

Prepared for the NMSU CHANCE COMMITTEE

DATE 9/9/08

Debra Darmata, M.S.

WAVE Program Coordinator

The Amethyst Initiative raises important questions about what the social response to the critical problem of binge drinking should be, not just in college students but in the broader population as well. There are points of the Amethyst statement that we agree with; Institutions of higher education should always be places where open discussion of complex and difficult issues is welcomed, that there are tremendous painful losses as a result of drinking in this population, that in spite of the legal age students continue to have access to and abuse alcohol, and that we all need to find new ways to prepare young adults to make responsible decisions about alcohol. NMSU, regardless of the drinking age, will continue to employ the known effective best practices to reduce the harm to our students by excessive drinking. NMSU has committed important resources and support to these efforts and we will continue to do so and welcome the discovery of new ways to address this issue that is so critical across the country.

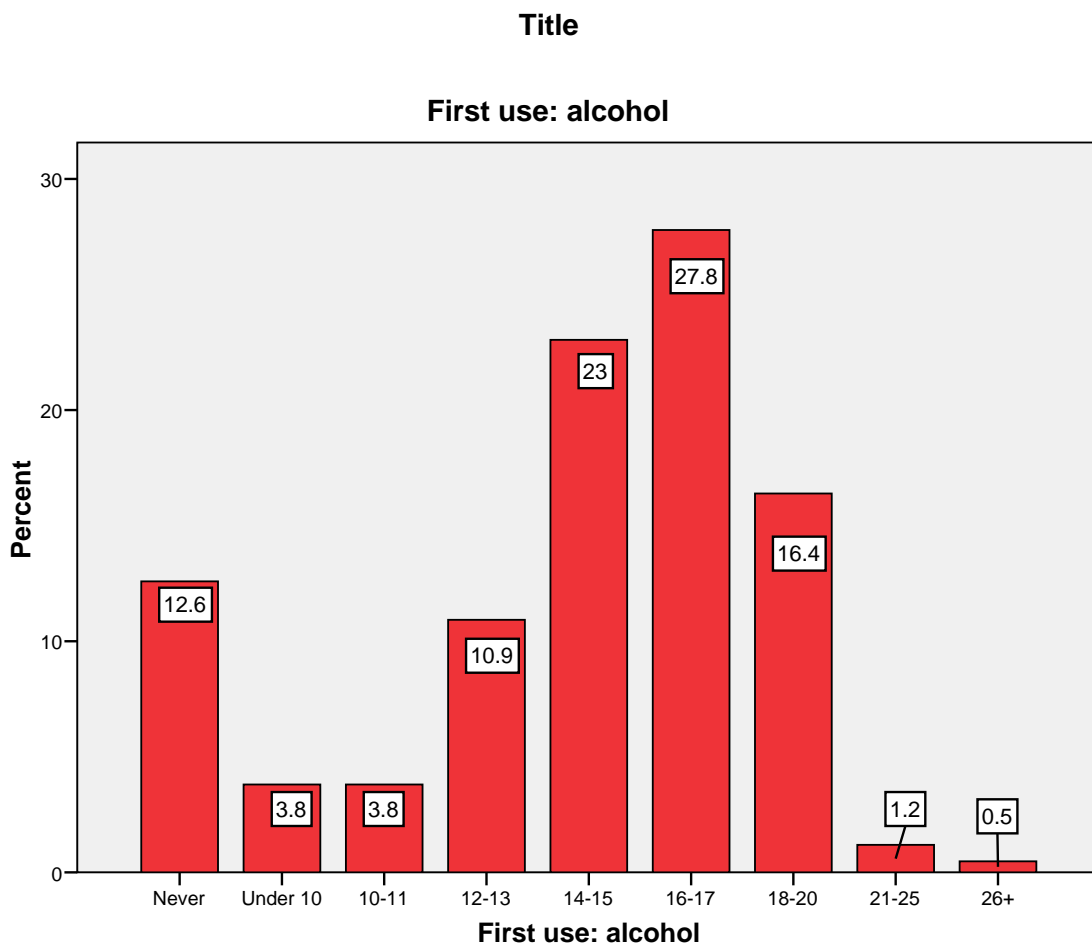
As NMSU considers taking a pro, con or otherwise neutral position on the Amethyst Initiative it is important to predict how specifically lowering the drinking age may affect NMSU students and the community at large. NMSU has several years' worth of data regarding student alcohol use via the yearly distribution of the CORE Survey. The most recent CORE 07 was distributed to a sample of NMSU students (N=426) during the fall semester of 07. When considering the issue of lowering the drinking age to 18 it makes sense to better understand the current patterns, behaviors and attitudes regarding alcohol and NMSU students, especially across age groups and across classifications. Four subgroups will be examined on several pertinent measures as follows:

