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Student Perceptions of Minnesota State University, Mankato's Alcohol and Drug Policy

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of students' perceptions of the current alcohol and other drug use policy at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU) now and in the future. The study explores undergraduate students' perceptions through surveys disseminated in the fall of 2010 and fall of 2011. The study is part of a four year longitudinal study, which began in 2010 after the implementation of a revised alcohol and other drug use policy.

Literature Review

Research studies on student perceptions of alcohol and drug use policies have found a majority of students support alcohol and drug use policies, support enforcement actions by the university, and perceive support of the policies by the student body to be much lower than individual support (Buettner, Bartle-Haring, Andrews, & Khuurana, 2010; DeJong, Towvim, & Schneider, 2007; Lavigne, Witt, Wood, Laforge, & DeJong, 2008; Weschsler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002). Furthermore, males, intercollegiate athletes, and members of the Greek community were more likely to not support policies while females, those involved in religious activities, and those who began using alcohol later in life were more likely to support university alcohol and drug use policies (Buettner et al., 2010). Other researchers have found varying degrees of knowledge about alcohol and drug use policies by university administrators and students (Hirschfeld, Edwardson, & McGovern, 2005; Knight, et. al., 2003). The lack of knowledge and availability of policies may be related to student behaviors, specifically binge drinking. However, there is still debate among researchers on the impact university alcohol and drug use policies have on student behaviors (Wechsler et al., 2002).

Methodology

- Survey administered by email to a random sample of 2,500 currently enrolled MNSU undergraduate students ages 18 to 24 in Nov. 2010 & 2011
- Survey developed by Dr. Roy Kammer, Dr. Miranda Hellenbrand, & Dr. Kari Much, MNSU faculty
- 17 questions - mixture of open ended & Likert-scale questions
- Likert-scale questions were coded on a scale of one to three (e.g. significantly less likely and less likely [1], no effect [2], more likely and significantly more likely [3])
- Data was cleaned, coded, & transferred to SPSS for data analysis
- Frequency tables created & T-Tests run to compare mean scores
- In 2010, 344 valid surveys were received (13.8%) & in 2011, 264 valid surveys were received (10.6%).

Results

Almost half of the respondents in 2010 (49.1%) reported being familiar or highly familiar with the current alcohol and other drug use policy. Over half of the respondents in 2011(59.3%) reported being familiar or highly familiar with the policy.

In 2010, 24.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the policy; whereas, 37.0% of respondents in 2011 agreed or strongly agreed with the policy. Furthermore, 45.5% in 2010 and 39.3% in 2011 indicated they were neutral with the policy. Respondents who reported they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the policy decreased from 30.2% in 2010 to 23.7% in 2011. Continued...

Table 1. Demographics

| Demographic Category | Year Completed Survey | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| | 2010 (N = 344) | 2011 (N = 264) |
| Age | | |
| Age 18-20 | 52.85% | 61.33% |
| Age 21-24 | 47.15% | 38.67% |
| Average Age | 20.41 | 20.18 |
| Classification | | |
| Freshman | 20.06% | 23.19% |
| Sophomore | 21.22% | 28.90% |
| Junior | 27.91% | 20.15% |
| Senior | 25.00% | 25.48% |
| Other | 5.81% | 2.28% |

