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TOWARD CHANGING A CULTURE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE

AT A RESEARCH INSTITUTION:

UNDERSTANDING ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING

A Dissertation in

Higher Education

by

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ABSTRACT

According to a 2008 study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, “binge drinking is a substantial and growing health problem” and is the third leading cause of death in the United States. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) estimates that there are 1,700 deaths from alcohol-related incidents on U.S. campuses each year, and half of them involve students under 21 years of age. Alcohol consumption is one factor that has been shown to have a relationship to poor academic performance.

Campus administrators make decisions about alcohol policy and program changes with little understanding of how decisions are made or what criteria should be used to make these decisions. The purpose of this case study is to understand decision-making by the leadership in Student Affairs at the Pennsylvania State University during a period of crisis that was precipitated by excessive use of alcohol by students. Specifically, this case study provides insights into how decisions were made, and what contextual factors were considered in the decision-making process, during a two-year timeframe from the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2011.

Three events sparked a response from the Student Affairs leadership to reduce the negative consequences associated with student alcohol consumption: (1) *Princeton Review* named Penn State the number-one party school, which generated an increase in media attention; (2) the number of student alcohol violations and BAC levels of student transported to the hospital were increasing; and (3) a first-year student died in a highly publicized alcohol-related incident.
In this study, four decision-making models were adopted to frame the Student Affairs leadership’s decision-making processes as it sought to reduce students’ excessive consumption of alcohol. The models were synthesized and expanded upon to illustrate student affairs’ decision-making processes. Two ways of making decisions were identified through this case study. The first approach involves decisions made regarding policies and initiatives that were housed within the Division of Student Affairs. The second approach involves decisions that require campus and community partners.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ viii

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... ix

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................. x

Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
   Significance of the Study .......................................................................................... 3
   The Case ................................................................................................................... 4
   Methods ................................................................................................................... 6
   Organization of this Dissertation ............................................................................ 8

Chapter 2 Alcohol and United States Higher Education ........................................ 9
   Alcohol Abuse ........................................................................................................ 9
   Alcohol in Higher Education ................................................................................ 10
   The Response Outside of Higher Education ......................................................... 13
   Recommendations for Colleges and Universities ................................................. 16
      Four Tiers for reducing alcohol abuse ................................................................. 16
      3-in-1 Framework ............................................................................................... 22
   What Colleges and Universities Have Done ........................................................ 24
   Administrators ...................................................................................................... 26
   The Case ................................................................................................................ 27
   Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................ 33
      Decision-Making Models ..................................................................................... 33
      Experiential Knowledge ...................................................................................... 39

Chapter 3 Methodology .............................................................................................. 41
   Case Study ............................................................................................................. 41
   Methods .................................................................................................................... 43
      Document Collection ............................................................................................ 43
      Pilot Study ............................................................................................................ 44
      Main Study ........................................................................................................... 44
      Participant Selection and Recruitment ............................................................. 45
      Participants .......................................................................................................... 46
      Interviews ............................................................................................................. 48
      Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 49
      Data Verification .................................................................................................. 50
   Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 51

Chapter 4 Community and Case Narrative ............................................................ 52
We Are… Penn State.................................................................53
A Drinking School with a Football Problem ........................................54
The Perfect Storm ........................................................................63
  Increased media attention .................................................................63
  Increase in BAC and violations .........................................................65
  Student Death .............................................................................68
Presentation to the Board of Trustees ....................................................73
Faculty Senate Committee on Student Life .........................................74

Chapter 5 Initiatives........................................................................76

The Individual..................................................................................78
  “The Gold Standard”: BASICS .......................................................79
  “Can’t Just Be Late-Night Programs”: Developing a Comprehensive
    Plan ......................................................................................91
  “I Was a Drunk Student”: Collegiate Recovery Community ..........94
  “Fans… Should Not Have to Put up with That”: Alcohol Related Issues
    at Football Games .................................................................100
The Student Body as a Whole ............................................................103
  “Early Intervention and Awareness Helps”: Penn State SAFE ....104
  “Evidence Be Damned”: Dry Residence Halls ............................110
  “Encouraged to Do the Right Thing”: Responsible Action Protocol...112
The Institution and Surrounding Community ....................................115
  “Representative of the Student Population”: Student Advisory Council ..116
  “A Holiday without a Holiday”: State Patty’s Day ......................118
  “Biggest Party in the State”: Football Tailgating ........................128
  “Expanding the Footprint of Alcohol”: Athletic Venues ..........133
Summary of Analysis ........................................................................141
  Common Occurrences in Decisions made by Student Affairs ........142
  Decisions Exclusive to Student Affairs .........................................145
  Decisions with University and Community Partners ....................150
Epilogue: Case Update .....................................................................154

Chapter 6 Discussion, Implications and Conclusions ..........................161

Summary of Key Findings ..................................................................162
  Decisions exclusive to student affairs ........................................164
  Decisions with University and community partners .....................167
Limitations of this Study .................................................................170
Implications for Practice ..................................................................171
  Common Practices .................................................................172
  Uncommon Practices ...............................................................173
Implications for Future Research .......................................................176
Conclusion ....................................................................................178
References.................................................................................................................. 183

Appendix A..................................................................................................................... 203
   Letter of participation for social science research ................................................. 203

Appendix B..................................................................................................................... 204
   Informed consent form for social science research ............................................. 204

Appendix C..................................................................................................................... 206
   List of participants ............................................................................................... 206

Appendix D..................................................................................................................... 207
   General interview questions .............................................................................. 207

Appendix E..................................................................................................................... 208
   Questions for Vice President of Student Affairs .............................................. 208

Appendix F..................................................................................................................... 210
   Questions for police ............................................................................................. 210

Appendix G..................................................................................................................... 211
   Questions for individuals identified by snowball sampling .............................. 211

Appendix H..................................................................................................................... 212
   Initiatives presented to the BOT ........................................................................ 212
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: 3-in-1 Framework ................................................................. 23
Figure 2.2: Alcohol intervention timeline, August 2009 to August 2010 .............. 31
Figure 2.3: Alcohol intervention timeline, September 2010 to August 2011 ........ 32
Figure 2.4: Dynamic model of organizational decision-making ....................... 37
Figure 4.1: Average BAC for students transported to hospital ......................... 66
Figure 4.2: Students transported to hospital ............................................ 67
Figure 4.3: Alcohol charges processed by Office of Judicial Affairs .................. 67
Figure 5.1: 3 in 1 Framework .................................................................. 77
Figure 5.2: Alcohol intervention timeline individual ..................................... 79
Figure 5.3: Alcohol intervention timeline for student body ............................... 104
Figure 5.4: Alcohol intervention timeline for institution and community ............. 116
Figure 5.5: Comparison of calls for service ............................................. 119
Figure 5.6: Calls made to the State College Police department on State Patty’s Day weekend ................................................................. 121
Figure 5.7: Alcohol charges processed by Office of Judicial Affairs ................. 156
Figure 5.8: Alcohol charges processed by Office of Residence Life ................. 156
Figure 5.9: State College Police calls for service ....................................... 158
Figure 6.1: Decisions exclusive to student affair ........................................ 166
Figure 6.2: Decisions with University and community partners ....................... 169
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Four Tiers of Evidence-Based Programs and Initiatives………………………….18
Table 4.1: Student Alcohol Data.......................................................................................66
Table 5.1: BASICS short term efficacy..............................................................................83
Table 5.2: State College Police Calls and Arrests for State Patty’s Weekend.................121
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Chapter 1

Introduction

University administrators across the United States have been working to reduce student alcohol use and abuse on college campuses for generations. At Princeton in 1807, several students were disciplined and expelled for getting drunk during the academic year (Horowitz, 1987; Wood, 2009). According to a 2008 study in the American Journal of Epidemiology, “binge drinking is a substantial and growing health problem” and is the third leading cause of death in the United States (Ahern, Hubbard, Midanik, & Syme, p. 1041). “High risk” alcohol use or “binge drinking” (H. Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), defined as four drinks for females and five drinks for males during a two hour period, has increased over the past decade among the college student population (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2004; H. Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) estimates that there are 1,700 deaths from alcohol-related incidents on U.S. campuses each year, and half of them involve students who are under 21 years of age (NIAAA, 2002a, 2011). Hingson and associates, among others, show that a significant number of assaults, incidents of vandalism, and negative academic consequences are associated with students who have excessively consumed alcohol (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005; Hingson, Heeren, Zackkocs, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002; Hingson, Heeren, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009; NIAAA, 2011). Other research findings provide evidence that high alcohol consumption has a relationship to poor academic performance (Aertgeerts & Buntinx, 2002; Singleton & Wolfson, 2009). Forty percent of
students report that they have had academic problems and 28% of the 40% dropped out of school because of alcohol-related issues (Hingson et al., 2005; Hingson et al., 2009).

While no solutions will eliminate binge drinking U.S. campuses, research is underway to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, or what is known as “binge drinking”. The NIAAA has released recommendations for colleges and universities to consider when attempting to change a culture of alcohol abuse (NIAAA, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). These recommendations are important in that they represent a comprehensive compilation of research results that indicate which initiatives work well, show promise, or have no demonstrated ability to change student behavior.

 Nonetheless, there remains an ongoing need for more research on the possible programmatic and policy options to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students at U.S. institutions of higher education. However, the effect of policy on student behavior is not the only aspect of the problem that needs to be addressed. Many campus administrators make decisions about policies and programs with little understanding of what outside influences may affect their decisions, what criteria they should use when making these decisions, or simply how to make decisions about student alcohol abuse.

Leadership and decision-making theories most often derive from business or politics, but some focus on academic leadership in higher education (Birnbaum, 1992). For example, deans of colleges and presidents of universities, have written books on decision-making in higher education; these books often contain anecdotal information on decision-making as perceived by the executive. They are not research studies as much as they are personal descriptions of individual decision-making processes. In addition, these executives are often not the individuals
who make decisions about specific problems on their campuses, such as student alcohol abuse. The administrators most often involved in these decisions are in their institution’s division of student affairs. The present study examines one institution’s response to a culture of binge drinking to identify how decisions are made by student affairs leaders and what contextual factors influenced their decisions.

This case study explored the following questions.

1. How did the leadership in a Division of Student Affairs make decisions about what policies and programs to adopt, terminate, and/or improve during the period of interest?
2. How did contextual factors influence these decisions?

**Significance of the Study**

Due to the prevalence of alcohol on college campuses, student affairs administrators at almost every U.S. college and university have been or will be called upon to deal with alcohol-related student injuries or deaths. A deeper understanding of what steps to take and what issues to consider when addressing student alcohol abuse will be of significant interest for student affairs professionals nationwide. Identifying the factors that influence these decisions could improve the ability of student affairs leaders to make decisions about alcohol policies and programs on their campuses.

Student affairs research is generally focused on student issues and how students are affected by policy and program changes at their institutions, such as student development, the effects of living-learning environments on persistence, and how student academic achievement is improved when students live in residence halls (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Research has also considered what
administrators can do to assist in students’ growth and development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Very little research has been done, however, on how university administrators can lead the change that is needed to address a culture of excessive consumption of alcohol. Minimal guidance exists in regard to how decisions are made by higher education leaders to address the negative consequences associated with alcohol abuse. The literature is virtually silent on the ways in which decisions are made by student affairs administrators and what other entities within the university or in the surrounding community may inform the decision-making process.

As an administrator in higher education I have often seen firsthand the consequences of alcohol use by students. There have been varied responses to the same or similar issues at each institution where I have been employed. One of the participants in the study suggested that the responses presented in this study were more comprehensive than what had been done by past university administrations, and that they involved the community surrounding the university (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs). Understanding the decisions that were made, along with the factors that influenced these decisions, will provide new information which can be used in future research and administrative practice.

The Case

This research study focuses on a single case at the Pennsylvania State University. The case study begins with three separate incidents that occurred in the fall of 2009. First, in August 2009, The Princeton Review named the University the number-one party school in the United States (J. Berman, 2009; Glass, 2009). The ranking brought with it an increase in media attention to the campus alcohol issue, including a national radio broadcast highlighting the
alcohol culture at the University. The report contained interviews and commentary from students, alumni, and community residents (Glass, 2009). Second, in September 2009, a first-year student was found dead after a night of partying that ended when he fell two stories from a roof of a campus building; the student was missing for two days before his body was discovered (Ganim, 2009). Third, data showed that the average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level, along with the number of students being transported to the hospital, had been increasing almost every year since 2003 (Student Affairs Research and Assessment, 2009).

These three events precipitated an aggressive response from the University administration and specifically from leaders in the Division of Student Affairs. Historically there had been discussions, along with minor changes to policies and procedures, to change the drinking culture of the institution. This concerted effort to reduce the amount of binge drinking at the Pennsylvania State University differed, however, from previous efforts. The Student Affairs leadership did not consider the usual one or two initiatives to keep these types of events from occurring in the future. Instead the response entailed formal evaluations of existing and new initiatives in an attempt to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students.

In short, the Division of Student Affairs took a leadership role in addressing the culture of binge drinking within the University community. This study analyzes the steps taken by the Pennsylvania State University Division of Student Affairs leadership during a two-year period, from the fall of 2009 through the fall of 2011. The time frame selected for this investigation begins with the three events, mentioned above, that occurred in rapid succession during the fall of 2009 semester and ends with the Vice President of Student Affairs’ presentation to a Faculty
Senate committee of the steps that the Division of Student Affairs had taken over the two year period.

The response that was proposed and enacted by the Vice President, the Assistant Vice Presidents, and the Directors in the Division of Student Affairs to counteract the overconsumption of alcohol by students was documented and analyzed, as were these individual’s perceptions of the influence that other university divisions and departments had on the initiatives that they ultimately adopted.

Methods

To explore how Student Affairs leaders made decisions about what policies and programs to adopt, terminate, and/or improve during the two years under study and how contextual factors influenced their decisions. I opted to use a case study methodology to investigate, analyze, and report the findings (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The case study methodology was selected to gain a thorough understanding of the circumstances of and insights into the initiatives that were adopted to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. As mentioned above, a specified two-year period of time with a beginning date and an end date, fall of 2009 to the fall of 2011, was used for this case study (Merriam & Associates, 2002; L. M. Smith, 1978).

For this study, four models were identified to assist in understanding and articulating the decision-making process that administrators in the Division of Student Affairs at the Pennsylvania State University employed as they sought to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students on the University Park campus: the Rational Model (Allison, 1971; March & Simon, 1958), the Political Model (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992), the Garbage Can
Model (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) and the Dynamic Model of Organizational Decision-Making (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997). The models are explained in detail in Chapter 2.

In spring 2012, I conducted a pilot study by interviewing three individuals intimately involved in the decisions that occurred following the three incidents in 2009. A pilot study “provides …an understanding of the meaning that these phenomena and events have for the people who are involved in them, and the perspectives that inform their actions” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 58). The pilot study was done to better understand the case and to identify areas that should be investigated further. The study assisted in my understanding of how individuals involved in the case were included in the decision-making and how they understood the influence of individuals and groups outside student affairs. As part of the pilot study, data were collected from: University archives, newspaper articles, meeting minutes, and websites to establish the timeline of events.

The main study began in fall 2012, at which time most interviews occurred. Several interviews occurred later, in fall 2013, as a result of information gained from prior interviews. Using the data shared in other interviews to identify additional individuals to be interviewed is referred to as snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Participants from the Division of Student Affairs were initially selected by identifying the Student Affairs staff members whose areas were responsible for the implementation of alcohol-related initiatives that were presented by the Vice President of Student Affairs to the Board of Trustees in the fall of 2009. To broaden the perspectives that would inform this story, other interviewees were originally selected by identifying members of the community whose work gave them an intimate knowledge of the effects of excessive
alcohol consumption by students. Throughout the interview process, I used the constant comparative method of data analysis to understand the information shared and how it applies to other data already collected.

**Organization of this Dissertation**

This introduction has provided an overview of the problems associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, a recalcitrant problem that many colleges and universities work continually to reduce. It has also presented evidence of a gap in the literature concerning alcohol-related decision-making by student affairs administrators, as well as the methods that this study employed to begin to fill that gap. Chapter 2 details extant research literature on alcohol use in the United States and higher education, including recommendations for curbing students’ excessive consumption of alcohol and changing a culture of alcohol abuse. Chapter 2 also includes a brief overview of the case being studied and current literature on decision-making models. Chapter 3 describes the method of study used in this study, along with information about the pilot study, participant selection, and the interview protocol used for the study. Chapter 4 describes common events involving the excessive consumption of alcohol that occur in State College, Pennsylvania in and around the University, along with the three precipitating factors for the response by Student Affairs. Chapter 5 includes an in-depth description of each initiative that the Division of Student Affairs attempted to implement during the two year period, along with analysis of each initiative and the contextual factors that informed Student Affairs staff’s decision about each initiative. Chapter 6 summarizes the case study findings, identifies implications for practice and research, and concludes with limitations of the study and some final thoughts about the study and its findings.
Chapter 2
Alcohol and United States Higher Education

This chapter describes the need for this research and introduces the theoretical model used in this study. First, I explain the key problems that alcohol use and abuse cause within higher education, along with why it is an issue of great importance generally. Second, I identify ways in which the public at large has responded to similar issues with alcohol at the community level, along with examples of initiatives that have decreased the negative impact of alcohol in those communities. Third, I present recommendations developed by a national institute for all colleges and universities to use when working on alcohol initiatives. Fourth, I share what many U.S. colleges and universities have done over the past 15 years to reduce alcohol use and abuse on their campuses. Fifth, I explain the decision-making model that, with modifications, frames this study.

Alcohol Abuse

Binge drinking is a form of alcohol abuse and often the terms are mistakenly used interchangeably. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) defines binge drinking as when a person consumes enough alcohol to have a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) over .08, which is also the national norm for impaired driving (NIAAA, 2002a). The physical effects and signs of intoxication differ by individual, however the symptoms most often include slurred speech, unsteadiness on one’s feet, impaired judgment, vomiting, or being unresponsive. The common understanding is that males reach this limit in five drinks, and females reach it in four drinks, in a two hour period (NIAAA, 2004; H. Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Rimm, 1995). According to a 2008 study, “binge drinking is
a substantial and growing health problem” and is the third leading cause of death in the United States (Ahern et al., p. 1041).

The federal government has attempted to use legislation to regulate behavior and attitudes regarding alcohol. In 1919, the 18th amendment to the U.S. Constitution banned the consumption, manufacturing and distribution of alcohol. Fourteen years later, the amendment was repealed and it was again legal to import, consume, and sell alcohol in the United States. In the 1980s, the federal government withheld funds from states that did not change their legal drinking age to 21 years. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is a major player in the legal drinking age debate and was also instrumental in bringing awareness and policy change to decrease the number of drunk driving deaths in the United States (Dowdall, 2009; Mothers Against Drunk Driving, 2011). Through marketing campaigns from MADD, the general public became more aware of the deaths associated with drunk driving, pressuring municipalities toward stricter enforcement and more severe punishments for individuals violating new laws.

Still, alcohol abuse remains a persistent social problem, causing over 75,000 deaths annually out of which over 10,000 deaths are associated with drunk driving (Center for Disease Control, 2004, 2012).

**Alcohol in Higher Education**

Alcohol use by college students is not a new issue, having caused much angst among faculty members, administrators, and students for generations. At the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in 1807, students rioted over the disciplining and subsequent expulsion of several students who had gotten drunk. Students signed a petition that demanded reinstatement of the expelled students and took it to the college president, who responded by
threatening disciplinary action against petition signatories. The students responded by seizing control of Nassau Hall and rioting (Horowitz, 1987; Wood, 2009). This early example illustrates how alcohol has been the catalyst for disciplinary action and policy development at institutions of higher education in the United States. The trend continues to this day.

“The situations we are dealing with on alcohol keep getting more serious,” said Peter McPherson, former president of Michigan State University. "No campus can escape this issue" (Sanchez, 1998, p. A3). Alcohol abuse results in serious bodily injury, assaults, vandalism, along with other health issues and problems in the classroom (Powell, Williams, & Wechsler, 2004; H. Wechsler, Kuo, Lee, & Dowdall, 2000). Each year, 600,000 to 700,000 students are assaulted by students who have been drinking, and approximately 11% of student drinkers have been accused of causing some type of vandalism or property damage (Hingson et al., 2002; NIAAA, 2011). The NIAAA (2011) estimates that there are 1,700 deaths annually from alcohol-related incidents on US campuses, and half of them involve students under 21 years of age.

Wechsler (2000) reports that underage students drink less often than students of legal drinking age, but when they did drink, underage students drank more heavily. Another research article states that the rates of traditional college-age (18-24) individuals who consumed five or more drinks regularly rose 4% from 1998 to 2005 (Mitka, 2009, p. 836). This increase may imply that more students are experiencing the negative consequences of alcohol consumption.

Former Unites States Surgeon General David Satcher has described the serious issues related to alcohol and young people in the United States and his particular concerns about drinking within the college population (Reisberg, 1998a). Binge drinking is responsible for 40%
of academic problems in U.S. colleges and universities, along with 28% of the students who drop out of school (Hingson et al., 2005; Hingson et al., 2009). Alcohol also harms individuals who may not drink or drink as heavily. There is the potential for secondhand effects of binge drinking that are somewhat similar to the effects of secondhand smoke on non-smokers, including lack of sleep, vandalism, assault, sexual assaults, and other verbal or physical altercations. These altercations have been found to increase at institutions where alcohol is consumed at a higher rate than at comparable peer institutions (H. Wechsler, Dowdall, & Davenport, 1995; Henry Wechsler & Nelson, 2008).

While student alcohol abuse received a lot of attention within academic research throughout the early 1990s, many of the same problems persist 15 years later. Universities have other priorities which need to be addressed such as budget cuts and scandals, as well as other more exciting and positive topics such as a conference or national sport championship. The issue of alcohol abuse always seems to fade to the background, and keeping the focus on decreasing the harm that alcohol does to college students will continue to be a struggle for administrators.

One approach that is being used to make long-term changes and keep attention on this issue is the attempt to change the normative behavior of community members so that alcohol is not looked upon as a part of the community experience. Community norms influence the alcohol use of individuals. People who live in a community that is more accepting of binge drinking or abuse are more likely to consume alcohol excessively (Ahern et al., 2008; Baer, 1994; Hingson et al., 2005). In the same way that a neighborhood or community has an impact on the alcohol consumption of individuals, the university environment also impacts the
use/abuse of alcohol by students. The customs and expectations that are handed down from one
generation of students to the next reinforce the culture of alcohol use on different campuses
(NIAAA, 2002a). As Masland (1985) describes, organizational culture “provides meaning and
social cohesion; and clarifies and explains behavioral expectations” (pp. 157-158). Therefore, if
students do not partake in the normative behavior of the university culture of alcohol
consumption they feel left out or inadequate. Moreover, some may also leave school due to the
second hand effects of alcohol consumption (Rabow & Duncan-Schill, 1995).

Sporadically addressing the culture of alcohol use within a college may not be enough to
decrease its negative consequences for the college population. Research suggests that
environmental factors of the university and surrounding community shape the alcohol culture on
campus. The evidence shows that when the area surrounding campus is considered a “wet
environment” there is a positive correlation to the amount of consumption by students. Wet
environments include those places in close proximity to campus that promote alcohol
consumption, advertise alcohol prominently, host bars and liquor stores, and offer inexpensive
alcohol prices (Edwards et al., 1997; H. Wechsler, Kuo et al., 2000; Weitzman, Nelson, &
Wechsler, 2003). These external influences are often overlooked or perceived to be too complex
for colleges or universities to change. This perception often translates into beliefs that nothing
can be done depending on the size and scope of the institution.

The Response Outside of Higher Education

Some strategies have been studied and found to have a positive influence on decreasing
alcohol abuse among college students. The most recent research considers how the whole
environment can be a positive or negative influence on behavior. Schein (1993) argues that an
individual's behavior can be determined by three different forces: the culture in which individuals find themselves, the individuals’ own personalities, and the external environment.

Scholars recommend that a comprehensive community intervention approach may be the most successful in addressing the issue of binge drinking on college campuses (DeJong & Langford, 2002; Toomey, Lenk, & Wagenaar, 2007; H. Wechsler, Kelley, Weitzman, Giovanni, & Seibring, 2000). The environmental management model is a comprehensive approach that takes into account factors throughout the local community that could be used to decrease the over-consumption of alcohol and other drugs. This model for decreasing the consumption of alcohol identifies several areas that affect how an individual makes choices about consumption, such as the physical space (proximity of bars and other distributors), along with the social, legal, and economic factors that pertain to the availability and allure of alcohol (Zimmerman & DeJong, 2003). More specifically, according to the Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention (HEC) in the U.S. Department of Education, environmental management uses multiple avenues to bring about behavior change (2012). Specifically, such a model operates by:

…promoting positive behaviors and norms and also discouraging high-risk behaviors. It encompasses a range of activities from environmental change that includes policy changes at the campus and community level to intervention and treatment programs aimed at students displaying signs of distress to education and awareness activities aimed at groups known to be at higher risk for engaging in problem behaviors, and
finally, to health protection programs that aim to minimize the harm incurred by problem behaviors (p. 2).

The environmental management approach may be the most comprehensive, if not the best way of decreasing alcohol abuse on college campuses (Wechsler, Lee et al., 2000). There are five major categories within the environmental management model (DeJong & Langford, 2006, p. 1):

1. Offering alcohol-free social, extracurricular, and public service option's
2. Creating a health promoting normative environment
3. Limiting alcohol availability
4. Restricting the marketing and promotion of alcohol
5. Creating increasing enforcement of policies and laws

Over the past several decades various organizations, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), have attempted to change the culture of alcohol abuse by working with different aspects of the environmental management model. MADD has been instrumental in increasing the legal consequences for drunk driving, and these legislative changes have been shown to correlate with a decrease in the number of drunk drivers. As the negative consequences for driving drunk increase, the number of drunk drivers cited has decreased (Dowdall, 2009). Mortality rates have also decreased in places where drunk driving policies and the overall control policies have become more restrictive (Berman, Hull & May, 2000).

Policy changes are not the only environmental changes that have had an effect on alcohol consumption. The price of alcohol has a significant correlation with consumption and abuse. Coate and Grossman (1988) found that increasing the taxes on alcohol significantly
decreases the rates of consumption and death among youth. Others have found that increasing the cost of a beverage leads to decreases in consumption among all individuals (Chaloupka, Grossman, & Saffer, 2002; Chaloupka & Wechsler, 1996; Dee, 1999) but has a greater impact on the number of youth who drink frequently compared to their counterparts who drink less frequently (Grossman, Coate, & Anluck, 1997; Laixuthai & Chaloupka, 1993).

**Recommendations for Colleges and Universities**

In 2002 the NIAAA (2002a) released a taskforce report that accumulated three years of work among researchers, administrators, and students in an attempt to decrease the use and abuse of alcohol by college students. The NIAAA claims that this report differs from similar reports that were released previously because it is based on scientific evidence (NIAAA, 2002a). In the process of preparing this report (NIAAA, 2002a), the NIAAA created two panels to discuss the issue of alcohol on college campuses and to assist in setting a national research agenda. The panels consisted of non-government experts, including college presidents, administrators, well-known researchers of alcohol abuse, and students. The report was based on peer-reviewed articles that were written by experts in the field and with extensive discussion among the panels. The report provided specific strategy suggestions, but methods of implementation were left open to colleges and universities, based on their populations and environments (NIAAA, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

**Four Tiers for reducing alcohol abuse**

The NIAAA (NIAAA, 2002a) taskforce report defined effective strategies for curbing binge drinking and presented a four-tier system that ranked current practices and potential initiatives: tier one has strong evidence of successfully decreasing alcohol abuse among college
students; tier two has evidence of successfully decreasing alcohol abuse among the general population; tier three programs has had some success in decreasing alcohol abuse; tier four are those initiatives that have shown to be ineffective. A summary of the four tiers is located in Table 2.1 and each tier is described in more detail below.
### Table 2.1

**Four Tiers of Evidence-Based Programs and Initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 1:</strong> Evidence of Effectiveness among College Students</td>
<td>Educational and Intervention Programs</td>
<td>Reduce amount of alcohol consumed</td>
<td>-Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Tier 2:** Evidence Of Success with General Population | Alcohol Availability | Limit alcohol available on and off-campus | -Require responsible beverage service program  
-Limit the number of alcohol distribution points near campus  
-Increase state tax |
| | Marketing and Promoting Alcohol | Restrict alcohol promotion on and off-campus | -Cooperative agreement to install minimum drink prices  
-Cooperative agreement to ban or restrict low-price specials |
| | Policy Development and Enforcement | Develop and enforce campus policies, local, state and federal law | -Enforce minimum drinking age laws  
-Increase ID checks  
-Enforce seller penalties  
-Enforce fake ID penalties |
| **Tier 3:** Evidence of Promise | Alcohol-Free Options | Offer and promote activities that exclude alcohol | -New alcohol free environments  
-Promote alcohol free events  
-Provide service learning and volunteer activities  
-Require community service in the academic curriculum |
| | Alcohol-Free Normative Environment | Create a campus environment that has norms supporting alcohol-free | -Increase the number of substance free halls offered  
-Employ upper class resident assistants  
-Create a social norms marketing campaign |
| | Alcohol Availability | Limit alcohol available on and off-campus | -Ban or restrict alcohol use on campus  
-Prohibit alcohol use in public  
-Eliminate alcohol sales at sport events  
-Provide guidelines for off-campus parties |
| | Marketing and Promoting Alcohol | Restrict alcohol promotion on and off-campus | -Ban or restrict alcohol advertising on-campus  
-Ban or restrict alcohol industry sponsorship of on-campus events  
-Ban alcohol promotions that promote drinking in high-risk contexts  
-Require healthy messages to off-set the alcohol advertising |
| | Policy Development and Enforcement | Develop and enforce campus policies, local, state and federal law | -Advertise campus alcohol policies and sanctions  
-Increase patrols near on-campus parties  
-Increase sanctions for violations of alcohol policy  
-Notify parents of rules violations  
-Pass ordinances restricting house assemblies and noise levels |
| **Tier 4:** Evidence of Ineffectiveness | Educational Programs | Education about alcohol and effects of alcohol | -Basic awareness and education programs  
-Curriculum infusion  
-BAC monitoring |

(Note: Adapted from NIAAA, 2002a)
Tier one describes programs that have been through rigorous scientific studies and shown positive results for reducing individual alcohol consumption and abuse. The approaches that were found to be most effective in curbing binge drinking included cognitive understanding of the true impact of alcohol’s effects, understanding the institution’s intolerance for behaviors associated with binge drinking, and the use of motivational conversations to assist students who want to change their behaviors to be more consistent with societal and university expectations.

The only intervention included in tier one is the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) program. The BASICS program uses motivational interview techniques that have been shown to reduce binge drinking and problems related alcohol consumption specifically in young adults (Heather, 1996; Larimer, Cronce, Lee, & Kilmer, 2004; NIAAA, 2002a; Vasilaki, Hosier, & Cox, 2006). To identify why a student drinks, a BASICS counselor discusses with the client his or her perception of how alcohol affects him or her in social situations. The counselor also covers the client’s perceptions of how his or her drinking compares to the average individual in his or her age group. Through two individual sessions, the counselor and student have structured conversations based on an initial assessment which measures the client’s use and perception of use of alcohol, as well as his or her stress level. The client finishes the sessions with an idea of what others in his or her age group are consuming along with strategies to reduce his or her own consumption (Dimeff, Baer, Kivlahan, & Marlatt, 1999).

Tier two is comprised of initiatives, policies, and programs that have been shown to assist the larger community reduce the harmful effects of binge drinking on the individual and on the community. These strategies have not yet been studied within the context of higher
education institutions, but they show promise and may be effective in this arena (Holder et al., 2000; Wechsler et al., 2000). These strategies may not affect every college student who is binge drinking, but they are important for addressing the areas of the campus and community that support the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Increasing enforcement of current policies and laws is one strategy that has been shown to decrease the use of alcohol (Holder et al., 2000; Wagenaar & Toomey, 2002). There is no need to increase the number of policies; just enforcing the current policies consistently has been shown to decrease consumption. Enforcing existing policies may provide the same results on a university campus. Restricting the number of venues where alcohol is served has also been shown to be positive. Decreasing the number of venues decreases the availability of alcohol, thus diminishing access, consumption, and crimes (Toomey & Wagenaar, 2002).