1. CORE Survey 07 as a whole
2. CORE Survey 07 – legal versus underage drinkers
3. CORE Survey 07 – Freshmen versus all other classifications
4. CORE Survey 07 – Different ages

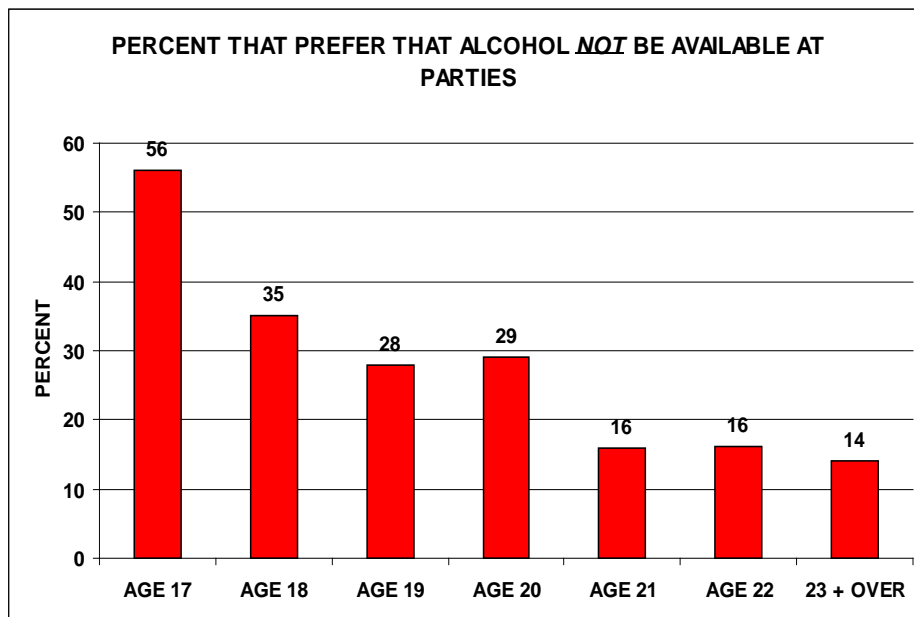
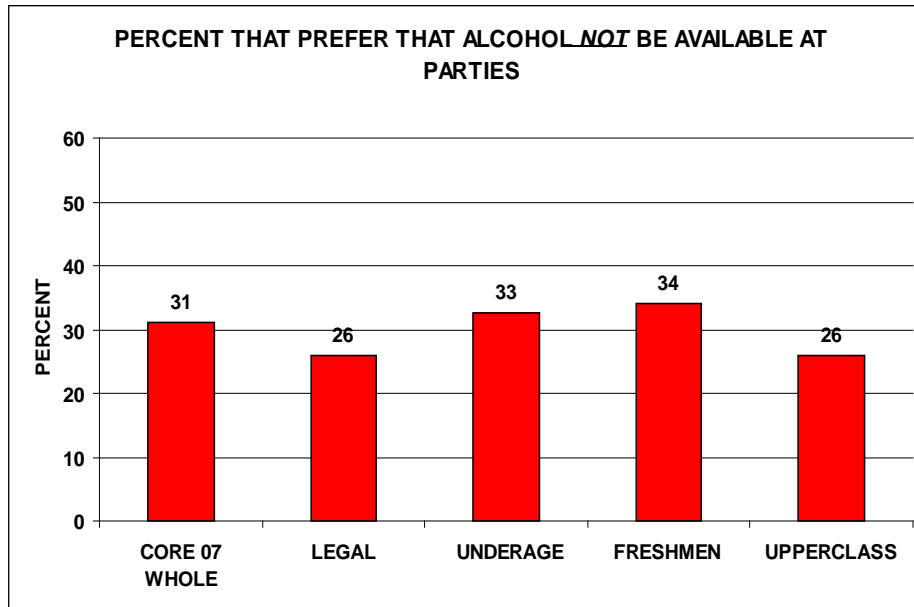
The measures include the following:

1. Desire for alcohol availability
2. Binge Drinking
3. Average # of drinks per week
4. Where students are drinking
5. Consequences of drinking

It is important to note that when asked “At what age did you first use alcohol?” Sixty nine percent of respondents acknowledge drinking prior to age 18, thus it is likely they were drinking prior to attending NMSU. Only 7.4% of respondent’s age twenty one and over reported waiting until they were of legal drinking age prior to taking their first drink. Only 13.8% of those students 20 and younger reported that they had yet to take their first drink. In addition 72% believe that NMSU cares about and is concerned about alcohol prevention, and only 8% perceive that NMSU *does not* enforce its alcohol polices.

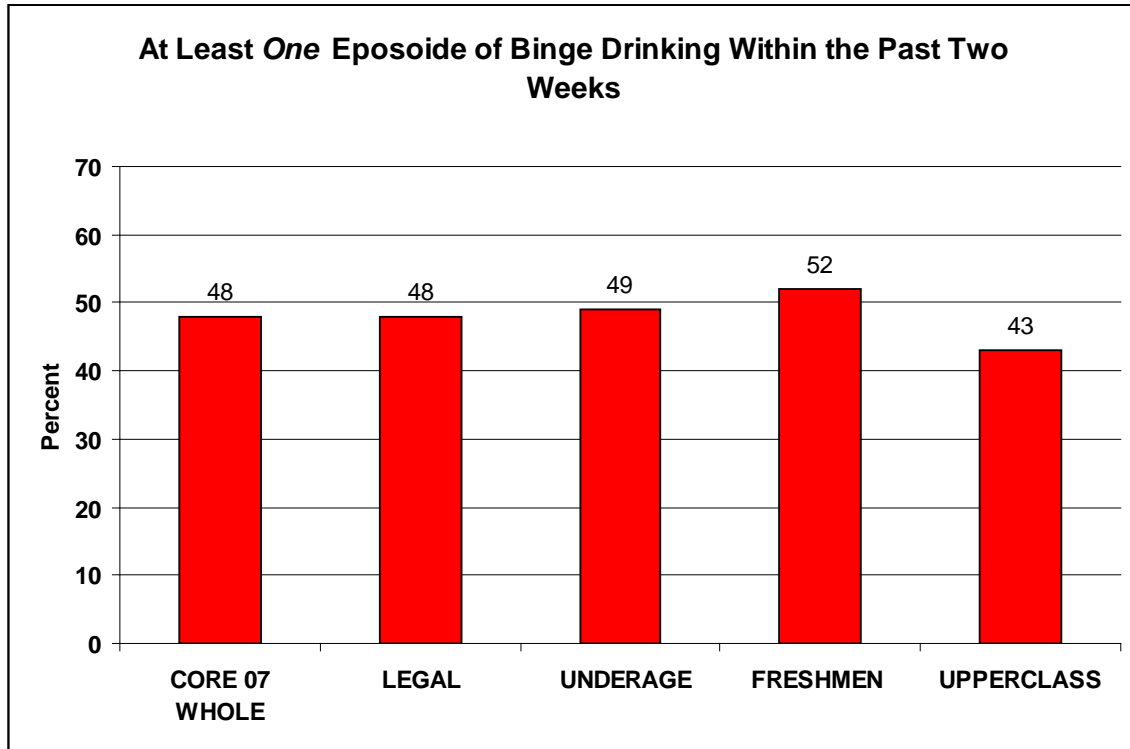


The following graphs summarize the response to the question “Do you prefer that alcohol *is or is not* available at parties?”

