Evaluating Carleton College’s Alcohol Policy
Part II
Carleton College’s Alcohol Policy relies heavily on the use of educational materials to support its students’ responsible drinking behaviors. However, the policy fails in that it relies too heavily on these programs and does not place enough emphasis on changing the environment in which students drink. Specifically, the policy lacks cooperation between the College and the Northfield Police Department. Yet, the overall problem with the policy is the vague language used to skirt main issues. This irresponsible policy shifts blame away from college and onto the students through the idea of personal responsibility. Therefore, through a policy of non-action that does not take a clear stance against high risk drinking Carleton College indirectly condones such behavior.

Carleton’s Alcohol Policy relies heavily on education about drinking safely. The policy encourages students to make responsible choices when choosing to imbibe through programs and pamphlets from The Student Wellness Center. However, as the authors of the analysis of the 2001 Harvard Survey state, “We noted no difference between level of binge drinking at an institution and exposure to direct educational materials.” Thus, it has been proven that educational materials have relatively low impact on student drinking behavior. Yet Dean Govoni states in his March 15th letter that “We remain committed to alcohol education though research demonstrates that most educational programs have low

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1 Mark Govoni, Appendix #3 “Student Drinking at Carleton.” *Communications from the Dean of Students, Carleton College.* 15 March 2004. 7 November, 2004 <http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/dos/communications/?story_id=44480>

impact on student choice.”³ By speaking about educational programs in general, Govoni does not acknowledge that the educational programs at Carleton are ineffective. This fact is evident in that of the 20 programs offered in the 2003-2004 school year, there were 150 total students present.⁴ Likewise, despite the increase in educational programs over the past ten years, the weighted percentage of students engaging in high risk drinking behavior, binge drinking, has increased eleven percent over that same time period.⁵ Therefore Carleton relies too heavily on an ineffective educational policy to combat high risk drinking behavior.

As recent research has shown, alcohol policies emphasizing the reduction of environmental factors that lead to drinking will lead to a decrease in high risk drinking behavior. The most recent study released on college drinking from the Harvard School of Public Health’s College Alcohol Study reveals that environmental factors have a profound affect on students’ drinking behaviors: “at the five program schools that incorporated more of the AMOD-recommended environmental policies and programs significant changes were noted in drinking and related harms.”⁶ In essence, Carleton’s Alcohol policy relies on environmental control of drinking. The college implements such environmental changes suggested by the AMOD program such as “requiring the registration for purchasers of kegs; expansion of substance-free residence halls; and the

³ Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.” Communications from the Dean of Students, Carleton College. 15 March 2004. 7 November, 2004 <http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/dos/communications/?story_id=44480>
⁴ Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.”
⁵ The weighted percentage of students defined as binge drinkers went from 37% in 1993 to 48% in 2004. Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study. 5-Year Cover Report for CHB/CAS, 4.
⁶ “Press Release: Evaluation Finds Success In Some Town-Gown Partnership to Reduce High-Risk College Drinking.”
promotion of alcohol-free activities.”\(^7\) Therefore, it can be said that through its implementation of programs proven to reduce drinking Carleton makes a valid attempt to curb high risk drinking behavior.

However, Carleton fails to incorporate all the environmental changes suggested by the Harvard Study that lead to reductions in harmful drinking. One such issue is the lack of an attempt to keep “alcohol-related items out of student bookstores.”\(^8\) The Carleton Bookstore carries eight different types of alcohol glassware, each one baring the name of the College.\(^9\) One glass totes different filling levels for freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, each one increasing incrementally.\(^10\) This last glass encourages students to drink throughout their time at Carleton and to drink more heavily as time progresses. By not taking a stance against these items, the college is in fact promoting drinking though its official policy states otherwise.

Similarly, Carleton’s Alcohol Policy fails to foster a strong connection with the local authorities and the Northfield community at large to combat high risk drinking behavior. Two other environmental programs suggested by the Harvard Study which Carleton does not implement are “mandatory training for responsible beverage service; [and] prohibiting the selling of alcohol without a license.”\(^11\) In his letter on “Student

\(^7\)”Press Release: Evaluation Finds Success In Some Town-Gown Partnership to Reduce High-Risk College Drinking.”

\(^8\)”Press Release: Evaluation Finds Success In Some Town-Gown Partnership to Reduce High-Risk College Drinking.”


\(^10\)“Carleton College Gifts-Mugs & Glassware,” Carleton Bookstore.

Drinking at Carleton,” Dean Govoni rarely mentions the Northfield authorities except in reference to the lack of their presence: “NPD have an occasional presence, but do not routinely conduct surveillance on campus.”12 Similarly, in reference to the Crime Blotter in the local newspaper, Dean Govoni writes that “the Deans Office does not routinely contact students whose names appear in print.”13 Instead of working in conjunction with each other to combat high risk drinking, Carleton and the Northfield Police department work independently of each other.

Therefore, through its current Alcohol Policy, Carleton has created two separately governed jurisdictions, that of on-campus and that of off-campus. To Carleton, “Off-campus units . . .are the province of the NPD. Though the College reserves the right to hold students accountable for off-campus behavior, such cases are rare, though not unprecedented. The downtown scene . . .is pretty much off the radar screen.”14 Therefore, Carleton allows the Police department take care of situations off-campus and the Police Department allows Carleton take care of situations on-campus. Yet research suggests that off-campus parties are the locations at which students drink most frequently and believe they are least likely to be caught.15 This information combined with the statistic from the Harvard Study that “off-campus parties and off-campus bars were the

12 Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.”
13 Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.”
14 Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.”
15 “More students believed they were likely to be caught drinking at on-campus venues over the four surveys, whereas fewer students believed this to be the case for off-campus venues over time.” Henry Wechsler, Jae Eun Lee, Toben Nelson, Meichun Kuo, “Underage Students’ Drinking Behavior, Access to Alcohol, and the Influence of Deterrence Policies.” Journal of American College Health, Volume 58, Number 5, 227.
locations where students were likely to report drinking and heavy drinking”\textsuperscript{16} leads one to deem Carleton’s Policy ineffective. Thus, the students can take advantage of this weakness in the college’s policy to not only drink illegally, but also to engage in drinking behaviors Carleton specifically bans such as progressives.

Yet, the greatest flaw in the policy centers about its use of vague language to curtail main issues. Carleton’s Policy falls back on the statement that “this policy is effectively a federal mandate – all state alcohol laws prohibit alcohol consumption by those under 21.”\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, the College does not condone high risk behavior, but it does not take a clear stance against it either: “When students chose to drink or participate in events involving drinking, they assume risks inherent in those decisions.”\textsuperscript{18} The College is not looking out for the best interest of its students. John Burnham describes the reliance of alcohol sellers on the idea of personal responsibility, “the substance and the marketers of the substance were blameless. Rather, responsibility lay with those who used alcohol.”\textsuperscript{19} Carleton’s policy echoes this idea, placing the idea of responsible drinking into the hands of the students. Therefore, it is out of their hands when something goes wrong with one of its students.

Therefore, through a policy of non-action that does not take a clear stance against high risk drinking Carleton College indirectly condones such behavior. Its reliance upon

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\item[18] Mark Govoni, “Student Drinking at Carleton.”
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educational materials to prevent high risk drinking behavior has shown mediocre results at best. At the same time, the lack of incorporation of environmental changes to curb high risk drinking including cooperation with local authorities has lead to an increase in the amount of binge drinking by students. An educational policy combined with one that attempts to change the environment in which students chose to drink would be the most effective at curbing high risk drinking behavior.