RE: CONCERNS ABOUT HIGH-RISK STUDENT BEHAVIOR

First, I would like to welcome you to our University community. I encourage you to continue to play an active role in your son or daughter’s life while here at UW-River Falls. The transition from high school to college is an exciting and anticipated time that also marks a rite of passage into adulthood. During this transition, your son or daughter will make many decisions that can or will impact their lives in significant ways. One of these critical decisions is whether or not to use alcoholic beverages during their college years. This is my reason for sending this letter today.

Since it is likely that your son or daughter has not yet reached the legal Wisconsin drinking age of 21, their decision to use alcohol would be illegal. As with most U.S. colleges and universities, UWRFS research about our students suggests that a majority of incoming freshman have already used alcohol. 2009 research on this campus shows that 35.5% of our students did not use alcohol in the last 30 days. However, 97% of our students think the average student drank alcohol at least once in the last month. This tells us that students overestimate how often their fellow students drink. Your son or daughter may feel pressure to drink because they think everyone does.

The UW System, including UWRFS, is working to affect changes in college life where alcohol use might be involved. UWRFS collaborates with campus and community partners on initiatives to decrease high-risk drinking. Examples include: 1) correcting misperceptions about student alcohol use; 2) offering educational programs on the risks associated with alcohol or drug misuse; 3) on-campus alcohol-free events during the week and on weekends; 4) sending 21st birthday cards encouraging students to celebrate safely. Additionally, Student Health and Counseling Services can help students struggling with alcohol and other drugs.

Drinking at UWRFS is no worse than at comparable institutions, even so, for many students, it can lead to significant problems. Through research we also found that student use of alcohol has undesirable effects including: reducing class attendance, decreasing academic performance and achievement, causing financial problems, creating legal problems, losing driving privileges, negatively impacting interpersonal relationships on-campus and at home, and increasing one’s risk for sexual assault. A 1998 Koss study found that 75% of male students and 55% of female students involved in date rape had been drinking or using drugs at the time.

We care about your son or daughter’s success while at the UWRFS. I encourage responsible use of alcohol by students who are of legal age and choose to drink. However, you and your son or daughter should understand that the University will not protect any student from the legal consequences of misusing alcohol and/or violating the law.

One consequence for residence hall students is that repeat or serious violations of the alcohol or drug policy will likely result in notification to you as the parent that your student is engaging in behaviors that may lead to serious disciplinary actions. Should you be contacted, you are encouraged to talk with your student about repercussions they may be facing if they continue to make choices that violate the community standards of our residence halls. We are asking you to discuss with your son or daughter their attitudes about the use of alcohol and the very serious implications it can have for their college career, and possibly the rest of their lives.

Campus alcohol policies can be found at http://www.uwrf.edu/StudentHealthAndCounseling/HealthTopicsAtoZ.cfm

Enclosed find a letter addressed to your student. I urge you to discuss the realities of high-risk drinking with your student before your student arrives at UW-River Falls. Please reinforce the message that we care about your student’s success and hope that they will choose not to engage in high-risk drinking during their college career.

Feel free to contact me with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Gregg Heinselman
Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
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