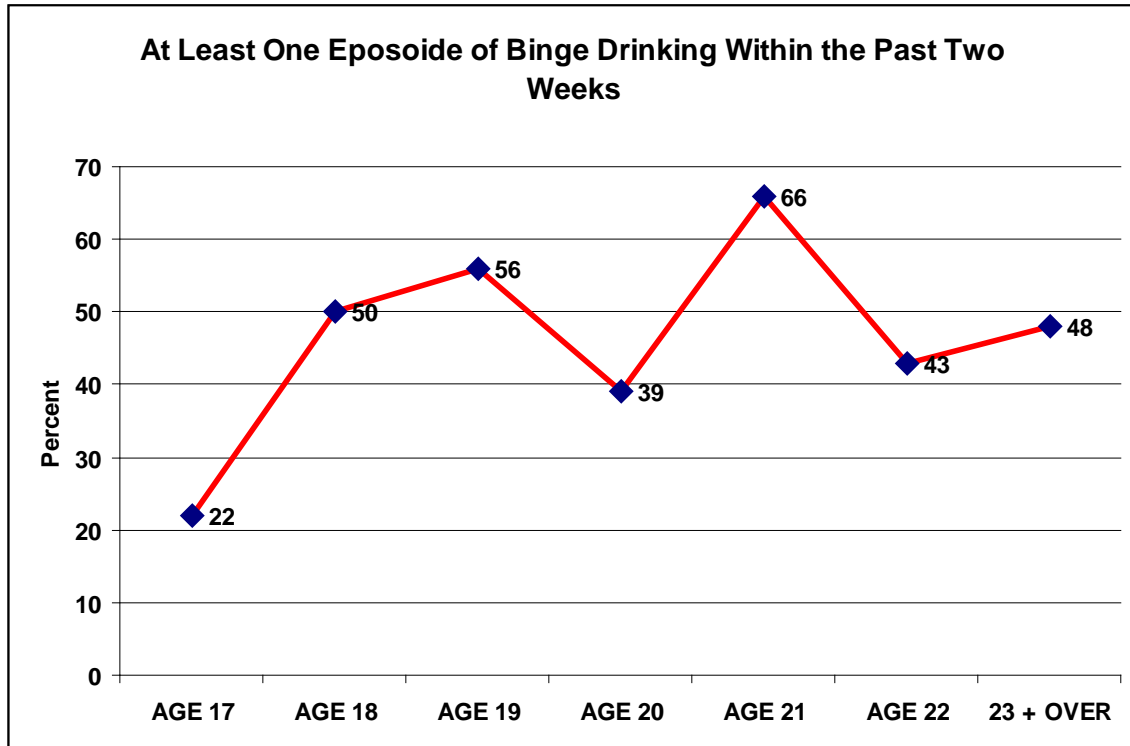


It seems clear that the pattern is for the preference for alcohol to be available at party's increases with legal status and age. It is likely that if the drinking age changed to 18 more students would prefer that alcohol be available to them at parties.

The following graphs address the issue of binge drinking as defined by 5 or more drinks within 2 hours for males and 4 or more drinks within 2 hours for females:

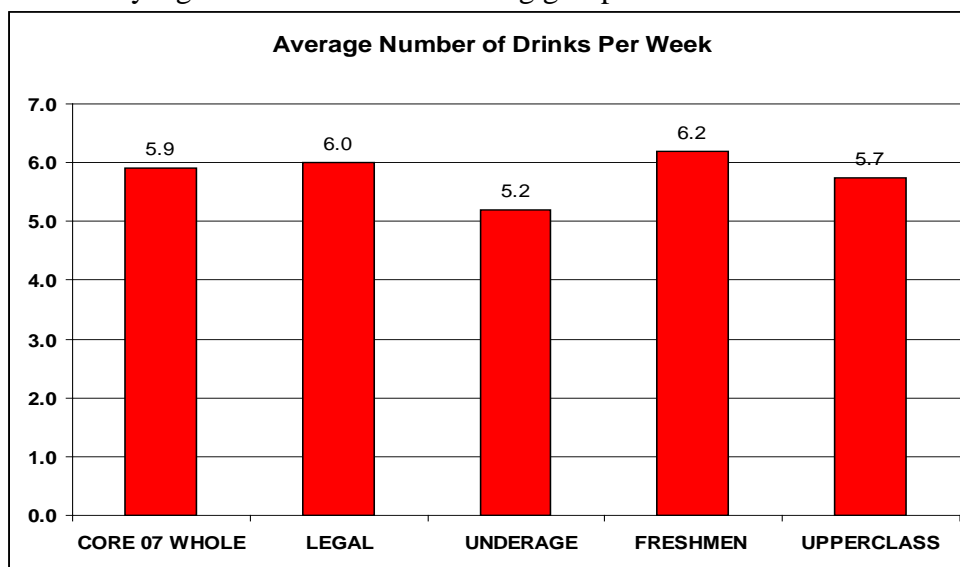


The largest difference between the above groups is between the freshmen and upperclassmen with a nine percentage point difference. It has been well documented that freshman are an "at risk" group for high risk drinking behaviors and the above confirms this notion.

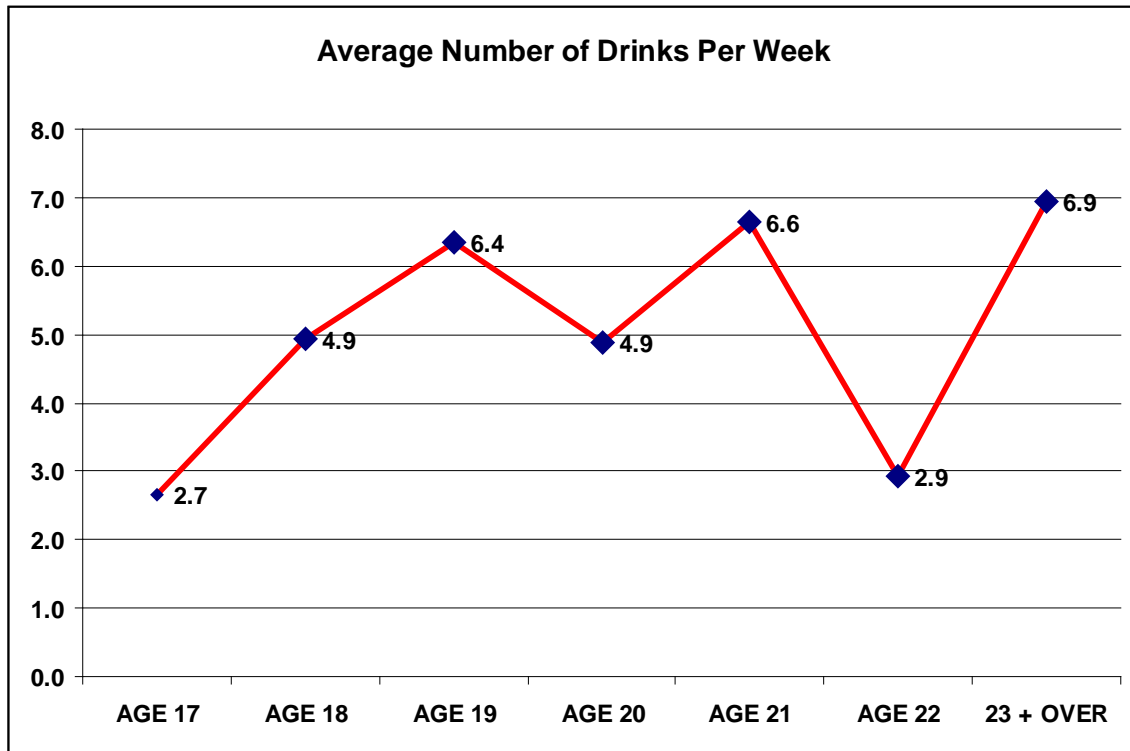


The highest rate of binge drinking occurs with 21 year olds – the beginning of drinking legally. There is a clear spike at age twenty one. The notion that alcohol loses its appeal when it becomes legal is not supported here. Would changing the legal age to 18 increase binge drinking behaviors for that group who are already high risk drinkers and developmentally much younger than their 21 year old counterparts?

