It’s tempting to think of drinking as a harmless part of the college experience. But recent statistics show that heavy drinking among college students holds grave risks.

An estimated 1,700 college students in the United States die each year from alcohol-related injuries. Heavy drinking also plays a role in a staggering number of physical and sexual assaults, and jeopardizes students’ academic goals. (See statistics, right.)

The problem is particularly pressing in Wisconsin, which ranks first in the nation for binge and heavy drinking among adults. College students here match that trend: Surveys conducted on the University of Wisconsin campuses show that more UW students drink alcohol compared with national averages, and those who drink consume more per occasion than national averages. Both male and female students at Wisconsin state schools report an average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .10 on a typical drinking occasion. (The legal BAC for drunk driving is .08.)

“Given these indicators, I believe it’s critically important that CABHR devotes a portion of its research agenda to interventions aimed at college drinking,” says Director Michael Fendrich, Ph.D.

To stimulate collaborations on college drinking research, CABHR will host an open forum on college drinking in spring 2009. The forum is funded in part by a grant from MillerCoors.

Alcohol researchers believe that tackling college drinking requires a combination of interventions, including campus-wide alcohol education, programs to treat individual students with potential alcohol problems, and partnerships between campus and community officials to limit or control students’ access to alcohol.

Helping Students Reduce Risks
Alcohol researchers prefer to see decreases in the number of college students who drink. But because many do drink, current interventions focus on helping students reduce their risks when they imbibe. “If people make the choice to drink, we want to make sure that they are taking steps to keep their blood alcohol concentration in a safer range,” explains William DeJong, Ph.D., professor of social and behavioral sciences at the Boston University School of Public Health. Part of that process is teaching students that while small amounts of alcohol produce relaxation, larger doses have a depressive effect that outweighs those benefits, DeJong says.

Funded by a National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) grant, CABHR affiliated scientist Carol Haertlein Sells, Ph.D., and Paul Dupont, Ph.D., counseling director at UW–Milwaukee’s Norris Health Center, are studying two interventions to reach student drinkers. Their randomized, controlled trial involves 304 UW–Milwaukee freshmen who violated alcohol policy in residence halls. Participants were assigned to a group intervention known as Choices About Responsible Drinking (CARD), or a one-on-one intervention called Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS). Both interventions are supported by previous research and give students personally meaningful information—including details on calculating their BAC—that allows them to reflect on their drinking habits. The research team is now conducting follow-ups and hopes to share findings next spring.

Dr. DeJong believes it’s important to change students’ perception that heavy drinking is the norm. He recently led two large trials of social norms marketing campaigns, in which students were surveyed about their own drinking behavior and how much they believed others drank. Posters and ads were then positioned around campus to correct any exaggerated misperceptions. (For example, an ad might say, “Most students at this university drink three or fewer drinks per week.”) The social norms campaigns were effective, but only in communities that had relatively few alcohol outlets near campus. When campuses had a high concentration of bars, liquor stores, and restaurants within a three-mile radius, the marketing campaigns were relatively ineffective. UW–Milwaukee, one of the 32 schools studied, met the criteria for a high-density campus. “Our best thinking at this point,” Dr. DeJong says, “is that when you have a lot of alcohol outlets, it creates a public context where students can observe lots of other students drinking and they do not misperceive the drinking norm.”

For sources, see www.cabhr.uwm.edu.
You can learn a lot about UW–Milwaukee student life by walking south along Downer Avenue on any Thursday, Friday, or Saturday night. This is a residential neighborhood that includes both owner-occupied homes and UW–Milwaukee student rentals. When I’m out walking my dog late at night, I often observe lawns and sidewalks crowded with partying students. On a recent Thursday night, I heard violent threats traded between one group of students poised atop a balcony and another gathering angrily on the street below. I saw students stumbling precariously into a busy thoroughfare, joking about their comparative levels of inebriation. I have to be careful to avoid glass from broken beer bottles found on sidewalks and parkways in this neighborhood, a hazard for any pedestrian, but especially my dog, who is blind. There is usually no visible sign of law enforcement or neighborhood concern about the noisy revelry, and on that particular night, I could still hear the arguments when I walked back to my house a block east around midnight.

