

University drinking: students' perception on the zero tolerance on alcohol consumption policy at DWU



Divine Word University, Madang, PNG
Photo Credit: Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam

by Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam

27 September 2021

In the [first](#) and [second](#) blogs of this series, I discussed students' views on alcohol consumption and students' drinking behavior; the factors that contribute to students' drinking, and the effects of this drinking. In this last blog, I discuss the students' perceptions on the university's [policy](#) of zero tolerance on alcohol consumption and the university's efforts to address the issue. I also share some practical ways forward.

While my study participants agree that the policy is important to instill discipline and self-control among students, they also deemed the implementation of the policy ineffective, and the penalties to be unfair and unreasonable. Participants define effective implementation as students being caught, taken to the student disciplinary board, and served the penalties as per the policy:

... I don't think the policy is that effective because I've seen students drinking ... this year, I don't think there's a strong upholding of the policy. I don't think the ones under the policy are doing a good job on upholding the policy because I've seen students still drinking ... So, the people upholding the policy should do a more better job in upholding that policy ...

... It's effective to those that they catch but some students get away with it because no one catches them ...

... If students are drinking on campus, they should terminate them instead of the thing they do where sometimes the students get sent for community service at the mess, because they've been doing that so. Some of them are let off with warnings. They need to be more adamant about this policy ...

The participants identified various factors contributing to this lack of effective implementation including: weak security check at main gates; security officers compromising with students to bring in alcohol; no regular checks in dorms by Deans; practices of nepotism and partiality when dealing with intoxicated students; authorities too lenient on students caught drinking; ineffective communication between University and students; students threatening university staff implementing the policy; and, lack of effective use of breathalyzers. They said:

... No. I don't think the policy is effective. Because, even though they have signed these papers that give them authority to terminate students if they are found drinking on campus, they still let students off with warnings. They still let them go by just working in the mess. The fight that we had on Sunday night, the dean came over and he just got all the boys to calm down and sent the boys to their dorms, and that's it. No talks about disciplinary hearing, nothing at all. While the policy guidelines and laws are effective, the people enforcing it are not effective ...

... I think, from one point, some students caught are related to the person who is of interest, like our deans, as his wantoks^[1], then he will try to do whatever he can to protect the interest of the particular students not to be terminated ... The other is because of some threat. Some students used threatening words to the person in authority so, because of his own safety, he will try to make a decision that can go in line with the person who is caught drinking ...

... I don't think the deans are doing a good job. I think that the application of the policy would be effective if they put someone who is strict. Because they give a lot of chances to drunkards ...

Furthermore, participants stressed the need for boundaries between the personal and professional relationships of students and the staff who implement the policy, the Deans and the Rangers^[2].

... I think the people like the sister dean or the dean papa or mama should be really strict. And there should be a certain boundary, of course they can have a good relationship with students, but there has to be certain boundaries where school rules need to be abided to. Not because certain groups of students are wantoks. This is nepotism. There has to be a boundary between the different relationships ...

Overall, participants recognise the need to have such a policy and rules, but think that it is equally important to consider the students as adults, reconsider the penalties applied, and explore other options in addressing alcohol consumption and

related issues. To improve the situation, participants suggested that DWU be strict in implementing the policy, and that staff must practice impartiality in every case, have an open dialogue with students on the policy, and offer mandatory counselling services for students who seem to have a drinking problem.

Participants agreed that the university cannot prevent students from consuming alcohol, but it can control how much, and when and where they consume it. A controversial suggestion made is to allow students to consume alcohol in a controlled environment, with a policy that regulates alcohol consumption on campus. This is an approach taken by [James Cook University](#), as a guideline for alcohol consumption on campus. This would possibly prevent high-risk behaviors among students, and will provide them an opportunity to learn how to drink responsibly.

DWU has a number of activities and intervention programs in place. These include very dynamic and effective sports programs, weekly psycho-educational seminars, student-counseling services, and other extracurricular activities like fun nights, debate competitions and toastmasters, among others. Additionally, as a Christian institution, DWU also encourages students to attend church services.

It is clear from the study that a proper policy on alcohol consumption is lacking. Currently, it stands as a set of rules consisting of brief and general policy statements, with the implementation deemed by students as ineffective. When students are caught drinking, some are terminated or suspended, while others are let off on warnings, given less harsh penalties, and sometimes nothing at all.

The DWU student disciplinary board has a rigorous process in dealing with alcohol consumption cases, however, while some cases are well documented, others are not. The policy needs to be strengthened by creating and implementing proper guidelines to define terms and actions associated with alcohol consumption, and provide descriptions of sanctions for the actions of intoxicated students.

The university should also consider to what extent it should go in implementing this policy and in prohibiting students to consume alcohol. While the policy may act as a deterrence, it can also promote rebellion and restlessness among students. Perhaps with proper dialogue between concerned parties, an agreeable alternative may be reached.

To conclude, this was a small-scale study, involving the perceptions of a very small sample of the student population. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised, but can rather offer some insights into the reality of alcohol consumption among students in a university in PNG, and help institutions develop appropriate regulations for

students' alcohol consumption, and avoid and alleviate related issues in the future.

Notes

[1] A Tok Pisin term that could mean either a relative or people they know, or someone they have strong familial, cultural and/or communal ties with.

[2] DWU security personnel on campus

This is the final blog in a series on [#Student drinking in PNG](#).

Author/s:

Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam

Lorelle Tekopiri Yakam is a Graduate Researcher in the Centre for Social Research at Divine Word University.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/university-students-perception-of-zero-tolerance-alcohol-policy-at-dwu-20210927/>