The following graph describes average number of drinks per week in which there are no statistically significant differences among groups:



The following graph describes average number of drinks per week across age:



Again there is a spike at age twenty one when drinking becomes legal however performing a two sided One Way ANOVA did not reveal significant differences among groups.

The fourth measure to be examined is “where” are students drinking? The following tables describe the percentage of respondents that endorsed “yes” to the question “Where have you used alcohol?”

	NEVER	CAMPUS EVENTS	RES. HALL	FRAT-SOR
CORE 07	15	12.9	16.7	18.1
LEGAL	10.3	21.6	11.3	17.5
UNDERAGE	15.8	10.6	18.3	18.6
FRESHMEN	16	8.2	17.7	16.9
UPPERCLASS	13	19.5	15.1	20

	BAR/REST.	WHERE LIVE	CAR	PRIVATE PARTIES	OTHER
CORE 07	27.2	43.9	20	63.8	22.1
LEGAL	60.8	64.9	20.6	58.8	16.5
UNDERAGE	17.4	37.3	19.9	65.2	23.3
FRESHMEN	14.2	33.8	19.5	63.2	22.1
UPPERCLASS	43.2	55.1	20	63.8	21.1

	NEVER	CAMPUS EVENTS	RES. HALL	FRAT-SOR
17	33	0	11.1	11.1
18	16.6	9.1	18.2	16.5
19	9	7.7	17.9	21.8
20	17.5	21.1	19.3	21.1
21	2.6	31.6	15.8	28.9
22	14.3	7.1	14.3	21.4
23 +	15.9	18.2	6.8	6.8

	BAR/REST.	WHERE LIVE	CAR	PRIVATE PARTIES	OTHER
17	0	33	11	33.3	11.1
18	12.5	30.7	19.9	63.1	22.7
19	21.8	48.7	20.5	69.2	23.1
20	29.8	40.4	17.5	70.2	26.3
21	76.3	76.3	34.2	76.3	18.4
22	50	50	14.3	42.9	14.3
23 +	50	59.1	11.4	47.7	15.9

The above question is a bit difficult to interpret because endorsing “Where you live” may include residential hall or fraternity / sorority; however the pattern seems clear that decreasing the drinking age to 18 would likely promote a greater percentage of students

drinking while on campus whether that is in residential halls or at campus events. In addition there is once again a surge at age 21 of drinking with “never” being endorsed the least at age 21 with private parties, bars, and drinking where one lives being endorsed the most times at age twenty one.

There is no evidence in the first four measures, i.e., availability, binge drinking, average number of drinks, where one drinks that would suggest that making alcohol legal somehow makes it less appealing. In fact drinking seems to spike at 21 and then decrease. The last measure to consider is the consequence of alcohol. The following tables represent consequences as asked in the CORE Survey “Please indicate how often you have experienced the following due to your drinking or drug use *this past year*”.

