



## College Freshmen Asked to Think Before They Drink

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CHICO, CA - In a freshly-painted, 14.5-foot by 12-foot room on the ninth floor of Whitney Hall, five freshmen fire off tips they've picked up on navigating Chico State's party scene.

"Turn your cup upside down when you walk from house to house," says 17-year-old Jennie Pizante from Fresno, "and the cops won't bother you." (True, if the cup is clearly upside down and empty, says Chico Police Lt. Lori MacPhail.)

"Stay on the grass and out of the sidewalk and street," adds Krista Winkler, 18, of Carmichael, "and the cops won't bother people who have drinks." (Not necessarily true, MacPhail says.)

One more thing to remember, says Aaron McIntyre, 18, of Citrus Heights: "Tuesday and Thursday are the hardest and longest days of class, so people really party on those nights." (Thursdays are indeed busy, says MacPhail.)

It's Monday night and these brand-new college students and 2,332 other freshmen have finished their first day of classes at California State University, Chico. Their parents dropped them off at the 16,000-student campus just six days earlier.

Born in 1987 -- the same year that Playboy labeled Chico State America's No. 1 party school -- these new freshmen are the target of an aggressive prevention and intervention campaign by university leaders and law enforcement to rein in disruptive and dangerous drinking behavior.

"Particularly with our freshmen, we want to encourage students to see themselves more as citizens of the university and city community and to recognize that they have responsibilities as citizens for safety, well-being and quality of life," says Chico State President Paul Zingg.

The first six weeks of school -- often a revelatory time for students -- will test a series of new reforms prompted by the water-poisoning death of 21-year-old Matthew Carrington in a hazing incident in February and the near death of a Butte College student from alcohol poisoning at a Chico State fraternity house in January.

Other campuses, including Sacramento State, UC Davis and UC Berkeley, are also launching new programs this school year to curb dangerous drinking and instill more social responsibility in students.

Drinking behavior of Chico freshmen, like those who live on Whitney Hall's ninth floor, will be scrutinized closely.

All of them, drinkers or not, must finish an online alcohol abuse prevention course before they can register for spring classes.



Those caught with booze in residence halls will have to answer to parents on their first offense. Busted a second time, they'll be banished from campus housing. The agency in charge of prevention and intervention -- Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Center -- will establish "walking under the influence checkpoints" on big party nights to warn students that police can arrest them for public intoxication, says Shauna Quinn, the program's director.

Zingg, who became president of Chico State a year and a half ago, has pledged to dramatically alter student behavior and, by extension, burnish the university's image.

Much of his focus has been on the campus' fraternities and sororities. In June, he announced that alcohol would be banned at all fraternity and sorority houses and events, recruitment of new members would be postponed until spring and all fraternity and sorority members must maintain minimum grade point averages.

When school opens at UC Davis next month, campus officials will work with students, police and community residents to curb the sort of disruptive, large-scale parties in private residences that have troubled Davis, said Dr. Michelle Famula, director of the campus' student health center. At Sacramento State, campus officials on Friday will unveil a series of efforts with police to discourage drinking and driving and underage drinking. UC Berkeley freshmen, like those at Chico State, are also required to complete an online alcohol awareness course.

None of Chico's new rules, nor bad publicity from the Carrington tragedy, are crimping demand for a Chico State education.

Numbers released by admissions officials Wednesday show the campus has its largest ever freshman class. Chico State has some of the most rigorous admissions standards in the 23-campus CSU system and is home to top-notch degree programs such as engineering and journalism.

The university -- frequently ranked as one of the top regional universities in the West by U.S. News & World Report -- was nowhere to be found on the Princeton Review's just-released list of the best party schools.

Still, in their battle to tame Chico State's drinking culture, campus officials face some steep odds.

The freshman women on Whitney Hall's ninth floor, in their first weekend away at college, describe the Saturday night party scene (two days before classes began) at the corner of Fifth and Ivy streets, just three blocks from campus.

"It was wild," says Jackie McCurdy, a 17-year-old from Simi Valley. "There were people everywhere and lines of people to get inside houses with kegs."

McCurdy tested the party scene with her roommate and a Whitney Hall third floor resident: Dani Abrams and Dannie Huttner, both 18. They braved a filthy bathroom at the Sigma Chi fraternity house and figured out that their gender can propel them to the front of most lines at house parties.



McCurdy and Huttner admit that promises of a vibrant party scene with "lots and lots of hot guys," was a big part of Chico State's appeal.

"I'm a social person ... I really like that this is a town full of college students and there are lots of parties," Huttner says .

But, say both girls, they will heed some of the alcohol abuse prevention message they have heard nearly every day since they arrived on campus. For one thing, they've vowed to look out for each other when they go to parties.

"They've basically beat it into our heads that there's going to be no tolerance," says Huttner.

Down the hall, in Pizante and Winkler's room, there's another rehash of Saturday night's festivities.

Nicole McCall, a 17-year-old from Linden, deals a deck of cards onto the carpet to demonstrate a drinking game (with a title too vulgar to print) she played at a house party. The object is to guess if the dealer's card will be higher or lower than the cards on the floor -- if you're wrong, you drink and take another turn.

"It was a real Chico experience for me," says McCall, who has attracted lots of attention with her trademark cowboy hat. "I got smashed, I threw up and had my first hangover. I got it out of the way."