

Colleges struggle to deal with increased binge drinking

By Colleen De Baise
College Press Service

At Louisiana State University, administrators tried to combat a "party school" reputation by banning alcohol from all student functions on campus.

But the strict policy, it seems, wasn't enough. A week after LSU was named to a national Top 10 Party School list, a 20-year-old fraternity pledge died after consuming an estimated 24 drinks in one sitting.

When police found Benjamin Wynne passed out on the floor of Sigma Alpha Epsilon, his blood alcohol content was 0.588--six times above the legal limit to drive. Three other students who had celebrated fraternity bid day with him were hospitalized.

While the incident happened at an off-campus party and bar, it was enough to highlight the university's frustration with how to prevent students from binge drinking.

"The tragedy is compounded by the fact that, in recent years, we have worked very hard to educate our students about the consequences of alcohol and substance abuse," said LSU chancellor William L. Jenkins. "Unfortunately, it is not humanly possible to totally regulate the conduct of our students, particularly in their off-campus activities."

LSU is not the only university grappling with how to avoid some of the tragic consequences of binge drinking--which essentially is when a student drinks five or more drinks in one sitting. Even as more universities scramble to implement bans on alcohol and step up enforcement, growing numbers of students admit to binge drinking.

A national study recently released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that during a 30-day period in 1995, 34 percent of college students had consumed five or more alcoholic drinks on at least one occasion. Slightly more than four percent said they had drunk on at least 20 of the 30 days.

A 1995 study by Harvard University's School of Public Health found more cases of binge drinking reported by fraternities and sororities, which it referred to as "functional saloons." According to the survey, 86 percent of fraternity men and 80 percent of sorority women are binge drinkers.

The CDC study pointed to some of the potential side effects of binge drinking: date rape, HIV infection, poor academic performance and car accidents.

And in the past year alone, a number of deaths from binge drinking have been reported. At Frostburg

State University in Maryland, eight fraternity members were charged with manslaughter following the death of a freshman. The 20-year-old had drunk eight cups of beer and 14 shots of vodka in two hours.

This spring, eight members of Theta Chi fraternity at Clarkson University in New York pleaded guilty in the hazing death of a 17-year-old pledge who choked on his own vomit and died. The fraternity's pledges had been told to stand in a circle and drink until they threw up, authorities said.

The most recent case at LSU comes a month after two members of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity at University of California-Los Angeles drowned in an alcohol-related incident.

"How many of these will it take to make people wake up to the issue?" said Kevin Patrick, director of the health center at San Diego State University, who served as an expert for the CDC study. "I don't know of anything dramatic that is being done now or is in the wings as far as changing this pattern of behavior."

But what campuses can do to prevent binge drinking is not exactly clear. The University of Colorado is one of six campuses that received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to curb all drinking on and off campus. Last May,

however, the crackdown on drinking resulted in student riots against police.

"The attempted change of culture never had a buy-in with the students," said Jon Cooper, one of three student body presidents at CU. "They were doing it in a way that was very antagonistic. They used a lot of scare tactics."

Students continue to complain about what they view as a heavy-handed approach to alcohol by local authorities. One fraternity member told Cooper that he was studying in his room when the police shined a spotlight through the window to see what he was doing. "It was a very 'get-in-your-face' attitude," Cooper said.

The university maintains that strict enforcement is appropriate on a campus where most students are under the legal drinking age of 21.

But Cooper says he would like the university to fund special programs that teach students--regardless of their age--how to drink responsibly and that "alcohol use is OK, but alcohol abuse is wrong."

Such programs would be problematic to the mission of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, which discourages alcohol use in general, said Robert Maust, who directs the grant program at CU.

"The university has no desire to take some institutional stance that says, 'Humans--all people--should not use alcohol,' [but] the grant part of the university will take a much more aggressive approach to always asking the question, 'Why alcohol at all,'" he said.

With binge drinking on the rise, a number of universities, like CU, have implemented no-alcohol policies. In March, two national fraternities, Sigma Nu and Phi Delta Theta, decided to ban alcohol at all chapter houses starting in 2000.

Other colleges are choosing to focus on binge drinking rather than alcohol use in general. At Western Maryland College, all freshmen this fall will take part in the On Campus Talking About Alcohol program, which discusses, among other things, binge drinking versus drinking responsibly, according to Bonnie Bosley, health services director.

The program used to be only required for students who violated the school's alcohol policy. Now, all freshmen will undergo training "because of the prevalence of alcohol problems among the nation's new college students who come to college thinking it is, or should be, just like *Animal House*," Bosley said, in reference to the 1978 movie starring John Belushi.

