



**Testimony
Before the Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate**

**Under the Influence:
The Binge Drinking Epidemic on
College Campuses**

Statement of

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

My name is Raynard Kington, and I am the Acting Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) at the National Institutes of Health.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss an extremely important public health issue – excessive and high-risk drinking among students at our Nation’s colleges and universities.

Last month, NIAAA’s Task Force on College Drinking released important new data. You may have seen, as did much of the Nation, the troubling statistics detailing dangerous drinking behavior by college students and its consequences for both drinkers and those who don’t drink but must suffer the results of others’ drinking. We see that the harm as measured each year -- 1,400 estimated deaths, 500,000 injuries, 600,000 assaults, and 70,000 sexual assaults -- caused by excessive college student drinking is profound. Greater, perhaps, than any of us might have guessed. The release of this information garnered significant news coverage, reaching over one-half of the American public -- an extraordinary figure by any measure; public interest is high.

The scientific evidence of the size of the problem presented in our report is only reinforced by the regular press coverage of deaths on college campuses throughout the country. News stories in the past several months have reported on the tragic deaths of students at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut and at the University of Maryland. These deaths highlight the consequences of college drinking for families, for colleges and universities, and for the peers and friends of these students. Much healing is needed and action must be taken.

What did not receive as much attention in the media as the scope of the problem is what can be done about it by communities, college presidents, parents, students, and others. The Task Force did not want to cite another major health problem in America without focusing on ways of addressing that problem.

The Task Force -- chaired by Dr. Mark Goldman, Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida (and a member of this panel), and University of Notre Dame President Father Edward Malloy -- was formed in 1998 by the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, amid growing concern about college drinking as well as the identification of gaps in our knowledge base regarding effective interventions.

The Task Force was charged with examining all available scientific data, commissioning studies to close the gaps in our knowledge, and recommending research-based solutions.

The report moves beyond the sheer number of college students engaged in high-risk drinking and focuses on the tremendous overall societal burden created by high-risk drinking on campus. We focus on the consequences of college drinking, but also provide tools to help college presidents address this problem.

The Task Force on College Drinking is unique in that:

- C It’s the first project of this breadth and depth that brings together college presidents and researchers – the Task Force report is the collective effort of college presidents, researchers, and college and high school students.
- C It’s the first NIH report on college drinking, producing 24 commissioned papers on all aspects of this issue. In addition to the publication of Dr. Hingson’s study in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, eighteen of those papers were published in a special supplement to that journal.
- C It’s the first report to offer research-based recommendations to college presidents.
- C The Task Force has produced a variety of products that reach out to and address the needs and interests of a wide range of audiences. These include college presidents, researchers, parents, college students, and peer educators.
- C We have launched a new Web site, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov, which includes full-text versions of all of these products plus other useful information. Since April 9th, the site has logged over 1.2 million “hits,” an important measure of public interest. It has also won seven awards.
- C Finally, the Task Force sets forth a comprehensive research agenda to ensure that future interventions also are based on scientific evidence. We are currently spending approximately \$7 million to study these issues, with an additional \$8 million proposed over the next two fiscal years.

As we discuss this problem, we need to be very clear about one thing: while many college students do not misuse alcohol, and many do not drink at all, a culture of high-risk drinking prevails on many college campuses.

This may come as no surprise to many of you. In fact, for some of these campuses with cultures of high risk drinking, a typical response to this might be: “Drinking has always been part of the college tradition and always will be.”

But high-risk drinking, and its often tragic consequences, are preventable. We refuse to accept a single alcohol-related death, a single assault, a single case of date rape as inevitable.

As a result of the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking, we now know not only how injurious college drinking is to our sons and daughters, but also that there are steps we can take on our campuses and in our communities, to address this problem – today – even as we continue to learn more about the problem and its solutions.

Is our work done? Absolutely not.

- C We are planning to conduct regional workshops around the country. This is one way to maintain the involvement of those college presidents who participated in the Task Force’s work. As a matter of fact, one of the Task Force’s Presidents, Susan Resneck Pierce of the University of Puget Sound, will host the first of these regional workshops next fall. Robert Carothers, President of the University of Rhode Island has been invited to host a regional meeting for the New England states.
- C We will produce additional brochures and other information for different audiences such as high school guidance counselors and communities.
- C We will expand research collaborations with universities, such as a project we are funding with 16 campuses in the California State systems (jointly funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration).
- C We will seek to increase coordination with other Federal agencies and other partners, such as the Department of Education, Governors’ Spouses and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

This is just the beginning of what promises to be a long-term effort. “Changing the culture” does not come quickly or easily.

We urge all college and university presidents to apply the recommendations in the Task Force Report. NIAAA is sending the report and all related materials to every college and university in the country. We challenge society to no longer ignore the consequences of drinking on our Nation’s campuses.

Thank you again for inviting me.