

August 2009

To the Parents of New University of Wisconsin-River Falls Students:

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 they are here at UWRF. The transition that occurs from high school to college is usually an exciting and highly anticipated time that also marks a rite of passage into adulthood. During this transition, your son or daughter will be asked to make all kinds of 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 his or her 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 colleges and universities across the U.S., research compiled by the UWRF about our students suggests that a majority of incoming freshman students have already used alcohol when they arrive on campus. Research from 2007 on this campus indicates that 29% of our students did not use alcohol in the last 30 days and 43% only drank alcohol one to five days in the last 30 days. However, 81% of our students think the average student drank alcohol six or more days in the last month. This tells us that students overestimate how often their fellow students drink and therefore may feel pressure to drink while in college and that everyone does it when this is not the case.

The entire University of Wisconsin System, including UWRF, is making a concerted effort to try to affect some changes in college life where the use of alcohol might be involved. UWRF collaborates with campus and community partners on multiple initiatives to decrease high-risk drinking, such as correcting misperceptions of student alcohol use, offering numerous programs that educate students on the risks associated with alcohol or drug misuse, and sending out 21st birthday cards encouraging students to celebrate safely. We also have an Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Coalition composed of campus and community members that meet regularly. There are also alcohol-free events for students on campus. For students struggling with alcohol and other drugs, services and resources are available through Student Health and Counseling Services.

Drinking at UWRF is no worse than at other comparable institutions, but for many students it can lead to significant problems. Through our research, we have also found that the use of alcohol by our students has other highly undesirable effects such as: reducing class attendance, decreasing academic performance and achievement, causing financial problems, creating legal problems, losing driving privileges, negatively impacting interpersonal relationships both on campus and at home, and increasing one's risk for sexual assault. Sexual assault and sexual harassment will be treated as serious offenses and will not be tolerated and could affect your son or daughter's ability to continue their education at UWRF. A 1998 study by Koss found that 75% of male students and 55% of female students involved in date rape had been drinking or using drugs at the time.

I want you to know that we care very much about your son or daughter's success while at the UWRF; I want to encourage responsible use of alcohol by those students who are of legal age and choose to drink, and I want you and your son or daughter to 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 receive this information, 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 www.uwrf.edu/policies and click on Alcoholic Beverages on Campus.

I have included a letter for your son or daughter to read as well as additional information about alcohol use on college campuses. If you have any questions regarding the information presented here, please do not hesitate to call me. I am delighted to have your son or daughter join us for what we hope will be a wonderful college experience.

Sincerely,

Gregg Heinselman
Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs