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## **Interview: UM doctor discusses culture of drinking on college campuses**

**By: Walyce Almeida // Senior News Writer**

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*The following is a Q&A conducted via e-mail on April 21 with Dr. Ihsan Salloum, professor of addiction psychiatry and director of a psychiatric comorbidity research, treatment and training program at the Miller School of Medicine.*

### **1. From your field of study, what explanations are given to why college students do or do not drink?**

Reasons for drinking, as any social behavior, are quite complex and attributed to a combination of personal and environmental factors. A student may have a history of drinking and may have positive expectations of the effect of alcohol prior to joining college. Personal factors that were found important to increased risk of drinking include family influence and some personality dimensions. For example, impulsivity, sensation seeking, rebelliousness, non-conforming, and deviancy all found associated with increased risk of drinking. Also negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, boredom and stress, were found to be associated with more drinking. Chronic drinking, on the other hand, can cause these negative emotions. There is an important role for the individual's genetic susceptibility to alcohol abuse. Fraternities and sororities on campus and the prominent role of sport teams were also reported to be associated with increased drinking. The local community where the campus is located also plays a role, where communities with dense outlets and advertising for alcoholic beverages, along with lax reinforcement of drinking age and tolerance of underage drinking were found to be associated with increased drinking.

### **2. What do the explanations say? In terms of the student who tasted alcohol as a child and turned away from it, the person who grew up in a strict religious culture and the moderate**

**person who drinks only at parties.**

The lack of risk factors mentioned above should help. Also there may be some genetic factors that may act as protective factors. In terms of religious commitment, some studies have found that students who are more committed to traditional values and more religious reported less drinking. Religious beliefs appeared to be protective, especially in permissive environments.

**3. Friends don't tend to tell each other if they passed a limit. They only offer help or advice after something negative occurred, such as passing out. Why do you think students do this?**

Changing the culture of drinking on college campuses is a major goal in changing students' attitude and level of comfort in deciding to intervene. This topic is one of the focal points of reports mentioned in the first web link below. Another important factor that I think is playing a role is the lack of knowledge about the effect of alcohol and how to know when it has passed the limit before obvious consequences appear. It is hard to intervene when we do not know.

*-Walyce Almeida*

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