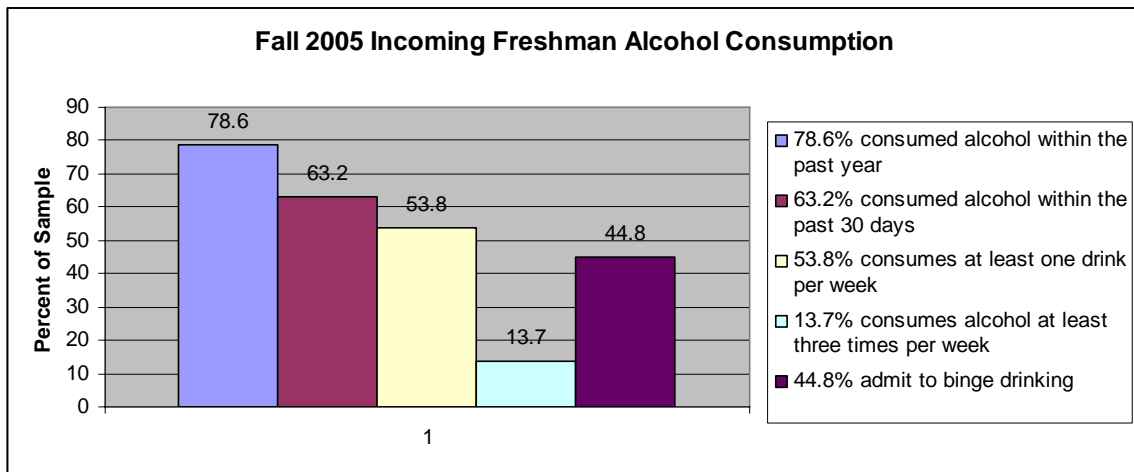
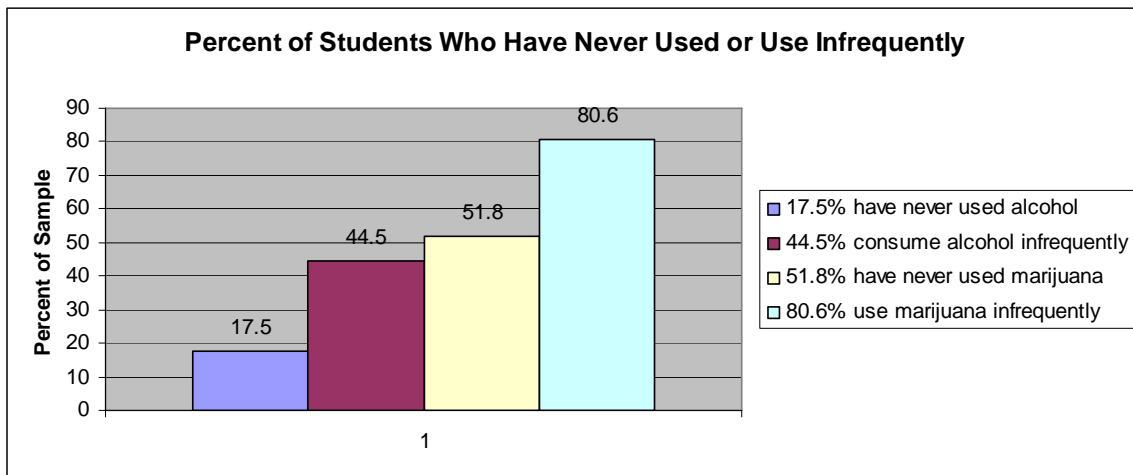


NMSU Alcohol Use
Written by
John Irvine, Director
Counseling and Student Development

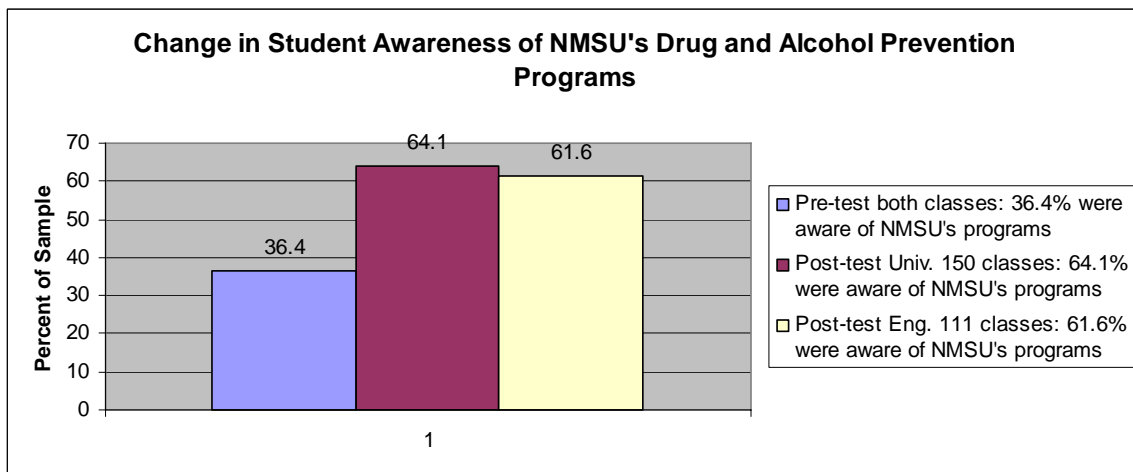
Most everyone is well aware that the use of alcohol by college students leads to a host of negative outcomes such as accidents, sexual assaults, vandalism, and academic failure. Recent national studies have attributed nearly 1700 students' deaths from alcohol abuse each year. It is often believed that when students come to college with their new found freedom and independence, the lack of previous parental and institutional controls, and ready access to alcohol, they initiate these patterns of use that lead to so many problems. We do know from both national and previous NMSU studies that it is our newest and youngest students that are at greatest risk. However, we also have strong data suggesting students come to NMSU with already well developed patterns of alcohol and other drug abuse firmly in place.



While it can be discouraging to look at these numbers and to recognize the inevitable harm that will grow from these behaviors one can also take a more positive perspective as well.



So what happens when these students come to campus with their greater autonomy, the opportunity to make new choices, and take new chances? Our data collected at the end of this past semester suggests that there is very little change in use during the 1st semester. Counter to the notion that when students come to the college campus they suddenly develop new and negative behaviors, what we found is that those who were abusing alcohol continued to do so, and those who were not also continued their pre-college patterns. The only significant change was that NMSU students gained greater knowledge and awareness of our policies and program concerning these issues.



So where does this leave us and where do we need to go from here? The college campus is not the causative factor in student substance abuse. That said, use among 1st year students remain at levels that put them at significant risk of harm from multiple sources and we clearly have a responsibility to intervene. Our efforts must be the most validated intervention and prevention strategies known to effectively reduce student harm, whether that be physical, social, or academic. You can help by (1) supporting students who make healthy choices, (2) not perpetuating the myth that all college students drink to excess, (3) bringing the topic of alcohol use into the classroom for research, readings, or discussions, and (4) talking with students you believe may have a substance abuse problem and referring them to our BASICS program (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students).

For more information about what NMSU is doing to help raise awareness about alcohol and violence issues on campus contact the Wellness, Alcohol & Violence Education (WAVE) Program at 646-2813 or PeerEd@nmsu.edu. This report is also available online at www.nmsu.edu/~wave