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New Insights on College Drinking

Psychologists' research is pinpointing who is most at risk for drinking problems in college and developing more targeted, evidence-based interventions.

At the University at Albany in 2000, Chad Waxman fit the profile of a college student primed for risky drinking: A freshman male fraternity brother who drank in high school, Waxman chose Albany in part for its balance between work and play. "I wanted that time to let loose," he says.

Despite the predictors, Waxman sailed through college in health and happiness, even serving in student government and winning multiple leadership awards at the university before graduating in 2003. He went on to earn his master's degree in counseling psychology and school counseling from Albany in 2005 and is now a PsyD candidate at Nova Southeastern University.

How did Waxman, now 33, avoid the pitfalls of drinking common among college students? That's a question psychologists are probing deeply. After all, each year, more than 1,825 college students die from alcohol-related accidents and nearly 600,000 are injured while drunk, according to a 2009 study in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. Another 696,000 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking, and 97,000 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape, the study found.

Then there's the 25 percent of college students who report academic consequences related to alcohol — a hangover can quickly derail plans for class or study — and the 11 percent who admit damaging property after a night of drinking (Journal of American College Health, 2002). An estimated 5 percent get into legal trouble as a result of alcohol, the same study found. In all, of the 80 percent of college students who drink alcohol, half "binge drink," or consume about four drinks in two hours for women and five in two hours for men, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). To read more about this research, please click here.

To read more about Underage and College Drinking, click here.