To combat heavy drinking, the University of Illinois has started a program targeted toward college freshmen called "Alcohol 101." The program, funded by The Century Council, developed an interactive CD-ROM that takes students to a virtual party where they come face to face with the consequences of their personal alcohol-related behavior. The program is being piloted on more than 30 college campuses.

Patrick, from San Diego State, says there's no clear-cut approach to how universities should deal with binge drinking.

"That's our dilemma in this country," he said. "There is no magic bullet. We have to grapple with this and deal with this."

Some health experts are encouraging a community-wide backlash against drinking, similar to what has happened in the past years with cigarette smoking, Patrick said.

"Some of us hope what might happen with this is removing the focus from the individual to the people around that individual, the social network," he said. "What is it that's stopping people from smoking? Nasty looks [from] friends."

Some students say it's unlikely they'll stop drinking altogether--although looking out for friends is

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Computer upgrades welcome change for MC

By Sonya Sparks Murdock
Staff Writer

Now that Methodist's students have had a month to settle back into college life, most of you have probably noticed one major campus improvement that occurred over the lazy days of summer: Computers that really work!

Returning MC students will especially appreciate this computer upgrade, after experiencing the torments of using the CAC (Computer Assisted Composition) lab in past years. The 34 dinosaurs that the college once passed off as computers have now been replaced by 20 brand-spanking-new Pentium processors with 133 megahertz clock speed. The old 386 computers, which offered only 25 megahertz clock speed, were plagued by viruses. Sometimes as many as half of the computers in the lab were simultaneously crashed by these bugs, often leaving students panicking over term-paper deadlines. The new systems are disc-free, which promises to leave the lab virtually virus-free.

Other ancient relics that have been replaced are the faulty old dot matrix printers that slowly screeched out students' papers ... when they worked. The college invested in a Hewlett Packard laser printer that is capable of producing thousands of high-quality documents per hour. Located in the lab atten-

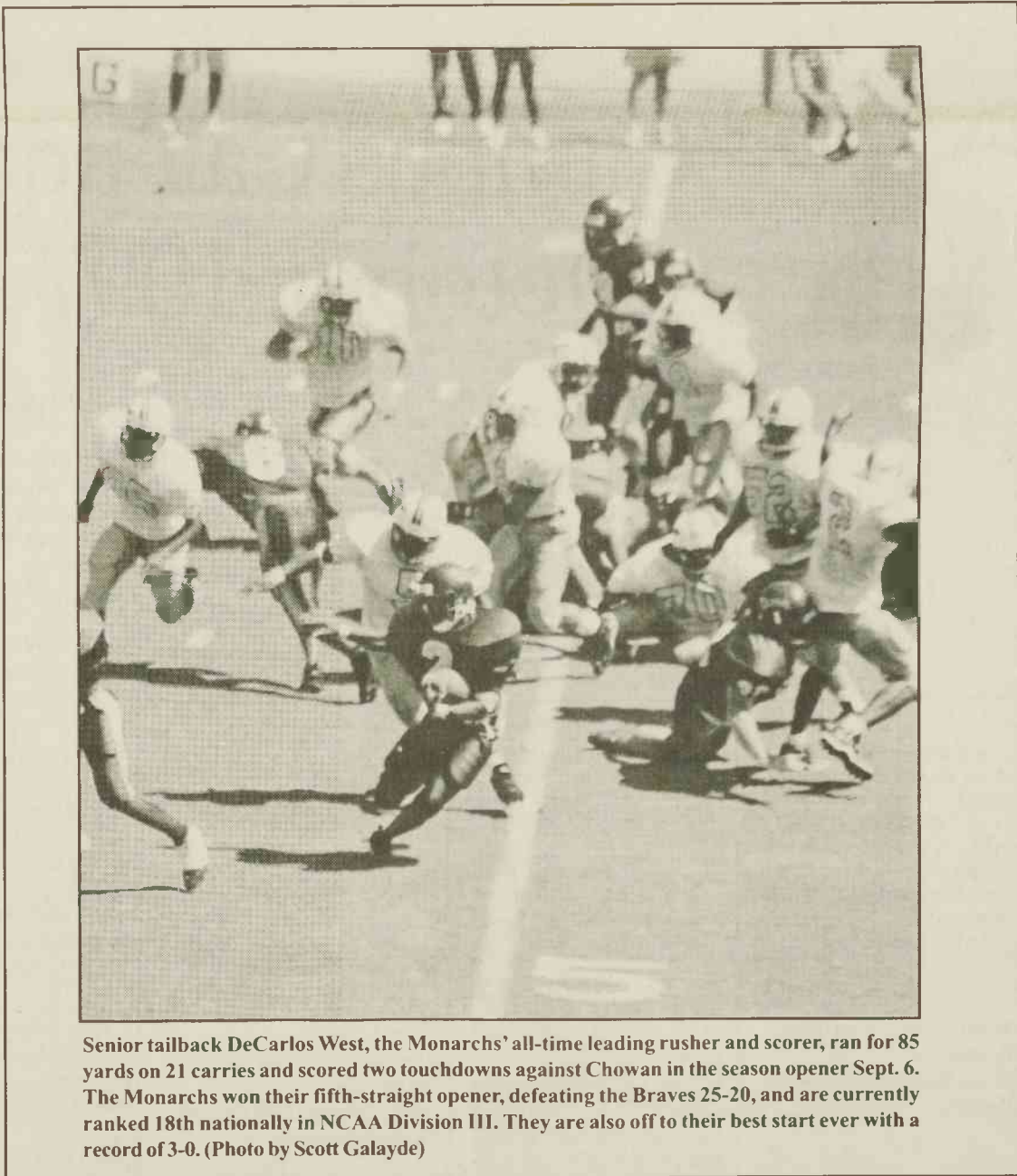
dants' cubicle at the back of the room, the laser printer is accompanied by a flatbed color scanner that students can use to visually enhance their projects this year.

