

Debunking myths about university and alcohol

Just who drinks the most around here anyway? And what is all that alcohol doing to our brains?

by Deena Kinarthy

The rumor is out there—the University of Victoria is a party school.

Our university subculture has a loose reputation as a place where you can do the things you were told not to do as teenagers: free sex, free booze, free experimentation.

UVic's 18,000 undergraduate students, the majority of whom are between the ages of 18 and 28, know how and where to party.

What they don't know, or don't care to acknowledge, is that too much alcohol can cause permanent damage to brain function, relationships, and life after school.

What is worse, you may become an alcoholic while at school and not even realize it.

To find out how UVic students really drink, the *Martlet* informally surveyed 50 random students from various majors and asked them what major they thought drank the most.

Almost everyone amusedly mentioned the "engineers," but according to the survey, while your social peer group may influence your partying and drinking habits, it varies greatly from individual to individual.

The Fine Arts students party the hardest, according to our survey. Theatre majors scored high, as did psychology majors.

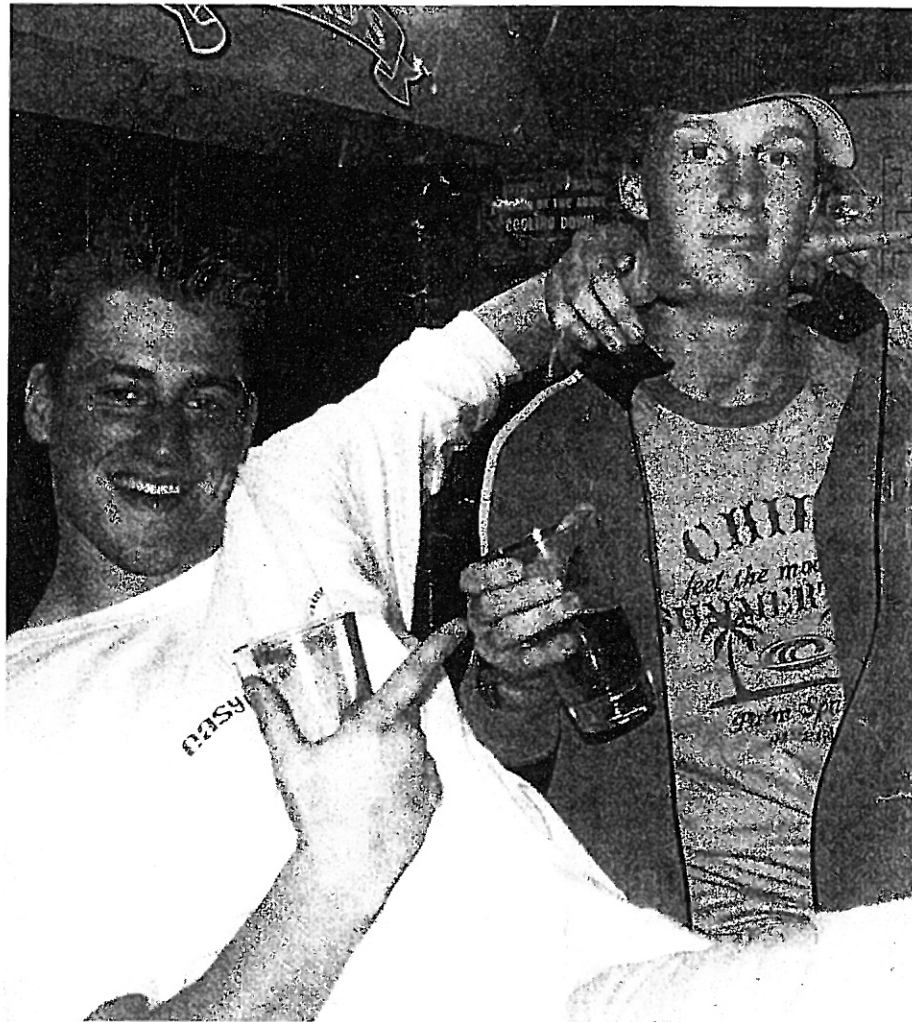
Both groups partied frequently and either drank 3–5 drinks each time, drank until they got drunk, or drank so much they didn't remember how much they actually did drink.

"It's hard to tell who drinks more," said Alex Warrington, a fourth year psychology major. "I know a lot of psychology students, but I also am friends with a lot of people in drama, and they have a night life culture of drinking."

Director of campus Health Services Dr. Bill Dyson believes that today alcohol is used more often as a tool for escape than celebration. Dyson says that many students facing the anxieties and pressures of university turn to alcohol to alleviate their fears and to self-medicate.

"Since alcohol acts as a depressant and numbs the brain... in excess it often leads to depression," said Dyson.

Excessive amounts of alcohol can also cause permanent brain damage. Studies show that binge drinking kills brain cells needed for stud-



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University may be the time to cut loose and experiment, but alcohol can seriously impair brain function, which is not so good for the grades.

ies. The American Journal of Medicine reports "very heavy drinking over many years, especially without adequate food intake and proper nutrition, can cause permanent damage to the brain such as complete memory loss, including the inability to learn new material."

Director of Student Services David C. Clode agrees UVic has recently become known as one of those schools where binge drinking—consuming five or more drinks for a man and four or more drinks for a woman on a single occasion—is a problem. With the easy

availability of alcohol in liquor stores near campus, economics could be to blame: a number of new liquor stores opened near campus in the past year, Cadboro Bay village replaced a deli with a wine and beer store last year, and a new liquor store opened near Hillside Mall.

Contractors of the new Tuscany Market at Mackenzie and Shelbourne are building a liquor supermarket. This new store could push other outlets in town to lower their prices to maintain a competitive edge on business, resulting in

cheaper booze available for UVic students.

A lot of first year students can't drink legally, so to get it out of their system, many students binge drink and party the first week of classes and then buckle down. One Residence Advisor who did not want to give her name said, "The first week is out-of-control before rules are enforced." Another R.A. predicts that many freshmen will inevitably drink until they pass out or get alcohol poisoning.