Figure 1: Agreement by classification

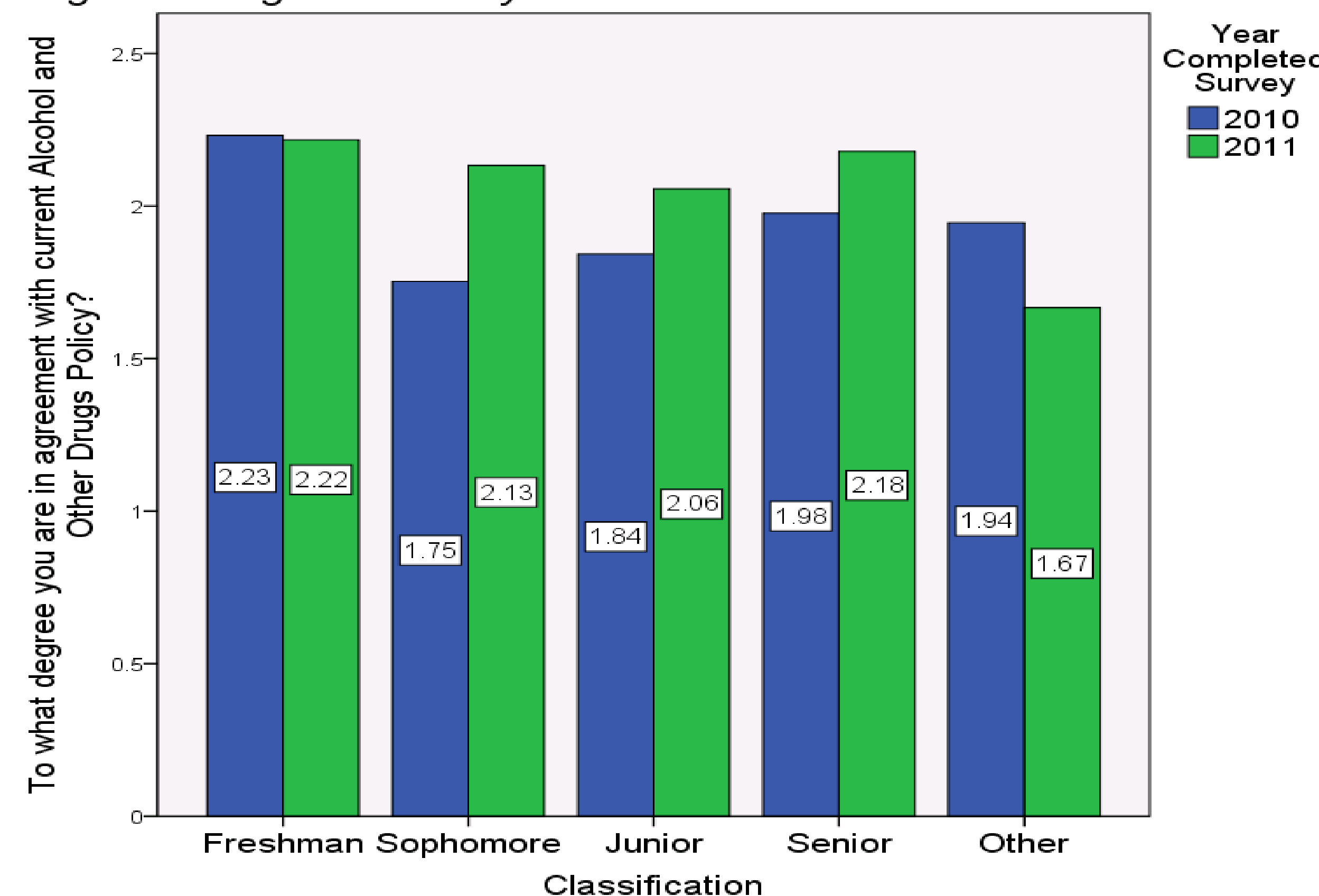


Table 2. Means and p values

| Question | 2010 (M) | 2011 (M) | p |
|--|----------|----------|--------|
| To what degree familiar with the current Alcohol and Other Drugs policy? | 2.22 | 2.45 | 0.00** |
| To what degree in agreement with the current Alcohol and Other Drugs policy? | 1.94 | 2.13 | 0.00** |
| Identify the level of effect this policy is likely to have on your decision to remain a student at MNSU. | 1.94 | 2.05 | 0.01* |
| Identify the level of effect this policy is likely to have on your decision to use alcohol or drugs on-campus. | 1.82 | 1.81 | 0.91 |
| Identify the level of effect this policy is likely to have on your decision to use alcohol or drugs off-campus. | 1.91 | 1.95 | 0.41 |
| Identify the level of effect you believe this policy has on other students' decision to use alcohol or drugs on campus. | 1.78 | 1.91 | 0.03* |
| Identify the level of effect you believe this policy has on other students' decision to use alcohol or drugs off-campus. | 2.05 | 2.06 | 0.74 |
| Identify the number of on-campus citations you received since 07.01.2010 | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.06 |
| Identify the number of off-campus citations you received since 07.01.2010 | 0.06 | 0.09 | 0.33 |
| Identify the number of close friends that received since 07.01.2010 | 0.91 | 0.73 | 0.046* |

* = $p < 0.05$. ** = $p < 0.01$

Results Cont.

Among sophomores, juniors or seniors, those interviewed in 2011 reported a higher degree of agreement with the policy compared to those in 2010. Among freshmen, there was almost no change in the level of agreement with the policy between 2010 and 2011. Although the level of agreement between classifications in 2011 was minimal, respondents in 2010 and 2011 who identified as freshman appeared to agree more with the policy compared to others (see Figure 1).

When asked to rate the level of effect the policy will have on a decision to remain a student at MNSU, a majority of respondents, 69.9% in 2010 and 75.1% in 2011, reported the policy will have no effect on their decision to remain a student.

A significant majority of respondents, 63.4% in 2010 and 63.5% in 2011, reported the policy will have no effect on their decision to use alcohol or drugs on-campus. Even more respondents, 73.8% in 2010 and 75.6% in 2011, indicated the policy would have no effect on their decision to use alcohol or drugs off-campus.