Reducing the number of places on and around campus where alcohol is available may have the same impact on a college community. Working with the community to restrict marketing and increase alcohol prices and taxes has been shown to decrease consumption in the general public and may have similar results with college and university students (Cook & Moore, 2002; Kenkel & Manning, 1996; Henry Wechsler & Nelson, 2008). Paying a relatively low price for drinks or paying a set price for unlimited drinks is associated with binge drinking. Making alcohol unavailable or difficult for the college population to attain may not be possible, but making it less easy may be a start (Wechsler, Kuo et al., 2000; Henry Wechsler & Nelson, 2008). The research presented in tier two has focused on the general population and more specifically has been shown to have a more significant influence on young adults (Chaloupka & Wechsler, 1996; Coate & Grossman, 1988; Sutton & Godfrey, 1995). A drawback of these
strategies is that increasing prices has not been shown to have any impact on the heaviest five percent of drinkers (Manning, Blumberg, & Moulton, 1995). University and community efforts need to be implemented in conjunction with other programs to provide a comprehensive environmental management initiative.

Tier three addresses other potentially helpful programs recommendations that have “evidence of logical and theoretical promise” (NIAAA, 2002a, p. 21). There was not enough empirical evidence for the taskforce to recommend these strategies, so the NIAAA encouraged universities employing these strategies to do their own research (Wechsler et al., 2000). The strategies included adoption of policies that may direct students to the core mission of the university as an academic institution and in turn reduce alcohol consumption, such as holding more Friday classes and having exams during Friday and Saturday classes. Recommendations also included prohibiting tailgating activities and alcohol at sporting events and banning alcohol on campus including at faculty and alumni events (NIAAA, 2002a).

Tier four features strategies that have been shown to be ineffective to the point where they might increase alcohol consumption. Several strategies that are often employed by colleges and universities were included in this tier including basic education to increase students’ knowledge of alcohol issues and its effects on the body and blood alcohol content monitors that allow students to know when they may be intoxicated. The inadequacies of these strategies have been noted in other research as well: “The field of public health acknowledges that information and education alone cannot change behavior yet most schools have added even more educational campaigns and efforts” (Vicary & Karshin, 2002, p. 322). Six years after these recommendations were put forth by the NIAAA, 22% of institutions that responded to a
University of Minnesota School of Public Health study did not know about the recommendations, and 98% of respondents reported that they employed strategies that have been proven ineffective (Wojciechowska, 2010).

According to the NIAAA the strategies in tiers two and three show promise, but have years of research ahead to indicate whether they produce significant change. However despite the lack of hard evidence for colleges and universities, government officials and scholars agree that including several different strategies in their approach to curbing binge drinking is the best course of action (Vicary & Karshin, 2002; H. Wechsler, Seibring, Liu, & Ahl, 2004). Other strategies, such as substance-free space in residence halls, a community norms approach, and getting students more involved on campus, along with volunteer experiences, have also been shown to decrease alcohol consumption (H. Wechsler, Dowdall, & Davenport, 1995; Henry Wechsler & Nelson, 2008; Weitzman & Kawachi, 2000). Implementing several of these initiatives on a college or university campus would be a more comprehensive approach than many institutions have used in the past and would be consistent with the previously discussed environmental management model.

3-in-1 Framework

The 3-in-1 Framework offered by the 2002 NIAAA taskforce (NIAAA, 2002a: see Figure 2.1), resembles the environmental management model. The taskforce did not identify a single, stand-alone strategy to decrease student alcohol consumption. Instead, it identified three different areas that need to be simultaneously addressed for positive results to occur: (1) the individual; (2) the student body as a whole; and (3) the institution and the surrounding community.
The first section concerns identifying and providing assistance to those students who currently are or will become dependent on alcohol, including alcohol-dependent and at-risk drinkers, as well as students who are occasional yet severe binge drinkers. The second section addresses the need to reduce community promotion of overconsumption, including the prevalence of alcohol on and off campus, the considerable amounts of time that students’ spend outside the classroom, and inconsistent advertising messages and uneven enforcement of policy and law (DeJong & Langford, 2002; NIAAA, 2002a; Perkins, 2002; Wagenaar & Toomey, 2002). The third section concerns the members of the college or university and its surrounding community who need to be included in the process of reframing the issue of alcohol abuse and redefining alcohol expectations for all students and community members. These relationships often improve communication overall between important interest groups on campus (e.g. student affairs and residence life staff, university police) and in the community (e.g. police, alcohol distributors and judges) (Hingson & Howland, 2002; Holder et al., 1997).
What Colleges and Universities Have Done

In 1989, the Drug-Free Schools and Campus Act Amendment mandated that colleges and universities adopt policies to prevent the illegal use, possession, and selling of drugs and alcohol on their campus and educate students and staff about the dangers of abusing drugs and alcohol (Vicary & Karshin, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2004). By 2000, almost all four year colleges and universities offered some type of alcohol education program, and many institutions provided targeted education for student-athletes and members of Greek social organizations (Wechsler et al., 2000). Many of these education initiatives included peer education and social norms campaigns. Social norms campaigns proliferated to educate students on the actual alcohol consumption habits of their peers as compared to their often inflated beliefs about peer consumption. Such initiatives have continued even though there is little empirical evidence that they have a significant impact on alcohol or drug consumption (Wechsler et al., 2003; Zimmerman & DeJong, 2003).

Since the Drug-Free Schools and Campus Amendment Act (1989) was passed over two decades ago, many colleges and universities have attempted to improve their efforts to curb dangerous student drinking through stand-alone initiatives, despite the preponderance of research indicating that a multi-pronged approach is more effective. In 1998, for example, the University of Kentucky increased its sanctions for a first-time policy violation to one year of university probation, a $50 fine, and mandatory participation in an alcohol education class (Reisberg, 1998a). That same year, following the alcohol-related death of a student, the Michigan Institute of Technology required all first-year students to live on campus (White, 2005). The University of Oklahoma banned alcohol in residence halls and fraternity houses
In fall 2000, the University of Colorado implemented a “three strikes” policy in an attempt to decrease alcohol related incidents. The three strikes could occur on or off campus and included a first-time one semester probation, community service, and an alcohol education class. If a student received a third violation he or she would be suspended from the University of Colorado system for a minimum of one semester (Whaley, 2000).

The California State University (CSU) system implemented what it claimed to be a “comprehensive” plan for all 23 campuses in fall 2001 after the death of a student at CSU-Chico. The plan included the review of state laws and a yearly notification to all students of any law or University policy changes, along with a ban of alcohol advertisements on campus. The University was also encouraging student organizations to fundraise from non-alcohol related sources by providing them matching funds (Kellogg, 2001).

Other institutions that have attempted to change their alcohol policies on and off campus have encountered resistance in the form of student resistance. Students at many universities have rebelled against their administrations for the right to drink alcohol even if they are under the legal drinking age (Lively, 1998b). Michigan State University students rioted in 2000 after the University announced an alcohol ban at a specific tailgating spot during home football games. Students stated they did not feel that they had a voice in the decision to implement the ban. Preceding the ban and subsequent riots, the welcome week activities before the beginning of the fall semester were cut from a week to a few days because of the excessive binge drinking that was occurring during this time period (Lively, 1998a).

At Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, university officials attempted to stop an annual celebration that ended in a riot. Students were throwing beer cans and bottles at police
officers when they attempted to shut down the festivities. Students continued until the police drew billy clubs (Reisberg, 1998b). The inter-fraternity council at Washington State University placed a ban on alcohol at all programs in fraternity houses. Students anger turned into a confrontation with police (Reisberg, 1998b). Similar initiatives were implemented on different campuses throughout the United States. While, some campuses experienced major riots such as those cited here, most have experienced minor disturbances related to policy changes.

**Administrators**

The individuals often tasked with spearheading an institution’s alcohol policy developments or changes are administrators in the division of student affairs or student services. The student affairs staff may report to an institution’s president through the provost, but often a vice president is responsible for the division and reports to the president. The division is comprised of departments that work with students when they are not in the classroom or otherwise engaged in their academic programs (Rentz, 1996). Departments within Student Affairs often include academic advising, career advising, health services, student conduct, orientation, residence life, the student union, student activities, international programs and multicultural programs, among others.

Historically, student affairs work originally was done by faculty members (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). As class sizes and teaching demands increased, responsibilities not directly connected to academics were assigned to individuals other than faculty members. The growth in access to higher education has meant that the positions and responsibilities within student affairs have increased drastically (Rentz, 1996). As the scope of student affairs has widened, associations have formed to set research agendas for the field. Most research agendas have been
focused on students and how students are affected by their institutions and programs within them. There has been little consideration on best practices for student affairs leadership and decision-making.

When issues such as student alcohol abuse present themselves, no clear roadmap or set criteria exist for student affairs leaders to use when making decisions about which initiatives to adopt at their institution. Although practitioners in the field understand that experience and knowledge of campus culture are necessary to make well informed decisions, guidelines for understanding the different forces that influence student affairs leaders’ decisions is sorely lacking. Many recognized that such information would be of assistance to student affairs leaders and other administrators as they struggle with alcohol related issues on their campuses.

The Case

The Pennsylvania State University provides an example of a large higher education institution attempting to shift the student drinking culture away from binge drinking and excessive drinking. The University began to acknowledge a crisis within the student drinking culture when the Princeton Review named it the number-one party school in the fall of 2009 (J. Berman, 2009) and an increase was identified in the number of students transported to the hospital for excessive alcohol consumption (Student Affairs Research and Assessment, 2011). Two months later a first-year student was found dead after a night of partying that ended when he fell two stories from a roof of a campus building (Ganim, 2009). These events precipitated increased media attention, which exposed the issues surrounding student drinking on the University Park campus. This media coverage included interviews with students, alumni, and community residents (Glass, 2009). Pat James, a Director in Student Affairs at the University
described these events as constituting a “perfect storm” that led University faculty members and administrators to implement changes to reduce student binge drinking.

In the months following the student’s death, members of the community, parents of current students, alumni, faculty members, and administrators demanded solutions to the Universities student drinking problem. The individual who came to the forefront as the “face” of the University on this issue was the Vice President of Student Affairs. He had been hired a year prior to the student death and was the individual who first spoke to the parents when the student was found. He went on to coordinate efforts over the next two years to curb alcohol consumption and abuse on campus.

The leadership in the Division of Student Affairs provided its first actionable response to the crisis in early December 2009, when information about initiatives to reduce underage age and high risk drinking was released (Pennsylvania State University, 2009). In February 2010, the Intra-Fraternity Council (IFC) passed legislation that prohibited parties at fraternities on the weekend of State Patty’s Day, a faux holiday that had been invented several years previously (Peters, 2010). A community discussion that included University administrators occurred in March (Twomley, 2010), after which there was a short break from announcing new initiatives in the summer months, presumably so that discussions could take place to decide which policies and initiatives would be implemented or changed for the fall.

Prior to the students’ return to campus in fall 2010, all first-year students who were moving into the residence halls were informed that first-year buildings would be completely “dry” or alcohol-free. Along with this change in residence hall policy came the news that, unlike in previous years, all off-campus violations of the University’s alcohol policy would be
charged and sanctioned as violations of the Universities conduct code. Just as the semester was starting, the announcement was made of an increase in sanctions for all alcohol violations, including participation in the new Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) program (Rogers, 2010c; Scorzafave, 2010). Furthermore, there was an announcement that a new Alcoholics Anonymous group would be holding meetings on campus (Rogers, 2010c).

New initiatives and changes to existing policies continued to be implemented throughout campus during the fall semester. In early September 2010, the IFC announced its first dry recruitment season and the University administration declared that the tailgating areas for home football games would be more closely monitored by police and security personnel (McDermott, 2010; Rogers, 2010b). During the September Board of Regents meeting the Vice President announced his comprehensive plan of initiatives to curb alcohol consumption by underage students and over-consumption by of age students (Thorpe, 2010). October brought the announcement that the University logo would no longer be printed on shot glasses, a move that increased the sale of these items almost immediately as they would no longer be available in the future (Rogers, 2010a).

December 2010 brought about a number of other initiatives that had been planned for several months. Housing announced that all undergraduate residence halls, not just first year halls, would be dry starting in fall 2011. According to the new University policies, the only on-campus housing were students could have alcohol would be in graduate and family housing (Rogers & Wintner, 2010). The Vice President met with the Faculty Senate in December to share a list of initiatives previously presented to the Board of Trustees (Rushton, 2010).
There was another break in activity until the beginning of April 2011 when the Faculty Senate passed a resolution that requested that the administration continue to examine the University’s alcohol problem. The beginning of June brought about another change for first-year students: All incoming first-year students were required to complete an online alcohol education program produced by the University that included alcohol policies and expectations specific to the University, the community, and the state (Coakley, 2011). During the previous three years, all incoming students were required to complete the AlcoholEdu program, which was a privately produced general online education module about alcohol. The closing point of this present case study is August 2011, two years after the first-year student’s death, when the Vice President met with the Student Life subcommittee of the Faculty Senate to update the membership on his division’s progress in changing and implementing alcohol-related initiatives over the previous two years. The timeline of events as described above are in Figures 2.2 and 2.3.
Figure 2.2. Alcohol intervention timeline, August 2009 to August 2010.
Figure 2.3. Alcohol intervention timeline, September 2010 to August 2011.
**Conceptual Framework**

Making substantive changes within a university can be a very arduous task, as there are many competing interests, philosophies, and structures that may or may not allow for speedy, desirable responses to problematic situations. Due to the nature of the university, initiatives can be raised and then fall into the quagmire of discussion and process. Because of this tendency, there is a need for an individual or a group of individuals to lead when a change is needed. Schein (1993) states “leaders create and change culture” (p. 361). Leadership, however, is not straightforward. Complicating this role, university leaders grapple with different structures and a “high degree of uncertainty and conflict” (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1977, p. 128), all of which is inevitable in such a diverse and multipurpose entity.

Studying leadership phenomena also poses a complex task. Hence, I conducted a pilot study to learn about the viability of a larger study. The pilot study was looking for information that has not been identified before and to see if there was context-specific information that a larger study could provide beyond existing theory. It also assisted in identifying specific areas on which to concentrate the final study. The information gained in the pilot study assisted in identifying the theoretical model which is being used as a skeletal structure for this study. The intention was to update and modify the model to show how leaders in student affairs make decisions about reducing alcohol consumption.

**Decision-Making Models**

Decision-making, according to Barnard (1938), is the act of making choices that will influence an organizational environment. Others have defined decision-making as the act of rationally deciding between different options in an attempt to solve a problem presented to an
organization (Drucker, 1993; Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976). All leaders need to make decisions many times a day in reaction to situations that present themselves or about the direction in which their organization, division or unit is moving. Attaining the best available knowledge prior to making a decision and attempting to understand how a decision may affect an organization are extremely important considerations in any decision-making process.

Prior research provides a number of decision-making models and here I present a brief synopsis of the three models that have led to the model used in this study. The rational action model, the political model, and the garbage can model were examined but found to be limited in their use. The fourth model ultimately adopted as one providing the most appropriate conceptual framework for this study is the dynamic model of organizational decision-making.

The rational action model (Allison, 1971; March & Simon, 1958) of decision-making is a very basic model to describe the decision-making process, but has been shown to be an oversimplification of decision-making in most cases (Cyert & March, 1963). The rational action model posits that individuals enter a decision-making process with a purpose and have specific outcomes in mind for a decision. These desired outcomes drive the process as specific consequences of decisions are contemplated. Alternative possible actions are also identified and logically debated. Ultimately, the decision is made by selecting the best course of action between the alternatives presented.

The political model derives from legislative processes and political science research. It posits that individually, people making decisions may use the rational action decision-making process to determine an outcome or an objective that would be best for them. However, when working together, decision makers have differing viewpoints and different goals that often disrupt the rational decision upon which they had originally decided (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki,
In the political model’s ideal form, the most powerful people in a conflict make the decisions (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). However, individuals who may not be the most powerful attempt to change the inevitable outcome in their favor through coalition building, resource allocation, and the use of information to gain power (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992).

The garbage can model was developed, in reaction to the rational and political model to describe decision-making in highly ambiguous situations. The belief was that these two models were too structured to actually describe situations in extremely complex and unclear environments (Cohen et al., 1972). According to this theory, the uncertainty of the organizations and the decision-making process becomes apparent in three ways.

First, decision makers do not always have the most clearly defined objectives or desired outcomes prior to making decisions. Second, the knowledge that decision makers possess to actually understand the way to achieve an outcome from start to finish is limited. Third, decision makers’ interest in the topic, time available, and other constraints cause individuals to flow in and out of a decision-making process. The garbage can model recognizes that there are many ways to make decisions, which are not always straightforward.

Within the garbage can model, Cohen and March (1974) discuss the occurrence of choice opportunities as a way of understanding how decisions are made in an organization. A choice opportunity is an “occasion when an organization is expected to produce behavior that can be called a decision” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 82). The “perfect storm” of events presented at the beginning of this case study can be classified as a choice opportunity for the Pennsylvania State University to make decisions about alcohol abuse on campus.

There are three ways in which decisions can be made in the garbage can model: oversight, flight, and resolution. Oversight is the process of implementing a solution with little
discussion or debate. Very little time or energy is exerted to formulate these decisions. Flight decisions involved problems that may require a large amount of time for discussion and discernment of the best course of action. The perceived time to resolve the issue is greater than the decisions makers want to spend on it, so a decision is postponed to a later time. When the item is revisited, a decision is made quickly, in a similar fashion to a decision made by oversight, even though the decision may not solve the problem. Decisions by resolution begin with the development of alternatives that could solve the problem at hand. These alternatives are then examined by the decision makers to identify the consequences of each solution, which leads to an examination of these hypothetical consequences in relation to the objectives that the decision makers are trying to achieve. After going through this process, a decision is made on the best course of action.

The dynamic model of organizational decision-making (Figure 2.4), developed by Kunreuther and Bowman in 1997, uses some concepts from the garbage can model from Cohen, et al. (1972).
The model explains that a decision-making process begins with a new occasion or event (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997, p. 407). The new occasion brings a change in reference point or a new way of looking at the issue. New participants from the model includes the individuals who will get involved in the decision-making process. The new occasion, new reference point, and new participants influence a change in constraints, which is an increase in or relaxing of restrictions due to the new circumstance and new participants in the decision-making process. The constraints segment of the model is consistent with the political model in that the change in constraints can assist individuals and groups to build coalitions, reallocate resources, and use information to gain power to make changes and move initiatives forward. Next, according to the dynamic model, the change in reference point and change in constraints lead to new problems.
Finally, the decision makers then reevaluate current policies and operations in an attempt to produce a new solution.

In the case under study here, the new occasion is constituted by the “perfect storm”: the Princeton Review’s recognition of the University as the number one-party school, the alcohol-related death of the first-year student, and the negative media attention that these events brought on the University. The change in reference point for this case is the realization by many members of the University and surrounding community that recognized the University had a serious issue with student alcohol abuse. While University leaders may have had prior knowledge of alcohol issues at University Park, as the “perfect storm” unfolded, it was more compelling for individuals to get involved in finding a solution. The key new participant in this case was the Vice President of Student Affairs, who was completely new to the University and had been in his position for less than a year. New participants could also include other individuals that become involved in the issue. These people had not been involved in the past. Some of these included: faculty, staff, students, and community members that became involved in the decision-making process in this case.

As a new participant, the Vice President of Student Affairs may have been given more latitude to question policies and request the implementation of new initiatives because he was new to a university that is steeped in tradition. Universities are by nature complex and political organizations that often have competing interests about what is most important for the institution. There are often many different departments and divisions competing for the scarce resources that are allocated to institutions of higher education. These competing interests have their own agendas and their own understandings of what it means to have a successful university. These
competing views often come into conflict with each other, and the presence of a new individual who can ask questions about things that have always been may have been helpful in this case.

The change in the University’s constraints against confronting the student culture of alcohol abuse was twofold. First, this situation, the “perfect storm”, brought with it the ability for University-wide discussions on the culture of alcohol abuse to occur. Second, as stated previously, the new Vice President had fewer constraints because of his limited time and experience at the University. Difficult questions could be asked, long-standing beliefs could be challenged, and new ideas could be implemented. The new problem that these changes precipitated was: How does the University change a culture of alcohol abuse? Addressing this question led to new solutions that would implement new policies and programs, and change existing policies and programs.

**Experiential Knowledge**

In addition to the decision-making models that were discussed, the concept of experiential knowledge (Maxwell, 2005) also informed the conceptual framework of this study. Experiential knowledge is the use of the researcher’s knowledge to help inform a study and analyze its data. For the purpose of this study and data analysis, experiential knowledge includes referring to my own knowledge of higher education and specifically of student affairs.

My job history includes eighteen years of working in student affairs and nine of those years at the Pennsylvania State University. I have worked in departments of housing and residence life at four different universities, obtaining increasing levels of responsibility. Through my work, I have talked with students, adjudicated conduct cases, and counseled students as they have made personal decisions about the use of alcohol. I have also participated in conversations at different levels of the administration as the universities attempted to curb their students’
excessive and dangerous drinking. Three of the four institutions where I have worked have had significant, ongoing issues with student alcohol consumption, and all had different but usually low levels of success in addressing the issue.

The present study seeks to illumine the space between the last two stages of the dynamic model of organizational decision-making presented above --- new problem and new solution. Specifically, it asks the two following research questions:

1. How did the leadership in Student Affairs make decisions about what policies and programs to adopt, terminate, and/or improve during the period of interest?
2. How did contextual factors influence these decisions?

In the next chapter, I explain the methods used to explore these research questions.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and research methods used for this study. The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of how student affairs administrators make decisions regarding to student alcohol abuse, as very little research exists about how these professionals make decisions. The study explored the following questions.

1. How did the leadership in Student Affairs make decisions about what policies and programs to adopt, terminate, and/or improve during the period of interest?

2. How did contextual factors influence these decisions?

To these ends, a case study methodology was employed to understand the decisions made by Student Affairs leaders at the Pennsylvania State University as they sought to change the student culture of excessive alcohol consumption. The case focused on a two-year period, from the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2011.

Case Study

The case study, according to Merriam (1998), “is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). More specifically, a case study is a thorough analysis of a single event or bound system (Smith, 1978). A bound system has a beginning point and an end point, which are used by the researcher to contain the information being acquired (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In this study, the bound system began just prior to the death of a student and continued for two years. The two-year time frame ends with the Vice President of Student Affairs’ presentation to a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate regarding the initiatives that the division had implemented and expanded over the previous two
years to discourage the student culture of alcohol abuse. Yin (2009) states that case studies are most appropriate when a researcher wants to learn about the “how” and “why” of a situation (p. 27). The study presented here focused on how and why decisions were made by the student affairs leadership and how other entities may have influenced its decisions.

The study employed a single case study design to explain what occurred as individuals in leadership positions within the Division of Student Affairs framed new policies and procedures to address concerns about the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. Yin (2009) identifies a critical case as one of the reasons to use a single-case study design. It can test a theory or model and “can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory” (Yin, 2009, p. 47). A critical case can “make a point quite dramatically or …is particularly important in the scheme of things” (Patton, 1990, p. 174). A student death due to alcohol is not an uncommon occurrence on university campuses across the country. Colleges and universities experience tragic incidents often that result from students’ consumption and abuse of alcohol. These tragedies constitute “tipping points” at which institutions revisit and revise their alcohol policies. Although these situations occur frequently, there is little research on how an institution responds and why it responds in a particular way.

The findings from qualitative research and case studies cannot be generalized to a population, but the information gathered in a case study can assist in identifying themes that may be looked at further in subsequent studies (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2009). In addition, results and conclusions from case studies are appropriately generalized to identify new concepts or to build “grounded theories” that might prove useful to the understanding of similar contexts or situations. When reading this case study, it will become the readers’ task to decide what aspects of the case are applicable to their specific circumstances and apply the knowledge gained as they
deem appropriate. In short, and according to Yin (2009), “case studies rely on analytic generalization… the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory” (p. 43). This study builds upon the decision-making models presented in Chapter 2 as it provides new information about the specifics of student affairs administrators’ decision-making around issues of excessive consumption of alcohol by students.

**Methods**

The methods used to gather information, select participants, and verify and analyze information are explained below. Data were collected in several different ways as the study progressed. Initially newspaper articles and other published documents were used to construct a timeline of events. A pilot study was done to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the issue. Following the analysis of the pilot study data, other interviews were conducted to gain a greater understanding of the events and the response by the leadership in the Division of Student Affairs.

**Document Collection**

Documents, specifically newspaper articles, were collected and filed by date. I initiated the collection of documents as events were unfolding because of my general interest in the topic. Other documents, such as meeting minutes, speech transcripts, and websites, were identified and filed throughout the two-year span under study. The documents were gathered to identify and understand the events that occurred and to detect what details would be pertinent to the study. Document analysis was used while reviewing official University documents, meeting minutes, speech transcripts, websites, and newspaper articles. The results of this analysis facilitated the construction of a timeline of events (Figures 2.2 and 2.3) that was used in the interviews. The documents and timeline offered a general understanding of the circumstances that triggered a
response by the University leadership. The items included in the timeline were identified as important because they either placed a spotlight on the issue of alcohol abuse or were student affairs initiatives to decrease abuse. The research questions and direction of this study took shape based on the findings of this document analysis.

**Pilot Study**

In anticipation of conducting this dissertation study, a pilot study of individual interviews was conducted in spring 2012. The purposes of the pilot study were to discern if enough information was available to constitute a viable research topic and to identify some key concepts and themes that might serve to explain the phenomenon. The shared purpose of the pilot study and the main study was to understand more deeply the components of university leaders’ decision-making to change a student culture of excessive alcohol consumption, including how decisions were made and what influenced the decision to implement or not implement a program or policy. For example, did certain individuals push certain decisions? Why were those individuals involved in the process?

The pilot study involved one-hour interviews with three individuals at different levels and in different departments within the Division of Student Affairs. This approach was purposefully used to gain perspective on their experience and understanding of what occurred as decisions were being made during the two-year period under examination. The pilot study also provided an introductory understanding of the case, a way to conduct analyses, and new insights that were not available from the documents that I had collected.

**Main Study**

After the pilot study was concluded a full study of the case was conducted. This section will start by explaining the participant selection and recruitment used in this case study. The
participants’ job experience and credentials will be shared. I also include the interview protocol and procedures adopted. The final two sub-sections will describe the data analysis used and the verification of that data.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

Participants in the pilot study were identified through preliminary conversations with the Vice President of Student Affairs and through the document analysis. The individuals who were interviewed had responsibility for implementing or changing policies and programs directly related to addressing the dangerous culture of alcohol abuse. Specifically, participants were selected because of their intimate knowledge of how the Student Affairs division responded to the “perfect storm”. The participants had direct oversight for the departments responsible for implementing or changing policies and programs directly related to addressing the excessive consumption of alcohol by students.

Participants originally identified for the main study included the Vice President of Student Affairs, Assistant Vice President for Family Services, Assistant Vice President for Housing, Food Services and Residence Life, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs, Interim Senior Director of Judicial Affairs, Senior Director of University Health Services, Senior Director of Counseling and Psychological Services, Director of Health Promotion and Wellness, Senior Director of Residence Life, and the Director of Greek Life. These interviewees identified other individuals who had made key contributions to the discussion and decision processes, and they were invited to be interviewed as well. The process of identifying other individuals in this manner is known as snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Those individuals identified through snowball sampling included, a city police officer, a counselor, a faculty member, an Assistant and Associate Athletic Director, the
Athletic Director, the Director of Athletic Facilities, the Director of Hospitality Services, and the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business. All individuals identified through snowball sampling were contacted to be interviewed, however not all individuals were able to participate in the study.

Prospective interviewees were contacted by e-mail to notify them of the research project and to invite them to participate in the study (Appendix A). Once the participants agreed to be interviewed for the project, a timeline of events (Figure 2.2 and 2.3) was e-mailed to the participants along with an explanation that during the interview they would be asked to identify what they felt to be four or five significant events on the timeline or other important events not included on the timeline. Participants were also sent an electronic copy of the consent form (Appendix B) prior to the scheduled interview. The interviews averaged one hour in length with one exception being two one hour sessions with the Vice President of Student Affairs. Participants sometimes identified other individuals who might have information that was pertinent to the case, and I invited them to be interviewed to add their perspectives on the University’s decision-making process regarding student alcohol abuse. I also invited individuals external to the University and Student Affairs who could provide context on the issue, the University’s response, and the initiatives that Student Affairs presented, but not all these individuals responded to requests for an interview.

Participants

The individuals who participated in this study were identified and invited because of their Student Affairs leadership role or their University or community responsibilities positioned them to provide useful insights for the case study. At the beginning of each interview, each participant received and signed an informed consent form (Appendix B). At this time,
participants were asked what, if any, personal information could be shared in reports on the study. Few individuals gave permission for all identifying factors to be used. To grant the request of most individuals in this study, much of participants’ identifying information has been changed or not specified to allow for greater anonymity; pseudonyms were used and the names of positions were altered. The participant details provided below is intended to provide readers with an understanding of interviewees’ roles and experiences (Appendix C).

The Vice President of Student Affairs has over 25 years of professional experience in student affairs in progressively more senior positions, most of which occurred at another institution in the Big Ten conference. He has a terminal degree and came to the Pennsylvania State University a year prior to the beginning of this case study. Each of the Assistant Vice Presidents, Marie Moore, Doug Anderson, and Sharon Newman, have over 25 years of experience in student affairs, most of which has been in various roles within the Division of Student Affairs at the Pennsylvania State University. Two of them have terminal degrees, and all three served as directors of departments within the division prior to obtaining their Assistant Vice President positions.

Directors Craig Morrison, Kevin Hill and Nancy Thompson have over 20 years of experience each in the health field. They all have terminal degrees in their respective fields and had been in their roles within the Division of Student Affairs for several years before the beginning of the case study time frame. Directors Jeff Cover, Pat James and Kris Smith are responsible for the following areas: Judicial Affairs, Residence Life, and Fraternity and Sorority Life. Each of them has over 25 years of experience in student affairs and worked at several other institutions prior to the Pennsylvania State University.
Among the study participants from outside the Division of Student Affairs, counselor George Tyson has been a counselor for over 25 years and has been with the University for most of his career. Officer John Lehman has over 15 years of experience as a police officer in the State College Borough and was a student at the Pennsylvania State University–University Park campus. Assistant Athletic Director Mike Johnson has been with the University for over 20 years; much of his career has been spent as an athletic administrator. Director Laura Collin works in the Office of Athletic Facilities Management. She has been at the University for over 25 years, serving in various roles throughout the University. Director Luke Koehler has spent over 25 years at the Pennsylvania State University in Hospitality Services; previously he worked in the private sector for several years. Frank Janz has served over 20 years as a faculty member at the University.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 16 participants to explore the research questions. Semi-structured interviews are “interviews in which the same general questions or topics are brought up to each of the subjects involved” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 275). The semi-structured interview approach was selected to provide some consistency in the interview questions, but interviewees were given the freedom to identify and discuss more thoroughly what they viewed to be significant events and issues.

Each semi-structured interview was an hour in length and started with a brief introduction of the topic, along with presentation of a hard copy of the timeline (Figure 2.2 and 2.3). I asked each interviewee if digital recording and note taking were acceptable, and all interviewees consented. Each interviewee was given a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) and asked to sign. The interviewees were advised that they did not have to answer a question if they felt
uncomfortable, and they could stop participation at any point. They were also instructed that the Vice President of Student Affairs was aware of and in support of the study prior to beginning the interviews.

All interviews were approximately one hour in length with the exception of the Vice President’s interview which was two separate one hour interviews as the first interview did not cover the entirety of the bounded case. The semi-structured interviews started with a brief introduction of the topic, along with the timeline being presented in hard copy (Figure 2.2 and 2.3). As mentioned earlier, individuals were asked to identify and discuss four or five events from the timeline that were significant to them during the two-year period under investigation (Appendix D).

Participants were given the opportunity to share information that was not listed on the timeline which they felt was important to the case. Follow-up questions were asked as time permitted to gain more of an understanding of the circumstances and experiences of the participants. Interviews about context for the case and those conducted with individuals identified through snowball sampling were asked more direct questions about their experiences (Appendix E, F, and G). Participants were asked to talk particularly about any decisions they were involved with specifically during the two year time frame. They were also asked to fill in anything missing from the timeline that is important to the decisions made during the timeline.

**Data Analysis**

The interview transcripts and other documents recommended by the participants were read, coded, and analyzed to discern patterns or commonalities present in the data that provided information about what decisions were being made by student affairs personnel. The data were compiled in NVivo, a software program that facilitates the discovery of patterns in qualitative
data. As categories were identified, information from each data source was coded according to those categories. The codes were used to detect patterns and inconsistencies in the data (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2009). The constant comparative method of data analysis was used throughout the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As patterns, commonalities, and categories emerged, earlier data were revisited to see if the patterns could also be identified in them. Categories were modified over time as more data were coded. The modifications brought about category name changes or the moving of information in and out of categories as the information was analyzed.

As more data were analyzed, diagrams were produced for each initiative as a way of organizing and understanding the decisions that led to adoption of each program. The diagrams incorporated the dynamic decision-making model, along with the political and garbage can models to assist in analyzing the data. The data analysis was compared to the model most closely representing the decisions being made in the case. Additional components were added to the model as the data supported a change. The diagrams were modified as more data were analyzed and the contextual factors were understood. These initial diagrams were then consolidated and changed as the analysis continued. The diagrams assisted in conceptualizing the decision-making process and all the pieces that influenced decisions throughout the case study (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2 in Chapter 6).

**Data Verification**

The issue of validity was addressed by cross-checking the data collected in different interviews to determine if it was accurate as compared to other sources of information. Specifically, the data collected at the beginning of the pilot study allowed me to generate a timeline of events, but it also was useful for checking the information presented by interviewees.
The use of triangulation (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998) in this way was very helpful for making sure that interviewees were consistent in remembering the circumstances of the events under study. Triangulation of information was also implemented by interviewing several individuals involved in the same initiatives and conversations. The interviewees discussed their perceptions of what occurred, which helped to increase the validity of the information shared by having multiple sources with the same data.

Another way in which the validity of the study was strengthened was through the use of member checks (Merriam, 1998). As the data were transcribed and coded, if there was a concern about the interpretation of the meaning of a participant’s comments, a question was sent by email to the interviewee for clarification and modification. Participants provided only a handful of modifications in wording, none of which changed the overall meaning of the interpretation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study will inform campus leaders as they address similar issues and circumstances at their institutions. Specifically, they will assist student affairs professionals in understanding how and why particular decisions are made about reducing the excessive consumption of alcohol by students and how members of their institutions may interact around these issues. This case is specific to one institution, but the study’s reliability is inherent in the research design through careful documentation and analysis of a wide variety of data sources. An audit trail of memos account for the collection of data, how institutional decisions were made, and what information was analyzed (Merriam, 1998).
Chapter 4

Community and Case Narrative

The purpose of this case study is to understand decision-making by the Student Affairs leadership at the Pennsylvania State University at a critical moment in the institution’s struggle with student alcohol abuse. The Student Affairs leaders include as Directors, Assistant Vice Presidents (AVPs), and the Vice President, all of whom were involved in the decision-making process to reduce negative consequences associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. The case study examines the two-year time frame from the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2011. Three events sparked a concerted response from the Student Affairs leadership:

1. Pennsylvania State University was named the number one party school (J. Berman, 2009; Glass, 2009).

2. The average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of students transported to the hospital was increasing, as was the number of alcohol violations.

3. A student death.

This study is intended to fill a gap in the student affairs literature. Specifically, its findings describe how and why decisions are made in relation to student alcohol policies. Presently, campus administrators make policy and program changes with little understanding of how decisions are made or what criteria could be used to make these decisions. To improve this situation, this study addresses the following research questions.

1. How did the leadership in Student Affairs make decisions about what policies and programs to adopt, terminate, and/or improve during the period of interest?

2. How did contextual factors influence these decisions?
This chapter provides an overview of the State College environment when the University is in session, along with summaries of the three catalysts that occurred in the fall of 2009 that initiated a University response. This presentation is followed by discussion of a speech that the Vice President of Student Affairs gave September 17, 2010 to the Board of Trustees on the alcohol-related programs that were in place at the time and the initiatives that had been identified for possible implementation (Thorpe, 2010). The chapter concludes at the beginning of the fall 2011 semester with the Vice President’s update to the Student Life committee of the Faculty Senate about the programs and policies that had been implemented during the previous two years. Chapter 5 describes the programs that the Student Affairs leaders considered and the decisions that they made, along with the contextual factors considered.

**We Are… Penn State**

State College is a quintessential college town nestled in the Allegheny Mountains of Central Pennsylvania. A small urban center with a major research university, it is located several hours from any metropolitan area. Each fall, over 45,000 students enroll in the institution and the community population almost doubles, so there is no mistaking the fact that school has begun. Across campus and through the downtown area there is a sense of excitement which comes with the college environment. The enthusiasm that students, faculty, and staff have for the institution is contagious. Often individuals will yell, "We are..." followed by a chorus of others yelling in response, "Penn State." Along with this enthusiasm and school pride there has been a culture of alcohol abuse which has cast a dark shadow over the town and the institution. Specifically, the fall of 2009 was a time in Pennsylvania State University history when the issue of alcohol abuse reached a climax.
A Drinking School with a Football Problem

Student alcohol abuse and issues stemming from the excessive consumption of alcohol are not new to the Pennsylvania State University community. As at many institutions across the country, the culture of excessive alcohol consumption is pervasive throughout the student community. “It's a deeply ingrained problem that has become a fundamental element of reality in higher education. We're not talking about an issue that inhabits the margins. It reaches to the core of our university… affecting more aspects of student life than any other problem (E. Thorpe, Vice President). Riots, property damaged, students injured, hospitalization for alcohol poisoning, and student deaths can be attributed to the consumption and often over consumption of alcohol. The consumption of alcohol at the Pennsylvania State University has become a cultural expectation and a normal part of college life. A T-shirt can be seen on campus that articulates the culture of alcohol consumption in the community, the T-shirt reads, “Penn State... A drinking school with a football problem.” According to Marie Moore, “It’s like a nagging injury that you know is always there. It’s like a burr in your saddle, but until it really rubs raw. You don’t really deal with it, but it’s always in the back of your mind.”

The south face of the University is across a street from a row of bars and restaurants that cater to students. The allure of alcohol is ever present in the daily lives of students. Many students who live off campus walk past these establishments on their way to and from class. “This is a town that is designed seemingly to have an alcohol problem. You have a huge student population that’s shoulder to shoulder with one cheap bar after the next. The economy is built on that, and they’re not going away” (E. Thorpe, Vice President). The bars often promote extremely inexpensive drink specials; some advertise all-you-can-drink. Even though individuals can easily overindulge in the bars, the Tavern Owners Association insists they are a responsible group,
comparing its establishments to fraternities and apartments that serve alcohol. They claim to closely monitor individuals’ alcohol consumption and look for signs of intoxication (E. Thorpe, Vice President). A few bars have Breathalyzer machines, to allow individuals to monitor their own drinking. The intended purpose of these machines has not always been their actual use. “You know the breathalyzers in the bars is my favorite, people just get into competition to see who could out breathalyze the other, if you will” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).

Outside the bars, on the streets and throughout the surrounding neighborhoods, individuals and groups roam in search of the next party. It is not uncommon to see “students walking down the middle of the street” (Glass, 2009). They know it is a street, but do not seem to care that cars are driving slowly behind them. I have been downtown on Friday and Saturday nights to observe student behaviors. There were large groups of students moving between bars, house parties, and fraternity parties. As I walked down the street, I would stand to the side, such as in a doorway of a business, while students filled the entire sidewalk in groups of 10 to 20. There was a lot of energy and excitement as they moved between bars and parties. School chants could be heard, and people were yelling to friends. Students could be seen darting across streets to see their friends or to just get from one side to the other. I have witnessed this practice first hand when driving downtown on different occasions. Often students will run into the street without looking until they are halfway into a lane. I have also seen students stumble into the street by accident, apparently drunk.

One night I was downtown after a football game. Large crowds had gathered on the sidewalks, often spilling out into the streets. This activity most often occurred on the side streets where the vehicular traffic was lighter. However, on the main street, Beaver Avenue, individuals would inadvertently step out into the street as groups passed each other because the sidewalks
were full. One time in the evening, I walked through an area of downtown dubbed “Beaver Canyon” because of the high-rise apartment complexes lining both sides of the street. The balconies were full of young adults yelling to their friends on the sidewalk. I kept looking up, thinking that something would be thrown or dropped from the balconies, which are almost on top of the sidewalk. The energy level was high, and people were yelling to each other and slapping high fives. Other than observations of a few people who obviously had had too much to drink, the atmosphere was upbeat and jovial. There was a distinct police presence as cruisers drove down the street every few minutes.

I spoke with Officer John Lehman of the State College Police Department about what a typical night looks like from the perspective of a patrolman. The officer indicated that he worked on the night shift for 10 years. Officer Lehman stated, there are “so many intoxicated people walking around and people just not paying attention, darting in front of your car, walking into the side of your car. They come out of nowhere, fighting. There is a lot of chaos going on and that was pretty much all the time.” The officer also indicated that it is often difficult to respond to emergencies during the evening and weekend hours because personnel have to be very careful not to cause another accident or hit a pedestrian.

Ambulance drivers who respond to the scene of an excessively intoxicated individual have similar experiences: “While responding we find ourselves maneuvering in and out of traffic, always watching for people to walk out in front of us. Overindulgent partiers find it necessary to run out toward the street to wave” (Knable, 2010, p. 3). Once at the scene, the dangers to police and emergency medical staff do not cease. First responders diligently watch for individuals who do not want their friends to be cited for public intoxication or underage consumption. These individuals often become verbally and sometimes physically
confrontational. “Occasionally the increased alcohol level in their bloodstream builds up muscle and make even the smallest female a candidate for the WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment)” (Knable, 2010, p. 3).

Students have to be cautious on the streets of State College even if they are not consuming alcohol. Sometimes pedestrians cause accidents, and other times student drivers do. In October 2006, for example, a student was driving drunk, ran a red light, and hit two pedestrians crossing the street (Ganim, 2007). According to the officer with whom I spoke, the student had been drinking at several different parties prior to getting in the car and was driving 40 miles per hour when he ran the red light. One student was killed instantly, and the other student has been in a wheelchair since the accident (Ganim, 2007; J. Lehman, Police Officer). Another incident occurred in December 2006, when an intoxicated student stumbled into the street and was struck by another individual who was driving drunk (Boyer, 2008). These incidents do not occur every weekend, but unfortunately, they are not infrequent.

Damage to property as opposed to people is a much more common occurrence in State College. Director of Student Affairs Pat James stated that over the years there has been an increase in the number of students living in downtown State College. There is a belief that the increase in the student population and a decrease in the permanent resident population is a factor in much of the alcohol-related property damage. Director James said:

> there are more students living there (downtown) than fulltime residents... The impact on the neighbors I think became profoundly more adverse and we were getting more and more information about the public urinations, the no respect for property, trash and all of those types of things and it’s more so than in any other time that I remembered.
Late at night and in the early morning hours, “students vandalize residents’ homes and disrupt their families” (McPherson, 2010). Students can be seen urinating in yards throughout the night (Glass, 2009), along with discarding everything from clothes to cans to condoms and other personal items. “Our homes and yards become public dumping grounds for beer cans and bodily fluids” (Twomley, 2010). Traveling the streets of downtown State College in the early morning hours on a weekend, just after sunrise, one can see the aftermath of the previous evening’s activities. Driving past houses, one can see which ones hosted parties, as their yards are filled with plastic cups, beer cans, and other discarded items.

The damage and trash are not confined to the houses and apartments that host parties. Officer Lehman shared a story about some students that caused damage to a local business. According to the Officer Lehman, a new business had just moved onto one of the main streets in downtown State College, very close to student apartment complexes and fraternity houses. The business had completed some new landscaping in anticipation of a grand opening. One morning before the business opened, police were called to the location because there had been damage to the landscaping. One of the newly planted dogwood trees was missing. The officer who responded to the scene followed a dirt trail down the street to an apartment complex in the area. The officer knocked on a door at the end of the dirt trail, and when a highly intoxicated student opened the door, a six-foot dogwood tree was seen inside the apartment.

Home invasions, like property damage, are also not uncommon in the State College community. Home invasions where items are stolen or individuals are assaulted are not the norm, but they do occur. The home invasion that is most often seen in State College involves students who believe that they are in their own homes. A student finds a comfortable place and lies down. On one such occasion, a daughter told her mother that she wanted to play in her room and asked
mom get the man out of her bed. The woman assured her daughter there was no one in her bed and she could go and play. Her daughter went away for a bit, presumably to check. She came back a few minutes later and repeated that there was a man in her bed. When the mother went to investigate, she found a student who had come into the house and fallen asleep in her daughter’s bed (Glass, 2009).

Another incident involved a student found showering in the middle of the night. The student was showering in a child’s bathroom and the parents wrestled the student out of the house (Bergher, 2010). State College police often receive calls about students who are found sleeping on couches, banging on doors, or breaking a window to attempt to gain entry. These individuals are so intoxicated that they believe they are trying to get into their own houses. According to Officer Lehman these incidents are not uncommon: “Kids are just intoxicated and staggering, and it just paints a picture. They are always sleeping on somebody else’s couch, going into somebody else’s apartment.” In one incident, officers met for three hours with female students who were terrified that someone was attempting to break into their ground-floor apartment. The individual entered an adjacent apartment, thinking he was home. “We investigated and found the person turned out to be just a really highly intoxicated kid coming back from the bars who lived about a half a block away, and thought he was home and was trying to get into his own apartment.”

Officer Lehman shared another incident of a student who was lost on the parkway just outside of State College Borough in subzero temperatures. That evening, the police received many reports of noise from several different locations. It was later surmised that the noise calls followed the student’s path as he was trying to find his way home. The student was finally found outside a house. After being in the extreme cold for several hours, “he had hypothermia so badly,
he almost died, and he had significant frostbite on his leg [and] had to have part of his calf muscles removed.”

University officials have not been blind to the fact that students and community members alike are being hurt due to the use of alcohol. As problems have been identified, University administrators have addressed the problem in different ways. For example, at the beginning of the 2006 football season, from kickoff until the final whistle, alcohol consumption outside the stadium (i.e., in tailgating areas) was banned (Larchuk, 2006). Forbidding drinking on University property during football games was not the first change made by the administration in an attempt to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, however. The program LateNight-PennState was developed by former President Graham Spanier to provide alternative activities for students on Friday and Saturday nights.

LateNight-PennState began in Fall 1996 to give students other weekend entertainment options than drinking. The mission of LateNight-PennState is to “make available to students quality late night entertainment during prime social times…. LateNight provides an alcohol-free environment with opportunities for students to gain experiences in programming, leadership development, and responsible social interaction” (Pennsylvania State University, 2012). Programs are held throughout the Hetzel Union Building (HUB) every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night from 9 p.m. until 2 a.m. and include comedians, concerts, magicians, art and craft activities, board games, and movies; snacks are also available at reduced prices for Penn State students (Day, 2001; Pennsylvania State University, 2012). Students can assist in the planning of events through involvement in many student organizations (Day, 2001).

When Spanier began his tenure as the President of Pennsylvania State University in 1995, he sought to change the culture of binge drinking. When people first asked Dr. Spanier about the
biggest problem he has had as a university president, he would say it was the alcohol issue (Glass, 2009; Pennsylvania State University, 2012). In his 1998 State of the University address, Spanier discussed the issue of student alcohol consumption and made one statement to incoming Penn State students: “If you’re interested in Penn State because of the attraction of binge drinking, please go somewhere else” (Glass, 2009). According to counselor George Tyson of the University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Spanier’s efforts to curb binge drinking were seen as a negative by such diverse groups as the University trustees, alumni, and the local American Civil Liberties Union, and he soon delegated this responsibility to other members of his administration.

The individual to whom responsibility it is for addressing the issue of students’ excessive consumption of alcohol has been the Vice President of Student Affairs. Previous Vice Presidents have given this issue differing levels of attention, according to Director Kevin Hill, who has been at the Pennsylvania State University for over 25 years. A previous Vice President gave student alcohol consumption a “nominal” degree of attention within his administration, while a more recent Vice President was “more about the glitz than substance.” To Hill, it seemed as if concern about the alcohol issue was handled with “window dressing” rather than substantive change initiatives. “Some would say, okay, we’re going to do what we need to do to give the impression that we’re really tackling this job. [She] would show attention to it, and she would have sort of high profile workshops and gatherings.”

Hill was appointed for approximately four years to the new position of Senior University Liaison for Addressing High-Risk Drinking. This position was established by a former Vice President for Student Affairs in an attempt to show that the University was doing something about the student alcohol issue. Hill stated that the position was a monitoring position, as
opposed to a position with real authority to implement change, and no budget to assist with implementation of new strategies accompanied the new title. There was a lot of promotion of the idea of decreasing risky behaviors, but according to Hill, “it was pretty much status quo.” There was some education and a bit more monitoring, but there were no real initiatives. Through this experience, Hill learned one valuable lesson: “It’s like pushing a boulder up the hill, you never quite reach the top, but if you let up at all you’re crushed under the weight of it again.” An Assistant Vice President also stated that this has been an ongoing concern for the University; she had been involved with many committees attempting to address this issue during her tenure at the University (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs).

AVP Sharon Newman believes that the new Vice President, who had been in his position for almost a year at the time of this study, used a different approach than his predecessors. He “decided to carry that burden because after he had to sit across the table and explain to a family that their first year student was gone, I think that had a tremendous impact on him personally.” An observation by Director Kevin Hill supports this belief: The Vice President “seemed to have some genuine interest in it, and he also was at the table, not sending someone on his staff to the table. He was at the table and did a good job of identifying what we had. Incorporating new forms of intervention, supporting us with real dollars in the form of the BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) program and some additional staffing opportunities for CAPS (Counseling And Psychological Services)…. That was really a cornerstone of his administration early on.” The impetus to act came from three separate occurrences that made the “perfect storm”.
The Perfect Storm

The “perfect storm,” as termed by Pat James, a Director in Student Affairs, came from three separate incidents in a very short period of time at the beginning of the Fall 2009 semester:

1. Pennsylvania State University was named the number one party school, which brought increased media attention (J. Berman, 2009; Glass, 2009).

2. The average blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of students transported to the hospital was increasing, as was the number of alcohol violations (Student Affairs Research and Assessment, 2011).

3. A student death.

Increased media attention

In August of 2009, the Princeton Review released their annual list of the country’s top party schools. The Pennsylvania State University was listed as the number-one party school in the country (J. Berman, 2009). Students often take great pride in their school’s ranking at the top of the list. Administrators, on the other hand, usually try to distance themselves from the negative press that such recognition causes, pointing out that the rankings are a nonscientific study (Armas, 2009; Glass, 2009; Heldt, 2013). The top party schools are typically institutions with a large student and alumni populations. The Princeton Review does describe the data that it gathers to create the rankings, including:

- students' answers to survey questions concerning: the use of alcohol and drugs at their school, the number of hours they study each day outside of class time, and the popularity of fraternities/sororities at their school. Schools on the "Party Schools" list are those at which surveyed students' answers indicated a
combination of: low personal daily study hours (outside of class), high usages of alcohol and drugs on campus, and high popularity on campus for frats/sororities.

(The Princeton Review's college rankings, 2013)

Even though this study is nonscientific, the list often brings with it an influx of media attention, and Penn State proved no exception. The list was reprinted by newspapers across the country, and a producer of Chicago Public Media’s This American Life, Sarah Koenig, was inspired by the ranking to feature Penn State on a show segment (Koenig, 2009). In December 2009, This American Life’s story on the alcohol culture at the Pennsylvania State University was aired by National Public Radio (NPR) (Glass, 2009). Student Affairs Director Craig Morrison stated, “I do think that that drew a lot of attention to Penn State.... I think that good and bad.... It was used to sort of keep the issue moving.”

The host of This American Life, Ira Glass, visited a community member, Sarah Koenig, who is also a producer for the show. They sat on her front porch and watched individuals and groups move through the neighborhood after a night of partying. In the first few minutes of the show, they described several groups of students walking/stumbling down the street. They saw one student being carried, and a few minutes later, another group of students threw trash into a neighbor’s lawn. A short time later the host described the sound of something scraping along the street, and she and Glass went to investigate. They stopped a couple of male students who were dragging a stop sign. First the students stated they had found the stop sign on the ground. Later in the segment, they admitted to pulling the sign out of the ground. This sequence of events all occurred within the first half-hour of Glass and Koenig’s observations that night. Although the focus was on Penn State, Glass (2009) acknowledged that these types of activities are not unusual for a large state school with a large Greek system and a nationally known football team.
The radio segment then transitioned to a tailgate before a Penn State football game. Glass (2009) talked about how tailgates represent a “deeply embedded drinking” culture as multiple generations of Penn State alumni and families drink outside at tailgates. One section of the report included a student who had just turned 21 and was drinking at several tailgating parties in an on-campus parking garage. The tailgates started at 8 a.m. and would not end until 7 p.m., when the game started. One of the interviewees was asked what would happen if the alumni were told they could not drink at their tailgates anymore, and his immediate response was “there would be a revolt” (Glass, 2009). This individual was an alumnus from the class of 1977 and believed drinking is part of the Pennsylvania State University tradition (Glass, 2009).

**Increase in BAC and violations**

The Partnership is a University and community committee of individuals that works to address student alcohol issues at Penn State and in the surrounding community. Every year the committee releases a report that consolidates all relevant data collected by many different on-campus sources. According to the Partnership’s annual report, the average BAC (Figure 4.1; Table 4.1) along with the number of students being transported to the hospital due to alcohol overconsumption (Figure 4.2; Table 4.1) has been increasing almost every year since 2003 (Student Affairs Research and Assessment, 2011).

The number of alcohol violations processed by the Office of Judicial Affairs for violating the University Code of Conduct in relation to alcohol has also increased since 2003 (Figure 4.3; Table 4.1). The number of students attending the Pennsylvania State University increased during this six year period from 40,810 students to 43,272. The change in population does not fully explain the increase in violations over this period. The number of alcohol violations increased from 1.6% of the student population in 03-04, to 2.1% of the student population having alcohol
violations in 08-09. Also, the increase of 2,462 students over the six years does not fully explain the 408 increase of students transported to the hospital during this same period. The percentage of the student population that was transported to the hospital in the 2003-2004 academic year was .4%, as compared to 1.3% being transported during the 2008-2009 academic year.

**Table 4.1**  
*Student Alcohol Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>PSU students transported to hospital</th>
<th>Avg. BAC for students transported to hospital</th>
<th># of student alcohol violations (DUI, liquor law violation and Public Drunk)</th>
<th>Alcohol charges processed by Office of Judicial Affairs</th>
<th>University Park Campus enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>1253</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>40,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>1230</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>40,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>39,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>1691</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>41,914</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>1454</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>42,083</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>1545</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>43,272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Figure 4.1.** Average BAC for students transported to hospital (Partnership Annual Assessment Report, 2010-2011)
Figure 4.2. Students transported to hospital (Partnership Annual Assessment Report, 2010-2011).

Figure 4.3. Alcohol charges processed by Office of Judicial Affairs (Partnership Annual Assessment Report, 2010-2011 and 2007-2008)
**Student Death**

Monday, September 21, 2009 a State Police helicopter could be heard circling over State College and what is known as University Park (Ganim, 2009). Students, faculty, and staff knew that a student was missing, and the sound of the helicopter was ominous as it signaled to them that the search had increased in intensity. Helicopters are not often heard above the town, and the anxiety level of individuals in the community grew as the hours passed. The freshman student who was missing, lived on campus, as 98% of the first-year class does each year. I was still taking classes at this time, and I was on my way to a class as the helicopter hovered overhead. Before the class started, I talked with my professor about the possibility that I may be called out of class. She knew I worked in Residence Life, and her eyes started to tear up as she asked if it was because of the student that was missing. At that moment, I realized that the community was on edge as we were waiting for the “story” to end. I was not called out of class as the student’s body, lying at the bottom of an infrequently used utility stairway leading to the basement of the Hosler Building (Ganim, 2009), was not found until after my class ended, but it was clear this situation would not be forgotten within a few weeks.

The directors with whom I spoke each had their own thoughts on how this situation changed the conversation around alcohol. Director Kevin Hill stated, “because of the way it sort of evolved in the fact that it took days to unfold before anybody knew what was going on. We all have this graphic image of this poor kid leaping over a fence or barrier and falling to his death steps away from the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity where it was later determined that he had been consuming alcohol. That really brought it home” (Cirilli, 2009b, 2009c; Ganim, 2009). Director Craig Morrison stated, “There was a strong emotional part of it too. You know, because here
was this 18-year-old boy who is alone, there's a lot of mystery surrounding his whereabouts and even his death. I mean, no one really knows what happened”.

The police officer whom I interviewed had an additional connection to the missing student. The student grew up in the officer’s hometown, which is about two hours from the Pennsylvania State University - University Park campus. The situation was also affecting people outside the immediate community. One of the officer’s cousins went to high school with the student and was calling hourly to see if she could find out any information about what was happening in the search. “Here’s this kid straight out of high school, starting his college career, should just be having the time of his life. Should be just excited to be away from home and on his own. It’s a huge tragedy for the community and for the students as well.”

The Vice President was informed soon after the student was reported missing and received information from police as the 39-hour search progressed. The police sought to figure out a timeline of events to see where the student may have been located. According to Officer Lehman, “None of his cards were being used [credit cards or student ID], his cell phone wasn’t being used, and it’s just not typical behavior for somebody his age.” In other words, as the hours passed, it became increasingly apparent that something significant had happened to the student.

Search groups were organized and sent out to different areas of campus and the community in an attempt to find the student. In the last few minutes before the student’s body was found, the Vice President was driving to the police station, “when cars went zipping out of the police station, as I was pulling up.” When the Vice President entered the station, the Chief of Police pulled him and an Assistant Vice President into a room to let them know that the student’s body might have been found. “The search committee was just convened with dogs and all that, it was just about to leave the police office, literally, physically we were about to walk out when we
were told about [the student]. We got the notice that he was found by the custodial person. It became very real and personal” (S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs).

    The Vice President, the Chief of Police, and Assistant Vice President Newman were in a room together when the news was verified by the police officers dispatched to identify the student. The Vice President notified the parents that their son’s body had been found.

    I went into the room and essentially told them almost immediately that [their son] had been found and that he was dead, and they reacted the way you might predict they would. The parents were having great difficulties, so we had a conversation about it, and I tried to answer what I could in those moments, but there isn’t much that you can say and I didn’t really know many of the particulars.

    After speaking with the student’s parents and family, the Vice President made his way to the student center to address a group of students that had gathered. In my interview with the Vice President, he stated,

    Students had gathered there to also conduct a search. There were quite a few students in the auditorium that night. And so, I had to go and break the news to all these students who were gathered for that purpose…. I did that, then I went down the street where the student’s body had been found and talked to the police about it. And you know the rest of the evening was sort of a blur.

The succession of events seemed to play a significant role in the Vice President’s view of the alcohol issue at Penn State. According to Assistant Vice President Newman, “that moment really impacted one of the major leaders of the institution who made the decision to now act. I don’t know how to put it, but I think it was another thing that allowed him to get support from the
president to go attack the issue, it was empowering.” Assistant Vice President Marie Moore reiterated this sentiment, “the entire institution was saying it’s the Student Affairs’ problem. It has to do with students; it ought to be the members in Student Affairs to carry that burden. And, I think [the Vice President] decided to carry that burden because after he had to sit across the table and explain to a family that their first year student was gone, I think that had a tremendous impact on him personally.”

After the search ended, the Vice President reflected on the events of the previous 40-plus hours. He decided that it would be important to not let this student death go without attempting to change the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. The attention that the student’s death would bring to the issue of excessive consumption at the Pennsylvania State University, along with the two other pieces of the “perfect storm” that preceded it, could not be overlooked. The Vice President stated:

I remember coming back to my office and just sitting around thinking to myself about this. What could be done with this and it actually dawned on me that I thought that this situation needed to somehow be used in a positive way. This death had to be turned into something that mattered…. So I determined, realizing that, that the last thing we needed to do was to make broad pronouncements about all the things we’re going to do immediately and know with some certainty that they wouldn’t bear any more fruit than all the earlier iterations had. So, I was determined not to go in that direction. The usual way of doing things becomes a bit cliché…. They [other administrators] make big announcements they try to be very high-profile for a moment and capture attention and then go on to other
things. I knew that wasn’t going to work for me and I didn’t think it would work for the institution.

The introspection, preliminary analysis, and beginnings of decision-making that the Vice President articulated were also occurring across campus. Individuals were attempting to understand what had occurred and how to move forward. “The incident was so wrenching for so many people, and it came at a time when we were already keenly aware of Penn State’s drinking problem” (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs). All the individuals interviewed for this study agreed that the facts surrounding the student’s death changed the conversation about alcohol and became the focal point for the conversation. The death of the student was the watershed moment for what had been occurring on campus and in the community. Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman reported that the University has an average of 30 student deaths a year, of which many can be attributed to drugs or alcohol in some way. The death of this student was different in that it occurred on campus, his sisters attended the University and searched for him with their parents (Bail, 2009), and the student’s BAC was not excessively high at 0.169 (Cirilli, 2009a).

“The Vice President still, whenever he is talking in front of a group, mentions the [student death]” (S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs). Pat James (Director Student Affairs) discussed it as a motivating point for the Vice President, and he then “motivated the rest of us.” He would always say, “We are going to do something, we’re going to do many things. My list is up to 40, my list is up to 80, and we’re going to involve the entire community. Student Affairs needs to take some leadership here.” According to the This American Life story (Glass, 2009), “[The Vice President] thinks being named the number one party school and the [student death]
have pushed the issue to some kind of tipping point, and he plans to capitalize on it. He's working on a list of ideas. When we met it was 72 items long.”

In talking with many of the Student Affairs Directors, it was clear that none of them had seen the full list of potential changes that the Vice President had in mind. However, soon after the student’s death the Vice President pulled several Directors and Assistant Vice Presidents together to have a discussion about what “levers need to be pulled and in what succession should those levers be activated” (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs). According to the Vice President, he needed to “persuade our community that the sources of the problem are many and the solutions must be many too. Launch a multi-pronged effort unlike anything Penn State has tried before. Sustain that effort over time—a long time. Discourage the inevitable and completely pointless finger-pointing. And persuade our students to view Penn State as a family—one in which we are each responsible for ourselves and responsible for each other” (Koenig, 2009).

The list referred to above includes the initiatives, collaborations, and programs that were being discussed in the weeks and months after the student’s death. Each time the Vice President would meet with someone, receive an e-mail, or read a new article, another item would be added to the list to be considered. The list continued to grow throughout the next year as more conversations occurred. The final list (Appendix H) was presented to the Board of Trustees in fall 2010.

**Presentation to the Board of Trustees**

On September 17, 2010, approximately a year after the “perfect storm”, the Vice President, along with the Assistant Vice President of Student and Family Services, the Director of Health Promotion and Wellness in University Health Services, and the Inter-Fraternity Council President addressed the Board of Trustees. The presentation included a list of initiatives
that were already occurring, some that were being worked on, and some that were being considered for future implementation (Thorpe, 2010). The Vice President stated, “I tried to lay out what the problem was and then tried to suggest that, a great many things had been done.” In the speech to the Board of Trustees, the Vice President asserted, “success is possible only by way of a sustained, persistent, multifaceted effort that touches upon every aspect of the problem” (Koenig, 2009).

The Vice President also reported telling the Board that “no university that I knew of, other than Brigham Young, could claim it doesn't have a fairly significant problem with alcohol. Despite that, I was essentially saying we have the choice of throwing up our hands and just saying, “It's intractable.” I remember looking at [the President] when I said that because that was what he was telling me [to do], or we could decide this is so important that we're going to just stick with it for a long, long time.” A board member asked the Vice President how he defined a long time. “I said years, you know, a decade or more at least, maybe longer. I don’t know it just seems to me that it has to always be one of our foremost concerns when it comes to student success.” Several Board members applauded the Vice President at the end of the presentation and encouraged him to continue his efforts.

Faculty Senate Committee on Student Life

August 30, 2011 brings this two-year case study to a close. On that day, the Vice President of Student Affairs spoke to the Faculty Senate Committee on Student Life, a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate (McCarty, 2011). I requested the Vice President’s notes that were used to address the committee and he consented. The Vice President stated that he briefly discussed in his speech the initiatives that began during the 2010-2011 academic year along with some of the initial results.
The Vice President spoke about alcohol being the “single most important, overarching, ever present issue for the Student Affairs Office” (McCarty, 2011). He talked briefly about the BASICS program that was implemented the previous year, along with the fact that the program was showing “promising results” (McCarty, 2011). He also explained a change in sanctioning for alcohol violations. Sanctions were being extended to include all off-campus violations of the University alcohol policy to be consistent with sanctions for on-campus violations.

The Division of Student Affairs’ efforts to develop and implement a recovery community were shared, which will be explained in the next chapter. Also discussed was the ongoing conversation with Intercollegiate Athletics regarding expectations and consequences of alcohol consumption among fans. Finally, he shared that curbing excessive alcohol consumption by students was an ongoing issue that needed constant support and oversight so that Student Affairs could continue to make incremental changes in the coming years (Thorpe, 2011). He went on to note the fact that the faculty also has “a role in addressing this issue” (McCarty, 2011), but he did not talk specifically about what they could do to help. According to the Vice President, the speech was well received by the Faculty Senate Committee on Student Life. There were a few questions presented by the members, but overall the committee appeared satisfied with the implemented programs.
Chapter 5

Initiatives

The goal of this case study is to understand decision-making by Student Affairs leaders at the Pennsylvania State University in the wake of a crisis. The time frame under study is the fall of 2009, when a series of events brought the University’s student alcohol culture to the forefront, to the fall of 2011, when the Vice President of Student Affairs presented to the Faculty Senate his division’s efforts to mitigate this student culture. The study is intended to assist Student Affairs administrators in understanding how decisions related to student alcohol concerns are made, as very little research about decision-making in higher education in general, and in this area specifically, exists. Campus administrators make decisions about policy and program changes with little understanding of how decisions are made or what criteria could be used to make decisions.

Chapter 4 provided a brief overview of the State College environment when the University is in session and some illustrative examples of the negative consequences that excessive consumption of alcohol by students has on the community, as well as an overview of the University’s efforts to curtail student alcohol abuse. Chapter 5 identifies the major initiatives discussed during the two-year span of this study, how those decisions were made by the leadership in the division of Student Affairs, and what contextual factors influenced their decisions. Each initiative is described, as are the decision points and contextual factors, to give insight into why the Student Affairs leadership implemented each program or policy. Each initiative is presented through the lens of the 3-in1 Framework described in Chapter 2 (NIAAA, 2002a; see Figure 2.1).
According to the 3-in-1 Framework (Figure 5.1) (NIAAA, 2002a), university leaders must consider three areas in the process of changing a student culture such as one that functions to maintain and propagate an environment of alcohol abuse. Leaders must focus attention on: the individual student, the collective student body, the institution itself and its surrounding community (Hingson et al., 2002; Hingson & Howland, 2002). In the first area, the focus is on identifying and providing assistance to individual students who are at-risk binge drinkers or indeed alcohol-dependent. The second area targets reducing those aspects of the student community that promote the overconsumption of alcohol (DeJong & Langford, 2002; NIAAA, 2002a; Perkins, 2002; Wagenaar & Toomey, 2002). The third area addresses the institution and the surrounding community, encouraging the campus and its community to collaborate on reframing the issue of alcohol abuse and defining alcohol expectations (Hingson & Howland, 2002; Holder et al., 1997).

![Figure 5.1. 3 in 1 Framework](image)

The Vice President of Student Affairs was interviewed in June 2009 for a *This American Life* segment that explored what it is like for the University to be named the number-one party school in the country (Koenig, 2009). He said that there is no simple solution to the issue of
student alcohol consumption and he knew it was going to take substantial time and a large group from across the University to make any changes to this culture:

The answer to this problem is not found in one magical solution. Beefed up enforcement will help, but it will not in itself get us where we need to be. Education is important, but without enforcement it will have little effect. New policies and practices must be part of the equation, but only part. Excessive tailgating must be stemmed, but doing so will affect behavior eight Saturdays each year. The bars should stop offering ridiculous drink specials, but doing so will not stop excessive drinking in other venues. Academic rigor should be the hallmark of the undergraduate experience at Penn State, but students must still enjoy free time, and we must ensure that they do so safely. This is a complicated issue, and it will change only if we decide to work in concert with one another. Students must be a key element in the solution. If we treat them as the problem, the problem will deepen. (Koenig, 2009)

**The Individual**

The first initiatives to be discussed are those that pertain specifically to the individual student, addressing and changing his or her alcohol consumption behavior. These initiatives are designed to be exercised on a case-by-case basis, most often as targeted enforcement or education of individual students who have been identified as at-risk or alcohol-dependent drinkers. Four initiatives were adopted or designed during the timeframe of the present study. These were

1. the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) program,
2. revised University sanctions,
3. the Collegiate Recovery Community, and
4. fan behavior initiatives at home football games.

The timeline, first introduced in Chapter 2 has been modified to show the “perfect storm” and the interventions mentioned above. This is followed by descriptions of the initiatives that the University implemented.

Figure 5.2. Alcohol Intervention Timeline Individual.

“The Gold Standard”: BASICS

The Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) program, which is considered to be the “gold standard” for reducing the excessive consumption of alcohol
by individual students (Borsari & Carey, 2000; DiFulvio, Linowski, Mazziotti, & Puleo, 2012; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; P. James, Director Student Affairs), was implemented in fall 2010. Students who violated campus alcohol policies had previously been sanctioned to an educational program called PAWS, which had been designed by Pennsylvania State University, University Health Services staff. According to Director Morrison, PAWS was “based on BASICS, but it wasn’t true BASICS”. BASICS was implemented by the Office of Health Promotion and Wellness after many conversations with Judicial Affairs, Residence Life, and the Vice Presidents of Student Affairs Office (P. James, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs).

**PAWS.** The name of the alcohol education program that preceded BASICS, PAWS, was not an acronym. Rather, it was a reference to the Pennsylvania State University mascot, the Nittany Lion. It was also a play on words in that the program asked students to “pause” and think about how they use alcohol.

PAWS included two levels. The placement of a student in either level was done in a somewhat subjective and inconsistent manner by a judicial case manager (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs; G. Tyson, CAPS Counselor). For example, if a student was charged and sanctioned for excessively consuming alcohol by the University’s Office of Judicial Affairs or Residence Life, he or she might be sent to the second level of PAWS, as it was deemed more appropriate for individuals who were at high risk of alcohol abuse. The first level was generally for individuals who had a minor violation or first-time offense of the University’s alcohol policy.

Individuals who participated in the first level met as a group with 20 to 30 other students who had also violated the alcohol policy. The focus of these sessions, which lasted
approximately two hours, was to learn about alcohol and how it affects the body. These sessions were run by graduate students in counseling who were hired and trained specifically for the program. The second level of PAWS involved one-on-one meetings between a student peer educator and a student, during which they talked about the student’s alcohol use and the peer educator shared social norms information.

Students who voluntarily stated to the judicial case manager that they may have a problem with alcohol were assigned to the Alcohol Intervention Program (AIP). Individuals who had multiple alcohol violations could also be assigned to AIP as a third level sanction (P. James, Director Student Affairs). AIP was a one-on-one counseling session with a certified addictions counselor in Universities Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; G. Tyson, CAPS Counselor).

Unlike PAWS, which was abandoned when BASICS was adopted, AIP has continued in the same format in conjunction with BASICS. Individuals can be sent to AIP by the judicial case manager in the same way as previously assigned if they identify a need to receive assistance with reducing their alcohol consumption (G. Tyson, CAPS Counselor). However, since BASICS was adopted, students are assigned to AIP through a more objective assessment that is administered to all students assigned to BASICS. The assessment measures the student’s average alcohol consumption and propensity for addiction (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; G. Tyson, CAPS Counselor).

**BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students).** According to Director Craig Morrison, the Student Affairs leadership considered academic research and other institutions’ experiences in the process of making decisions to implement the full version of BASICS. A number of studies (Baer, Kivlahan, Blume, McKnight, & Marlatt, 2001; Borsari &
Carey, 2000; DiFulvio et al., 2012) have shown BASICS to reduce student alcohol consumption (See Table 5.1). As Director Morrison stated:

This is the gold standard for alcohol interventions with college students. This is what the National Institute for Alcohol and Alcoholism (NIAAA) is saying we should do…. There is basically no ambiguity in the college health world that BASICS is the intervention to use for mandated students [those that are required to attend because of a University sanction].

The conversation about implementing the full BASICS program started with a site visit to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst by the Health Services Director (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs). Nancy Thompson reported: “It did have an impact… the program at the University of Massachusetts, it was their main campus… they had implemented it on a pretty mass scale”.

When the “perfect storm” occurred in the fall of 2009, the opportunity was available to gain support for more staff and resources to follow a full BASICS model of alcohol education. Director Thompson recalled, “There was good evidence that this program (BASICS) worked, and so we kind of started advocating for moving in that direction, and I think because of the timing, because it was when [the Vice President] was really motivated to do something about alcohol”. Research findings and a proposal to implement the program were presented to the Vice President, an Assistant Vice President, the Director of Judicial Affairs, and the Director of Residence Life by the Health Education Director in spring 2010 (P. James, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs).
Table 5.1
*BASICS short term efficacy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th></th>
<th>Follow up</th>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 29</td>
<td>N = 31</td>
<td>N = 29</td>
<td>N = 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of drinks consumed per week</td>
<td>17.57 8.20</td>
<td>18.56 12.48</td>
<td>11.90 7.03</td>
<td>15.78 8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of times consuming alcohol, past month</td>
<td>4.41 0.62</td>
<td>4.53 0.90</td>
<td>3.83 0.89</td>
<td>4.57 1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of binge drinking, past month</td>
<td>3.20 0.90</td>
<td>3.50 0.90</td>
<td>2.55 1.40</td>
<td>3.37 1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Brief intervention/control between-groups t test on variables significant at p < .017 (one-way Bonferroni adjustment). (Borsari & Carey, 2000)

According to Director Morrison, “People were on board right away…. There was just a question of making sure that all the resources were in place to do it properly.” While Student Affairs staff may have perceived this attitude among the senior leadership, the Vice President stated that he checked the facts prior to authorizing adoption of the program. Specifically, before deciding that BASICS was the best course of action for Penn State, he did some benchmarking by contacting institutions that already used the program. He also investigated current research was saying about student alcohol abuse and how a university could change student behavior. The Vice President stated that he often reads up on issues occurring at the University so that he has insight on what is being discussed:

I spend a lot of time reading. I could bone up on things quickly and then get into conversation with people who actually know and live this every day in various ways. It puts me in a better position, I think, to ask good questions … and also
prod them at times in some different directions because I think that it’s human nature for any of us to become a bit complacent about what we’re doing.

The Vice President continued, “I was willing to make the heaviest investment in the [BASICS] program because it just seemed like the one promising thing that we had going for us, and you couldn’t do it half way. You had to do it all the way.” Ultimately, the Vice President authorized an investigation into the feasibility of implementing BASICS as one prong of a multi-pronged initiative to reduce the issues related to the over consumption of alcohol by students. The following sub-sections: increase testing, students, staffing, and cost, represent discussion points that occurred as BASICS was being vetted for implementation.

Increase testing. The first component of BASICS is two one-hour meetings between a student and a professional BASICS counselor trained in harm reduction techniques. In the first meeting, the counselor and the student talk about the situation that brought them to the meeting, and the student completes some assessments that the counselor will use to guide the second meeting. BASICS does not prescribe the test used to assess students; selection is left to the implementation group. BASICS is based on motivational interviewing and a harm-reduction approach, which is designed to help students reduce their alcohol consumption, with the desired outcome of not harming themselves through the use of alcohol in the future (Dimeff et al., 1999).

The decision of what test to use in the screening process was determined by the medical and health education staff in University Health Services (UHS): the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). The test was developed by the World Health Organization and has been used to identify individuals experiencing or at risk for experiencing alcohol-related issues (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; Reinert & Allen, 2006). The UHS staff, in collaboration with the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff, decided to enhance the AUDIT by
including the Overall Anxiety Severity and Impairment Scale (OASIS), which tests for anxiety,
and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), which tests for depression and suicide (C.
Morrison, Director Student Affairs).

Incorporation of these additional tests was based on the alcohol abuse literature, which often links anxiety, depression, and suicide risk to possible alcohol abuse:

Often problems with alcohol are not pure in the sense that it’s not just an alcohol issue. Typically there is what we might call a dual diagnosis to be applied, an individual is depressed or has been chronically depressed and turns to alcohol as a way of sort of self-medicating their anxiety… to increase their comfort in social situations they’ll drink more to get relaxed or to appear as though they’re more socially skilled. (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs)

*Increase Students.* As the potential adoption of BASICS was being explored, a parallel conversation was occurring around the need for consistency in charges against and sanctioning of students who violate the University’s alcohol policies. The committees discussing these topics included several of the same people. The group that was exploring inconsistencies in the application of the University’s alcohol policies concluded that, at that time, not all individuals who were caught violating the policies were being assigned to a University education program. Several participants remembered that the Vice President’s stance was that the sanctioning needed to be stronger and more consistent for all students.

The University’s sanctioning guidelines stated that an individual with an underage alcohol violation should receive an alcohol education sanction and housing contract review or University probation (OSC, 2011). However, first-time alcohol violation sanctions were set by
the case manager, and the case manager often loosely followed the sanctioning guidelines. Also, students who lived off campus were receiving e-mail warnings that future violations could affect their student status (P. James, Director Student Affairs). Students who committed off-campus violations were often sent to a community alcohol education program by the magistrate and were not sanctioned to the University program.

According to Pat James (Director Student Affairs), the committee concluded, with the Vice President, that since BASICS was the gold standard in alcohol education programs, it should be used for all students, not just those caught drinking on-campus. Thus, the committee recommended that all first-time violators of the University’s alcohol policies, both on- and off-campus, should be sanctioned to the BASICS program because of the program’s documented record of reducing alcohol consumption (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). The new sanctions for students found in violation of alcohol or drug policies off campus were effective the fall 2010 semester. All students, on- or off-campus, would be charged and sanctioned according to the University code of conduct and held to the same standard (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; Partnership, 2011).

Consistent application of the University’s code of conduct to both on- and off-campus students would eliminate the ability of staff to implement sanctions differently, depending on the circumstances. It would also mean that more students would experience the University’s judicial process. Moreover, sanctioning all students who violated the University’s alcohol policies, whether on- or off-campus, and assigning them the BASICS program would increase the volume of students and bring down the per-student cost. In the end, the widening of enforcement of the University’s alcohol policies to include both on- and off-campus violations would necessitate an increase in staff in several departments.
Increase Staffing. To address the major concerns of staffing and costs associated with the implementation of BASICS, the discussions within Student Affairs soon became a collaboration between departments (P. James, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs). To meet anticipated student demand, it was projected that five BASICS counselors would be needed, which would result in a significant increase in salary and benefits costs (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs). Judicial Affairs also needed to increase its staff to address off-campus student violations and assist with the administration of their cases (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; K. Hill, Director Student Affairs; P. James, Director Student Affairs). The issue was discussed in committee meetings with representatives from the departments that would be sanctioning students to BASICS.

CAPS also added an addictions counselor to meet the demands of the BASICS program, the expense of which was figured into the total cost of offering BASICS (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs). The tests that are described in the section above produce a score for each student. If a student’s total score was above a threshold set by UHS staff, the student was referred to two additional one-hour sessions with an addictions counselor after meeting with a BASICS counselor for two initial sessions. This referral system, combined with the potential increase in demand from off-campus cases, made hiring another counselor necessary.

Increase Cost. The UHS staff estimated a per-student fee-for-service by calculating “the total number of staff hours required to conduct sessions for BASICS in UHS and CAPS” (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs). The calculation of staff hours determined the number of staff members needed as well as the funds needed for salaries and benefits. The final BASICS
fee was calculated by dividing the total projected cost of program staffing by the average number of students who violate the alcohol policy each year. The cost estimate per student came to $200, up from the previous cost of $150 for PAWS (C. Morrison, interview and follow up email, Director Student Affairs).

The cost per student was taken to the Vice President for approval. With the approval made, the program was implemented in the fall 2010 semester (Ganim & Danahy, 2010). According to several study participants, the $200 cost charged to students who attend the program was not meant to be a fine. Rather, the fee was conceptualized as a cost-recovery for having a well-staffed and researched program to assist students who violated the University’s alcohol policy to reduce their alcohol consumption (P. James, Director Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). The Vice President stated that he knew some people were going to be upset they were being charged $200 for the program, and they might see it as a fine. He stated, “That’s okay. You can avoid the $200 charge by not doing the wrong thing here, folks.” The Vice President’s attitude made the BASICS staff members feel well supported in their efforts, and they have continued to feel supported as students’ and parents’ complaints about the cost have come in, although these complaints have been fewer than anticipated (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs).

Analysis. Decision-making regarding the implementation of the BASICS program was influenced by several contextual factors. The decision was evidence-based, with research showing positive results in decreasing an individual’s alcohol consumption (Baer et al., 2001; Borsari & Carey, 2000; DiFulvio et al., 2012). The BASICS literature was compelling enough for the Vice President to mandate that all first-time violators of the University’s alcohol policy, on- or off-campus, attend. The research on the benefit for individuals is straightforward and
convincing. There is little ambiguity about the program's efficacy. It would have been difficult to create a comprehensive program that required hiring six new staff members (five BASICS counselors and one addictions counselor) in the current economic climate of shrinking resources without research data to reinforce the decision. The data do not show a full picture of the decision, however.

The mandate to implement BASICS by the Vice President removed decision-making on a smaller scale from individual case managers. The directive eliminated the ambiguity of sanctioning alcohol cases for the case manager. Case managers no longer had to decide what sanction was appropriate for the student and could not give a lower sanction to keep the student from paying the fee. The change kept case managers, who may have felt bad for a student in the past, from making a decision that provided inequities between students. Previous to BASICS, depending on which case manager a student may have been assigned to for the discipline meeting a different outcome for the same behavior may have occurred. The decision to implement BASICS for all first-time offenses has standardized the sanctioning process.

Another contextual factor in the implementation of BASICS is the fact that the Pennsylvania State University has the luxury of a large health and wellness department within the Division of Student Affairs. The medical and health experts within the University, most with terminal degrees, used their knowledge of alcohol use by college students as they researched and implemented BASICS. Through this process, these staff members were convinced this program needed to be implemented at the University, and advocated for its adoption.

Another significant contextual factor at the University was the fact that an off-campus misconduct policy existed prior to the decision to adopt BASICS. The off-campus misconduct policy permitted “alcohol related activity that occurs off-campus to come under the jurisdiction
of the Office of Judicial Affairs” (OSC, 2011). The policy allowed the University to be involved in sanctioning cases that occurred off-campus. The policy did not have to be created or approved by student groups, the Faculty Senate, or the Board of Trustees. This allowed for the implementation to be quicker and without controversy, which may have occurred if a philosophical debate about how far the University could reach to sanction individuals had occurred. The enforcement of the off-campus misconduct policy was evenly applied to all students who broke the University’s alcohol policy anywhere in the community.

The Student Affairs staff continued the decision-making process by talking with other universities to learn about their program and its implementation at their institutions. The different units in the decision-making process talked to colleagues with similar responsibilities to gather information. This process assisted with the staff in understanding the program and having a voice in the implementation. The information gathered through benchmarking assisted the Student Affairs administrators’ discussions about staffing and resource allocation. As was noted previously, the Vice President also used benchmarking when he vetted the program before agreeing to adopt it. He called colleagues at other institutions to learn firsthand what they were doing and how the program was working.

Another part of the information gathering process occurred after the departments in Student Affairs were instructed to move forward with the BASICS implementation as they evaluated the resources available. Collaboration between these departments was critical for identifying resources that were already available and those that would be needed for the program. When the staff was brought together from different departments the discussions and negotiations about how the whole process, from sanctioning to completion, could be discussed and figured out prior to implementation.
Since BASICS was a replacement for PAWS rather than a brand-new program, its implementation could be expedited. The merits of the new program and the additional costs associated with it needed to be discussed. However, the logistics of assigning students, receiving payment for services rendered, and tracking students who fulfilled their sanctions were already in place. Implementing a completely new program was not necessary, which allowed the qualities of the BASICS program to be the main focus.

“Can’t Just Be Late-Night Programs”: Developing a Comprehensive Plan

The Vice President challenged the Student Affairs staff in the fall of 2009 to identify better ways to educate students, along with ways to hold them more consistently accountable for their actions (P. James, Director Student Affairs). The staff was instructed to consider initiatives more broadly and plan ways to be more consistent. Marie Moore (AVP Student Affairs) stated that the staff was told, “It can’t just be late night programs, it can’t just be the University Health Services staff having alcohol education programs in the residence halls, it can’t just be the RAs being more diligent about enforcing the alcohol policy.” According to the Vice President, all individuals in leadership positions were expected to discuss and present ideas so that the plan could be as comprehensive as possible. Directors from the units most connected to the topic were invited to a meeting for a discussion about student alcohol abuse. The Vice President took notes on their ideas during the meeting (Sharon Newman, AVP Student Affairs).

Ultimately, after taking feedback and input from many sources, the Vice President mandated that a number of policies were to be modified and initiatives implemented (P. James, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). The following policies were changed.

1. Parents will be notified of all first-time alcohol violations.
2. Parents and students will receive more education about alcohol abuse prior to student matriculation.

3. Students who are one violation away from being suspended from the University must meet with the Vice President of Student Affairs.

Parent notification policy. The parent notification policy was changed from letters being sent home for second violations of the University’s alcohol policies and for severe first offenses, to letters being sent home for all first-time violations. The new policy would still be in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; U. S. Department of Education, 2012) which allows an institution to notify parents of dependent children in cases in which a student’s health or safety may be in jeopardy. The federal law does not specifically define what constitutes a health or safety concern, and the threshold is left to individual institutions to determine. The Pennsylvania State University decided that a first-time alcohol violation is a health and safety concern for students under the legal drinking age and for dependent of-age students who may have received an excessive consumption violation (P. James, Director Student Affairs; S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs).

This change in policy was motivated by the hope that parents could be included in the discussion about their child’s alcohol consumption. Parents would receive a letter stating which University code their child violated and what sanction he or she received, along with the name of a staff member to contact with any questions. The determination of which alcohol violations should result in a parental notification was based on the severity of the violation and whether the individual was under the legal drinking age (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). Parental notifications were previously issued only for major violations, such as excessive consumption of alcohol or a second underage possession or use charge (OSC, 2011).
**Parent and student education.** Leaders in several Student Affairs units agreed to engage parents and students in conversations about alcohol use prior to the students’ matriculation at the University. The agreement was implemented during summer orientation sessions, during which the issue of alcohol was discussed in public forums as parents and students visited campus (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). The discussions included descriptions of alcohol-related policies and the educational and punitive sanctions that result from breaking the policies.

The parental notification policy and introduction of parent education during orientation were implemented to increase the partnership between the University and parents to discourage alcohol abuse by students. The idea was to encourage student success by addressing the topic of alcohol consumption as early as possible and from as many different vantage points as possible (D. Anderson, Director Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs).

**Meeting the Vice President.** Students who accumulate significant alcohol policy violations and face suspension or expulsion from the University are now required to meet with the Vice President of Student Affairs (P. James, Director Student Affairs). This meeting is intended to discuss the student’s academic career and the choices that he or she is making outside the classroom. The Vice President has expressed hope that these meetings will serve as a wake-up call and reinforce the seriousness of this issue for those students (Thorpe, 2010).

**Analysis.** After staff input was received, both supporting and questioning the parental notification and education initiatives, the Vice President of Student Affairs presented all three initiatives to his staff as non-negotiable strategies to attempt to change students’ excessive alcohol consumption behaviors. The belief that students may need assistance from the University and their parents to be successful at the Pennsylvania State University was a contextual factor of the decision-making process for these initiatives. Parents were sought as allies in talking with
students about alcohol and the possible outcomes of consuming alcohol underage or to excess. The strategy of bringing parents into the conversation about alcohol—prior to their child’s matriculation and again if he or she violated University policy—was designed to establish a more consistent relationship with parents from the beginning of their student’s journey (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; P. James, Director Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). The meeting with the Vice President was created to assist students in identifying the serious nature of their actions and their potential consequences, as well as in understanding that individuals within the University were concerned about them (E. Thorpe, Vice President; P. James, Director Student Affairs).

The decision to implement these initiatives was mandated by the Vice President. However, in this case it did not follow the garbage can model’s specific definition of oversight (Cohen et al., 1972; see Chapter 2). The Vice President made the decision to implement the initiatives without a lot of debate, which is consistent with oversight decisions, but the Student Affairs staff was tasked with development of ideas for implementing the initiatives. The staff put forth recommendations, and the Vice President made the final decision after gathering input from the Student Affairs leadership. The garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972) does not mention the process of soliciting ideas or input from subordinates.

“I Was a Drunk Student”: Collegiate Recovery Community

The Pennsylvania State University administration implemented the initial stages of a collegiate recovery community (CRC) in fall 2011. A CRC is a program designed to assist students in recovery from an addiction to drugs or alcohol within the university. The CRC concept began in 1977 at Brown University and in 1983 at Rutgers University-New Brunswick (Karlin-Resnick, 2004; Patterson, 2008; W. White & Finch, 2006).
Texas Tech University hosts one of the leading programs in the nation, and its website states that the CRC “provides a nurturing, affirming environment in which individuals recovering from addictive disorders can find peer support while attaining a college education” (Texas Tech University, 2007). Other college and university recovery programs have similar statements on their websites, which include providing students assistance in attaining an education free of drugs and alcohol (Patterson, 2008; University of Michigan, 2013).

These programs are seen as critical for the academic and social success of recovering alcoholic or drug-addicted students in that they are supportive environments that assist students with avoiding college social scenes that include alcohol. Pennsylvania State University Associate Professor of Human Development Hobart Cleveland said, “preliminary research indicates that those in collegiate recovery communities experience extraordinarily low relapse rates” (Rogers, 2011). These programs consist of different levels of support, including housing students together, offering specialized coursework, and providing therapeutic and academic support services (W. White & Finch, 2006). On-campus Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings are associated with a number of these programs (Karlin-Resnick, 2004).

The first step in the development of the Pennsylvania State University’s CRC came in the form of a weekly AA meeting in the student center, which began in fall 2010 as a response to the “perfect storm” of fall 2009 (F. Janz, Faculty; Pennsylvania State University, 2010b; Rogers, 2011). This cause was championed by a member of the faculty who was initially in recovery in a major metropolitan area where a major source of support came from AA meetings on college campuses (D. Anderson, Director Student Affairs; F. Janz, Faculty; E. Thorpe, Vice President). This faculty member requested a meeting with the Vice President, at which he shared the fact that in 1995 he had tried to launch Adult Children of Alcoholics meetings on campus. Few
attended those meetings, and they ended after six months. The Vice President offered his support by forming a committee to identify space on campus that could regularly host AA meetings (F. Janz, Faculty; E. Thorpe, Vice President). Having a sustainable AA meeting on campus for the first time was a “big deal” for the Pennsylvania State University community (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs).

This faculty member along with others later initiated conversations about implementing a collegiate recovery program at Pennsylvania State University. Developing a collegiate recovery program was not the initial goal, as there was no knowledge of such programs during the early stages of this conversation (F. Janz, Faculty). Kevin Hill (Director Student Affairs) stated that the passion communicated by this faculty member really got him and others involved in such a way that there was no option but to implement the program to assist students in need. Kevin also stated that passion was not the only driving force. Indeed individuals who are passionate cannot always get people to move in their desired direction. He believes they need to have a good balance between passion and the “intellectual integrity” to understand the process. Kevin believes that the faculty member “adds a nice life force to what could be just a drab planning group, just another meeting.”

Around the same time as the discussion to host an AA on campus was occurring, a graduate student who had attended the University as an undergraduate and a second faculty member went to the Vice President to advise him that he was wrong in how he was dealing with the alcohol issue. The student told the Vice President that as an undergraduate, he was a “drunken student.” He confessed to being one of those students who broke lights, urinated on the street, got into fights, and caused trouble. He was not doing well academically, and he just drank and drank and drank. He believed that more of the problems were caused by alcoholics than was
realized. One beer for him was trouble, and for them, it is the same thing (F. Janz, Faculty; E. Thorpe, Vice President). The Vice President then did what he always does when confronted with new information: He read more to inform himself of the issue. Through his research, the Vice President found that “Six percent of a college population, like this, is alcoholic or about to become an alcoholic, and you apply that to a base of 45,000 students, you get 2,500 students pretty quickly—or more.”

Once the recovery program idea emerged, other faculty members became involved in developing and working with the program as it progressed. The initiative started with a few people, but it quickly grew to include other stakeholders and experts, including directors from departments within Student Affairs who would be able to assist in working with students, referring students, or providing space for the program (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). As the discussion continued, Texas Tech University and the University of Michigan were consulted regarding their programs (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). In June 2011, “the Director and Co-Director of the Texas Tech program were invited to campus by the Vice President” (F. Janz, Faculty). The idea of including a residential component was also discussed, as other institutions have dedicated space in residence halls to support the recovery community, and the Assistant Vice President for Housing, Food Services, and Residence Life was brought in to the discussion, along with the Director of Residence Life (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President).

As the discussion continued, more stakeholders were brought in to discern how best to move forward. The decision was made to modify space in the Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs to provide the collegiate recovery community a safe space to meet and start building their
community. Three main reasons motivated this decision. First, the space was identified through a space usage study. Second, AA meetings were already occurring in the Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs. Third, the director of the facility was supportive (F. Janz, Faculty; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). The recovery community initiative prior to the end of this study seemed to be a compromise between doing very little to support the recovering students and implementing a full recovery program.

The Vice President is a strong proponent of incremental change. “My incremental approach … was challenged … by that group more than anyone else because they said, ‘You got to do it now. We need to do this now….’ I don’t have the resources for that, but we can go slowly.” Part of the reason that incremental change is so important in Student Affairs work is the fact that resources are often hard to secure for expensive items such as a new residence. There was a small monetary allocation from the Division of Student Affairs to assist in the program’s development. A stipend was allocated for a graduate student coordinator who would work ten hours each week, as was an operations budget of $2,000 (F. Janz, Faculty).

Small changes also lend time for good progress to be made and a strong foundation to be developed to support students (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs). The Vice President also stated that the individuals involved, particularly the faculty member that initiated the program, “did a lot of work” to develop the program. The work that they did developed a strong community that had some institutional support and a strong foundation for the future.

Lions for Recovery, a Penn State student organization, began in fall 2011 and according to Professor Hobart Cleveland, the Division of Student Affairs played an integral role in bringing this program to fruition (Rogers, 2011a). According to Frank Janz (Faculty), “the ‘for’ in the name was deliberately used so that friends of recovering students could be included.”
Approximately 15 students identified as “in recovery” and formed the initial group. There was also a planning committee comprised of three faculty members, two of whom were in long-term recovery of over 20 years, and one who had worked at Texas Tech and had extensive research experience in recovery and addiction; one University addictions counselor; one BASICS counselor; a student in recovery; and an alumnus from the DC area (F. Janz, Faculty). The Student Affairs leadership set aside space in the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center for the collegiate recovery community to meet (F. Janz, Faculty; Rogers, 2011). Lions for Recovery was just forming as the timeline and resource allocation were still being developed at the end of this case study (Rogers, 2011). With the support of faculty and staff throughout the University, the program will surely grow to meet the needs of the Penn State community.

**Analysis.** The decision to implement a Collegiate Recovery program at the Pennsylvania State University campus is an example of how an organization moves through a flight decision to a decision by resolution (Cohen et al., 1972). Flight decisions involve the perception that making a decision will take a large amount of time, which the decision makers do not have or want to spend on a decision. The decision makers move forward, and the decision is postponed to a later date (Cohen et al., 1972). Director Kevin Hill’s observation about a faculty member’s passion and intellectual integrity was that these two traits were able to push the group past the point of postponing the decision to act. The Student Affairs leadership felt compelled to act because the faculty member came to them with a passion, experience, and knowledge that could not be ignored.

When leaders moved past a flight decision, prior to moving any further, they collected data to learn what a recovery program would require (E. Thorpe, Vice President). Individuals reviewed information about current recovery programs to inform their decisions. Counterparts
from other institutions were able to provide useful information through a campus visit during which they showed Penn State administrators how to develop a program.

The last part of the decision-making process was looking at the resources available to assist in program development. Several faculty members were willing to donate their time to implement the program. Designated space for the program that was larger than the location in the Spiritual Center was difficult to secure without significant resource allocations, which were not readily apparent. The decision was made by the Vice President to implement the program incrementally so that the recovery program would expand as resources became available.

“Fans… Should Not Have to Put up with That”: Alcohol Related Issues at Football Games

The final new initiative that is focused on the behavior of individual student’s concerns at-home football games in Beaver Stadium. The football season has seven home games each year and on average, seventy seven individuals are removed from the stadium over the course of the season (Bogus, 2014). These individuals were removed for being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and unable to care for themselves or causing a scene. Students in these circumstances are asked to leave the stadium and are referred to Judicial Affairs for a possible violation of the University’s alcohol policy. Often they are arrested by the University Police for alcohol related issues and disorderly conduct.

The leadership in Student Affairs and Athletics discussed an idea to restrict individuals who were under the influence of alcohol from entering the football stadium (McDermott, 2010; P. James, Director Student Affairs). The idea was to adopt a breathalyzer program to deter individuals from coming into the stadium after consuming a large amount of alcohol. Individuals who were ejected from the stadium because of excessive consumption of alcohol and being a disruption to others would be required to come to games sober for the rest of the season, and they
would have to take a breathalyzer test at the stadium gates every time they entered (Ganim & Danahy, 2010).

Breathalyzer programs were already underway at other Big Ten institutions. The University of Wisconsin-Madison started a similar program in fall 2007, and the University of Minnesota began a program in the fall of 2009 (McDermott, 2010; Steinbach, 2007). The Pennsylvania State University administrators examined these schools’ programs to calculate the cost and identify the administrative staff members who should be responsible for the program. Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman stated, “Every other school that does it has athletics do it.” According to the Vice President of Student Affairs, the administration in Athletics “sort of trumped up a number of excuses. They talked about how that had tried and failed” at other institutions, and that “we (Penn State) really couldn’t do that just logistically we couldn’t manage that.”

Assistant Athletic Director Mike Johnson remembered that the breathalyzer idea came up in a staff meeting. The Athletics leadership was not in favor of implementing the program mainly because of the size of the stadium and the number of staff members that they believed it would take to implement it. He also suggested that disruptive fans were the responsibility of the ushers in the stadium:

I go to the games, and I go to every game, I do get disappointed sometimes when the staff, the usher, does not take control of the situation to remove fans that are clearly intoxicated. I’ve been around some situations where I’m thinking, come on, I know you’re an usher. Get a policeman. Get somebody up here to get this guy out because he’s drunk… fans who want to enjoy the game should not have to put up with that.
Johnson also stated that the stadium staff is continually being trained on the best way to handle situations in which “guests” become rowdy or belligerent.

Even though Athletics and Student Affairs leaders could not agree on how to implement a breathalyzer program, Athletics has not ignored the issue of overly intoxicated individuals in the stadium. They have implemented a texting program through which individuals who feel someone is causing a problem can text their location to a number advertised throughout the stadium. The stadium staff is then alerted and monitors the area. Assistant Athletic Director Johnson stated, “it still comes down to the staff.”

**Analysis.** The possibility of implementing a breathalyzer program for all home football games was discussed by the leadership in Student Affairs and Athletics. Several contextual factors were involved in the attempt to adopt this program. The first piece of context is the fact that the Pennsylvania State University’s Athletics division is not a department within the Students Affairs hierarchy as is the case at many smaller institutions without NCAA Division I athletic programs. Since Student Affairs does not have direct oversight of Athletics, its ability to implement change in areas related to Penn State sports is extremely limited and requires cooperation from the Athletics leadership. Athletics has responsibility for the venue and thus has more power (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974) over the policy decision.

Another contextual piece of this initiative was the fact that no other entity within the University or in the surrounding community was pushing for the breathalyzer program. Due to the lack of Athletics oversight by Student Affairs, the decision to implement the breathalyzer program needed to be a political decision (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992) and required a coalition of support. Simply put, Student Affairs did not have enough power to move the breathalyzer initiative forward without the involvement of others, either internally or externally to the
University. In the political model, when there is differential power between two units, the less powerful unit needs to either accrue more power or concede. In this case, the Division of Student Affairs could have built a coalition with the community, but it did not. Thus, Athletics did not need to change policies or implement a new program because of mounting pressure from external sources. They could take the suggestion and make a final decision not to implement the breathalyzer program.

**The Student Body as a Whole**

The policy changes and education initiatives discussed in this section were implemented to address the behavior of the student body as a whole and the culture that communicates inconsistent messages to students about alcohol (NIAAA, 2002a). The three initiatives presented in this section are

1. Penn State SAFE,
2. dry residence halls, and
“Early Intervention and Awareness Helps”: Penn State SAFE

Since fall 2008 (one year before the “perfect storm”), the University has required first year students to complete an online education module to teach them about Pennsylvania State University’s expectations regarding alcohol. All first-year and transfer students had to complete the online module prior to their arrival on campus (Anselme, 2011). When the Pennsylvania State University established this requirement, it used a commercial program called AlcoholEdu (Doran, 2008). According to the company website, AlcoholEdu “was designed for population-level prevention. Its personalized approach provides an experience that impacts both individual behavior and campus culture, reducing your institutional risk” (Everfi, 2011).
Pennsylvania State University used a $245,000 grant from John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to implement AlcoholEdu (Doran, 2008). It is believed that the Knight Foundation took interest in the community because the local newspaper is owned by the Knight Ridder Corporation: “The Knight Foundation was very interested in helping Penn State…. The CDT (Centre Daily Times) was a Knight Ridder newspaper. That’s kind of where this relationship came from…. They were very interested in supporting efforts to reduce the adverse effect of alcohol in the community” (N. Thompson, interview, November 12, 2012).

AlcoholEdu was described by Director Nancy Thompson as “ready to go in the can. We didn’t have to do anything to customize it.” The company website shows evidence that AlcoholEdu reduces dangerous alcohol consumption behavior by college students (Everfi, 2011). The Pennsylvania State University assessment staff that evaluated AlcoholEdu believed it was a “relatively solid product” (D. Anderson, Director Student Affairs), and based on this perception, the University entered a three-year agreement with the Knight Foundation and AlcoholEdu (Doran, 2008).

The AlcoholEdu program had an assessment component in which individuals would take pre- and post-tests. There was also an additional post-test 30 days after completion of the online module to measure the program’s long-term efficacy (Everfi, 2011). During the first semester of AlcoholEdu (fall 2008), a large number of students who were at the highest levels of risk and/or abuse did not take the 30-day follow-up test. “We had a fairly significant response rate for Survey 2 [the 30-day follow-up]. And when we looked at the students we lost from Survey 1, we lost a lot of the higher risk drinkers. They didn’t come back to take it” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).
This lack of participation made the information about the effectiveness of the program incomplete. “We worked hard to improve that the next couple years, but still the data were at best inconclusive” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). The lack of evidence showing the efficacy of the program, along with a student death on campus in an alcohol-related incident pushed the Student Affairs leadership to consider the long-term cost benefits of the program. The Knight Foundation money would expire after the 2010-2011 academic year, and the University would need to pay the entire implementation cost if other sources were not found (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). The University’s confidence in the program continued to decrease because “anecdotally we heard stories of students making it into drinking games” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).

Conversations occurred with the health and alcohol experts on campus, an expert on assessment, and the Vice President to decide the fate of AlcoholEdu. The group made the decision to drop the AlcoholEdu program (N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs). Despite the lack of evidence showing that this type of program worked, several individuals within the Division of Student Affairs continued to believe that “early intervention and awareness helps, or at the very least does not hurt students” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs) and decided that entering students still needed this type of program—although not AlcoholEdu. They were not ready to eliminate an educational initiative that provided every entering student with information on how to be safe with alcohol.

There were still really awful things happening, and there was always this sense that we couldn’t stop, we would still have such a problem. We couldn’t stop doing any of the things we were doing, and we weren’t really ready to stop an intervention that touched every single incoming student, and I think maybe
without a tremendous amount of evidence, but just a feeling that was the wrong thing to do. (N. Thompson, Director Student Affairs)

“Politically, for us to have done away with our alcohol education program for students prior to their matriculation would probably not [have gone] well” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). The political pressure to say that the University offered an education program to all entering students to discourage their excessive alcohol consumption was more powerful than the need for evidence of the program’s effectiveness. According to Assistant Vice President Doug Anderson, as long as the program did no harm it was important to keep the program in place, “regardless of [its] effectiveness.” If the program was causing harm to any student, abandoning it would be worth the political fallout. Otherwise, there was no option but to provide a program to all incoming students.

Ultimately, the decision to discontinue AlcoholEdu came from student feedback, assessment data, and resource availability. Student feedback on the AlcoholEdu program stated that the module took too long to complete, the content was boring, and it seemed irrelevant to the Pennsylvania State University experience (C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs). AlcoholEdu discussed in great depth the physiological effects of alcohol on the individual, which can be good information but may not change student behavior (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs). “We know from some of the information from students where it [AlcoholEdu] goes south…. AlcoholEdu had a lot about the physiological effects of alcohol…. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter really whether it’s the front lobe or the hypothalamus as to why these things happen, right” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). The technical aspects of how alcohol works within the human body was causing students to
disconnect from the rest of the program. There was a belief that an in-house program could be shorter and could be made more relevant to the Pennsylvania State University experience (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).

The decision to have an in-house program was not solely based on student feedback and a desire for relevance to the institution; it was also based on resource availability. The cost of AlcoholEdu was $100,000 per year, and Assistant Vice President Anderson asked sarcastically, “Do we have $100,000 sitting around to continue with AlcoholEdu?” As has been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the availability of financial resources is often limited, particularly when the needed resources are so significant. The discussion turned to the resources that were readily available and what else would be needed to produce a quality product. When the available resources and the ability to personalize the information were compiled, the total cost was compared to the $100,000 annual cost for AlcoholEdu.

The Division of Student Affairs had an instructional designer on staff. Mark Heckel could create the modules and assist in the production of a quality educational product. There were content experts on staff in Student Affairs and across the University who could provide content, as well as faculty members who were interested in researching the use of personalized normative feedback through electronic media to do the assessment. Student Affairs also partnered with another University entity, WPSU, to produce the video and audio portions of the program at cost, which was a huge savings (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs). These resources made the creation of an in-house program possible. This program, Penn State SAFE, was implemented in fall 2011 (Anselme, 2011).

**Analysis.** The online program continuation was evaluated using many criteria, including efficacy, cost, resource allocation, and student feedback (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).
The strongest contextual factor for Student Affairs leadership to continue with some type of alcohol education program for matriculating students was the fact that there was already an online program in place. Although there is a lack of evidence showing the efficacy of such online programs, there is also no evidence showing the programs do harm.

Without a clear outcome one way or the other, the next decision factor, according to a number of study participants in Student Affairs, was the potential for political fallout as the data was unclear and could not be used in a decision to keep the program. The political fallout in this case is not part of the political model of decision-making (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992) because it did not include coalition building or attempting to control more resources to force a decision. Political fallout refers to the attention that may be focused on the University if an alcohol education program was abandoned and another alcohol-related student accident or death occurred.

Once the decision was made to continue with some type of online early intervention program because of the potential for political fallout, decision-making for this initiative was done by resolution (Cohen et al., 1972) to find the best course of action. The decision was made by evaluating pertinent information and putting in the time to make a decision on the best course of action to move forward in keeping or replacing the alcohol education module. The financial commitment of $100,000 a year was evaluated against the option of using personnel already employed at the University. In addition to this potential cost savings, students using the AlcoholEdu satisfaction survey had requested a more personalized message (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). An internally produced online module could create a similar message to AlcoholEdu, meet students’ needs, and provide cost savings to the University.
“Evidence Be Damned”: Dry Residence Halls

Alcohol was prohibited in all first-year residence halls at the Pennsylvania State University starting in fall 2010 (Rogers & Wintner, 2010; Thorpe, 2010). Technically, first-year residence halls were already alcohol-free because their residents were under the legal drinking age, as they were traditional college students. The prohibition was expanded in fall 2011 to include all residence halls on campus where undergraduate students lived. Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman stated that the decision was a move to show the public how significant the issue of alcohol abuse had become to the University.

The decision to ban alcohol from the undergraduate residence halls came from the President of the University (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President), even though research evidence that shows dry residence halls decrease alcohol consumption on college campuses is unavailable, and there was no evidence of significant issues with alcohol consumption in the Pennsylvania State University residence halls. The President believed it was a decision that had to be made (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs), and he “decided evidence be damned, it doesn’t matter when you believe that this is a lever that has to be pushed, and he unilaterally made that decision” (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). Director Kris Smith believed that the decision to have alcohol-free residence halls was “totally political… They might have an impact on the residence hall environment, and it might make policy enforcement easier for the RAs…, but we didn’t really expect any measurable change.” Other study participants within Student Affairs agreed that the staff had no expectation of a measurable change in behavior (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs). The decision was politically motivated as a way to show the surrounding community that the University was taking this issue seriously, and
it was something many community members had been requesting for years (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs).

Many staff members were not supportive of the change in policy as they didn’t believe it would make any changes to the alcohol culture, although some staff believed the new policy would notify incoming students that alcohol consumption is not a welcome activity at Penn State (K. Smith, Director Student Affairs; M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs). The staff did give feedback to the President through the Vice President of Student Affairs, which resulted in a change in the timing of the implementation of the completely dry campus policy. When the idea of implementing the dry campus policy was first discussed, the staff voiced concerns about implementing it for all students (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs).

Staff concerns about instituting a dry campus for the fall of 2010 were based on two distinct populations. The first population included students who were returning to campus in fall 2010. These students had signed their 2010-2011 housing contracts before the new policy was in place. Although it was written into the contract that a change could take place, the staff voiced their concerns about expecting students who were of legal drinking age to abide by the new policy without prior notice (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs; K. Smith, Director Student Affairs). Thus, the change to an all-campus alcohol ban was postponed until fall 2011, which allowed all returning students to make an informed decision about their housing options.

The second population was students living in family and graduate housing. It was decided that these areas would be the only residential facilities on campus where alcohol would still be permitted as occupants were almost all of-age graduate students. According to Marie Moore, “He [the President] did acquiesce… and said that if you were in graduate housing you could drink
and that would be okay because most of our graduate students are over the age of 21. He felt that was okay for that to happen, but in our undergraduate halls, regardless of your age, they were dry buildings.”

**Analysis.** The dry residence hall policy was not a decision made by Student Affairs. The policy was mandated by the President of the University to be implemented by the Student Affairs staff. There was an impression in the community that student alcohol issues throughout the area were stemming from alcohol consumption in on-campus residence halls. The hierarchical structure of Student Affairs made the mandate from the President possible. The President received some feedback from the Student Affairs staff, but it did not change the final outcome. Rather, implementation of the mandate was modified slightly because of staff feedback.

**“Encouraged to Do the Right Thing”: Responsible Action Protocol**

In fall 2010, the University adopted a new policy that allowed students who have broken state law by consuming alcohol to be exempt from University sanctions if they were requesting assistance for an individual in need of medical attention (Danahy, 2011). According to Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman, this policy had been the University Police and administration’s practice for years. This policy change formalized the practice. Concern was always for the student in danger and not to catch other individuals who were at the scene and assisting the student.

The Responsible Action Protocol policy clarifies what circumstances are needed for an individual to be exempted from sanctions: “students who seek medical assistance for peers suffering from alcohol poisoning or related problems would not be charged through the campus student conduct system for their own alcohol violations” (OSC, 2011). A few stipulations are included in the policy so that it does not provide a blanket pass for consuming alcohol underage.
Students must notify a University official or call 911 to address the emergency needs of another student, and they cannot be charged with violating another University policy. Students covered by the Responsible Action Protocol are still required to attend BASICS if they also consumed alcohol, but they do not receive a University discipline record and are not required to pay the $200 fee (OSC, 2011).

Two of the major student government organizations on campus, the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) and the Commonwealth Campus Student Government (CCSG), had been lobbying the administration for several years to implement such a policy. The two student groups were proponents of having no sanctions for any individuals involved in these situations, including the student in need of assistance (McCormack, 2007; Nichols, 2009). The students argued that individuals may not call the police or medical personnel for assistance if they or the person for whom they called would be sanctioned by the University (C. Smith, 2009). Pat James remembers that, when the policy was under discussion, the Vice President pushed implementation forward with some reservations by stating, “I’m not all about this amnesty for someone that drinks too much and has to be hospitalized because that’s going to make them less safe.” The Vice President solicited feedback from the leadership in Student Affairs and students to assist in writing the policy.

The decision to implement this policy involved several different entities that were responsible for the documentation and enforcement. Students, Student Affairs staff, and University Police were asked for their input prior to policy implementation. The conversation largely centered on whether the no-sanction aspect of the policy would include the intoxicated individuals for whom help was called. The general impression was that staff would rather save a
life than charge someone with a violation of the code of conduct (P. James, Director Student Affairs; S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs):

We’re OK if somebody calls the ambulance, calls 911, and they’ve been drinking, they’re not at risk themselves…. If you need to be encouraged to do the right thing, and that’s going to make people safer, but the other clear message…. if you were the person that needs the medical help because you drank too much, then your consequences will be appropriate … because it may save your life.” (P. James, Director Student Affairs)

The consensus was to fall on the side of safety for all students and have the educational conversation with the individual who tried to help a fellow student, rather than impose punitive sanctions on that person. However, the intoxicated individual would be charged and sanctioned as appropriate.

**Analysis.** Development of the Responsible Action Protocol began with a contextual factor of students’ requesting a change to policy. The student leaders believed that students would not call emergency services to assist other students if the caller believed he or she would be held responsible for consuming alcohol as well. A second contextual factor was that the new policy was already the practice of University Police officers, although it was technically at an officer’s discretion.

The Vice President made the final decision to implement the policy because of student concerns and to formalize University practice. As in other decisions made by the Vice President, he presented his decision to Student Affairs staff members and asked them to scrutinize all the information and write a policy that would work for the University. Representatives from University Police, several offices within Student Affairs, and the student governments were brought in to conversations about the new policy. The group then took the time to discuss the
policy changes and how best to implement them by holding several meetings and using e-mail to discuss policy language that explicitly informed staff who would be covered by the new policy. Insight from the group framed the new policy in a way that was a positive change for students and gave clear direction to staff.

The Institution and Surrounding Community

The initiatives presented in this section concern the institution and its surrounding community. These initiatives are designed to involve all stakeholders in the reframing of the issue of alcohol abuse and the redefinition of expectations around student alcohol consumption (NIAAA, 2002a). Four initiatives are discussed here

1. Student Advisory Council,
2. State Patty’s Day,
3. Football Tailgating, and
“Representative of the Student Population”: Student Advisory Council

The Vice President began a student alcohol advisory council in fall 2010 to discuss alcohol concerns and to get student insight on initiatives (Pennsylvania State University, 2010a). Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman stated that this step was important because “nothing can really be done to impact the student culture if students are not involved in the change.” Many students shared ideas with the Vice President, and he consulted many students before initiatives were implemented, but the formulation of a formal advisory council made partnering with a diverse group of students even easier. The Vice President stated that the student advisory committee was to be “representative of the student population. I wanted a variety of perspectives in there. It really is simply advisory to bounce some ideas off of; it was big enough that it had
some diversity in it.” The Vice President was able to gain some political capital with student leaders as he brought them together to discuss the issue of students’ excessive consumption of alcohol at the institution.

The Vice President did not want to impose expectations on the student community, and the creation of the student advisory council would facilitate hearing the student voice. He believed the solution to the issues at hand could be found only by including students in the process. The Vice President stated,

I’ve always believed that this is a problem that inhabits the student community and that the source of its solution is going to be found among students themselves. We can facilitate, we can encourage it, we can cajole them, we can provide them resources but really, a lot of it has to happen at that level because too much of it has to do with choices they're making at 2:30 in the morning when I'm not around and most of the rest of us aren't interacting with them.

Students were very involved from the beginning of the group, meeting with the Vice President and talking about the issues. The idea of establishing a group of students singularly devoted to talking with the Vice President and bringing him recommendations about alcohol was a change that brought more student leaders to the table, thus influencing more individuals and groups at the University (S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs).

**Analysis.** Student input into decisions that Student Affairs administrators are making is an extremely important part of the decision-making process in this context. Students are the individuals who are ultimately most affected by the policies implemented by their colleges and universities. Administrators often seek student feedback by randomly asking for their thoughts
on a topic or by bringing one or two students onto a committee. The students who sit on these committees are then asked to represent the opinion of all students.

The creation of a committee of students who represent all different groups at the University to vet alcohol policies and inform the Vice President of issues was a significant change to this practice. Developing a student advisory council was another oversight decision (Cohen et al., 1972) made by the Vice President of Student Affairs. The committee formalized feedback the Vice President could receive from students and could be made of many different types of students, not just student leaders that are often connected.

“A Holiday without a Holiday”: State Patty’s Day

In 2007, a group of students invented a Saint Patrick’s Day substitute. These students noticed that year that Saint Patrick’s Day was going to occur at the same time as the University’s spring break, thus disallowing them to partake with their peers in traditional Saint Patrick’s Day festivities in State College (Boyle, 2010; Nichols, 2010; Tully, 2011; Victor, 2010). The students created a Facebook page and started promoting their own faux holiday, State Patty’s Day that occurs prior to Saint Patrick’s Day (Nichols, 2010). Local vendors assisted in promoting the event by selling green and shamrock covered clothing with “State Patty’s Day” prominently displayed, along with opening the bars early (Boyle, 2010; Geiger, 2011a).

The faux holiday has not been a welcome addition to the State College community. Police Officer Lehman stated that State Patty’s Day is “a holiday without a holiday.” The resources needed to keep students, guests, and community members safe during this weekend has grown quickly. The cost of police staffing and resources has risen to over $300,000 because every person in the State College Police Department has to work on State Patty’s Day weekend. In contrast, according to Officer Lehman, a regular weekend costs a few thousand dollars in
staffing and resources. State Patty’s Day taxes police and hospital emergency room resources.

Figure 5.5 shows the number of calls for service that occurred over State Patty’s Day from 2007 to 2011 and compares them to the number of calls for an average fall or spring weekend during which there is not a major event on campus, such as a football game.

![Comparison of calls for service](image)

Figure 5.5. Comparison of calls for service.

Officer Lehman was asked if State Patty’s Day is similar to a football weekend. He responded that it was much worse than a football weekend due to the level of intoxication of students and guests. He explained,

When you have a football game weekend, you have a lot of people coming back to their alma mater. They have some connections with the community. They care about the community. They are not here to destroy things, and they have some genuine concern about what’s going on. Yeah, they’re here to have
a good time, but they like Penn State, they love Happy Valley so there is a
great difference. Difference in age, there is a difference in concern and care
towards the community.

The State Patty’s Day weekend has a different focal point than a football weekend. The football
game breaks up the weekend and slows drinking by the 100,000 fans who enter the stadium for
the game. State Patty’s Day exclusive focus is on drinking from Friday night through Sunday
morning (J. Lehman, Police Officer). State College Police Department Captain Dana Leonard
said, “The police department is used to handling high-risk nights like Halloween, but State
Patty’s Day takes the risks to a whole new level because of the timeframe in which students
drink” (Boyle, 2010). The police expect to see students stumbling and in need of assistance
during the evening and late-night hours, but on State Patty’s Day, students need help in the
middle of the afternoon.

State Patty’s Day weekend begins like many other weekends in State College—indeed,
like many other weekends for a majority of college students and young adults. Penn State
students unwind in the company of friends after the academic week comes to a close, and friends
drive into town from different parts of Pennsylvania and surrounding states. They will drink and
socialize into the early hours of Saturday morning.

The State Patty’s Day difference becomes clear on Saturday morning, when students are
able to enter their favorite bars or house parties at 8:00 a.m. and start consuming alcohol again
(Boyle, 2010; Geiger, 2011a). In many cases, they are consuming green beer while wearing a
plethora of green clothing and other festive apparel. By mid-morning, there are thousands of
individuals in green walking between the bars and local houses as they are celebrating this faux
holiday (Geiger, 2011a; Tully, 2011). Captain Leonard once saw an individual urinate on the
terrace just outside the entrance to the police station in broad daylight (Boyle, 2010). Table 5.2 and Figure 5.6 show the number of calls for service and arrests made by the State College Police Department from Friday at 3:00 p.m. to Sunday at 3:00 p.m. on State Patty’s Day weekends from 2007 through 2011.

Table 5.2

<table>
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<td>41</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>190</td>
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</table>

*Note:* These figures provided by Officer J. Lehman and the State College Police Department.

Figure 5.6.

Calls made to the State College Police Department on State Patty’s Day weekend (figures provided by Officer J. Lehman and the State College Police Department).

While talking with Officer Lehman about these numbers in a follow-up conversation on August 22, 2013, he suggested that the increase in arrest numbers each year could be explained
by the increase in patrol numbers and stricter enforcement of law: “More eyes means that more violations are seen and confronted.” However, Officer Lehman stated that the increase in calls “could not be explained by an increase in the number of officers on patrol. This number shows there was more concern from the community during this time period as people were calling the police department for assistance.”

The faux holiday soon became a favorite winter time event for students and out-of-town guests, but it continued to cause major problems for the State College community. According to the Chief of Police for the State College Borough, Tom King, in 2009, State Patty’s Day had more alcohol-related incidents than the primetime Illinois football game or the 2008 homecoming weekend (Nichols, 2010). After only a few years as an unofficial holiday in the town, State Patty’s Day had caused a litany of issues for students, non-students, and property. One of the student creators of State Patty’s Day admitted that the faux holiday had created a “very large rift ripping through Penn State and State College” (Nichols, 2010). The leadership from the Borough and the University took it upon themselves to increase their communication in an attempt to repair relationships and build a coalition that could work together to reduce its threat to students.

In 2010, just months after the “perfect storm”, State College Borough administrators and the Vice President of Student Affairs encouraged area vendors to not promote State Patty’s Day. The initial effort to curb the weekend of excessive drinking found the Vice President and the State College Borough Manager at a meeting of the Tavern Owners Association to talk with its members about alcohol and the faux holiday. According to the Vice President, the meeting was a bit contentious as the association members were upset that the University continued to push responsibility for many student alcohol issues onto them. The tavern owners made the argument
that because they have licenses to serve alcohol; they are obligated to manage the consumption of anyone in their establishments, unlike the apartment parties, house parties, and fraternity parties that occur around town. After some open dialogue, the Vice President and Borough Manager understood the tavern owners’ concerns, and the tavern owners had a better understanding of the University and Borough’s concerns. The conversation concluded with the consensus that all three groups wanted to end State Patty’s Day.

According to the Vice President, this face-to-face conversation enhanced relations between the Tavern Owners Association and the University. Following the meeting, the Tavern Owners Association decided not to participate in State Patty’s Day in 2010 by not offering green beer or special promotions and not extending their hours of operation—two bars even decided not to open (Nichols, 2010; Victor, 2010). Even with these changes, however, State Patty’s Day issues continued to increase.

In anticipation of another active State Patty’s Day, police from around the Commonwealth were called in as reinforcements in 2010 (Nichols, 2010). According to Sergeant John Wilson of the University Police, “An awful lot of parties were broken up. There was very heavy pedestrian traffic…. Several foot pursuits. It was extremely challenging and a busy day for law enforcement” (Ganim, 2010b). One individual who was seen urinating on the front door of a bar was cited after starting a fight with the staff. Another individual was cited after he was found hugging a street sign in an attempt to stand after a day of drinking (Ganim, 2010b). Having the bars open at their regular times may have helped reduce some of the excessive drinking, but it did not stop 2010 from being another record-setting weekend (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Geiger, 2011b; State College Borough, 2012). Half the arrests were visitors or non-students, as a considerable number of individuals from out of town came to partake in the faux holiday.
(Ganim, 2010a).

After the 2010 State Patty’s Day celebration, a more collaborative effort was forged between the affected constituencies. The Vice President stated, for the faux holiday to be abandoned, “it has to be a community-institution partnership in meaningful ways.” Several entities had worked independently in previous years, and they started to come together during 2010 State Patty’s Day, but a big push came during spring 2011. Student leaders emerged as the leaders of the charge, which was a switch from previous years. They asked other students to refrain from participating and for support from the community to reduce the availability of alcohol (Morgan, 2011; Peters, 2011). According to the Vice President, “They [the students] make a more compelling case when they go to the members [of the Tavern Owner’s Association].” A joint letter was also sent from the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Borough Manager, and the Downtown State College Improvement District Director, in which they asked the taverns and retailers to show that they are community-minded by refraining from participating in the promotion of State Patty’s Day (Geiger, 2011a). Tavern Owners Association members decided that they would not open early, and several establishments decided to not have specials to entice the State Patty’s Day crowd. Duke Gastiger, owner of the All-American Rathskeller said, “We are a tavern that’s been around for almost 80 years now, and we’re catering to students. We would never close on a Saturday for any contrived reason, but I think you have to be a little flexible in what you offer. I think not having specials is part of that” (Geiger, 2011a).

Another push came from student leaders’ efforts to find something else for students to do during State Patty’s Day weekend. Prior to the start of the spring 2011 semester, students met with leaders from the University, the Borough, and local community service organizations
Several student groups collaborated with community organizations in need of assistance to develop service projects for students on the Saturday of State Patty’s Day weekend. The Council of Lionhearts, an organization consisting of the presidents of all the student service organizations on campus, worked with the Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council to develop “State Service Day: May no act of ours bring shame” (Morgan, 2011).

Students and community members were encouraged to go about their daily routine in the downtown area to provide a sober presence and assist the police with keeping students and visitors safe (Morgan, 2011; Peters, 2011). State College Chief of Police Tom King said, “The program is part of the Borough’s community policing efforts. Volunteers don’t have any specific duties but they are expected to be visible, pleasant, sober and not willing to get involved in any violation of the law. It’s not just the Police Department’s job to keep the community safe. It’s our job to take official action but it’s also the community’s job to make us aware of danger” (Peters, 2011). Borough police also sent a notice to apartment residents in downtown State College that they would have uniformed and undercover officers walking the hallways throughout the weekend. This pressure seemed to have an effect on at least some apartment residents. One student stated that an increased presence would affect her plans for the weekend: “Well, I won’t be having any parties [at my apartment], that’s for sure. We were thinking about it, but now we are definitely not doing it” (Osolnick, 2011).