	CORE 07	LEGAL	UNDERAGE	FRESHMEN	UPPERCLASS
HANGOVER	61.7	63	62	58	66.6
POOR TEST SCORE	25.6	28	28	25.6	26.8
TROUBLE WITH POLICE	15.3	14	16.5	16.6	14.5
DAMAGED PROP.	4.9	4.3	5.2	3.6	6.7
ARGUE/FIGHT	35.6	32.6	36.8	35.9	35.4
NAUSEOUS/VOMITED	55.1	52.2	56.3	54.7	56
DRIVEN UNDER INFLUENCE	36.8	40.2	35.2	32	41
MISSED CLASS	37.2	41.8	36.5	36.7	38.6
BEEN CRITICIZED	32.3	29.7	33.2	34	30.5
THOUGHT I HAD PROBLEM	11.7	11	12	11.2	12.4
MEMORY LOSS	28.9	30.8	28.6	29.9	28.2
REGRETTED ACTION	34.5	30	45.7	38.3	29.7
DWI	2.9	6.6	1.9	1.8	4.5
WAS SEXUALLY ASSULTED	7.8	4.3	8.7	8.5	6.7
SEXUALLY ASSULTED SOMEONE	1.9	3.3	1.6	1	3.4
TRIED BUT FAILED TO STOP	7.5	8.7	7.5	5.9	10.1
THOUGHT ABOUT SUICIDE	5.1	7.6	4.5	3.6	7.3
TRIED TO COMMIT SUICIDE	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2
BEEN HURT OR INJURED	15.3	10.9	16.4	17.3	12.4

Surprisingly both the “Legal” and “Upper class” groups faired worse in terms of consequences. There clearly seems to be an increase in driving while intoxicated which leads to an increase in DWI’s.

AGE	17	18	19	20	21	22	23 +
HANGOVER	33.3	57	71.6	67	67.6	64.3	57.1
POOR TEST SCORE	33.3	23	31.5	25	32.4	28.6	24.4
TROUBLE WITH POLICE	11.1	17.4	16.4	14.3	13.5	7.1	14.6
DAMAGED PROP.	0	4.1	6.8	7.1	5.4	0.0	4.9
ARGUE/FIGHT	44.4	35.5	34.2	43	29.7	21.4	37.5
NAUSEOUS/VOMITED	22	56.4	60	56	64.9	57.1	37.5
DRIVEN UNDER INFLUENCE	22.2	30	44	42	48.6	35.7	32.5
MISSED CLASS	33.3	36.5	38.4	34.5	51.4	35.7	33.3
BEEN CRITICIZED	33.3	32.6	37	30.4	39.0	21.4	25.6
THOUGHT I HAD PROBLEM	11.1	9.2	17.8	12.5	10.8	21.4	7.7
MEMORY LOSS	22	28.8	31.5	25	40.5	35.7	20.5
REGRETTED ACTION	33.3	37.4	38.4	27.3	36.0	42.9	20.5
DWI	0	2.3	2.7	0	2.8	7.1	10.0
WAS SEXUALLY ASSULTED	0	8.7	9.6	9	8.1	7.1	0.0
SEXUALLY ASSULTED SOMEONE	0	0.06	2.7	3.6	5.4	0.0	2.5
TRIED BUT FAILED TO STOP	0	5.3	11	10.7	10.8	14.3	5.0
THOUGHT ABOUT SUICIDE	0	2.9	4.1	11	11.1	7.1	4.9
TRIED TO COMMIT SUICIDE	0	2.3	1.4	3.6	0.0	7.1	2.4
BEEN HURT OR INJURED	22	16	13.5	20	8.1	14.3	12.5

Again there seems to be an increase of consequence at age 21. It is likely that some of the endorsement at age 22 occurred at age 21 since the survey asked about the occurrences of the past year.

In summary the data from the most recent NMSU CORE Survey clearly suggests that lowering the drinking age on this campus would likely:

1. Increase drinking on campus and in residence halls.
2. Increase driving while intoxicated and subsequent DWI's.
3. Increase problems associated with alcohol at a younger age, i.e., hangovers, memory loss, missed classes, suicide attempts, etc.
4. Increase binge drinking.

It does not appear becoming a “legal drinker” does much to decrease the allure of alcohol but in fact it seems to increase use and subsequent consequences.

Regardless of the legal drinking age the NMSU WAVE program continues in its prevention efforts by adhering to the risk reduction model. Alcohol is a dangerous drug and when misused can kill anyone regardless of age or their legal status as a drinker. The WAVE program continues to provide thousands of NMSU students with pertinent information regarding alcohol regardless of age or legal status and will continue with these efforts regardless of any potential change in the drinking law. The WAVE mission and focus remains the same.