

Beverage ethics: education for alcohol responsibility

by Carl J. Pfaffenberg

The study looked at the processes in the development of an alcohol responsibility program for post secondary students in the service management major at the University of Tennessee. The program has been certified by the State of Tennessee to satisfy the Alcohol Beverage Commission requirement for server training related to the handling and service of alcoholic beverages. A managerial viewpoint was adopted so as to provide the greatest benefit to service management graduates.

Few local papers report a day's news without some incident related to alcohol consumption. It may be a relatively harmless act of public urination or it may be a tragedy resulting in the death of an innocent third party.¹ Frequently the articles indicate that a minor and/or a college student was a party in the incident.

Fewer than 20 years ago, the ability to consume alcohol was viewed as one of the aspects of manhood. The more one could consume, the better "man" he was.

This virtue is not unique to the United States, as it is emulated in many cultures.² However, since the early 1980s, perceptions about alcohol consumption, if not the activities, have definitely changed.

The founding of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was a major blow to the machismo of drinking.³ Shortly after MADD, Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD) was founded. They have since changed their formal name to Students Against Destructive Decisions.⁴ These organizations made a serious impact on the psyche of the public at large. Simultaneously, an emphasis on health and fitness arose that exacerbated the condemnation of inebriates. It was no longer cool or okay to get drunk, let alone drive while drunk. These groups had an impact on restaurants and drinking establishments. Traditionally, the producers of alcoholic beverages would be primarily concerned with marketing and

sales of products. Now they were promoting tolerance and responsible consumption.⁵

Drinking culture exists

There is an epidemic of alcohol consumption among young people.⁶ However, there is not a public outcry like that of the 1980s. Perhaps it is true that the consumption of alcohol by youth is like living next to a fish cannery; pretty soon you get used to the smell.⁷

The drinking culture truly exists. Nowhere does it exist more vitally than within the Greek community. Virtually every fraternity has a song that glorifies the consumption of alcohol. From the drinking song in the *Student Prince* to the Whiffenpoof song of Yale University and all manner of tunes in between, drinking has been romanticized in the university environment.⁸ As the refrain from the Whiffenpoof song indicates, "We're poor little lambs who have lost our way, Bah, Bah, Bah. We're little black sheep who have gone astray, Bah, Bah, Bah." Today's society knows that someone who abuses alcohol and gets behind the wheel of an automobile is not a "poor little lamb who has lost his way."

The *Princeton Review* surveys 100,000 students at 345 top colleges on many issues, the results of which comprise a number of rankings. In 2002 Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, had the best academics overall. The U.S. Air Force Academy was the best-administered college, and Rice University in Houston offered the "Best

Academic Bang for Your Buck." Lists of the top 20 ranking colleges in these and 60 other categories from financial aid to campus amenities appear in the new 2003 edition of the *Princeton Review's* annual college guidebook. The list that seems to get most publicity is the list of top party schools. In 2002 Indiana University had the top spot. The University of Tennessee was ranked number one in 2001.⁹

About the same time that the *Princeton Review* released its findings, the MADD organization released its survey of the top 25 cities for having alcohol-related deaths. Tennessee placed four cities in the top 25. The study found that the average number of alcohol-related traffic deaths per 100,000 residents from 1995 through 1997 was 6.3 in Knoxville, the 25th highest among the 97 largest cities surveyed. Nashville-Davidson was fourth, with 8.4 deaths per 100,000; Chattanooga, eighth, with 7.9; and Memphis, 12th, with 7.5.¹⁰ Additionally, the MADD report card of states for 2002 indicated that the state of Tennessee received a C- overall for its efforts related to controlling drinking and driving, with a D in the area of controlling minors drinking and driving.¹¹

University develops program

A local distributor of malt beverage products indicated a desire to assist in the education of college students related to responsible alcohol consumption by providing support for the development of an alcohol awareness

program directed at post-secondary students. University of Tennessee instructors would develop such a program with original materials and present it to a class of students enrolled in the service management degree program each semester. The presentation would be updated each semester. The distributor declined any credit or publicity for this altruistic gesture. The University of Tennessee indicated that the program could be adopted in the general student orientation program.

The first objective of the study was to provide a sample of students with a program of alcohol awareness, the intent of which was to educate them to the realities of alcohol consumption personally, and to the responsibilities of alcohol service as managers. The sample was to be service management majors in two programs: Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management, and Retail and Consumer Sciences.