Many UW–Milwaukee faculty and administrators scratch their heads when local residents react strongly to our plans for expansion and growth. Perhaps their negative views are related to their everyday experiences with scenes like these. My observations, supported by system-level surveys of the student body, underscore the reality that problem drinking among our students is a serious crisis. Much more than UW–Milwaukee’s reputation is at stake in our failure to adequately address this problem. Episodic, high-risk drinking increases the odds of our students’ academic failure. Besides the well-publicized dangers associated with driving, high-risk drinking increases students’ vulnerability to crime victimization (including sexual assault) and accidental injuries. It also harms their short- and long-term physical and mental health and well-being.

Yet, as our lead article suggests, there are evidence-based strategies that can be taken to prevent or reduce this problem. The current programs run by Paul Dupont of UW–Milwaukee’s Norris Health Center and CABHR affiliated scientist and health sciences professor Carol Haertlein Sells are a starting point. But this is a problem that goes well beyond the bounds of our campus. Because most of our students live off campus and in the Milwaukee community, we need community-wide efforts to effectively address this problem.

This fall, CABHR scientists have met with other UW–Milwaukee faculty members and staff to discuss building a coalition of local colleges and service providers to implement and evaluate drinking prevention strategies and programs in the Milwaukee area. Our partners in this effort include CABHR scientist Todd Campbell of Marquette University and Duncan Shrout of IMPACT, a Milwaukee-area alcohol and drug treatment organization. We hope to bolster these efforts with the open forum on college drinking planned for late spring, led by national research experts including Bill DeJong of the Boston University School of Public Health, and Bob Saltz of the Prevention Research Center in Berkeley, California. For more on our forum, visit www.cabhr.uwm.edu.

This is just the beginning; the coalition will take months to build. Our efforts will require extramural funding, as well as “buy in” from colleges, businesses, community leaders, students, and our Milwaukee neighbors. As a research center devoted to addictions and mental health, we at CABHR want the implementation of evidence-based college drinking prevention strategies to be a priority for UW–Milwaukee and the broader community.

I hope you’ll consider attending the forum on college drinking, and I also welcome your thoughts on this topic. Please e-mail me at fendrich@uwm.edu.

**WHAT IS CABHR?**

Based in the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee’s Helen Bader School of Social Welfare, CABHR is a research center led by core academic scientists with broad interests in the addictions and behavioral health. CABHR conducts cutting-edge epidemiological, intervention, and clinical research. Its scientists currently hold $1.5 million in research grants.
**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Begun Receives Award to Study Social Work Instruction**  
CABHR scientist Audrey Begun, Ph.D., and Jeanne Wagner, clinical assistant professor in the department of social work, recently received a grant from the UW–Milwaukee Center for Instructional and Professional Development for their project, “Social Work Education Threshold Concepts.”

This project will explore social work students’ development related to understanding the biopsychosocial nature of human behavior. Many students struggle with this complex construct, but once they fully understand it, the knowledge transforms the way they approach other learning and social work practices, Dr. Begun says. The project involves students in several graduate and undergraduate social work courses, as well as the faculty, ad hoc instructors, and field instructors who teach them.

**CABHR Examines Assessments for IMPACT**  
CABHR scientist Lisa Berger, Ph.D., and social work graduate student Ivy Sturgen recently completed a research project on effective motivational assessments for IMPACT, a Milwaukee-area alcohol and drug treatment organization.

When clients come to IMPACT to address drinking problems, they receive an assessment that measures their motivation to change drinking behavior. Staff at IMPACT asked CABHR for help in determining if this assessment was the most accurate and appropriate instrument to measure motivation in their clients. With Dr. Berger’s guidance, Sturgen did a search of motivational assessments and identified four possible instruments for IMPACT to consider. She prepared a report of these findings to share with IMPACT.

**Israeli Researcher Speaks on Coping and Trauma**  
In September, CABHR hosted a presentation with the UW–Milwaukee department of social work on the coping skills of people facing persistent security threats. Orit Nutman-Shwartz, Ph.D., head of the social work department at Sapir College in Israel, discussed her studies of how residents of different types of Israeli communities dealt with the trauma of ongoing Qassam rocket attacks.

One study compared the coping skills of residents of development towns and kibbutzim and revealed that those in development towns experienced more post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but also more post-traumatic growth (PTG) than kibbutz residents. In another study, of Israeli college students, Dr. Nutman-Shwartz found that a sense of belonging contributed to lower stress responses, while alcohol consumption and disengagement contributed to higher stress responses.