Even with all these efforts to reduce the harmful effects of State Patty’s Day on students and the community, others continued to try to promote and profit from the event. For example, two students created a t-shirt to sell for the faux holiday. Six weeks prior to the 2011 State Patty’s Day, over 2,000 individuals had ordered the shirts, which read: “KISS ME… I’M WASTED” on the front and “STATE PATTY’S 11 – There’s no beer in heaven… So we drink
ours here” on the back (Tully, 2011). The Interfraternity Council President and University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) President both stated they were disappointed by the t-shirt. “Penn State is a campus that is fighting binge drinking and we don’t want to send out the wrong message” said Christian Ragland, UPUA President (Tully, 2011).

Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman was downtown all day on State Patty’s Day and believed that the students who remained sober during State Patty’s Day had a considerable influence on the overall feel of the weekend. Even though they did not do much to stop their peers from drinking, the presence of students who were going about their daily business and working on community service projects “offered great support. It was about making a statement that we as a community, are coming together.” In 2011, the incoming UPUA President T.J. Bard stated that he saw something different during that years State Patty’s Day celebration: “I’ve definitely seen a change in student culture. This year, in my opinion, students were getting frustrated with students from out of town” (Cole & Morgan, 2011). Assistant Vice President Newman was hopeful that the initiatives started in 2011 would encourage future students to make responsible choices. “Hopefully, it will grow and that will have more of a climate impact.”

**Analysis.** University leaders in Student Affairs and across campus had identified State Patty’s Day weekend as a complex student alcohol issue. However, not enough interest in spending a large amount of effort to confront the problem existed within any one entity at the University. The University and the State College community were challenged in deciding how best to decrease the State Patty’s Day celebration. They were hoping it would just go away eventually, but the event continued to grow.

The decision to discourage the alcohol abuse occurring on State Patty’s Day weekend started as a flight decision (Cohen et al., 1972) in spring 2008 and spring 2009. In 2009, State
Patty’s Day weekend witnessed the most alcohol arrests and transports to the hospital of any State Patty’s weekend to date (Ganim, 2010c). Community members watched and worked independently of each other as the issues, citations, and damages during the weekend continued to increase each year. The momentum changed from a flight decision to a political decision of coalition building and resource allocation after the “perfect storm” in the fall of 2009. An effort was made to encourage the Tavern Owners Association and student leaders to work on this initiative together with the larger State College community and the University (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The Partnership (see Chapter 4) was a key part of the coalition as the Vice President of Student Affairs and the State College Borough Manager co-chaired the group. The relationships formed by the Vice President and other Student Affairs leaders through the Partnership assisted in coalition building to decrease the negative consequences of the faux holiday.

The coalition began to make significant strides when all these groups came together with a goal of ending the excessive celebration. Coalition members each had a different reason for being in the discussion. The community members did not want individuals causing property damage or disturbances late at night. The Tavern Owners Association did not want more property damage or be cited for alcohol violations (Boyle, 2010). The Borough Council and Police did not want to spend the financial and personnel resources on this weekend. University leaders did not want another student injury and more negative publicity. Students also did not want more publicity that focused on Penn State’s party atmosphere and disregarded the good name of the institution (Tully, 2011). Sharing the same goal solidified a coalition that would work together to make decisions by resolution in an attempt to diminish the faux holiday.
“Biggest Party in the State”: Football Tailgating

Intercollegiate athletics can be significant for the student experience outside the classroom. Participation in athletics has a positive influence on the leadership development of students, and athletic programs build the Pennsylvania State University community by giving students, alumni, and guests a common experience. Athletic events often bring communities together, and an NCAA Division I program can have influence that is far greater than what is occurring on the field or in another athletic venue. The administrators in Athletics understand the alcohol issue on campus and the culture of alcohol use that is disruptive to students and the University (M. Johnson, Assistant Athletic Director).

I interviewed Assistant Athletic Director Mike Johnson to learn about Athletics’ role on the regular, excessive consumption of alcohol by Pennsylvania State University students. I also asked him about his experience and understanding of any conversations that the Athletics leadership may have had with the Student Affairs leadership about alcohol at tailgating activities or in athletic venues. The Assistant Athletic Director was not aware of the conversations with the Vice President of Students Affairs. He said, “I never really got involved at the level where [the Athletic Director and/or Associate Athletic Director] was talking with [the Vice President of Student Affairs] about philosophy, process, that sort of thing. I’m more in the trenches working with coaches and working with student athletes in terms of decision-making and so forth.”  

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1 As I developed this study, the plan was to interview an Associate Athletic Director and the Athletic Director as well as an Assistant Athletic Director. The Associate Athletic Director shared with the Assistant Athletic Director that he would be unable to provide me with any additional information, and my requests for an interview to the Athletic Director went unanswered. An alleged scandal that had significant impact on the Athletic Department came to light just after the end of the timeline for this case study. In the wake of this scandal, a number of high-ranking administrators lost their jobs, including the President, the Athletic Director, the Vice President of Finance and Business, the Associate Athletic Director, and the Football Coach.
Assistant Athletic Director Johnson did share with me his experience with alcohol in Athletics and his day-to-day responsibilities around this topic. A portion of the Bio-Behavioral Health class that student-athletes take devotes a section to alcohol education that is provided by the Health Promotion and Wellness Office of UHS (M. Johnson, Assistant Athletic Director; D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs). Sports administrators work with student-athletes to try to keep them from being swept into the University’s alcohol culture (M. Johnson, Assistant Athletic Director). The Assistant Athletic Directors have conversations with the athletes about alcohol and report to the coaches when students at the Pennsylvania State University or at other institutions are hurt from alcohol use. Assistant Athletic Director Johnson stated, “I use those situations and alert our coaches to make sure they are really hitting hard on alcohol, the decision-making, the responsible use of alcohol, and use it as a teachable moment.” Johnson has been at the University for 30 years, and he continues to learn new strategies for educating and helping student-athletes make better choices. He invites students to participate in exit interviews when they graduate, and he always asks a couple questions about alcohol, such as: “How are we doing here at Penn State relative to alcohol education? Is there anything, as a department, that we can be doing so we don’t have these situations, these issues?

If a student-athlete gets involved with alcohol, programs are in place to assist the student in being successful in both athletics and academics. Coaches talk directly with any student-athlete who is found to be in violation of the University’s alcohol policies. Athletes are also charged and sanctioned appropriately through the University disciplinary process. First time alcohol policy violations would attend BASICS sessions as would other students, along with a parental notification.
Athletics sets the policies and procedures for what alumni, students, and guests of the University do while attending a sporting event on campus. For example, alcohol is not permitted on University grounds outside of approved University events and venues, but on football Saturday individuals can be seen walking around with open containers of alcohol in the fields and parking areas outside Beaver Stadium (McDermott, 2010). Tailgating and Penn State football are synonymous; it is a tradition that occurs before and after every home game. When attending a football game at Penn State, there is no way to miss the tailgating experience. If you walk to the stadium from any direction, there are fields full of cars, trucks, and RVs with people cooking, drinking, and socializing. If you stand just outside the stadium and look around, there is a sea of blue and white canopies from the tailgating festivities.

Several of the tailgating areas are next to first-year on-campus residence halls. The parking lots open in the early morning on game day, so students wake up, and from their residence hall room see people drinking. This observation sends a mixed message to the student population, and Pat James feels “it’s hypocritical to say we’re doing everything we can about dangerous drinking and then throwing the biggest party in the state eight times a year.” Assistant Vice President Marie Moore has been at the University for many years and throughout her tenure has been involved in numerous conversations about tailgating. She sees both sides of the issue. She stated that there is an inconsistency in that particular policy on campus, but I think it has to do with money that our alums come up for football. Football is a large revenue producer for the institution. It’s tied a great deal to our alumni base and I think to institute a dry policy, when it comes to tailgating, would have a very negative effect on alumni’s feelings about the institution and their willingness to give.
Alumni have stated that, “it is everybody’s right to come back to college and get crazy once in a while. They argue it’s the glory days and that they are writing the check” (S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs). This places some restraints on Athletics and other divisions at the University when it comes to decreasing the excessive consumption of alcohol. Athletics relies on donors and alumni to support its programs financially and to expand the University’s resources.

Athletics at the Pennsylvania State University is a self-sufficient revenue generating entity of the University (Berkowitz, Upton, & Brady, 2013), which means that its programs do not receive financial assistance from student tuition and fees or from the Commonwealth. The money spent within Athletics must be generated from Athletics. As supportive as Athletics administrators are to student-athletes around issues of alcohol and keeping the students safe, they also need to balance the alcohol issue with the need to keep attendance at football games high. They want to avoid upsetting alumni who tailgate and attend games because of the possible financial repercussions if they push too hard. The Vice President of Student Affairs stated, “[The Athletic Director] wanted to be supportive [of reducing alcohol issues on campus] but also [he] didn’t want to do anything to compromise football and attendance of football and the spirit of a Penn State football game. So he was mostly protective of keeping things the way they were.”

Administrators’ worries about how people would react to changes in the institutional policies on tailgating are not limited to alumni. Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman shared an example of an individual whom she knows who has no affiliation with the University:

There is a guy in Mount Union, who I know, who is a friend of the family. He gives like $10,000 a year to Penn State. Never went to school, never went to college, and doesn’t have a kid that ever went here, just loves Penn State. That person is vocal. Try and tell him he can’t tailgate when he wants to.
There is a belief that many alumni feel the same and would be upset if they were prohibited from tailgating with alcohol on game day.

Athletics has attempted to change the culture of uninhibited alcohol consumption during football games by banning drinking in tailgating areas from kickoff through the final whistle (Toole, 2009). At the same time, Assistant Vice President Newman believes more could be done to curb the issues associated with tailgating, but it is difficult to take on the “sacred cows.” Indeed, several individuals in Student Affairs believe that the leadership in Athletics was not fully supportive of changing the alcohol culture at the Pennsylvania State University following the “perfect storm”. The words used by staff to describe the relationship with Athletics about alcohol included: “not helpful,” “pushback,” “stalling,” and “resistant”. Specifically, Athletics administrators hesitated if the conversation involved changing what was occurring at their venues and events. Assistant Vice President Sharon Newman stated, “We would initiate conversations with Athletics, but we really couldn’t get them to do much.” The Vice President of Student Affairs stated, “Athletics was willing to sort of inch forward in various ways but would never go as far as I wanted them to go” to address concerns about alcohol.

Analysis. Tailgating at the Pennsylvania State University on football weekends is a decades-old tradition and is a contextual factor that does not exist in the same way at all institutions. The event begins hours before a football game in parking lots and fields adjacent to several residence halls in which first-year students live. The authority to change policies related to tailgating do not reside in Student Affairs; policies regarding football tailgating are regulated by Athletics. A significant coalition would be needed to change the tailgating policies. The decision to reduce or ban alcohol during tailgating would require the support of others within the University and possibly in the surrounding community.
Financial solvency is the priority that took precedence for Athletics administrators when they were approached about making changes to the tailgating policy. The Athletic Director was fearful of losing income from the community and alumni who enjoy tailgating and believe it is the right of all Penn State faithful to tailgate at football games, according to the Vice President. This finding is not a condemnation of the Athletic Director or the Athletic Department. There are always competing interests and priorities within all divisions of a university. Rather, this finding indicates that the policy change did not have sufficient support from groups external to Student Affairs to force a change in rules about alcohol consumption at tailgating events. Without a coalition, the Student Affairs leadership did not have enough influence to change the priority interests of the tailgating policies set forth by Athletics.

“Expanding the Footprint of Alcohol”: Athletic Venues

In September 2010, the Pennsylvania State University announced that alumnus Terry Pegula donated $88 million to sponsor men’s and women’s hockey programs and build a new hockey arena (Barton, 2010; Rice, 2010). The arena construction brought with it discussions about the policies and procedures that would be implemented in the new facility. The conversation soon turned to alcohol, including the ability to serve alcohol, along with expectations of guests to consume alcohol, and the use of alcohol within the arena. These discussions included a number of high-level administrators from across the University (M. Moore, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President).

The impetus for the discussion was the alcohol policy in the new hockey arena’s suites, which, according to the Vice President, came from a belief that “Terry Pegula has to have a glass of wine” at the games. The Vice President for Student Affairs stated, “I don’t understand that because I walk downstairs, I do my homework, I walk downstairs, [and] Pegula has a box at the
football games, [and] there’s no alcohol in his box at the football games.” Laura Collin, Director of Athletic Facilities, spoke with the Associate Athletic Director responsible for securing the donation and building the hockey arena. She remembers the AAD’s observation that “having a beer at least is a very common thing in hockey arenas.” Luke Koehler, Director of Hospitality Services at the Pennsylvania State University, remembers the Associate Athletic Director stating, “This has to be, this has to be.” There was a belief that “it adds to the atmosphere…. People expect it,” and according to Laura Collin, the Athletic Department was “worried about selling all these seats and that the donors expected it [alcohol] to be there.”

The discussion quickly changed course to include alcohol policies in all athletic venues. Director Collin stated that this occasion was not the first time a discussion about alcohol was brought up to her. The staff responsible for the basketball/concert arena had brought the issue to her several times. “They kept bringing it up, bringing it up, bringing it up, because many arenas across the country do that [serve alcohol]…. For them, it wasn’t even about the money, they said, ‘You know, yeah, we could make a ton of money doing this, but we’d give all that money back to the University for us to be able to get more patrons in, greater variety of shows, etc.’” Staff members also believed that they could control the atmosphere better and regulate consumption so that individuals were not causing issues for other patrons.

They can’t get a drink of beer in that facility, they’re drinking in the parking lots, they’re drinking on the way, and it’s causing all these other problems. Plus there are certain shows that don’t want to perform in a dry arena. They want the audience to have, you know, loosen up a little bit. (L. Koehler, Director Hospitality).

The arena staff believed one way to increase the number of possible shows and the size of
audiences was by providing alcohol. The decision to implement a new policy would take the approval of several individuals from different divisions across the University.

The Vice President of Student Affairs was involved in the discussion along with the Senior Vice President of Finance and Business, the Athletic Director, an Associate Athletic Director, the General Manager of Hospitality Services, and the President. The Associate Athletic Director claimed that alcohol had to be served in the hockey arena box seats similarly to how it was served in the football stadium. Laura Collin stated that she heard the following statement from the Associate Athletic Director: “We are not going to sell alcohol, but we are going to make the same arrangement at Pegula that we have at Beaver Stadium.” The Vice President of Student Affairs shared that in the football stadium suites, except for the President’s suite and the Government Relations suite, alcohol is served by the groups that hold the leases for the suites. They can bring in as much alcohol as they would like on the Friday before a game: “There’s no control over that…. You are trusting them” (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director).

There is a significant difference between the suites at the football stadium and those at the two other arenas. The suites at the hockey arena and the basketball/concert arena are within an arm’s reach of the individuals sitting in the arena bowl. The difference in physical attributes of the three facilities was a significant part of the conversation (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director; L. Koehler, Director Hospitality). “There’s no gate, there’s no window…. What’s going to stop anybody from giving it to the people below them…? So there was a lot of concern about that” (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director). The discussion continued as different options were presented for the best way to allow alcohol consumption in athletic venues.

According to Laura Collin, the discussion changed direction at one point with the question, “Why don’t we just change what we are doing in the [football] stadium?” The idea to
have the hospitality unit at Penn State control the alcohol distribution in athletic venues gained
the most support. “In the licensed establishments you have the ultimate accountability and
responsibility for every ounce of alcohol and how it’s handled, managed, stored, served” (L.
Koehler, Director Hospitality). To some individuals in the discussion, having trained
professionals provide the personnel and infrastructure needed to serve alcohol legally seemed
like the right move: “If we are going to do this then we ought to do it right, we ought to do it
with the licenses that we have or get another license…. Whatever we needed to do legally with
the Liquor Control Board…. we felt it would be better if we controlled it” (L. Collin, Athletic
Facilities Director). The Director of Hospitality Services stated that he had an opinion similar to
Assistant Vice President Collin’s perspective, however in his role as a support entity of the
University, it was his job to implement what is asked of him by the leadership of the University.
In this situation, Director Koehler was hoping the final decision would allow him to “do it right.”

The discussion concluded with permission being granted for alcohol to be served in all
three major athletic venues on campus, although the way in which alcohol would be served in the
football stadium would be different. There was still some disagreement around the table when
the President made the decision. Director Koehler remembers that “the reality was that
everybody wasn’t okay” with the decision. Koehler continued, “It was [the President] at the head
of the table and a few of us sitting around the table talking about the options” when the President
declared that all venues would serve alcohol, and it would be regulated by Hospitality Services.
The Vice President of Student Affairs remembers saying, “So we’re expanding the footprint of
alcohol?” The President stated, “Well, this is what you want.” The Vice President responded,
“No, it’s not what I want, it’s absolutely not what I want.” He “threw up” his hands, shook his
head, and thought “God, this just really pisses me off.”
Regarding Beaver Stadium, suite owners would no longer be allowed to bring in their own alcohol. Hospitality Services would be responsible for all alcohol sales in the suite area, and there would continue to be no alcohol served to other areas of the stadium. The employees serving alcohol were to watch for signs of excessive consumption by individuals and refrain from serving them, thus controlling the use of alcohol and becoming a licensed establishment (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director; L. Koehler, Director Hospitality). This arrangement also meant that the suite holders in the football stadium would be paying a premium for each drink. The cost associated with the alcohol sales would pay for the service.

For the basketball/concert arena, it was proposed that alcohol would be served in a room that was removed from the arena (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director). Occupants in the suites would be allowed before the game or at half time to purchase and consume alcohol in this space before returning to their seats. The hockey arena would have a similar arrangement. There, a high-end food area was planned just outside the suites, and individuals could purchase and consume alcohol there before returning to their suites (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director; L. Koehler, Director Hospitality). According to the Vice President, it was believed that keeping the alcohol out of the suites would not send a mixed message to the students below in the arena bowl, although there were still questions about whether the decision was best for the University.

A number of individuals who were involved in the decision-making process still had concerns about the implementation of a policy that would increase the alcohol footprint at the University. Director Koehler stated that there were “all these other people who all of a sudden they had something on their plate that they didn’t necessarily ask for.” For example, “Police Services weren’t excited about it” (L. Koehler, Director Hospitality), presumably because they might have more alcohol-related issues if alcohol could be sold in all event venues. “Athletics,
they were concerned about what it would do to the stadium” (L. Koehler, Director Hospitality), since suite holders in the football stadium might no longer purchase suites, and their revenue stream would be decreased. “There was a whole lot of concern given all the other stuff that was going on…. Isn’t that going against what we were trying to do with not only the students, but faculty and staff in the town?” (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director). According to Koehler and the Vice President, several members of the group shared the feeling that the University would be sending a contradictory message if the new policy were implemented.

Soon after the decision was made, the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business left the Pennsylvania State University for a new position (Pruitt, 2011). The President then reinstated the previous Senior Vice President for Finance and Business, who had retired in 2009 (Conte, 2011; Shiflett, 2011). The Vice President for Student Affairs shared that he had a good relationship with the previously retired Senior Vice President and was asked to meet with him to talk about changes that had been made during his retirement. One of the items that they discussed was the alcohol issue on campus and specifically selling alcohol in on-campus athletic venues. The Vice President for Student Affairs remembers the Senior Vice President saying:

You’re kidding. For years we have said no alcohol in the Bryce Jordan Center [basketball/concert arena]. The concession of what we did over at the Beaver Stadium is a problem. We should never have let them [Athletics] get away with that, but we shouldn’t now add to the problem.

The Senior Vice President for Finance and Business called a meeting with many of the same individuals who attended the first meeting, but he included a few attendees, such as the Assistant Vice President for Police and Public Safety and the Vice President for University Relations. The President did not attend this second meeting. “I think we were all trying to put our
case on the table and trying to figure what was in the University’s best interests” (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director). The Vice President for Student Affairs presented his argument about the need to reduce mixed messages about alcohol and the use of alcohol on campus. The Assistant Vice President for Police and Public Safety described how the change in policy would add to the time that his staff would need to address alcohol issues, and the Vice President for University Relations talked about the difficulty in explaining to people why alcohol was being served on-campus in these venues. The Senior Vice President for Finance and Business’s “view tipped the balance” according to Director Koehler. The Vice President for Student Affairs recalls that at the conclusion of the meeting, the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business said, “I think you [the Athletic Director] and I need to go pay [the President] a visit soon and tell him because it seems the consensus of the group is we can’t go in this direction that you’ve been talking about.”

The Athletic Director was visibly upset as the group departed the meeting walked down the hall of Old Main. “To be honest, I think [the Athletic Director] had the hardest time around the room because he knew he had all this money at stake” (L. Collin, Athletic Facilities Director). The Vice President for Student Affairs had a good relationship with the Athletic Director and encouraged him to not be to upset about the decision. The Athletic Director stated, “Buddy, you don’t know the half of it. There’re just some big problems around here. A few weeks after the meeting, an alleged scandal that included a retired assistant football coach, the President, the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business, and the Athletic Director consumed the University community. The Vice President for Student Affairs stated that he has not spoken with those individuals since that meeting.
Plans to sell alcohol in the University’s athletic venues did not continue. The footprint of alcohol did not expand past the suites of the football stadium, and no new procedures were adopted for dispensing alcohol. Publicly, the alcohol issue has not received much more attention as the abuse scandal took over the public conscience. However, the leadership in Student Affairs and others continue their quest to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students.

**Analysis.** Athletics and Finance and Business are the two divisions responsible for policy implementation and enforcement in the University’s athletic venues. The Vice President for Student Affairs was brought in to the discussion as the individual responsible for alcohol initiatives on campus, along with being responsible for approving any gathering that serves alcohol on University property. The contextual factors that started the discussion included the donation of a large sum of money, the construction of a new athletic facility, and the perception that the donor needed to have alcohol during the games and to entertain guests.

The discussions about alcohol in the new venue gave a forum to discuss other venues and the alcohol policy. However, the departments represented in the room were part of an administrative hierarchy and thus were compelled to implement the President’s decision. “My problem with Athletics was always the fact that [the President], in the end, would fall over and play dead when [the Athletic Director] would go whining to him.” Even with this feeling, the Vice President of Student Affairs and others around the table were to implement the decision.

If the change in the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business had not changed, I believe the initial decision would have been the new policy. The Senior Vice President had been around the University for more than 30 years and had seen the negative consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. The Vice President of Student Affairs recognized the
philosophical change and used his relationship with the Senior Vice President to reopen the discussion.

The second meeting included more allies of the Vice President of Student Affairs, representatives from the University Police and the University Relations Division, and they opposed increasing the alcohol footprint on campus. In working with Athletics, the Vice President stated, “when I’m wrestling with Athletics, I can’t wrestle alone.” The coalition members had different reasons for the shared goal of not expanding the University’s alcohol footprint. The police were apprehensive of a possible increase in alcohol-related issues that may require an increase in the police presence at events. The University Relations representative was concerned about the negative publicity associated with the mixed messages being issued by the University about alcohol.

The balance of power shifted away from Athletics. The President was not included in this discussion; it is unclear whether his calendar did not allow for him to attend or he was not invited to the meeting. The new coalition changed the outcome of the discussion and the topic has not been revisited.

**Summary of Analysis**

For this research study, I collected various forms of data to examine the decision-making processes through which the leadership of Student Affairs sought to devise policies to curb the excessive consumption of alcohol by Penn State students. This section presents the more general procedures that decision makers used as they and others were scrutinizing and developing new initiatives and policies between the fall of 2009 and the fall of 2011. The section is broken into three areas of analysis. First, I discuss components that were part of all decisions by the leadership in Student Affairs. Second, I explore common decision elements of the initiatives
housed within Student Affairs. Third, I present decision-making processes that engaged external groups with the Student Affairs leadership.

**Common Occurrences in Decisions made by Student Affairs**

This section presents contextual factors and decisions that influenced the adoption of initiatives that are housed both inside and outside the Division of Student Affairs. Three things occurred in almost every case: The Vice President of Student Affairs was intimately involved in the process, an initial evaluation occurred, and staff benchmarked prospective policies and programs with other institutions and/or consulted with outside experts.

**Vice President’s involvement.** The Vice President was involved in almost every initiative mentioned in this case study. He took responsibility for responding to the “perfect storm” of fall 2009 and became the point person for curbing students’ excessive consumption of alcohol. It was clear from the beginning of this case study that the Vice President was highly affected by the first-year student’s death in 2009 and built on that experience to advocate for change. He also became the face of the administration and the individual to whom people would turn with ideas that they thought would help.

Previously, the issue of students’ excessive consumption of alcohol was not addressed at the Vice President’s level. Rather, it was delegated to a senior staff member—not the highest-ranking Student Affairs professional on campus. The Vice President’s decision to serve as the point person for this problem put the clout of one of the University’s most senior administrators behind the conversation, which allowed access to other high-level administrators to discuss the issue. The Vice President was aware of the challenges and the possible solutions because he educated himself on the issue. He was able to direct the conversation and mandate the
implementation of a number of initiatives because of his level within the Student Affairs hierarchy.

**Initial evaluation.** A significant decision early in the case set expectations for the Division and the community. This decision was an oversight decision (Cohen et al., 1972) made by the Vice President of Student Affairs in which he ordered that time be taken to assess the best course of action. This process allowed the Student Affairs leadership to evaluate initiatives before recommending or implementing anything. The Vice President stated several times that there were many steps in this process, and it would take many years to have a long-lasting solution to the problem of student alcohol abuse. He did not sit back in the hope that the issue would go away or use “window dressing” to make people believe something substantial was occurring while nothing was really happening.

The Vice President was compiling a list of possible initiatives, and he was extremely vocal about the collection. Each time the Vice President spoke to students, faculty, staff or other groups on the issue of alcohol, the list would be mentioned and ideas often requested. The list allowed for the evaluation and vetting of the programs as it showed the issue was being worked on diligently. The idea of the list, as it was frequently referenced, kept the issue and the thought in the forefront of people’s minds even though the list was not made public.

Even though new initiatives were not implemented immediately, there was not a large gap between the “perfect storm” and public discussion of initiatives that were under consideration for adoption. In November 2009, the Vice President and a panel of staff members made a presentation to the Board of Trustees regarding programs that were already occurring and some ideas for future implementation (Appendix H). The presentation was an opportunity to answer questions about the initiatives under consideration, as well as a chance for the Board to
give feedback directly to the Vice President. There did not seem to be a strong push from internal or external constituencies to move more quickly to curb behavior. The rate at which information was being shared and feedback gathered was accepted by the community since it was clear that the University was still concerned about and involved in a process to make change.

**Benchmarking and experts.** Benchmarking with peer institutions that had attempted to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students on their campuses was one of the first steps in vetting an initiative before making a decision about it. Benchmarking is a significant way in which universities collect information when they are considering new policies or initiatives (Mosier & Schwarzmueller, 2002). With limited time and resources, it is often preferable to adopt or adapt a program that has been successful at another institution rather than produce something new.

The Director of Health Services did some benchmarking of BASICS at other institutions prior to proposing the idea for Penn State. The initial benchmarking of BASICS showed promise and reaffirmed the published literature. The Vice President did some of his own benchmarking before approving BASICS for use at Penn State as well. The Student Affairs leadership also benchmarked the breathalyzer initiative with other Big Ten schools, and this process informed development of a plan for implementation. Benchmarking was also used during deliberations on the development of a recovery program to understand how these programs emerged at other institutions over time and how institutions implemented them.

In addition to benchmarking with other institutions, internal and external experts were consulted to discuss initiatives and share their specialized knowledge. Experts were asked for input about best practices or strategies that had been used at other institutions. The information from these experts educated the Student Affairs staff and encouraged staff members to be
involved in the process. For example, as the recovery program was being considered, individuals who had been working with collegiate recovery programs at other institutions were brought to campus to help the staff understand the benefits and possibilities of such a program. It was not assumed that the individuals at Penn State had all the answers; they relied on the knowledge of others to inform their discussion.

**Decisions Exclusive to Student Affairs**

Several initiatives were the exclusive responsibility of departments within the Division of Student Affairs. For example, BASICS is the shared responsibility of Judicial Affairs, Residence Life, and University Health Services. These departments worked together to develop, implement and oversee the initiative. The next section discusses the common decision-making themes discovered in this case study on initiatives housed within the Division of Student Affairs.

**Mandated decisions and feedback.** Student Affairs has a hierarchical structure which allows for oversight decisions from the Division leaders and the University President. The President oversees and has direct influence on the Division’s policies, which he exercised when the undergraduate residence halls became dry in the fall of 2011. The impression among the Student Affairs staff was that pressure from the surrounding community was a key factor in this decision; the thoughts and opinions of staff members within the Division regarding the efficacy of such a ban were not considered, and the initiative was implemented with little debate.

The Student Affairs leadership also practiced oversight decision-making to implement several initiatives. The Vice President would announce a course of action that he wanted to pursue. Then he would gather feedback from individuals within the Division as to how each initiative could be implemented. For example, the Responsible Action Protocol and the initiative to increase the consistency of sanctions were oversight decisions, although they used a different
structure than is described by the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972). The Vice President solicited feedback was he made his initial decision but before he ordered implementation of the plans. Staff input was used to identify program and implementation details.

The Vice President also solicited feedback from students for several initiatives. He formed a student group, the Student Advisory Council, for the specific purpose of vetting ideas and programs. Council members were also asked for feedback as the Vice President became aware of new issues or concerns. The feedback approach used the expertise and knowledge of students and staff to discern how or whether a new initiative might work within the culture of the University.

**Information gathering.** As initiatives were discussed and vetted in the wake of the “perfect storm”, Student Affairs staff members reviewed academic literature on the topic of curbing students’ excessive alcohol consumption. Expanding their knowledge about the topic allowed staff members to identify existing methods to decrease alcohol use at universities across the country and in the public sector, which in turn made possible more informed discussions about the issue.

Decisions about adoption or continuation of the alcohol-related initiatives presented in this study were often data-driven. The leadership considered assessments of programs to evaluate their efficacy and decide whether to continue existing programs or adopt new initiatives. In addition, several decisions were driven by published research in professional journals or by using efficacy data from other institutions. For example, published research and programmatic data provided strong cases for the implementation of BASICS, Penn State SAFE, and the increase in consistency of sanctions. In the case of BASICS specifically, research findings were used to encourage staff support for the initiative.
None of the Student Affairs leaders who participated in this study indicated that they had made a conscious decision to follow one model or another to decrease alcohol consumption by Penn State students. The Vice President and several Assistant Vice Presidents shared that they had general knowledge of NIAAA recommendations from some literature on the topic, but those recommendations were not the deciding factor when any program or policy was adopted (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; S. Newman, AVP Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). Ultimately, however, the initiatives that the University adopted did seem to follow the environmental management recommendations set forth by the NIAAA in the 3-in-1 model of interventions for the individual, the student body, and the community as a whole (NIAAA, 2002a).

**Program or policy already in place.** Prior to the timeframe of this case study, Pennsylvania State University had in place a number of programs and policies that sought to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. The assessment data for extant initiatives were evaluated to determine the programs’ efficacy and decide if the programs should be continued or changed in some way. The Student Affairs staff’s belief was that it would be more difficult to shut down a program that was already in place because of the potential public perception that the University was decreasing its efforts to reduce student alcohol abuse—a situation that presented a predicament to those who were trying to discern how best to expand Pennsylvania State University’s fight against the student culture of excessive alcohol consumption.

For example, the assessment data for the online alcohol education module for incoming students, AlcoholEdu, did not show the program to have clear benefits, despite its hefty price. When the grant that had funded AlcoholEdu was set to expire, the decision was made to develop
a new online education program, Penn State SAFE, in house so as to meet the needs of students and decrease costs. Replacing AlcoholEdu presented a quandary for the Student Affairs staff. The benefits of AlcoholEdu were unclear, and, at the time of the decision, Penn State SAFE was undeveloped and untested. The general impression, however, was that, in the months after the “perfect storm”, it would be difficult for the University to explain eliminating an alcohol education program that touched every matriculating student. My impression from study participants is that Penn State SAFE probably would have not been developed if AlcoholEdu had not already been in use for three years. AlcoholEdu established the expectation that participation in an alcohol education program would be required of all incoming students, even if there were no documented positive effects of the program. That is, if AlcoholEdu had not already been in place, it seems unlikely that the University would have provided the support needed to introduce such a program in the years following the sad and difficult events of fall 2009.