Students will find that, with the new systems, MC has finally caught up with 20th century computer technology. Lab attendant John Lynch admits, "We went from a Model A Ford to a (top of the line) Corvette" with the computer system upgrade.

Speaking of lab attendants, the college has employed three knowledgeable assistants (one full-time and two part-time) to aid students during all lab hours. The attendants are also in charge of setting up students' accounts and creating students' e-mail addresses.

Yes, I said *e-mail*. E-mail accounts are another new benefit for students who wish to use the lab. All 20 computers in the lab have been upgraded with free Internet access this year, a considerable improvement over last year's two Internet-capable computers located in the library. The e-mail is a free and easy method for students to keep in touch with friends and family back home, compared to the high prices of long-distance phone service these days. Lynch states, "Parents are pretty happy" with the college's new e-mail program for students. He adds that, while students

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Senior tailback DeCarlos West, the Monarchs' all-time leading rusher and scorer, ran for 85 yards on 21 carries and scored two touchdowns against Chowan in the season opener Sept. 6. The Monarchs won their fifth-straight opener, defeating the Braves 25-20, and are currently ranked 18th nationally in NCAA Division III. They are also off to their best start ever with a record of 3-0. (Photo by Scott Galayde)

Study abroad offers unique opportunity

By Joey Harris
Contributing Writer

Imagine traveling the world, seeing new sights, meeting new people, and getting semester hours toward your graduation for it. For some Methodist College students last summer, that dream became a reality.

The British Studies Program gave students a chance to study abroad in the United Kingdom while getting semester hours that transferred back to Methodist.

Dr. Neal McCrillis, coordinator for the program, explained that even though Methodist just started offering the program, it has existed for quite some time. "The program is about 20-25 years old, but the summer of 1997 was the first time it has ever been offered here," McCrillis said.

Five students went on this year's trip and studied a variety of courses, such as British law and criminal justice, a course about the legend of King Arthur, and Golf in the Kingdom: An Economic and Cultural History of Sports and Leisure.

The students in the program took many field trips and received lectures on a variety of topics. "That's the great thing about the British Studies Program," said McCrillis. "The students get to visit different places while learning more about what they

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Students addicted to Internet chat rooms

By Dawn Melvin
Staff Writer

The Internet is a very useful resource, but it can also be addiction for many college students.

According to Karen Schreiner, a CAC lab assistant at Methodist, most students who go into the CAC lab usually go into the chat rooms where they can spend two or more hours talking with others. Schreiner said that she sees many of the same students also come in to work on the Internet.

In the computer lab, a student is able to have Internet access and their own e-mail address when they are given an account.

Chat rooms are the most explored by college students. They can spend hours talking to people who share similar interests, or just for fun.



Sema Hashemi, a junior at Methodist, says that she uses the Internet to check her e-mail, but she says that she is not addicted to the

Internet. "I get on to chat and to browse around, and that is after I have done all of my work for my classes," she said.

According to the College Press Service, students are vulnerable to the Internet. Psychologist Kimberly S. Young of the University of Pittsburgh stated that some college students spend so much time on the Internet that they flunk out of college.

Young also said that such obsessive behavior should be viewed by the mental health community as seriously as alcohol or drug use, and that obsessive Internet users can spend up to 38 hours online each

week. Obsessive Internet users, or "dependents," stay online for hours each day and often create new personalities for themselves in chat rooms, she said.

In her study, Young found that for many users, chat room relationships answer "a deep and compelling need in people whose real lives are interpersonally impoverished." Research subjects also said they had jeopardized jobs, relationships, and other opportunities for the Net. "Dependents" met certain criteria including a preoccupation with the Internet, inability to control use, and irritability or other withdrawal symptoms when trying to cut back use.

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