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New Study Says Less College Freshmen Drink Alcohol

A recent University of California-Los Angeles survey found that the number of college freshmen who reported drinking is at a record low, but some students at Ohio State don't believe the statistics.

According UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program's annual study, 33.4 percent of the nearly 200,000 full-time freshmen who responded to the survey reported drinking beer "occasionally" or "frequently" in the last year. This was a drop from the 35.4 percent of freshmen in 2011 and the more than 70 percent in the late 1970s, the 2011 study reported.

The 2012 study that only 39.2 percent of the surveyed freshmen drank wine or liquor compared to 41.1 percent in 2011.

The study doesn't provide evidence to explain the downward trend, and some OSU students are unsure of what factors could have caused a decline.

"It doesn't really make sense to me," said Jaclyn Ingham, a second-year in nursing. "That just seems like a really big variation between the years if it's gone down that much."

Brianna Thacker, a second-year in Spanish, expressed a similar opinion of the survey results. "I guess it's sort of surprising," Thacker said. "You kind of think it would increase."

One possible factor Thacker suggested to explain the low numbers was the possibility that some responders failed to tell the truth. "Maybe they're not admitting it," Thacker said. "It's hard to believe that little amount parties."

Emily Pavkov, a fourth-year in sociology, also said she thought that the statistics were questionable after reflecting on her own college experience.

"It doesn't sound accurate to me," she said. "Based on my freshman year, we'd go out three nights a week. All of the people on my floor went out."

Pavkov said she would anticipate higher numbers if a similar survey was conducted at OSU.

"I think I'd probably guess ours is around 50 to 60 percent," Pavkov said. "There's a lot of parties around here."

While OSU students did not participate in the study, freshmen at other Ohio universities such as Case Western Reserve University, Miami University, Ohio University and Otterbein University were surveyed.

Whatever it is that leads adolescents to begin drinking, once they start they face a number of potential health and safety risks. Young people who drink are more likely to be sexually active and to have unsafe, unprotected sex; are more likely to be involved in a fight, commit violent crimes, fail at school, use other drugs, and experience verbal, physical, or sexual violence. And those who start drinking before age 15 are five times more likely to develop alcoholism later in life than those who begin drinking at age 21. (See "NCADD Fact Sheet On Underage Drinking")