

# Color of Drinking Survey 2023 Results

## About the Survey

The Color of Drinking is an exploratory study that examines how alcohol culture impacts campus climate, health and wellbeing, retention, and academics. The survey was administered at UW-Madison in 2015, 2017, and most recently in 2023.



### Administration Dates

November 20, 2023, through January 2, 2024



### Format

30 minute survey, completed online; mix of qualitative (open response) and quantitative (multiple choice) questions



### Participants

15,649 undergraduate students were invited to participate via email; this included all undergraduate international students and students of color, as well as a sample of domestic white students.



### Response Rate

12.4% (1,939 students)

## What's in This Report

Student experiences shared in the survey will be used to guide campus efforts to create a safe, supportive, inclusive campus environment so all students can thrive. This report shares high-level results to help leaders set priorities and inform student advocacy around policies, programs, and systems on campus. **A full data report with detailed findings in each area is available upon request.**

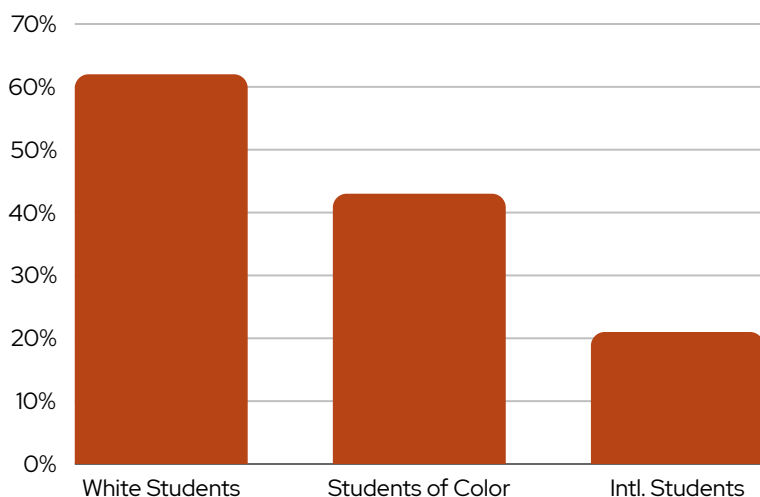
# Key Findings

## FINDING 1:

### At UW-Madison, drinking rates vary substantially by identity.

The Color of Drinking survey gathered information from three populations on campus: international students, students of color, and white students. Drinking rates varied between these subsets of students. Survey results indicate that students of color and international students report high-risk drinking at far lower rates than white students. This replicates patterns we have seen in past surveys.

Figure 1: Rates of High-Risk Drinking\*



\*See definitions of drinker types in the box to the right.

## Drinker Types

- **Nondrinkers** reported not drinking at all or having not drunk in the last 30 days.
- **Low-Risk Drinkers** reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days but not having four or five drinks in a row within a couple of hours.
- **High-Risk Drinkers** reported drinking in the past 30 days and having four or five drinks in a row within a couple of hours on at least one of those days.



## STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

*Alcohol is an important part of Wisconsin's culture; it cannot be separated from the school; the **party aspect of the school is part of what makes it so great.** – White Student*

*In a lot of ways, being a Badger is synonymous with being a partier, and in that sense, **I am not a Badger.** – Student of Color*