**Heller Honored for Stellar Service**  
Mary Heller, CABHR’s administrative assistant, received an outstanding service award from UW–Milwaukee in October. Mary was honored for her exceptional service to CABHR, the Child Welfare Training Program, and the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare.

**Stoffel Heads Mental Health Board**  
CABHR scientist Ginny Stoffel, Ph.D., is currently chair of the board of directors for Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHAW) through the end of 2008. Current MHAW projects include a campaign to reduce suicides in Wisconsin, and Strong Families, Healthy Homes, a series of direct service programs to support families led by parents or caregivers with serious mental illness. MHAW is also conducting a year-long radio campaign to raise awareness about mental health and reduce stigma, which includes the efforts of CABHR scientist Jonathan Kanter, Ph.D.

Dr. Stoffel is also on the mission council for Transitional Living Services, a Milwaukee agency meeting the recovery needs of adults with serious mental illness.

**Study Targets Opioid Dependence**  
CABHR scientists Michael Fendrich, Ph.D., Lisa Berger, Ph.D., and Mike Brondino, Ph.D., recently received funding from UW–Madison through the University of Wisconsin Institute for Clinical and Translational Research.

With these funds, Drs. Fendrich, Berger and Brondino will test an intervention to provide a combination of Buprenorphine and Nalaxone to opioid-dependent participants in the Dane County drug court treatment program. They will compare office-based to clinic-based delivery of medication. The project is led by Randy Brown, M.D., of the UW–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.

**CABHR Scientists Publish Findings**  
The following journals recently accepted articles by CABHR scientists: Addictive Behaviors • Annals of Epidemiology • Archives of Sexual Behavior • Behavior Therapy • Child Abuse and Neglect • Health Psychology • Journal of Adolescence • Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse • Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology • Journal of Law and Family Studies • Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease • Journal of Sex Research • Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions • Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment • Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health • Journal of Youth and Adolescence • Psychology and Aging • Social Work.

For more details on these articles, visit www4.uwm.edu/cabhr/research_news.cfm.

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**7CS CLINIC EVOLVES AND RELOCATES TO MARQUETTE**

In 2005, CABHR scientist Todd Campbell, Ph.D., founded the 7Cs Clinic to address coexisting addiction and mental health problems among clients of the Guest House of Milwaukee, a social service agency for the homeless. This fall, 7Cs relocated to the Marquette University campus, where Dr. Campbell is an associate professor and director of the department of counseling and educational psychology (COEP). 7Cs is now part of the university’s newly formed Counseling Clinic and Research Services (CCRS), housed in the COEP department at Marquette.

The new 7Cs Clinic will maintain a relationship with the Guest House of Milwaukee, and will continue to “provide best practices to those who are least likely to receive such treatment,” Dr. Campbell says. The new on-campus headquarters suits one of the key aims of 7Cs, to train Marquette students working toward a master’s degree in community counseling (on the addiction/mental health track) or a doctorate in counseling psychology. 7Cs will provide comprehensive addiction services to Marquette students, as well as clients from the community with third party insurance. “We’re thinking of this as a teaching hospital for community mental health,” Dr. Campbell says.

The new location will also foster addictions and mental health research, including Dr. Campbell’s ongoing study, “Motivational Enhancement Therapies for Significant Others,” funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.
MEET CABHR SCIENTISTS

Paul Florsheim, Ph.D.
CABHR Scientist, Associate Professor of Social Work, UW–Milwaukee

A specialist in adolescent mental health and treatment programs for high-risk youth, Dr. Florsheim joins UW–Milwaukee and CABHR this fall after 15 years at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. He continues to lead the ongoing Young Parenthood Program in Utah, a five-year study of interventions to build the interpersonal skills of teen parents and help young mothers and fathers work together as co-parents. Early findings suggest that the program has reduced intimate partner violence among participants. The U.S. Office of Population Affairs funds the project, and Dr. Florsheim hopes to launch a similar program for teen parents in Milwaukee.

