

Drinking...So What's the Problem?

—THERESA ANASTI—

Students at NCSSM vary in their opinions on drinking.

With the thousands of essays, articles, and books written about teenage drinking, it is expected that teenagers know everything there is to know about the subject. But does that matter? While most adolescents are aware of the consequences of drinking, they acknowledge this fact in several ways. Some choose simply not to drink. Even though this decision seems to be the least common, it may be more popular than many adults may think. At NCSSM, many students believe that drinking is either harmful, useless, and not worth the consequences of getting caught.

"I think that the risks involving drinking are not worth the high of being plastered," said a senior at NCSSM.

Many students here have similar sentiments, choosing to be free of all kinds of alcohol. Other students, choosing not to drink claim it's their own personal decision, but they do not condemn others for doing so.

"If that's what you want to do, do it responsibly, but I don't do it" said a senior at NCSSM.

"As long as you are intelligent enough about your decision, do whatever," said a junior.

In contrast to those students that abstain from drinking, NCSSM has many students who condone alcohol use. However, NCSSM is not alone in having a large group of students who drink; the majority of high schools also have many students who use alcohol on a regular basis. But there is no evidence to tell whether the percentage of students who drink at NCSSM is higher or lower than at other schools.

"I am going to take that on as a charge this year, and see if we can get some quantitative evidence on drinking at NCSSM compared to drinking at other schools. Since we are a residential school, students away from home may have the opportunity to drink more; whether they do drink more is up for debate," said Dr. Joan Barber.

"I would like to say that our students drink less than students from other high schools, but through anecdotes I have heard that it is more. However, I trust our students, and feel that they do drink less than students from other schools," said Warren Basket.

"One girl on my hall at the

beginning of last year said that she had never gotten drunk before, and everyone was almost shocked," said a senior.

Despite the fact that alcohol has often been linked to abusive home lives, most young adults who use alcohol do not even take this into account.

"I think peer pressure, stress and boredom are the main reasons why people choose to drink," said a junior at NCSSM.

Due to the high amounts of alcohol consumed in small towns and at competitive high schools/colleges, this can indeed be true. Alcohol also lowers your inhibitions, making a person do or say things they wouldn't normally.

"I drink alcohol because it's something fun to do, it's entertaining, exciting, and slightly rebellious," said a senior. "Just think of how much funnier everyone is when they've consumed alcohol."

But the fun that students describe has its cost. Alcohol tends to numb abusers and ends having detrimental effects. Its neurological effects are quite serious and should be encountered with precaution. Unfortunately many students choose to ignore the possibility of serious injury when they drink. This

inability of American teenagers to regulate their alcoholic intake is usually attributed to their unfamiliarity with the substance. Most just enjoy going to parties and getting really drunk, even though they know that it is harmful.

"It's really fun to just hang out with friends with some alcohol and laugh about stupid stuff for hours on end," said a junior.

Many of the students who drink believe there is nothing wrong with it; some proposed we should lower the drinking age to prevent this feeling of rebelliousness of consuming alcohol. Statistically, ninety-two percent of all American high school seniors have had alcohol, while sixty percent drink on a weekly basis. In America, 10,000 young adults ages 16-24 die from alcohol poisoning each year.

"I don't understand, we have millions of alcohol problems in our country and our drinking age is twenty-one. Europe does not enforce their drinking age and they are virtually free of alcohol problems! So why don't we just remove the drinking age?," said a senior.

Warren Basket, however, has a different opinion.

"Europe has a history

of allowing their children to drink alcohol; America, however, does not have the same ingrained culture. In turn, lowering the drinking age would not affect America directly, as giving children alcohol is not part of our culture," said Mr. Basket.

Since there are no numbers on the use of alcohol by NCSSM students it is very hard to say whether NCSSM has a higher portion of students that drink than other schools. But NCSSM is different in that it houses students and is therefore responsible for their behavior. So for every time somebody's mom would have disciplined her children NCSSM has to step in. That means that a policy on alcohol is needed whereas at other schools it is much less of an issue.

At NCSSM the views of the students are often drastically different, and their opinions on drinking follow this trend. From being adamantly against it, to supporting it wholeheartedly, NCSSM students take drastically different stances. However, no matter how hard it is discouraged, there will always be people trying to break the rules. Which makes a person wonder if the law really makes a difference in teenage drinking.

To Smoke or not to Smoke?

—EMILY WARREN—

Two years ago, tobacco products, specifically cigarettes, were formally banned from the NCSSM campus. In the fall of 1999, the school implemented a new tobacco policy under which student possession of tobacco on or off campus while under the school's jurisdiction would result in disciplinary action. But have the school's efforts to make NCSSM a smoke free campus produced any results?

The new policy, the Tobacco Cessation Program (TCP), is designed specifically for students at NCSSM. According to the student handbook: "Smoking, possession or use of tobacco products on school property" will result in a Level II.

One of the goals of this new plan is to work with students rather than just punish them. Smokers can be designated as "social tobacco users" or "addicted tobacco users." Addicted smokers are required to attend the Duke Addictions Program to help them quit smoking. Social smokers, will be given punishments depending on the severity of their case.

These punishments can range from work detail, to attending the same program as addicted smokers.

Even with the new policy, some students continue to smoke. People who are addicted to nicotine cannot easily give up their habit. So what do students who crave a cigarette do? They do the only thing they can: leave campus.

"I'm going to walk if I have to. It makes my life harder, but it's not a big enough deterrent for me to stop," said one student about the policy.

According to many students, there are fewer smokers on campus this year than there were last year. However, that doesn't mean that people quit smoking when they came to NCSSM.

"Most of the people who smoked last year graduated. I know there are some juniors who smoke, but I haven't met them yet," said one senior.

Students who don't smoke generally don't seem to be concerned by the policy.

"I don't like the smell of smoke...I know who the smokers are because I can smell them, but I wouldn't go as far as to turn someone in for smoking,"

said one non-smoker.

Everyone admits that NCSSM puts a great deal of stress on students. A lot of smokers express concern about the time commitment that is involved with their habit.

"I would get so much more work done if I could just smoke a cigarette

on campus, rather than having to walk away," said one smoker.

At the same time, some smokers say they are under too much stress to quit at this point in their lives. They feel that they would be able to quit if their load of schoolwork was not as heavy.

A student pointed out the impact that cigarettes have on his ability to concentrate: "If



Joe Camel, representative of smokers everywhere

free to students that wish to quit smoking.

In an ideal world, nobody would need to smoke. The aim of the policy established by Dr. Joan Barber is to educate prospective students about the policy, in hopes that they will prioritize and put their education before their addiction.

The policy does not affect people who don't smoke, but there will be some talented students who don't come to NCSSM because of the smoking policy.

One issue that has upset some students is that under North Carolina law eighteen-year olds are allowed to purchase and smoke cigarettes. However, when they are under the school's jurisdiction they are not allowed to smoke.

Smoking is an issue that will not be easily resolved, especially in a tight knit community of NCSSM. If you have feel that this issue should be addressed, we encourage you to write a letter to the editor. The staff wants to make sure that the views of the school are heard.

I don't have a cigarette, I just can't focus enough to get all of my homework done."

The Tobacco Cessation Program that was instituted last year attempts to remedy this situation, where students struggle to deal with their ad-