In contrast, in the wake of the “perfect storm”, Penn State decided to abandon PAWS, the alcohol intervention program that had been developed internally, with BASICS, a widely known and used intervention program. The decision to replace PAWS with BASICS was quite simple to make because research showed it to be an effective program for decreasing individual students’ consumption of alcohol, because research and NIAAA literature showed it to be an effective program (DiFulvio et al., 2012; NIAAA, 2002c).

**Resources.** A major decision point for several initiatives concerned the availability of resources. For the purpose of this study, “resources” encompass a broad spectrum of items to be drawn upon including but not limited to staff time, internal and external experts, technology, money, and space allocation. Penn State SAFE and BASICS both required a significant allocation of resources to encourage the desired student behaviors toward alcohol. In both
instances, resources were available to assist in development of the programs, but there was also a need for additional, long-term resources for the programs to be successful. Regarding Penn State SAFE, there was a perception that a backlash from students, their families, and the community might occur if an online alcohol education program did not continue to be offered. This perception was enough of an incentive to find the resources needed to continue the program, albeit in a new form. The development of Penn State SAFE required staff time and expertise in many different areas, from technology to content to curriculum design. Students were needed to narrate, act out, and preview the modules as well.

The resources needed for BASICS differed from those required for Penn State SAFE. Content experts were necessary to develop the program, but BASICS needed more staff time after the program was implemented. This staff time would be used for counselor training and student counseling sessions. BASICS also required offices for its counselors to meet with students, and dedicated space could be difficult to secure.

**Fear of political fallout.** The fear of political fallout was a significant part of the decision-making process that led to the replacement of the AlcoholEdu with Penn State SAFE. AlcoholEdu was the one alcohol education requirement for all students prior to matriculating at the University, and there was a belief within the staff that parents or community members would protest if the University stopped offering such a program, even if it had not been shown to be effective in the past. AlcoholEdu had a significant price tag of $100,000, and a more cost-effective alternative was found by using internal resources to develop a similar, more relevant program.

In the case of BASICS, staff did not fear political fallout because research and experience had shown it to be a highly effective alcohol intervention program, unlike PAWS. Extant
research and other institutions’ experience with BASICS provided the Student Affairs leadership with the information that they needed to advocate for the change. If BASICS were not found to be a better option than PAWS, the University may have followed a similar process to when AlcoholEdu was replaced by Penn State SAFE. A less expensive, in-house product with more content specific to Penn State’s culture would have been the goal. The major guideline for any of these decisions, which was considered in the Penn State SAFE discussion, was that whichever initiative were in place could no harm to students.

**Decisions with University and Community Partners**

Several alcohol-related initiatives required political decisions (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992) that were not exclusively the responsibility of the Vice President or other leaders within Student Affairs, and not all the outcomes of these decisions were desired by the leadership in Student Affairs. A number of common themes emerged within these decision-making processes: the need for positive relationships, consideration of financial repercussions, the focus on a goal, and the influence of passionate faculty members.

*The need for positive relationships.* In our meetings for this case study, the Vice President frequently mentioned that his leadership style always started with building relationships. According to the Vice President, this task is important for breaking down any misperceptions or misunderstandings that may occur between individuals about their different areas of responsibility. He spoke specifically about forging relationships with other campus leaders. The Vice President does not believe that Student Affairs can operate independently of the academic mission of the University; the Division of Student Affairs must work with its academic counterparts to provide students with a well rounded and seamless experience. “If we
can somehow bring these worlds together in various ways, really great stuff can happen. We’ve got to work at bringing those worlds together and they are very different worlds.”

Soon after the Vice President arrived on campus, he asked to schedule a regular meeting with the Provost. They established a one-hour meeting that occurred every two weeks. The Provost “laughed” when he was first asked to meet regularly with the Vice President because he had never been asked to meet with any of the previous Vice Presidents, much less on a regular basis. The Vice President asked for the Provost’s counsel on how to navigate the political landscape at Penn State and to understand issues from a different perspective.

The relationship between the academic leadership and the Student Affairs leadership grew as individuals became more familiar with each other and understood each other’s priorities better. Other leaders within Student Affairs who had been at the University for many years also had relationships with individuals in Academic Affairs and throughout the community before the Vice President’s initiative. His encouragement of these relationships and their continued expansion could only benefit Student Affairs as the Division attempted to change policies and practices throughout the University after the “perfect storm”. The Division of Student Affairs needed support from others within the University to move the conversation about alcohol forward. As the Vice President stated, “Alcohol is an issue that is present in many other issues that impede students’ success. It’s a financial problem, interpersonal relationship problem, it’s a health problem. It goes on and on. It’s an academic problem.”

According to the political model of decision-making (see Chapter 2), building coalitions and using information effectively can assist less powerful members of an organization in influencing decisions (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Generally speaking, student affairs
administrators do not have a significant amount of power on their campus, so positive relationships and tight coalitions are important for moving forward initiatives that involve other areas of campus. As the Vice President stated, “When I’m wrestling with Athletics, I can’t wrestle alone.” The relationships built by the Vice President allowed Student Affairs’ concerns about alcohol to be heard by others at the University and in the surrounding community. However, relationships without coalitions may not be enough to achieve a desired outcome, as is evident in the tailgating and breathalyzer discussions, where there were no coalitions to counterbalance Athletics’ stands on the issues.

**Consideration of financial repercussion.** Financial repercussions loom large in any decision made by the leaders of a college or university. While the financial implications of various decisions may not be felt directly by the individual or department that is requesting a change, they will be felt elsewhere. The negative perceptions of such a ripple effect might be mitigated by coalition building. The debate about alcohol at athletic venues illustrates this point.

Athletics is dependent on income from fans, donors, and alumni, and in turn these constituencies influence Athletics leaders’ decisions about policies. Athletics is an income-generating, self-supporting entity within the Pennsylvania State University. The size of Pennsylvania State University’s athletic programs, along with the fact that the Athletics division can be self-sufficient due to the success of the football team, allows the University to generate income independent of student fees (Berkowitz et al., 2013). Smaller institutions often have to rely on student fees to support their athletic programs because these programs do not generate sufficient income.

Athletics’ self-sufficiency presented obstacles that the Student Affairs leadership attempted to navigate as alcohol-related initiatives were brought forward for discussion. For
example, the belief that the donor of the ice arena and the men’s and women’s hockey programs expected alcohol in the arena suites for himself and to entertain guests was one point of contention. There was also reluctance to implement policies to stop alcohol consumption at tailgating or to impose a breathalyzer program for previous troublemakers in the football stadium. The hesitation and ultimate resistance came from a fear of backlash from fans, alumni, and donors, who would express their dismay with their wallets and checkbooks.

**Focus on a goal.** The decisions that ultimately ended with outcomes desired by the Division of Student Affairs shared similar goals, even if the groups that were involved in each decision did not share the same motivation for the goals. In the case of the debate on alcohol services in athletic venues, the coalition that opposed serving alcohol in the stadium and arenas did not want to send mixed messages to students and the public about alcohol consumption at the Pennsylvania State University and did not want to risk an increase in the number of alcohol-related issues at venue events. The motivations and goals of coalition members were expressed in conversations and assisted in shaping the final outcome.

Similarly, the coalition that formed in opposition to State Patty’s Day desired to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, although each participant in the discussion had a different reason for that goal. Coalition members wanted to: decrease the destruction of property; decrease the use of resources keeping students safe; and keep students from harming themselves by consuming alcohol all day. The motivations that built the coalition were not identical, however with similar goals the community began moving toward a solution.

All external group discussions about initiatives did not have the opportunity to develop common goals. The initiative to implement a breathalyzer program at the football stadium did not have a coalition with the same goals. Without a group of individuals with common goals, the
initiative failed to gain support to make a change. Decisions that did not have a common goal could not produce a coalition and the individuals with the most power were successful in implementing their wishes.

**Influence of faculty members.** The final example of decision-making with individuals and entities external to Student Affairs involved a passionate faculty member. It is worth spending time with a faculty member who is emphatic about an idea and willing to offer time and expertise to address an issue. For example, the faculty member who was involved in the development of the recovery program assisted in redirecting the initiative from a flight decision to a decision by resolution. In a flight decision situation, individuals do not make the time or have the desire to make a decision, whereas individuals making a decision by resolution stay engaged in the process and complete the necessary work to make a decision to improve an old initiative or start a new one (Cohen et al., 1972). The faculty member’s passion and knowledge of the subject of alcohol abuse and addiction could not be ignored. Her motivation was infectious and ultimately pushed the group to support the initiative.

**Epilogue: Case Update**

Additional programs and initiatives to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students have not been implemented since the fall of 2011. As was noted previously, soon after the end of the case study timeframe, charges were brought against Penn State’s President, Vice President of Finance and Business, Athletic Director, and Football Coach, as well as an Assistant Football Coach, that drew attention away from the University Park campus’s alcohol issue (Johnson, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The University administration, and specifically the Student Affairs leadership, has been consumed by investigations, inquiries, and compliance initiatives since fall 2011 (Johnson, 2012).
In spite of the alleged scandal and subsequent investigations, there has been some movement in decreasing the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. Penn State no longer appears on the *Princeton Review*'s Top Ten Party Schools list (The Princeton Review's college rankings, 2013). While the *Princeton Review* list is not the result of a scientific study, Penn State’s absence from the list could mean, anecdotally, that the University is now less of a party school. It would be premature to conclude that the change in party school status is due to the initiatives presented in this study. Indeed, students and staff members have suggested that the negative attention brought by the scandal may have influenced students and alumni to discourage negative attention focused on the University, and fewer people may be voting for Penn State to “win” this distinction.

The decisions to educate parents and students prior to matriculation, send post-violation notifications to parents, and charge and sanction off-campus students who violate the University’s alcohol policies have not decreased the number of students seen by Judicial Affairs (Figure 5.7). The off-campus violations continue to increase, with the largest jump having happened in fall 2010, when the new off-campus policy was enforced fervently. The easy answer—that more people must be excessively consuming alcohol—may not be accurate. As Officer John Lehman stated in his interview, an increase in arrest numbers could mean more or better enforcement. A separate study will need to be done to identify the reason for an increase in off-campus cases seen by Judicial Affairs. During the same timeframe (Fall of 2007 to Spring of 2013), students seen for alcohol policy violations in the residence halls have fallen back to 2007-2008 levels (Figure 5.8). Again, to attribute this decrease to the dry residence hall policy would be premature, as there could be other reasons for the decrease, such as differences in class
alcohol use prior to matriculation, policy enforcement levels, or decrease in access to alcohol for underage students due to alcohol sales enforcement.

Figure 5.7. Alcohol charges processed by Office of Judicial Affairs (Partnership Annual Assessment Report, 2010-2011)
Completion of the online alcohol education module, Penn State SAFE, continues to be a requirement of all matriculating undergraduate students. The videos and content have been updated once based on feedback from participants during the first two years of implementation (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs; C. Morrison, Director Student Affairs). The use of BASICS as a sanction, parental notification policy and responsible action protocol continue to be used for alcohol situations when the staff works with students. The BASICS program continues to encourage individual students to decrease their consumption of alcohol when they meet with a BASICS counselor after the first violation (Dimeff et al., 1999). The University’s athletic venues have not changed alcohol policies or procedures. Athletics has not implemented the breathalyzer program, and alcohol continues to be permitted during tailgating in the parking lots around the football stadium before and after each game. The student advisory council continues to be an asset to the Vice President, although its mission has changed: It has been organizing programs as a council, in addition to advising the Vice President, which was the original intention of the council.

Initiatives to decrease participation in State Patty’s Day have continued, and over the past two years significant progress has been made to reduce the negative consequences of the faux holiday. Calls for service over State Patty’s Day weekend to the State College Police department have decreased over the past several years (Figure 5.9).
The decrease in calls for service is an indicator, according to Officer Lehman, that illegal behaviors are decreasing, and thus it can be extrapolated that alcohol consumption may also be decreasing during the faux holiday. Arrests and citations in 2013 were down by 37% as compared to the 2012 holiday weekend (Pennsylvania State University, 2013). In 2014 the weekend arrests and citations decreased again by 57.4% from 244 to 102 for the weekend (Caldwell, 2014; Pennsylvania State University, 2014b).

A major change occurred after fall 2011 for the coalition of administrators, community members, students, and the Tavern Owners Association. The Tavern Owners Association removed itself from the coalition to decrease alcohol consumption on State Patty’s Day. In response, the remainder of the coalition offered the tavern owners monetary incentives to stay

*Figure 5.9. State College Police Calls for Service (information provided the State College Police)*
closed for the 2013 and 2014 State Patty’s Day celebrations (Falce, 2014; Miller, 2014; Pennsylvania State University, 2013). In addition, the Inter-fraternity Council banned affiliated organizations from hosting social functions, and the Panhellenic Council implemented a no-guest policy for all members in on-campus residence halls, during State Patty’s Day weekend (Caldwell, 2014; Miller, 2014; Pennsylvania State University, 2014b).

The Collegiate Recovery Community (CRC) continues to grow and has become a permanent part of Student Affairs. The CRC has a program coordinator who is responsible for coordinating programs, working with students, and enhancing program offerings. The program continues to be housed at the spiritual center on campus (Student Affairs Student and Family Services, 2014). Two organizations are affiliated with the CRC: Lions for Recovery continues to be the student organization affiliated with the program, and Lions in Recovery is an alumni group that “provides support, social unity, and professional networking” (Student Affairs Student and Family Services, 2014). The CRC sponsors four “recovery-related meetings” on campus, which include: Friday’s First Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; Sober Sundays alcoholics anonymous meetings; Narcotics Anonymous meetings; and CRC yoga/meditation meetings (Pennsylvania State University, 2014a). The CRC community was the last initiative implemented during the two years of this case study, and it has gained momentum despite the University’s change of focus away from the issues presented by the “perfect storm”.

Penn State has not resolved its student alcohol problem, but it has clearly made progress to address the crisis that was brought to the community’s attention by the “perfect storm” in the fall of 2009. The Division of Student Affairs leadership decisions have allowed for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the alcohol issue on campus and in the community. There will always be more initiatives that can be implemented and more coalitions that can be
built to decrease the availability of alcohol to students. However, as the University welcomes its 18th President in 2014, a firmer foundation has been laid to encourage a healthier environment for all members of the community.
Chapter 6

Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

As I explained in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the purpose of this case study is to understand decision-making by the Student Affairs leaders at the Pennsylvania State University as they responded to a “perfect storm” of alcohol-related issues. The goal remains to assist Student Affairs administrators in understanding how decisions are made in relation to alcohol concerns on and around campus; the literature review in Chapter 2 illustrated that there is very little extant research about decision-making in higher education, particularly regarding policies and programs related to student alcohol abuse. In Chapter 3, I presented the methods that I would use in this study, and in Chapter 4, I set the scene of the study through a community and case narrative. In Chapter 5, I presented and analyzed major alcohol-related decisions made by Student Affairs leaders during the two-year timeframe of this study, including how those decisions were made and what influenced the decisions.

Chapter 6 begins with a summary of the findings of this study. The first section addresses initiatives that were developed by and are housed in Student Affairs, and the second section discusses the creation and implementation of initiatives that included other divisions within the University. The process for each decision will be placed within the dynamic model of organizational decision-making (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997) to illustrate decision routes in Student Affairs. The chapter also includes implications for practice, future research opportunities, the limitations of this study, and a brief conclusion.
Summary of Key Findings

Decision-making by the Pennsylvania State University Student Affairs leadership regarding policies and programs to discourage the excessive consumption of alcohol by students incorporated several different decision-making models. The models were frequently intertwined as the decision-making process moved toward adoption and implementation of initiatives.

The dynamic model of organizational decision-making (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997; see Figure 2.4) was the primary theoretical model used to frame the data collected for this case study. The study’s findings fill in the model between the “new problem” and the “new solution,” at least concerning the topic of reducing the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, in that they explain what occurred in the decision-making process between these two steps. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 detail the decision-making processes that took the Student Affairs leadership from the new problem to the new solutions; they are discussed in detail below.

A “new participant” is identified in the dynamic model of organizational decision-making as an integral contributor to the decision-making process as one who brings a new perspective to the decisions. At the time of the “perfect storm”, the Vice President was a year into his tenure at the Pennsylvania State University, and preliminary findings from the pilot study suggested that his presence as a new participant was important to how the University proceeded with responding to the “perfect storm” of fall 2009. At the end of this study the “new participant” designation persists in the data as a significant part of the decision-making process that occurred. The Vice President’s tenure may have played a role in the process, so to say the model is incorrect by having the “new participant” would be premature. However, the individuals interviewed and the artifacts identified did not indicate this as a major influence on the outcome.
Rather, a key finding of this study is that the Vice President’s relationships with on-campus colleagues and members of the surrounding community were crucial to the success of the Pennsylvania State University’s efforts to quell student alcohol abuse. While the Vice President was quite new to the University, he was able to position himself as the face of the University concerning alcohol-related issues. He was the central point of contact for any conversation or initiative that sought to address the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. This position allowed him to influence the policy and program decisions that emerged after the “perfect storm”, but it also raised the significance of the issue. The fact that the Vice President was dedicating a significant amount of time on alcohol concerns did not go unnoticed, and it influenced others to spend time on identifying solutions to the issue as well.

Beyond the constant presence of the Vice President of Student Affairs in the decision-making processes for all the initiatives presented in Chapter 5, deliberations over most other initiatives shared another important component. Specifically, an initial evaluation period allowed ideas to be identified, discussed, and assessed. The evaluation time was critical because “obtaining more information is important to effectively define complex problems” (Vaccaro, McCoy, Champagne, & Siegel, 2013, p. 30). During this time, staff members gathered information from multiple sources, including research literature, other universities, and internal and external experts, to inform each decision. The Vice President often referred to a list during this period of time, which is believed to have afforded time to evaluate the different options without external pressure to make immediate improvements. The list being discussed offered the Vice President the opportunity to show ideas were being generated and that he was open to new ideas, which could be added to the list. The idea of the list showed that the issue to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students was being taken seriously.
Following this evaluation period, decision-making processes either stayed within the Division of Student Affairs or were expanded to include relevant stakeholders elsewhere in the University and/or the surrounding community. If the initiative was the responsibility of Student Affairs, the decision to move forward tended to include more oversight decisions (Cohen et al., 1972) by the Vice President due to the hierarchical structure of the Division. For initiatives that needed external consultation and support, decision-making processes used more political strategies, including coalition building. Below I present two models of decision-making—one for decisions that were exclusive to Student Affairs and another for decisions that involved others—that explain how the Pennsylvania State University transitioned from a new problem to a new solution in the wake of the “perfect storm” in the fall of 2009.

**Decisions exclusive to student affairs**

As the Division of Student Affairs sought to address the issue of student alcohol abuse, the staff examined programs already in use at the University as well as potential new initiatives. These options were identified, researched, and evaluated, in the manner that I described above. Assessment of established programs included the identification of ways to improve their efficacy or reduce costs. The information gathered from this research was shared with the Vice President (who also reported doing independent research), as he had the power within the Division to make decisions about the initiatives that should move forward for implementation and to designate staff members to form committees to create the best possible programs and policies. In Figure 6.1 these steps are labeled “oversight” and “resolution,” using terminology from the garbage can model of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972).

In the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972), resolution is identified as a part of the decision-making process in which members of a group invest the time and resources necessary to
make a decision. As is illustrated in Figure 6.1 and presented throughout this case study, the Vice President made oversight decisions regarding the adoption of initiatives and then sent the initiatives to committee for resolution of outstanding issues, thus forcing a decision by resolution to find the best way to implement an initiative (Cohen et al., 1972). The committee members who made the resolution decisions were influenced by resource availability and, at least for one initiative, a fear of political fallout if a program were not continued. Staff and student input were used in both the Vice President’s oversight decisions and the committees’ resolution decisions. The agreed-upon initiatives (i.e., updated or new policies and programs) were then implemented in the hope of reducing the excessive alcohol consumption by students.
Figure 6.1. Decisions exclusive to student affairs
Decisions with University and community partners

Adoption of a number of policies and programs designed to discourage the excessive consumption of alcohol by students required the involvement of groups outside Student Affairs because responsibility for implementation did not fall solely to the Division. As was the case for initiatives that were the exclusive responsibility of Student Affairs (Figure 6.1), the Vice President of Student Affairs played a very active role, and the process of considering initiatives that included other stakeholders also included an initial evaluation period (see Figure 6.2).

A key finding regarding decisions that required input from many stakeholders was that existing and new relationships between Student Affairs leaders and their counterparts in other areas of the University and surrounding community played a very large role in decisions to implement the policies and programs that the Student Affairs staff desired. These relationships were helpful for initiating conversations with other stakeholders and building coalitions to leverage group power for changes in policy (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992).

Building coalitions required the various parties to share a similar goal, even if their motivations for that goal differed. For example, in the drive to diminish State Patty’s Day celebrations, all coalition members had similar goals, but not identical goals for the day. Within the coalition, members of the group would make decisions by resolution (Figure 6.2). They would decide whether an initiative was important and potentially effective enough to dedicate the time and resources necessary to implement it. In contrast, in the initial discussion about serving alcohol in the University’s athletic venues, a coalition failed to form, and the group with the most control over the possible policy change, in this case, Athletics was able to push through its preferred decision since there was no concerted effort to influence another outcome. With a
change in the Finance and Business leadership, however, the Vice President of Student Affairs was able to build a coalition that managed to have the decision rescinded.

The one exception to this sequence of events was deliberation over the institution of a college recovery program. The recovery program was first a flight decision (Cohen et al., 1972) by the Vice President of Student Affairs (K. Hill, Director Student Affairs; E. Thorpe, Vice President). The Division was not ready to commit the time to develop such a program, so the decision was made to postpone discussion of the initiative to a later date. However, several passionate faculty members expressed directly to the Vice President their desire for a recovery program and managed to move the decision past a flight decision into a decision by resolution. Others were involved in the conversation, but the passion, experience, knowledge, and insight of the faculty members was invaluable and the driving force in moving the decision to a resolution decision and finally to a new solution.
Figure 6.2. Decisions with University and community partners
Limitations of this Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand how decisions were made by individuals in leadership positions in the Division of Student Affairs at the Pennsylvania State University following a “perfect storm” in the fall of 2009. The findings of this study are intended to assist future administrators in their decision-making processes when they are confronted with the issue of excessive consumption of alcohol by students. As with any study, this study has limitations.

A limitation of this study is the fact that I, along with most individuals interviewed for this study, am employed by the Pennsylvania State University. I believe that all study participants were open and honest throughout their interviews, but the possibility exists that they recalled information about colleagues and the process more favorably than what actually occurred. Efforts were made to minimize this potential limitation of the interview data. The information shared by each participant was triangulated with data from other interviews and published and unpublished sources. Follow-up questions were asked of participants to receive clarification on the information that they originally provided. These questions at times also probed more deeply into some areas, but as is always the case in qualitative research, the data collected is only as good as the memories and perceptions of the interviewees.

A second limitation of this study is the fact that some individuals were unavailable for interviews due to pending legal issues related to a different issue within the University. The President, Athletic Director, and Senior Vice President of Finance and Business (who had come out of retirement) were involved in a legal matter soon after the case study timeline ended. They did not respond to requests to discuss the topic addressed in this case study. Their firsthand accounts of meetings and conversations involving Athletics could have provided richer data and
more context. However, their absence from this study is not critical to understanding decision-making by student affairs leaders, as these individuals were not employed by the Division of Student Affairs.

The final limitation of this study is that it was a single-site case study at a particular type of university. The findings presented here may not be typical of other student affairs leaders at other types of institutions who are attempting to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol by students on their campuses. This case study provides a comprehensive understanding of what occurred at the Pennsylvania State University between the fall of 2009 and the fall of 2011 in response to the “perfect storm”. The findings of this study offer a preliminary understanding of decision-making in student affairs as the process pertains to student alcohol abuse, but further research is required to develop a fuller understanding of how alcohol-related policy and program decisions are made in student affairs.

**Implications for Practice**

Student affairs practitioners may be able to transfer to their own institutional settings this dissertation study’s findings about the decision-making processes of upper-level student affairs administrators who were trying to address the excessive consumption of alcohol by students. In the process of evaluating policies and making decisions about continuing, changing, or starting new programs, the leadership of the Pennsylvania State University’s Division of Student Affairs employed a number of different strategies. Some of these practices may already be common to student affairs practitioners, while others may be less so. The common and uncommon decision-making processes that were identified through this case study are discussed below.
Common Practices

According to Mosier and Schwarzmuller (2002), a common way to gather information for decision-making is through benchmarking. Benchmarking is often done through formal and informal channels prior to making program implementation or change decisions. The Pennsylvania State University leadership benchmarked with other institutions on several occasions throughout this case study. Leaders in student affairs are reminded to talk with colleagues at other institutions about initiatives that have been tried or are already in use at their colleges and universities especially if those are of comparable, size, mission, athletic division and surrounding community.

Pennsylvania State University’s Student Affairs leadership also made decisions by identifying and evaluating the resources (e.g., staff time, equipment, and expertise) available to develop a new initiative or to make changes to an existing initiative. Resource allocations in higher education are continually scrutinized by both internal and external stakeholders, and student affairs departments are not exempt from this scrutiny (Zusman, 2005). It is important for student affairs leaders to identify fiscally responsible solutions and make decisions accordingly. Soliciting assistance from experts from within the institution in the development and updating of programs can be an effective way to saving money. For example, when the Pennsylvania State University’s Student Affairs leaders decided to stop using the AlcoholEdu curriculum, they identified faculty and staff members and other individuals who could assist in the production of the Penn State SAFE online alcohol education module (D. Anderson, AVP Student Affairs).

Research literature can also inform student affairs decisions. This practice has become more common as more research has been completed in the field of higher education generally and in student affairs specifically. The process through which Penn State adopted the BASICS
program provides an example. Studies that identified BASICS as a viable option to reduce an individual student’s consumption of alcohol were familiar or sought out and shared with the leadership, and ultimately the program was adopted. The trend to make decisions by consulting research data will likely persist as resource allocations continue to be monitored and the knowledge of higher education and student affairs advances.

Student input was an important aspect of almost all decisions made throughout this case study. The importance of student input was underscored when the Vice President facilitated the development of a student advisory committee specifically related to alcohol issues on campus. The committee afforded the Vice President a group that he could work with to develop and vet ideas with prior to moving forward. The students were able to share their thoughts and ideas with the Vice President which can be invaluable for any university leaders to gain insight into the student’s lives, and motivations for behavior. The student voice is extremely important in the work of student affairs administrators.

**Uncommon Practices**

According to Kevin Hill (Director Student Affairs), a decision less commonly made when leaders are confronted with alcohol issues on campus is to take time to develop a strategic response. Previous leaders in the Pennsylvania State University’s Division of Student Affairs made “high gloss” decisions in an attempt to show that efforts were being made to curb the excessive consumption of alcohol by students, although very little changed programmatically. The strategy of the Vice President of Student Affairs in this case study was not to make a “knee jerk reaction”. During the first year of this case’s timeframe, discussions and analysis of programmatic options occurred. The decision to wait and strategize could easily have backfired if there had been a perception that nothing was occurring. To minimize this possibility the Vice
President publicized that he was keeping a list of initiatives to assist in addressing the issue. Along with the publicity of the list, the Vice President and the staff were evaluating different options to show that movement was occurring, but initiatives would not be implemented without careful consideration.

Although the time to strategize and identify initiatives was used in the beginning of this case study, to say a strategic plan was developed would be an overstatement. The initiatives identified and implemented were logically determined and pragmatic in their approach. BASICS is the only program shown to decrease the excessive consumption of alcohol. The other initiatives were experimental and based on the circumstances that presented themselves. A strategic plan may be a better approach, but more proven methods for reducing consumption need to be researched and proven effective for it to become a viable option.

Another practice in which the Vice President engaged even prior to the “perfect storm” of fall 2009 was to develop relationships with his colleagues and members of the community. He maintained a genuine interest in learning about other units within the University and a genuine belief that collaboration is an important aspect of university leadership. Nurturing these relationships was shown to be very important for the outcomes of several decisions made during the two-year period under study. As was evident several times in this study, divisions of student affairs rarely maintain the power necessary to influence other divisions to change existing policies. The Student Affairs leadership needed coalitions to influence others to making policy changes, and relationships built prior to the “perfect storm” became extremely useful when decisions required the involvement of groups outside the Division of Student Affairs. This finding is a good reminder for student affairs administrators to establish and continue to build
positive relationships with individuals throughout their institution and the surrounding community.

The ability for leaders to build coalitions is extremely helpful in making decisions that are favorable to the Division. However, it was evident from this case study that the coalitions do not need the same motives to reach a similar goal. For example, the coalition working on initiatives to reduce State Patty’s day activities had a goal to reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol by students and guests. Each member of the coalition had a different reason for the desired outcome. The bar association wanted to have a reduction in costs associate with damage occurring over that specific weekend, and the police wanted a reduction because the weekend was a drain on staff time. The community leaders wanted a reduction in disruptions to residents and businesses in and around downtown. All parties wanted a reduction in the excessive consumption of alcohol by students and out-of-town guests which brought the group together even though the reasons were different. The common goal formulated a desire to put in the time needed to make a decision by resolution. A similar but not necessarily identical goal for coalition members will be important as student affairs leaders at other institutions work to reduce the negative consequences associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol. If a common goal can be established prior to making decisions it will be more likely that a policy can be modified by a coalition.

In addition to building coalitions to direct and make decisions (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992), working with individuals who are passionate about a topic can be of significant importance. For example, the recovery program would not have received the attention, time, or resources needed to become a viable program if a passionate faculty member did not come forward to champion the initiative. The decision would have stayed as a flight decision if not for
the drive and determination of a faculty member who forced the issue. The faculty member pushed the Student Affairs staff to learn about recovery program options and to implement one at the institution. The lesson for student affairs practitioners is to engage with faculty, staff, and community members from outside their division who approach them with new ideas as they may offer useful insights and resources.

Finally, the practice of soliciting feedback was an important component of the decision-making processes presented in this case study. In its presentation of oversight decisions, the garbage can model does not discuss gathering feedback from individuals beyond those making the decision (Cohen et al., 1972). Beyond the garbage can model’s concept of oversight decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972), for most of his oversight decisions in this case study, the Vice President solicited input from others. On several occasions, he made it a priority to receive feedback from staff and students before moving forward with a decision. This feedback influenced how initiatives were implemented and gave these individuals ownership of the outcomes.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study’s findings support previous research that indicates that decision-making processes in large, complex organizations is not easily identified and does not necessarily fit into one single theoretical model (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). In this study, several models of decision-making were used jointly to illustrate decisions made by the Pennsylvania State University’s Student Affairs leadership. Further research is necessary to contribute to the development of a decision-making model for student affairs around the issue of students’ excessive consumption of alcohol.
This case study focused on a single site and lays the groundwork for future research. Future studies could involve multiple universities that have an acute issue with student alcohol abuse and whose student affairs leaders are responsible for addressing the issue. Researching multiple sites will provide the opportunity to compare with the way in which decisions were made by the Student Affairs leadership at the Pennsylvania State University, along with identifying findings that may only be specific to the single case study (Yin, 2009).

Research that examines how decisions are made by student affairs leaders on different campuses will be important to detect trends in decision-making processes. Differences in contextual factors may also influence the decisions made by student affairs administrators, and comparing contextual factors may help identify future planning by student affairs administrators who confront similar issues. Contextual factors such as differences in size, public vs. private, religious vs. secular, and population of the surrounding community may all influence how decisions are made and should be considered in future research.

Relationships were identified as key factors in the political decision-making that occurred in this case study. A focus for future research could explore how student affairs leaders form strong, positive relationships with counterparts throughout their institution. Such research could include exploration of the sources of coalitions (positive professional relationships vs. common interests, goals, or adversaries). Also, identification of the factors that constitute strong relationships between colleagues in higher education would be useful, as would learning how to foster such relationships.