His research interests include relapse prevention programs for teens with substance use disorders. A licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Florsheim has worked as a clinician and supervisor in adolescent treatment programs and educational settings. He also studies early intervention and detection among adolescents with genetic risk for schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Supported by a grant from the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health, he travels several times a year to the Republic of Palau in Micronesia. This island’s psychosis and schizophrenia rates are two to three times higher than most populations, making it an ideal place to examine cultural issues related to the treatment of youth at risk for psychosis.

Dr. Florsheim holds joint appointments in the Helen Bader School of Social Work and the Center for Urban Population Health at UW–Milwaukee. He is currently working with faculty members including CABHR Director Michael Fendrich, Ph.D., university administrators, and community partners to launch a School of Public Health at UW–Milwaukee. For details, visit www4.uwm.edu/publichealth/council.cfm.

For profiles of other CABHR scientists, visit www4.uwm.edu/cabhr/facstaff.cfm

CABHR LAUNCHES MAJOR STUDY OF RISK BEHAVIOR IN WOMEN

CABHR scientist Laura Otto-Salaj has received a five-year, $2.9 million grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to study the causes of risk behaviors among African American women in Milwaukee housing developments.

A specialist in the intersection of substance use and HIV sexual risk behaviors in women, Dr. Otto-Salaj says she has often been frustrated by the lack of research on what triggers risky choices. “We have some ideas, but we don’t really know for sure,” Dr. Otto-Salaj says. Part of the problem is the women who engage in risk behaviors often have complicated histories, involving factors such as sexual abuse and mental illness, and most studies don’t address that complexity. “I have a feeling that the methods and interventions that we’ve been using are just too simplistic,” she says. “The result is that a lot of risk reduction interventions just don’t work as well as we’d like.”

To address this lack of information, Dr. Otto-Salaj’s team will recruit 398 African American women between the ages of 18 and 45, randomly selected from units in Milwaukee housing developments. She and her team will interview participants nine times over twelve months, asking them questions on topics such as their sexual risk, alcohol and drug use, experiences of physical and sexual abuse, current levels of victimization, personal and family history of mental illness, and violence in their communities. The team will analyze their answers, hoping to spot what leads some women to pursue risk behaviors while others are resilient and avoid those risks.

Dr. Otto-Salaj will hire five or six full-time staff members to run the project. One of her main tasks, she says, is to select a project coordinator “who knows Milwaukee housing developments inside and out.” The project team will also include CABHR scientists Michael Brondino, Ph.D., Susan Rose, Ph.D., and Michael Fendrich, Ph.D.

WHAT WORKS WITH COLLEGE DRINKERS? continued from page 1

Taking a Comprehensive Approach
Promising new research attempts to tackle the environmental factors that encourage student drinking. Bob Saltz, Ph.D., senior scientist at the Prevention Research Center in Berkeley, California, recently conducted the Safer California Universities Project, a five-year NIAAA study of 14 campuses, including seven interventions sites and seven comparison sites. After conducting web-based surveys, Dr. Saltz and his team focused on off-campus parties, because they produced the most alcohol-related problems compared with other settings.

The interventions included multiple alcohol-control measures, such as decoy operations to ensure that retailers checked IDs before selling alcohol, DUI checkpoints, and “party patrols” of campus and city police, designed to respond to out-of-control parties. “The focus wasn’t on trying to catch underage drinkers,” Saltz explains. “It was about preventing potential hosts from throwing dangerous parties.” In some study cities, local governments passed ordinances to fine hosts who held multiple parties that required police intervention. Such enforcement activities were highly publicized, and Dr. Saltz believes that was an essential step. “I see the enforcement measures as a way to communicate the community’s culture and norms,” he says.

The interventions were successful. Researchers saw the likelihood of intoxication at off-campus parties drop by 20 percent, and intoxication at bars and restaurants decrease by about 25 percent per campus, compared with schools with no interventions. “In just one semester, that translates to something like 6,000 fewer drinking incidents at off-campus parties,” Dr. Saltz says, “and another 4,000 fewer at bars and restaurants.” A journal article reporting these results is currently under review, and Dr. Saltz and his team just received funding to continue the study by attempting to replicate the interventions at the seven comparison schools.

What’s Next?
Scientists are eager to review the latest findings, and Dr. DeJong says more studies are needed of environmental approaches in particular. But, he points out, such approaches are expensive to study with rigorous test design. Still, the effort to address heavy drinking on college campuses is worthwhile. “We are wasting the talent of the best and brightest in our country,” he says.