

# A growing concern

MISCONCEPTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF LEGAL AND ILLEGAL DRUGS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

"It was the scariest moment of my life," explained an Elon sophomore. "I woke up and my body was shaking, I had no idea what was going on ... all I knew was that I needed to gain control of my life and get rid of this addiction."

Starting his junior year of high school, the student began taking Adderall, a prescription stimulant drug that helps with Attention Deficit Disorder. Diagnosed at the age of 3, he had a hard time focusing and felt socially awkward in many instances. He entered high school and noticed some of his friends taking this drug and decided it might be effective for him.

"As soon as I began taking it, my grades dramatically improved from a 3.0 to a 3.7 GPA," he said. "I could finally take the honors and AP classes that I wanted and made the grades that I always dreamed of making without experiencing any side effects, at first."

Gradually, he began noticing a shift in his personality, body and overall attitude about life. The side effects began picking up a year later when he felt physically ter-

rible, faced depression and regularly dealt with insomnia. When coming into college, he realized he couldn't function without this prescription, but also knew it was time to make a change.

"It got to the point that the bad things were outweighing the advantages when taking the drug," he said. "I came to the point of realizing that my well-being is more important than my grades and I had to change or else I would eventually hurt myself."

This student ultimately decided to stop using Adderall and switched to a less addictive prescription drug, Vibiance. He brought the extra Adderall that he had left over to school, and help others when they need to be extra attentive.

"It is now socially accepted to use prescription drugs recreationally," he said. "The majority of people I know have used, or are currently using, these types of drugs to help them, especially during exam time. I don't see it as (harmful) by giving them these because the secondary effects fall later in the use or abuse of these drugs."

The rising social norm of the abuse of both legal and illegal drugs is sweeping the college scene and has increased during the past decade. By observing the actual perceptions of drug use on campus, misconceptions are cleared and the process that a student may face is better understood.

The student used spoke on the condition of anonymity.

## ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE

"Alcohol is the biggest drug issue that is found on our college campus," said Lauren Martin, coordinator for substance education Lauren Martin.

According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 40 percent of full-time college students binge drink and/or abuse prescription and illegal drugs. It was found in 2001 that more than 1,700 students died from alcohol-related injuries. In reviewing the causes of high-risk drinking on campus, the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking (2002) described the problem as a "culture of drinking" among college and university students.

"Elon struggles with this issue more than ever," Martin said. "We are actually higher than the national average on high-risk drinking."

The report from Elon's Presidential Task Force on Alcohol indicates the most recent Core Alcohol and Drug Survey data says Elon students "drink almost twice the amount of alcohol per week" as students nationally. It is also shown that students who arrive on campus already have an existing pattern of underage drinking. The 2004 Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey indicates the number of new students coming into Elon who drank in high school is nearly 20 percent higher than the number of their peers in other institutes.

When Elon students were polled in the National College Health Assessment, a comprehensive health survey on drugs, sexual and mental health and nutrition, the numbers were significantly skewed. After being asked the question, "Within the last 30 days, how often do you think students used alcohol?" only 2 percent thought the typical student never drinks,

54 percent thought students drink on one or more days, and 43 percent thought students drink daily.

In actuality, 17 percent of students don't drink, 15 percent of students didn't drink within the past 30 days and 30 percent of students never plan to drink. Because numbers are high for the use of alcohol on campus, Elon actively strives to combat the problem.

"We need to focus on our campus and we need to let students know what the issues are and try to help them out now before they get out in the real world," Martin said. "We are here to prepare students for a healthy life both in and out of college."

## FROM A NATIONAL TO A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

It was shown in a recent study done by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University that nearly half of America's 5.4 million full-time college students abuse drugs or binge drink at least once a month. When looking into the drug use at Elon in a local study done by the National College Health Assessment, 62.7 percent of students reported that they have never smoked pot, 20.7 percent have used marijuana, but not in the last 30 days, and 7 percent used it one to two days within the past 30 days.

Overall, 95 percent of Elon students report not using cocaine, and 98 percent of students report refraining from the use of ecstasy. Although alcohol statistics remain high and use of undercover prescription drugs may be unknown, the use of hard drugs on campus sinks below the national average according to recent findings of the NCHA study.

## FINDING HELP

Before a student makes the progression to the abuse of drugs and the viability of being caught, there are ways for students to prevent this from happening. By simply being a friend and recognizing signs of addiction, prevention can take place.

Jana Lynn Patterson, assistant vice president for student life, acts as a therapeutic intervention for students to come to in times of trouble. With all judicial affairs pushed aside, Patterson explained how she helps students by offering advice to prevent further repercussions.

"I probably deal with about six or seven students per year that are struggling," Patterson said. "I will say to them that I want to make sure you are safe and to get you to the right resources. By the time they come to me, they are almost relieved to come because they are out of control and academics are gone ... they need structure and support."

Patterson said the main problem she observes with most cases is students make decisions based on what is happening currently rather than thinking on down the road.

"Through proper counseling and help, I find that about 60 to 70 percent of the time, intervention works," said Patterson. "Most of the time, if we start the students with counseling then we get them thinking about what they are doing and help them on their way to recovery."

## COUNSELING SERVICES

Elon offers counseling services that struggling students can take advantage of when dealing with drug-related issues. Bruce Nelson, director of counseling services, explained how the services the health center offers are critical in helping a student.

"Here at Elon, the counselors see around 10 percent of the student body on any given year," said Nelson. "We see students that face issues with substances, disordered eating behavior and depression."

Students who come in for counseling face an assessment to see how they can best be served. The health center offers three main tracks for treatment: direct service for everyone who comes in, use collaboration with family and faculty and link resources such as an outside counseling center. When asked if there was a rise in the number of cases the counseling services has dealt with, Nelson was quick to respond.

"Overall, I have seen more complex situations come in here," he said. "It is now more of a combination of issues, such as stress and anxiety, paralleled with drug abuse and eating disorders."

Equipped with four full-time counselors, the health center focuses on short-term crisis oriented issues and is free of charge. Nelson said if the health center is not the right resource for the student, Elon links them

THE RISING SOCIAL NORM OF THE ABUSE OF BOTH LEGAL AND ILLEGAL DRUGS IS SWEEPING THE COLLEGE SCENE AND HAS SEEN AN INCREASE OVER THE PAST DECADE AS PRESSURES ARE COMING AT STUDENTS FROM ALL ANGLES.

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Photos and graphics MCT Campus