Only 41.6% of respondents in 2010 and 45.0% in 2011 reported the policy would have no effect on other students' decisions to use alcohol or drugs on-campus. In 2010, 56.0% of respondents believed the policy would have no effect on other students' decisions to use alcohol or drugs off-campus, compared to 62.4% in 2011.

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 96.5% in 2010 and 93.5% in 2011, denied receiving an on-campus citation since the policy was enacted on July 1, 2010. Also, a majority of respondents, 93.6% in 2010 and 92.0% in 2011, denied receiving an off-campus citation since the policy was enacted. Over half of the respondents (54.8% in 2010 and 62.0% in 2011) reported no close friends had received a citation.

Limitations

- Small response rate
- Question wording may be confusing to respondents
- Different samples each year
- Limited demographic information

Conclusions

- Students at MNSU are becoming more familiar with policy
 - ✓ May be attributed to the policy being in place for two years and has provided students with the opportunity to become aware of the policy through orientation, email announcements, and word of mouth
- Statistically significant difference in the level of agreement with the policy from 2010 to 2011, with a higher level of agreement for the policy in 2011
 - ✓ Could be a result of students having knowledge of the policy prior to making the decision to attend MNSU
 - ✓ Students' initial intentions to use alcohol or drugs on- and off-campus may impact their level of agreement
- Large majority of students reported the policy will have no effect on their decision to use alcohol or drug on- and off-campus in 2010 and 2011
 - ✓ 10.0% increase in the number of students who reported the policy would have no effect on their decision to use alcohol or drugs off-campus versus on-campus
 - ✓ May be disappointing as some believed the addition of a formal off-campus adjudication clause would deter alcohol and drug use off-campus
- Students perceived the policy would have no effect on a majority of other students' decisions to use alcohol or drugs on- and off-campus.
 - ✓ Over a 6.0% increase in the number of students who reported the policy would have no effect on other students' decisions to use off-campus in 2011
 - ✓ May have occurred due to the appearance of a massive student opposition for the policy as it was being developed and implemented
 - ✓ Research has shown that students perceive the level of support by the rest of the student body much lower than their own – which may be the same for impact on use

References are available from the author upon request.