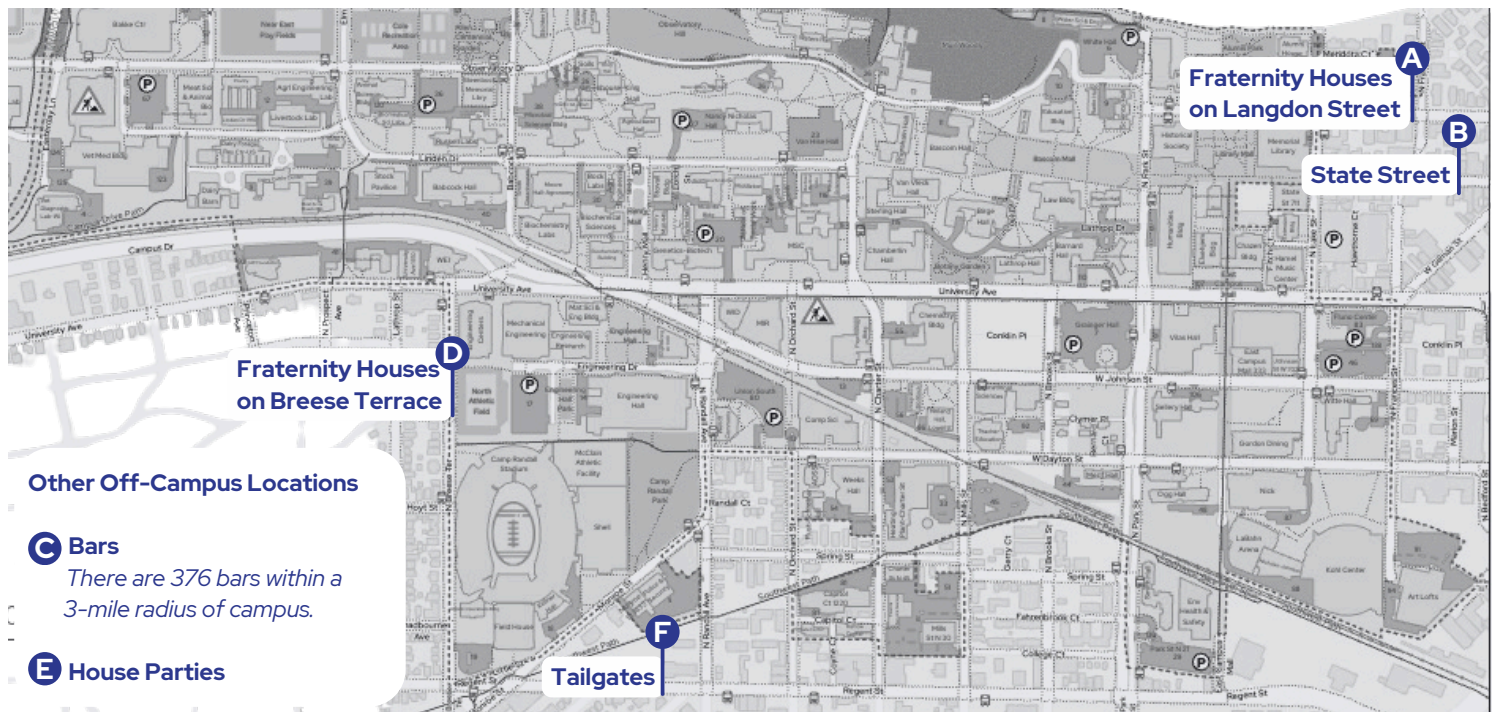
*In my experience there is a **heavy emphasis on drinking** as a social event and when that is challenged you might have to reconcile with the fact that people will not ask you to hang out as much. – Student of Color*

## FINDING 2:

# Some students avoid locations on campus where alcohol is present.

Students of all identities reported avoiding locations near campus due to the alcohol use of others. However, only students of color reported avoiding tailgates due to the alcohol use of others.

## What locations do students report avoiding due to the alcohol use of others?



### Top Locations Reported\*

**A. Fraternity Houses on Langdon Street:** 28% of students of color; 24% of international students; 20% of white students

**B. State Street:** 25% of students of color; 26% of international students; 17% of white students

**C. Bars:** 21% of students of color; 26% of international students; 13% of white students

**D. Fraternity Houses on Breese Terrace:** 17% of students of color; 16% of international students; 14% of white students

**E. House Parties:** 19% of international students; 11% of white students

**F. Tailgates:** 18% of students of color

\*Data is listed in order of frequency of occurrence in qualitative data. Student subsets not represented for a location did not report that location in qualitative responses.

“ ”

### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

*[I avoid] anywhere remotely close to frat houses... As an Asian trans man, [I] get verbally harassed a lot whenever I walk by obnoxious white men.*

— **International Student**

### FINDING 3:

## Alcohol use on campus affects all students' academic experience.

Students experience impacts to their academic performance due to both their own alcohol use and the alcohol use of others or alcohol culture more generally. Across all groups, high-risk drinkers are twice as likely to experience impacts on their academics due to their own alcohol use than their low-risk drinking peers.



### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

*I used [alcohol] to procrastinate academic work, but also sometimes used as an **incentive to get work done**.*

– **White Student**

*If fewer students drank, we would have more meaningful discussions in class. Every discussion I attend on a Friday is **full of hungover students** who struggle to string together a couple of words.*

– **Student of Color**

***I can't study at night** with all the drunk people yelling. I can hear them from my apartment.*

– **International Student**

**Drinking culture has secondhand effects on all students, even those who do not drink.**

**Data showed very little difference between how often nondrinkers' academic experience is disrupted by the secondhand effects alcohol culture when compared to the experience of high-risk drinkers.**

## What academic impacts did students report experiencing?

### Due to Personal Drinking

- Choosing to drink instead of study
- Being too hungover to attend class
- Performing poorly on assignments due to alcohol use

### Due to Others' Drinking

- Professor or teaching assistant referencing alcohol culture in the classroom
- Needing to schedule group projects around drinking days
- Needing to find alternative study spaces due to drinking culture

## FINDING 4:

# High-risk alcohol use appears to be a pathway to belonging, psychological wellbeing, and academic success.

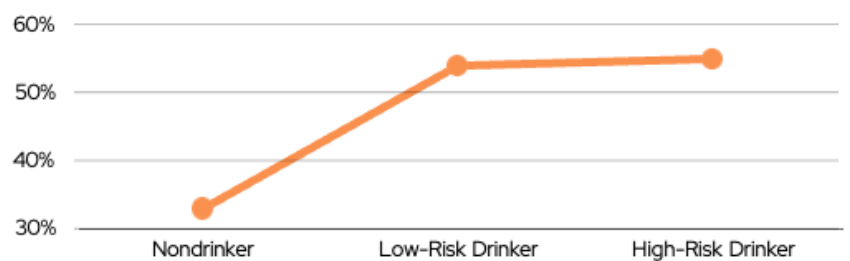
Students who are said to experience “psychological wellbeing” on campus feel optimism about their life, purpose, activities, relationships, and future.\* Survey data indicate a concerning trend. For many students, higher levels of drinking are linked to increased psychological wellbeing on campus.

## Number of Students Experiencing Psychological Wellbeing Based on Drinker Type

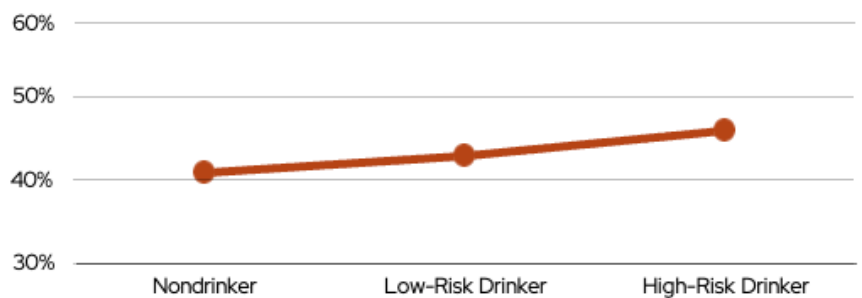
The relationship between alcohol use and psychological wellbeing differed between subsets of students.

- **The connection between psychological wellbeing and higher levels of drinking is the strongest for white students on campus.** As seen in **Figure 2**, the percentage of students experiencing psychological wellbeing is the lowest for nondrinkers and the highest for high-risk drinkers. This seems to indicate that higher levels of drinking is linked to increased psychological wellbeing for these students.
- **This connection is less strongly indicated but still present for students of color.** **Figure 3** shows that there is a slight increase in psychological wellbeing for students of color as their rates of drinking increase.
- **For international students, a different pattern emerges.** Low-risk drinkers report the highest levels of psychological wellbeing, as shown in **Figure 4**.

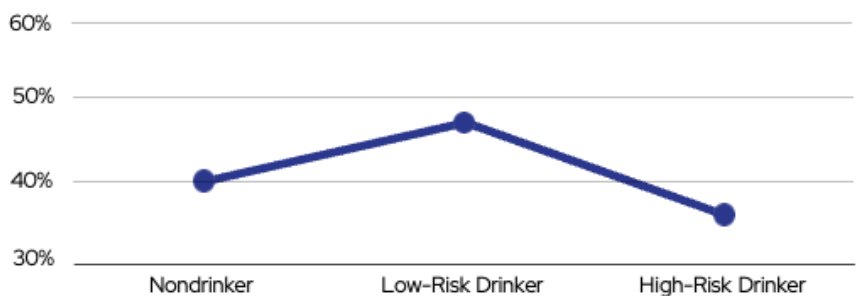
**Figure 2: White Students**



**Figure 3: Students of Color**



**Figure 4: International Students**



\* Psychological wellbeing is defined based on the Diener Flourishing Scale, determined by agreement with a series of statements.

