

Editorial: Binge drinking drops

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UC Davis officials trumpeted the news proudly the week before Picnic Day - "Safe Party Initiative cuts students' high-risk drinking," read a story in the Sacramento Bee. "Report: Binge drinking declines," read another in the Davis Enterprise.

If you had only read the headlines, you might have thought UC Davis students had given up hard drinking altogether, trading in those ubiquitous red Solo cups for bluebooks and #2 pencils.

UC Davis representatives quoted in the articles attributed a noticeable decline in binge drinking to the nearly \$7 million Safe Party Initiative, a multi-year campaign designed to educate students on the dangers of high-risk drinking.

There is reason to doubt this claim, however.

The initial study, completed in 2003, surveyed 1,000 students. The final survey in 2007 surveyed only 450 students. While The California Aggie spoke with a statistics professor who confirmed that this difference in sample size is not enough to invalidate the results of the study, the sampling method leaves a lot to be desired. Responses to the survey were submitted on a voluntary basis. If there's anything our required statistics courses have taught us here, it is that voluntary response surveys are not known to bring about accurate data.

Even granting that the numbers are accurate, though, there are more likely causes of the decline in drinking.

One fairly obvious one is a change in the undergraduate student body in the years the study measures. Statistics show that UC Davis has become much more selective in the past decade. Each year, more motivated students with higher and higher GPAs matriculate, and these students are presumably less likely to engage in high-risk drinking behaviors than their less studious predecessors.

None of this is to say the Safe Party Initiative was a bad thing. In fact, by informing students of their legal responsibilities and fostering positive relations between college students and Davis residents, the program contributed to the wellbeing of students and the community. Given the evidence, however, it seems presumptuous for the Safe Party coordinators to take credit for a shift in the campus culture that was more likely caused by a change in the kind of student UCD attracts.

A decline in high-risk drinking is good for everyone - let's just be realistic about its cause.