Decision-making by student affairs leaders outside of acute alcohol issues would be another avenue of research. Student affairs administrators regularly make decisions about their department’s daily operations and long-term plans for providing services to students. Future
research could provide insights as to whether student affairs leaders use similar decision-making processes for different types of issues, or if they approach different issues in other ways.

**Conclusion**

The excessive consumption of alcohol by students is ubiquitous on college campuses across the country. Student affairs practitioners are continually asked by their institutions and surrounding communities to address the topic. It is a difficult venture, as no clear path exists to discourage excessive consumption of alcohol by students, and no finish line designates when initiatives have accomplished their goal. The decisions made and initiatives implemented at the Pennsylvania State University are one example of a university’s efforts to curb behaviors that negatively affect students.

Within a college or university, the student affairs department is best situated to take on the monumental task of changing a student culture of excessive alcohol consumption. However, student affairs leaders cannot achieve this task on their own. This case study shows that a need exists to engage individuals from throughout the institution and the surrounding community to modify or adopt policies that are geared toward changing student behavior and expectations.

The findings of this case study suggest that the decision-making processes of Student Affairs leaders at the Pennsylvania State University were more involved than the processes presented in the garbage can model of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) and the dynamic model of organizational decision-making (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997). The garbage can model is helpful for understanding pieces of the choice decisions made by the Student Affairs leaders, but there is more specificity to decisions than what the model portrays. The decision-making process for policies and programs to reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol by
students is not as ambiguous or random as it is portrayed in the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972), nor is it as straightforward as the rational model (Allison, 1971; March & Simon, 1958).

Decision-making in the rational model involves individuals coming together, identifying options to be evaluated and then selecting the best course of action from the options presented. The decision-making processes during this study were not as straightforward. The University community is a complex entity which does not allow for decisions to be made in this manner and adding the external community in the decision-making process exponentially increases the complexity. Most individuals analyzed the issue from their point of view and came forward believing there were a select number of correct answers to the questions presented. When these ideas came together they began conflicting and contradicting each other, which would not allow for a rational decision-making process.

The garbage can model exemplifies the environment within which the decisions in this study occurred. The model frames decisions by organizations which have general or diffuse goals, an unclear path (technology) to accomplish the goals, and fluid participation in the process of decision-making by individuals. These three features were prominent in this case study throughout the decision-making processes. The overall goal was to decrease the consumption of alcohol by students and to prevent another student death. The specific goals differed slightly dependent upon each individuals/group involved in the decision process. The athletics department and businesses downtown also wanted the goals stated above, but needed to be financially viable. So, each group brought their goals to the discussion and prevented a unified goal from being pursued.

The technology or path to reach any of the goals was not clear. As stated previously, there is only one proven method to reduce an individual’s alcohol consumption (BASICS) and it
is able to be employed only after an individual is identified. The other initiatives, ideas, paths are untested and may not lead to the achievement of the goals as stated. The fluid participation of individuals or groups in the process was evident throughout the study. Each decision involved different entities and often those involved in the decision would change. Decisions internal to Student Affairs were portrayed as more consistent participation by individuals; however this would change as well, depending on workload, expertise, or position within the organization.

A variance in pathways of decision-making occurred most often when individuals from outside Student Affairs were involved in the decision-making process. The involvement of external decision makers required a political decision-making process of coalition building and the exploration of shared goals. If coalition members’ goals were similar, the decision often progressed through the resolution process of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972). The goals did not need to be identical, but the ultimate decision needed to satisfy all parties.

Decision-making by the Student Affairs leadership expanded the dynamic model of organizational decision-making (Kunreuther & Bowman, 1997) by identifying a number of steps between the new problem and the new solution that had not previously been identified. The dynamic model of organizational decision-making is more descriptive for choice opportunities that stem from perceived crisis situations such as the Pennsylvania State University’s “perfect storm”.

There is one theme that is woven throughout this case study in different ways. The Vice President of Student Affairs and several other leaders in the Division of Student Affairs used relationships to gather information and build coalitions. The importance of relationships with individuals in and around the University cannot be stressed enough. The significance of these
relationships was not evident in the pilot study. It was not until all interviews were completed that a pattern of relationship building among many of the participants was identified.

In the pilot study, the Vice President’s seemed to have a significant influence over the decision-making process that followed the “perfect storm”. The Vice President had been in his position for just over a year when the “perfect storm” began in the fall of 2009. His tenure came up during one interview as the response to the “perfect storm” was discussed. The topic that participants mentioned more frequently was the relationships that the Vice President and other Student Affairs leaders built with their colleagues in the University and members of the surrounding community. It became apparent that these relationships had the most influence over the implementation of several initiatives. The relationships that lead to coalitions were arguably the most important contributors to the adoption of anti-alcohol initiatives that required the support and approval of groups outside the Division of Student Affairs.

As one Director of Student Affairs mentioned, “Decades of good intent and effort and millions of dollars later, and no college or university in America can honestly claim to have solved the problem”. Despite the undeniable fact that the challenge of excessive alcohol consumption by students continues, understanding the decision-making processes, the reasons for particular decisions, and the influence of different individuals and groups on those decisions will be useful to the Pennsylvania State University and other institutions of higher education as they struggle with this issue. One study participant suggested that this struggle is permanent:

We’ll never know how many students we have positively impacted by the decisions that we have made. I mean, it only takes one tragedy to say you still have not gotten there, but I think there will be always be a tragedy, because there will always be one individual out of 45,000 to do something…. We will never know how many positive effects that we
have had and changed or helped somebody away from that ledge. (M. Moore, AVP Student Affairs)

The leadership of Pennsylvania State University’s Division of Student Affairs is motivated by the thought that making difficult decisions about alcohol policies and programs may help a student to seek treatment or keep a student from being hurt or killed. The findings of this case study provide insights into decision-making processes of the Division of Student Affairs at the Pennsylvania State University, along with how administrators can navigate future initiatives through the decision-making process so that time on task is used efficiently to form positive results.
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Appendix A

Letter of participation for social science research

Dear ______________,

My name is Mark Rameker, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at The Pennsylvania State University. This letter is to request your participation in a qualitative study about how the leadership in Student Affairs responds to a significant alcohol issue on campus. I am also interested in learning about what support or resistance may come from other divisions and departments within the university when attempting to respond. This study is being conducted for research purposes and is affiliated with The Pennsylvania State University. It is also being used to fulfill requirements for a Doctor of Education (DEd) degree in Higher Education.

I would like you to participate in my study as you may have some significant insight into the activities that occurred from the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2011. Specifically, I am hoping you can share some insight into the significant issue that alcohol plays in campus and community culture. Any stories that you can share either during this time or other significant stories are very much appreciated.

If you choose to participate in this study it will be an interview for approximately one to two hours in length and will be conducted at a time and place of your choosing. The timeline of events from the Fall of 2009 thru Fall 2011 will be sent to you in advance of our conversation along with the questions that I will be asking. This study will be semi-structured so there may be follow-up and clarifying questions based on your thoughts during the interview. The interview will be recorded with a digital recorder and I will also have a notebook with me. If I have any further questions after reviewing the transcripts, I will send them via email and you can send responses via email or we can set a time to talk over the phone if that is more convenient for you.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms. The audio transcripts will be kept in password protected files on my personal computer and will be destroyed after three years along with the written transcripts. The transcripts of our conversation will be provided to you to make sure they accurately reflect your comments during the interview. If there are comments that you would like removed for confidentiality reasons after your review they will be removed and not used in the dissertation. My advisor and I will be the only individuals with access to the data produces from our conversation.

I am the individual responsible for this study and can be reached at 814-32-5486, with any concerns, questions or complaints about this study. I can also be contacted at mjr22@psu.edu or by mail at 2321 Abington Circle, State College, PA 16801.

Sincerely,

Mark Rameker
Appendix B

Informed consent form for social science research

Title of Project: Toward Changing Alcohol Use/Abuse at a Research Institution: Implications for Practice

Principal Investigator: Mark Rameker
2321 Abington Circle
State College, PA 16801
Email: mjr22@psu.edu
Phone: 814-321-5486

Advisor: Dr. Dorothy Evensen
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802-3203
Email: dhd2@psu.edu
Phone: 814-863-2691

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to examine how the leadership in a division of Student Affairs at a major research institution responded to the death of a student and the culture of alcohol use by undergraduate students, as well as the perception of help or interference from other areas at the institution.

2. Procedures to be followed: To take part in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed for approximately one hour. The interview will occur at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of information. After the transcription is made, you will have the opportunity to review the transcriptions and make changes for accuracy. To help with the conversation during the interview, the questions will be sent to you in advance for your review. There may be additional questions that occur during the interview based on the information provided. If needed, a follow-up interview may be scheduled at your convenience or clarifying questions will be emailed to you. All follow-up interviews will be recorded and transcribed as stated above.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There are no risks associated with this study other than those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions may be personal and cause discomfort.

4. Benefits: The benefits to society include the development of a conceptual framework that will assist administrator’s at large public universities to successfully manage and understand a process for addressing alcohol use and abuse. Student Affairs administrators at almost every institution across the country have been or will be impacted by alcohol related injuries or death due to the prevalence of alcohol on college campuses. There is minimal guidance in regard to what individuals in leadership roles in higher education should do to address the negative consequences associated with alcohol abuse. There is no information on how Student Affairs leadership should navigate the politics of the university to formulate a plan to address the issue on campus. Learning what steps to take and what issues to consider will be of significant interest throughout higher education. Identifying the factors that have impacted the decisions will improve the ability for future administers in making decisions to assist students.

5. Duration/Time: The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. If needed, a follow-up interview of approximately one hour will be scheduled at your convenience or clarifying questions may be emailed to you.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Please check the boxes of the identifying information you are comfortable with being used in this dissertation.

☐ Title
☐ Name
☐ Department Name

**If no boxes are checked,** your name and specific title will not be used in the dissertation. It will only be known to the principal investigator and advisor. A generic term, such as Director 1 or Director 2 will be used to identify participants who do not check above.

Protecting the data is of utmost importance and several steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality. The data will be collected and stored on a password protected folder on the principal investigator’s personal computer. The data will be stored for 3 years past the close of the study (projected September 2015). All written copies of the transcripts will stay in a locked cabinet inside a locked office in the principal investigators home. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you for your review, to ensure accuracy and to allow you to make changes or deletions if you feel it would compromise your position or negatively impact your employment. No deletions will be used in the final dissertation. The transcripts will only be seen by the principal investigator and advisor. If questions are needed to be asked through email after the initial interview, the confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology used. There is no guarantee that can be made that a third party will not intercept the transmission. If you would like to speak in person or over the phone instead of email to mitigate this risk, that can be accommodated at your convenience.

The Pennsylvania State University’s Office of Research Protections and Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protection in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Mark Rameker at (814) 321-5486 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. If you have any questions, concerns, problems about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer input, please contact Penn State University’s Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about research procedures. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusing to participate or withdrawing early from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would be entitled to otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature                        Date

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Person Obtaining Consent                     Date
Appendix C

List of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edward Thorpe</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Moore</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug Anderson</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Newman</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Morrison</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Thompson</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>20+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin Hill</td>
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<td>Pat James</td>
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<td>Kris Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff Cover</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Tyson</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lehman</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Johnson</td>
<td>Assistant Athletic Director</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Collin</td>
<td>Director, Athletic Facilities</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Koehler</td>
<td>Director, Hospitality</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Janz</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>20+</td>
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Appendix D

General interview questions

1. Could you take me through the timeline of events and anything you remember about the events? When you come upon an event that you were involved in decision-making could you talk about that, who was involved and how you made a decision?

   If there are decision points that are missed in the timeline could you talk about those as well?

2. There were educational programs in place prior to the timeline to address the issue of alcohol use/abuse.

   How were the decisions made about what programs to keep, expand or cut?

   What influenced your decision to make changes and how did you decide on what may be most important?

3. When there were changes implemented how much influence did you have on the potential changes?

4. The second year after the student death there were several initiatives presented to the BOT.

   How were the specific initiative decisions made within the division, specifically when they included other university divisions or external groups?

5. There were punitive components that often went along with the educational programs. Some of these were increased, (i.e. BASICS and parental note for all first time violations, cost of $200 for educational sanction, Fraternity banned) How were these decisions made and implemented?

6. Could you talk about how other leaders throughout the university were involved in the process? Were there any mandates from others at the university about how Student Affairs should react or handle the situation?

7. Was there support or a lack of support from other units/divisions? Did this increase or decrease the potential for success?

8. Was there any entity that negatively influenced any initiatives and what did that look like?

9. Is there anything that you feel was important in influencing decisions made during this time, which we may not have already covered?
Appendix E

Questions for Vice President of Student Affairs

1. Could you take me through the timeline of events and anything you remember about the events?
   When you come upon an event that you were involved in decision-making could you talk about that, who was involved and how you decided to make a decision?
   Concurrently with that if there are decision points that are missed in the timeline could you talk about those as well?

2. There were educational programs in place to address the issue of alcohol use/abuse.
   How were these decisions made about what programs to keep, expand or cut?
   What influenced your decision to make changes and how did you decide on what may be most impactful?

3. You took a year to implement your plan… How did you come to the conclusion that it would take a year? What were you doing or making decisions on during that year?

4. Was there pressure to have a response quicker than a year? If so, How did you make the decision to not react? What did you have to do during that time to keep others from expecting a quicker response?

5. It looks like you are trying to do an environmental management model…. How did this come about??

6. Did you look at the NIAAA recommendations at any time when making decisions?

7. Was there pressure from outside the institution to stop the alcohol issue? How did you handle that pressure and how did you make the decision to hold off or put up with the pressure?

8. Could you talk about how other leaders throughout the university were involved in the process?
   Were there any mandates from others at the university about how Student Affairs should react or handle the situation?

9. Could you talk a bit about the recovery program and how that came about

10. Was there support or a lack of support from other units/divisions for any initiatives? Did this increase or decrease the potential for success?

11. What are some initiatives that you wanted to do that were shut down by some other department or division?
12. When there were changes implemented how much influence did you have on the potential changes?

13. Were students included in the discussion and were they involved in the decisions?

14. You had a meeting with the college Deans and shared with them the data from the PULSE Surveys. Why did you decide to do that? What were you trying to get the Deans to do if anything?

15. Is there anything that you feel was important in influencing decisions made during this time of change that we may not have already covered.

16. Is it possible to get his speeches from November 2011 update to a faculty sub-committee… are there other speeches or information that could be shared?
Appendix F

Questions for police

1. In this interview, I am looking to gain some context and insight into the excessive consumption of alcohol by students and how the borough is impacted by students, personnel or policies.

2. Could you discuss your thoughts on excessive consumption of alcohol by students prior to the fall of 2009? If you have any stories or memories that would be informative to illustrate your point please feel free to express those.

3. Can you talk about what a typical weekend night in State College entails for you as an officer? Do you any incidents come to mind when you think about students excessively consuming alcohol.

4. In the fall of 2009, a student fell to his death on the Penn State Campus. Do you recall this happening? Were you aware of the student death? How if it did? What, if any, response do you remember for yourself and your colleagues?

5. Where there any changes in behavior after the student death? Is there more, less or the same amount of drinking now?

6. What initiatives does the Police department engage in to curb excessive alcohol consumption by students? Was the Police department involved in any initiatives after the student death?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel is pertinent to the conversation on the excessive consumption of alcohol at Penn State?
Appendix G

Questions for individuals identified by snowball sampling

1. In this interview, I am looking to gain some context and insight into the excessive consumption of alcohol by students and how students you work with are influenced.

   Could you discuss your thoughts on excessive consumption of alcohol by students prior to the fall of 2009? If you have any stories or memories that would be informative to illustrate your point please feel free to express those?

2. In the fall of 2009, a student fell to his death on the Penn State Campus. Do you recall this happening? Were you aware of the student death? Did it impact you /your area of responsibility? How if it did? What, if any, response do you remember from yourself and your colleagues?

3. Were there any meetings or discussion you had with external departments about alcohol after these events? Did you or any colleagues specifically have conversations with anyone in Student Affairs?

4. Have the initiatives on the timeline impacted your department at all… If there is something, could you describe the situation, what occurred and conversations you recall?

5. (Here specific questions were asked about the circumstance that identified the individual as a good candidate to share information on the subject. Each question was specific to the individuals and only asked if the participant did not identify pertinent the relevant information while answering previous questions.)

6. Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel is pertinent to the conversation on the excessive consumption of alcohol at Penn State?
Appendix H

Initiatives presented to the BOT

Penn State Alcohol Initiatives 2010
Board of Trustees Presentation
September 17, 2010

Overview

The problem of excessive use of alcohol is hardly new to higher education. It dates to the origins of the modern Western university in the 12th and 13th centuries. Nor is the problem new to Penn State. Even Evan Pugh was troubled by students in the 1850s who preferred their liquor parties to his literary clubs.

But in the past year, a student death in the heart of the University Park campus, the number one party school ranking, an expose by This American Life, increased participation of out-of-towners in State Patty’s Day, and highly visible disruptive events in neighborhoods near some campuses have combined to feed the growing impression that the relationship between alcohol and our University is increasingly troublesome.

Penn State and the broader community it inhabits have engaged in a months-long discussion about the causes and effects of dangerous drinking. We recognize that years of good effort to stem this tide have not demonstrated the success we seek. New approaches are sought and a new strategy has been found. Many elements of that strategy, which is based on the simple premise that success is possible only by way of a sustained, persistent, multifaceted effort that touches upon every aspect of the problem, are outlined here.

Still, there is no magic formula for success with this issue. The problem is rooted deeply in American culture. It is not simply a higher education problem or a student problem. It will require consistent attention and effort from all of us—students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, parents, community members, and political leaders here and in Harrisburg—if change is to occur. If the search for a better relationship between alcohol and our University is one we all share, there is reason for optimism.

Education

- **AlcoholEdu** – A universally required online course for all incoming Penn State students designed to educate about alcohol use and its effects has been in place for the past three years.
- **FTCAP** – Greater emphasis this summer was placed on alcohol policies, laws, and expectations during new student and parent orientation; sessions discussed alcohol in a more integrated manner, involving University Police, Judicial Affairs, Residence Life, and Health Promotion and Wellness. Parents were repeatedly
encouraged to engage with sons and daughters in conversations about responsible choices regarding alcohol and the consequences for poor choices, and the Parents and Families Guide provided supporting information.

- **Academic Solutions to High Risk Drinking** – A 15 member faculty committee chaired by Careen Yarnal, an associate professor in Health & Human Development, and supported by funding from Student Affairs, is exploring the potential role of the classroom in addressing high risk alcohol consumption among students. The group plans to share its findings and recommendations with the Faculty Senate and other colleagues later this semester.

- **Simplifying University Rules and Regulations** – With the assistance of student focus groups and the newly formed Student Alcohol Advisory Committee, Judicial Affairs and others responsible for enforcement of the University’s policies on alcohol will consolidate, condense, and otherwise simplify the various expressions of rules and expectations regarding student possession and consumption of alcohol currently published. A single brochure, both in hardcopy and online, will be developed to highlight the essential elements that all students should know.

- **Fraternities & Sororities** – All fraternities and sororities now must engage in educational programming related to alcohol with at least 70% of each chapter’s membership participating. Each chapter also must demonstrate that it includes a substantial alcohol education component in its new member education program.

- **Residence Halls** – A quiz that included questions about alcohol policy was given at the first house or floor meeting of the year, and Resident Assistants were directed to follow up by expressly discussing alcohol policies and expectations during their mandatory one-on-one meetings with individual residents. Stall Stories, a popular weekly publication, is focusing coverage on the alcohol issue.

- **University Health Services** – Health Promotion & Wellness is extending interactive presentations on alcohol to academic classes and student organizations, expanding social marketing efforts, and developing various informational materials, including BAC cards, alcohol poisoning cards, posters, bus cards, and more.

- **Conversations on Sexual Assault** – First proposed by the Commission on Women, modeled on the popular Conversations on Race project, and jointly sponsored by Educational Equity and Student Affairs, these peer conversations will inevitably discuss the deep connection between alcohol and issues of sexual assault and relationship violence generally.

- **Educating Students about Alcohol Poisoning and How to Respond to It** – Among students, both on and off campus, and within student organizations, there
is a push to increase understanding of alcohol poisoning—how to recognize it and respond when you do. University staff will provide the educational programming required to accomplish this aim.

- **Alcohol Awareness Online Module** – Student Affairs’ instructional design team is developing a new online learning module that should improve upon the more generic AlcoholEdu program by tailoring a program to the needs of our students. The new module will focus students’ attention to Penn State’s rules and expectations, as well as Pennsylvania law, while educating them about alcohol’s influences and effects.

- **Social Marketing Campaign** – A large scale social marketing campaign, focused on a targeted audience of first-year students, student athletes, and fraternity and sorority members, will promote ten “Alcohol Rules” that promote positive normative messages about drinking behaviors. The campaign, which will utilize display ads in the *Collegian*, posters, bus cards, magnets, and other promotional materials, is funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board and matching funding from Student Affairs. Students themselves will develop the messages for the campaign in collaboration with Health Promotion & Wellness.

- **Publicizing Consequences and Support Services** – Each semester, a summary of judicial action and services designed to address the alcohol problem and provide related support will be published in local news media and widely disseminated among students to broaden awareness of these outcomes and initiatives.

**Environment**

- **Alcohol-Free Residence Halls** – Beginning with Pollock Halls this past summer, expanding to first-year student areas of East, Pollock, and South Halls this fall, and expanding more broadly through undergraduate residence halls next fall, Penn State will soon have one of the two most restrictive prohibitions against alcohol possession and use in campus residences among Big Ten schools. We hope to extend this practice to housing on other Penn State campuses, too.

- **Alcohol-Free Rush** – The Interfraternity Council and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life will collaborate on a formal rush experience that prohibits the use of alcohol during these functions.

- **Friday classes** – Continued discussions with academic administrators, the Faculty Senate, and the faculty-at-large about more extensive use of Friday class sessions should help contract the free time available to students by expanding their opportunity for meaningful engagement in educationally purposeful activities. We hope to make the academic week a five day experience, and encourage faculty members to have appropriate expectations for their students.
**Student Alcohol Advisory Committee & Student Leadership** – To ensure that the key constituency in the alcohol issue is represented at every turn, the VPSA is forming a Student Alcohol Advisory Committee wholly composed of students. Representatives from specific organizations, including UPUA, CCSG, the various Greek-letter councils, the Off-Campus Student Union, and the Association of Residence Hall Students will serve on the Committee, but students at-large may apply or be nominated for this service, too. The Committee will meet regularly to discuss new or proposed initiatives and offer advice. Other opportunities to bring into these discussions leaders of student organizations, particularly those from groups most directly affected by the issue, will be a priority. It is clear that our students must be responsible for the issue in every significant way.

**Downplaying State Patty’s Day** – A collaborative effort by town and gown to discourage area vendors from promoting State Patty’s Day, a game day-like law enforcement presence, extensive timely messages about responsible behavior from student leaders and their organizations, notification to other Pennsylvania colleges and universities if their students are found responsible for unlawful action in State College that day, appropriate messages to alumni, and efforts to encourage faculty to use create academic expectations for students on Friday and the succeeding Monday will be the focus of efforts to mitigate State Patty’s Day problems.

**Senior Week** – Eliminating the week between finals and Commencement will have many benefits, not least of which should be minimizing participation in bar tours that have become both commonplace and problematic in recent years.

**Responsible Action Protocol** – In response to the University Park Undergraduate Association’s campaign for a medical amnesty policy, whereby students who seek medical assistance for peers suffering from alcohol poisoning or related problems would not be charged through the campus judicial system, we have established a Responsible Action Protocol. Under the protocol, students who act responsibly by notifying the appropriate authorities (e.g., 911 calls, alerting an RA, contacting police) typically will not face University judicial action for their own alcohol violations, unless they are responsible for other violations (e.g., vandalism, assault). However, these students will be required to attend BASICS.

**Reinvigorating Late Night** – The Student Programming Association and the Union & Student Activities staff have worked closely to revitalize the Late Night program in the HUB. These efforts are showing good success in the form of increased participation and positive reviews from the students taking part in the alcohol free events running on Friday and Saturday nights (and early Sunday mornings) throughout the year.

**Alcohol-Free Tailgating** – Student Affairs and Intercollegiate Athletics are developing plans to offer an alcohol-free tailgating experience in the area of the
stadium closest to undergraduate residence halls. The plan may yet be in place this season, but certainly will be available in 2011.

Enforcement

- **Judicial Affairs Sanctions** – Beginning this fall, all off-campus underage possession or consumption charges will be processed through the campus discipline system; previously, only excessive alcohol consumption and driving while impaired charges found their way into the University’s system. Sanctioning guidelines used by University authorities have been adjusted to increase minimums in most cases involving alcohol, and the consequences for recidivists have been increased, too. Penn State’s off-campus misconduct policy remains the most vigorous in the Big Ten.

- **Mandatory BASICS Participation and the Emergency Department** – All students cited for alcohol violations on campus or off, or treated at the Mt. Nittany Medical Center Emergency Department for alcohol-related emergencies, will be required to complete the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students program, at a cost of $200. (See description of BASICS under “Intervention, Counseling, and Related Support.”)

- **Increased University Police Presence Downtown** – Auxiliary University Police officers on foot patrol will extend their presence to assist with downtown issues, alerting regular officers when trouble is sighted.

- **Increased Police Presence in Tailgating Hot Spots** – Certain tailgating areas that have been problematic in recent years will receive increased law enforcement attention; tolerance for excessive or dangerous behaviors will be limited.

- **Breathalyzing at Football Games** – Student Affairs, the University Police, and Intercollegiate Athletics are developing a process whereby anyone removed from a football game for reasons related to alcohol will not be permitted to gain entry at a subsequent game without first passing a breathalyzer test. The process may yet be utilized this season, but certainly will be in place for 2011.

- **Parental Notification** – Parents will be notified in every case involving an alcohol violation by an underage student; previously parental notification was utilized only in the more serious or repeat cases. The notification will be coupled with the offer to provide advice if the parent seeks additional insight that may be helpful to them in discussing the situation with their son or daughter.

- **Legislation to Increase Court Fines** – Court fines for underage alcohol violations have remained stagnant in Pennsylvania for 38 years. They are currently set at $300, and the University has collaborated with the local judiciary, Borough leadership, the District Attorney, law enforcement, and others to
encourage State Senator Jake Corman’s sponsorship of legislation that would significantly increase these fines, to as much as $1000.

- **Restorative Justice** – Judicial Affairs, in collaboration with University and Borough Police and other Borough leaders, will develop a blend of mediation and restitution that encourages student offenders to identify the harms they cause and devise agreements with victims to repair those harms. By interacting with the person harmed by their actions and discussing causes and consequences, those students assigned to engage in restorative justice should learn from the occurrence, and those harmed may find greater satisfaction and closure.

**Intervention, Counseling, and Related Support**

- **BASICS** – *Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students* is the only evidence-based program in the country that has demonstrated success at changing students’ behavior related to alcohol use. The program uses a harm reduction approach to encourage less risky behavior, thereby reducing negative consequences. All students violating laws or policies relating to underage consumption, public drunkenness, excessive consumption, or driving under the influence, either on- or off-campus, as well as all students visiting the Mt. Nittany Emergency Department for alcohol-related treatment, will be required to attend BASICS. Each student will have two 50-minute sessions with a trained health educator, who will discuss the student’s relationship with alcohol and recommend strategies for improving it. Students judged in need of additional intervention will be directed accordingly. There will be a $200 cost-recovery charge for participating in the program. Failure to complete the program will result in disciplinary action, and repeat offenders will not be referred to BASICS, but will be seen by Judicial Affairs instead.

- **Alcoholics Anonymous** – In response to concerns shared by students and faculty members who are recovering alcoholics, Student Affairs worked with a team to establish an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting on campus and provide it the visibility required. The meeting, titled *Friday’s First*, gathers every Friday afternoon at 5:15 pm in the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center. Nearly two dozen participants have attended the initial meetings this semester.

**Outreach**

- **Letters to Parents** – A series of three letters will be sent this academic year by the VPSA to all parents of new freshman to follow up on messages about alcohol conveyed to them during FTCAP. The letters will encourage parental support and guidance for students, inform parents about related policies and practices, and share insights about various University efforts to mitigate the problem.
• **Pre-Suspension Meetings** – Students who face the possibility of suspension or expulsion for alcohol related behavior will be directed to meet with the VPSA for a personal conversation about their circumstance and the need to change behavior immediately. This personalized effort is designed to awaken recognition in these students that the University will do all it can to see them succeed, but also is quite serious about its expectations regarding alcohol and related student behavior.

• **Neighborhood Associations** – The VPSA will meet periodically through the year with various neighborhood associations to hear directly from them about their members’ experiences with students and student organizations in their neighborhoods. These coffees will provide an opportunity to share with permanent residents news about the University’s efforts to improve relations between these intersecting constituencies.

• **Collaboration Between Student Affairs and the Alumni Association** – The Alumni Association has formed an ad hoc committee to consider ways the Association might help with the problem of excessive drinking. The group is eager to partner with Student Affairs and others to communicate appropriate messages to its primary audience. These messages will convey expectations for alumni behavior in the context of University and University-related events and activities and solicit alumni support in the University’s campaign against dangerous drinking.

• **Faculty Senate Report** – The Student Life Committee of the Faculty Senate has requested an annual report to the full Senate describing progress made on the alcohol issue. The first report will be given by the VPSA later this year and will emphasize what faculty can do to help with the cause.

• **Campus-Community Partnership Editorials** – On behalf of The Partnership: Campus and Community United against Dangerous Drinking, co-chairs Tom Fountaine, the State College Borough Manager, and Damon Sims authored the inaugural editorial in a series of commentaries on the alcohol issue published last year in the *Centre Daily Times*. As the Partnership and its activities evolve this year, additional commentary will be provided to educate the community about the group’s effort and intent and enlist community-wide engagement in constructive solutions.

**A Few Other Possibilities**

• **Expanding FTCAP** – Parents and others have occasionally expressed dismay that we do relatively little to orient students to the practical realities of living on their own away from home, at least through the FTCAP experience. Although there was increased emphasis on the alcohol issue in this past summer’s FTCAP sessions, the time devoted for such discussions was limited to 45 minutes. Ongoing deliberations may allow us to expand the timeframe for FTCAP to
permit more extensive orientation programming without compromising the important purposes FTCAP currently serves.

- **Promoting Active Learning** – Undergraduate Education, Outreach, and Student Affairs are pursuing a partnership designed to promote opportunities for active learning among undergraduate students by expanding student participation in service-learning, internships, research, and other educationally purposeful, value-adding experiences. Students at a residential campus may spend an average of 15 hours each week in class, leaving another 153 hours each week to fill. If successful, this partnership should narrow the window for less constructive (and occasionally destructive) activities among our students, even as it enriches the educational and developmental experience enjoyed by these students at Penn State.

- **Healthy Penn State** – A University wide collaboration designed to engage students, faculty, and staff in healthy activities and lifestyle choices would have many benefits, not least of which may be a more creative and positive approach to the alcohol issue. The *Healthy Penn State* plan, developed by staff in the University Health Service, offers a framework that may allow the University to turn students, faculty, and staff alike toward healthier lives and the many ancillary benefits that flow from them.

- **White House Office of Drug Control Strategy** – The Obama Administration has asked Penn State to support its efforts to extend the national drug control strategy to college campuses and the alcohol issue. We are in discussions with them about developing a White House gathering for leaders from CIC institutions to highlight the issue and possibly identify a new collaboration on alcohol on a scale larger than any effort tried before.

**Assessing Progress**

- The Penn State *Pulse* survey on student drinking and the annual *Partnership* assessment report will continue to provide longitudinal data allowing us to compare student attitudes and behaviors over time and measure the effectiveness of our efforts.

- Data collected from the *Student Satisfaction Survey* provides more in-depth analyses of student engagement and alcohol issues.

- These and other tools will be extended to enhance our understanding of areas of risk, the relationship between alcohol problems and environmental factors, and the effectiveness of our many efforts to mitigate the problem.

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9/17/10
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