## FINDING 5:

# Students commonly report negative impacts to their sense of belonging on campus due to alcohol culture.

In qualitative data, students frequently described the ways alcohol has shaped their overall experience at UW-Madison. Many students report that not drinking makes you feel like you don't belong; this is especially true for nondrinkers and low-risk drinkers. Survey data also shows that sense of belonging plays an important role in student retention and is frequently identified as a factor in a student's decision of whether or not to leave UW-Madison.



### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

**Not partaking in UW-Madison's alcohol culture has also caused me to lose friends** who drink heavily (not because of their level of alcohol consumption, but because of all/almost all interactions including high amounts of alcohol).

– **Student of Color**

Being harder to make friends and **not having a sense of belonging** here led to negative mental health effects for me. – **Student of Color**

**I have had a really hard time finding friends or community on campus** and I rarely feel like I belong here. This made me question my reality in many ways and negatively impacted my self-esteem and confidence as well as wellbeing overall.

– **International Student**

**“Sense of belonging”** refers to students' perceived social support on campus. Students who belong feel a sense of connection and mattering on campus. These students feel cared about, accepted, respected, and valued.

## FINDING 6:

# Students think the University should be doing more to address alcohol culture on campus.

Around one-third of all students reported wanting the university to take additional action regarding the alcohol culture. Support for additional action is much higher among nondrinkers than current drinkers.

## What actions would students like to see?

- **Alcohol education:** Students reported wanting more education on how to drink responsibly and safely.
- **Enforcement of alcohol laws and policies:** Students of color and international students endorsed greater accountability for those who break laws and policies related to alcohol. They also mentioned opportunities for stricter and more consistent enforcement.
- **More alcohol-free activities on campus:** Both students of color and white students hoped to see more alcohol-free programming, activities, and spaces on campus, including more late-night and weekend options that do not include alcohol.



### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

*The University should take an **adamant stance** that underage drinking is wrong and not tolerated. It should ask what is the point of a law if no one follows it? – **White Student***

*I wish there were more third spaces, and more campus spots open during the weekends and Friday nights. As someone who [lives in the] dorms, every Friday night and weekend feels like **the only options are to stay in or go out and drink.***

*– **Student of Color***

*People who get caught drinking underage or doing something illegal get a slap on the wrist and not much more... I don't think it's fair that **some folks get to do whatever they want and get away with it.** – **Student of Color***

Previous iterations of the Color of Drinking have resulted in concrete changes on campus, including alcohol-free programming at the Red Gym, policy changes, the development of Our Wisconsin inclusion education program, and cultural centers for Asian, Pacific Islander and Desi American (APIDA), and Latine students.

# Next Steps

UW-Madison is committed to providing an inclusive, safe, healthy, and enriching campus environment to support student learning and wellbeing. The experiences shared by students in the survey will help us identify trends, challenges, and opportunities to address the campus climate around alcohol, prevent alcohol-related harm, and increase student wellbeing and belonging.

As the administrator of the Color of Drinking Survey, University Health Services (UHS) is beginning to share the survey findings with campus leaders and partners. Addressing alcohol culture is a campus-wide effort, and UHS will work with campus partners to identify opportunities in their specific areas.

## UHS Commitments and Actions

UHS already works to address high-risk drinking through a combination of education, programming, policy, and clinical services. We will continue our commitment to supporting student wellbeing, guided by the survey results.



### Alcohol Harm Prevention Councils

UHS leadership will convene two councils to address high-risk drinking on campus: a leadership council and a coordinating council. These councils will review survey data and make recommendations for updates to campus policies, systems, and environments related to alcohol.



### Policy Review

UHS is leading a comprehensive review of campus policies related to alcohol and safety on campus and will recommend updates supported by survey data.



### Supporting Nondrinkers and Students in Recovery

UHS supports students in recovery through the Badger Recovery collegiate recovery community and will continue to advocate for future campus-led efforts to promote wellbeing, connection, and belonging for students who do not use alcohol.



### Reporting and Metrics

As part of the federally required Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Program Biennial Review, UHS will be producing additional reporting and metrics related to alcohol use on campus to track progress in alcohol-related issues.

For questions on the survey or results, please email [colorofdrinking@uhs.wisc.edu](mailto:colorofdrinking@uhs.wisc.edu).