The state of Tennessee requires that anyone serving liquor and/or wine by the drink must have a five-hour training session in the proper handling of alcoholic beverage service. It was felt that the program to be developed could satisfy the state requirement. Additionally, the five-hour program would contain additional information applicable to the management of alcohol service.

The second objective of the study was to have the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission certify the training program to

satisfy the state of Tennessee requirement for alcohol service, which would represent a value added dimension to graduates and potential employers of the service management program.

Certification requires course

It was felt that the first objective could be obtained by establishing learning outcomes and teaching to those outcomes. The faculty of the service management program has many years of practical experience in the management of alcohol service. The second objective related to state certification would prove more daunting. The author found six approved courses that satisfied the server training requirement in the state of Tennessee and attended the training session of one in-state and one out-of-state school to experience what was being presented locally and nationally.

The in-state program was conducted at a local Knoxville restaurant. Nine students took the five-hour session which included a break and examination. It was apparent that the attendees were there because of the state-imposed requirement. After successfully completing the course, the author was certified to serve alcoholic beverages in the state of Tennessee.

The out-of-state program was held in Philadelphia in conjunction with a trade seminar and show supporting the beverage industry. This course was similar in content to the in-state program. The one obvious difference was in the attitude of the attendees. The state of

Pennsylvania does not require server certification. The attendees were present because they wanted to be educated in the specifics of beverage service related to possible abuse. Materials and information presented in the two programs were somewhat similar. The format was primarily lecture with some interaction about experiences.

Upon successful completion of the program the author was certified as having taken this specific alcohol awareness class. After seeing both programs, it was decided that the following objectives for the program would be adopted. The program would do the following:

- build on the experiences of participants
- be grounded in research, supporting the academic standards of higher education
- demonstrate an understanding of the higher education culture
- provide up-to-date publications and other reference materials
- be interactive and dynamic and utilize group problem-solving exercises
- provide academic rigor in the standards used to assess progress

The first objective would be achieved upon completion of the materials and presentation to the students. A course on "Legal Aspects of the Service Industry," a required course in the degree program, was

selected to be the vehicle for the presentation. The second objective would be achieved when students were granted certification by the state.

Two segments presented

It was decided to break the presentation into two major segments. First would be the science of alcohol awareness, including chemical composition, breakdown of alcohol in the body, absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream, the metabolic process, blood alcohol concentration (BAC), and factors that affect BAC all related to the science of alcohol consumption.

The second major segment would be the art of alcohol awareness. Students would look at the visible signs of intoxication, what constitutes acceptable identification, how to check identification, how and when to intervene in alcohol service, documentation of intervention, specific laws related to the state of Tennessee, and the unique circumstances of a university environment that impact the need for awareness.

A real life experience from the local area brings home the point that alcohol abuse can be quite destructive. A real life video was chosen to open the program. In it, a Knoxville police officer crosses the street on foot in a crosswalk. Approximately one third of the way across, the officer is hit by a vehicle then tossed upon the hood of the vehicle, sliding off the hood to the pavement in front of the vehicle. The driver was an 18-year-old

female who had a BAC in excess of .12. She alleged that she received alcohol from a local bar. The criminal and civil outcome of this case is still pending.

Interactive learning was achieved through role playing in the form of what the student would do if confronted with certain situations. A set of six situations was developed that might be encountered in a restaurant/bar operation. Students were assigned to groups to discuss the various options that might be available. A spokesperson was chosen and solutions to the situations were presented to the group.

One of the final items in creating the program was to select a name; the program at the University of Tennessee is titled Beverage Ethics: College Level Education for Alcohol Responsibility, or BE CLEAR.

Class is offered

The first session was presented in two, three-hour segments as part of a course, "Legal Aspects of the Service Industry," scheduled for 3:35 to 6:35 p.m. on concurrent Mondays, November 4 and 11, 2002. Class attendance was the same 45 students for each session. A second session was conducted on February 24 and March 3, 2003, with 30 students.

Both sessions followed the same video and PowerPoint presentation. The instructors were identical and were careful to provide consistent phraseology and presentation for both sessions. At the end of each session atten-

dees completed an examination consisting of 50 multiple choice and true/false questions.

As a result of a post presentation evaluation the instructors were confident that the first objective of the study was accomplished for both groups. The first group, however, did not achieve the second objective of obtaining certification from the state of Tennessee. The BECLEAR program and the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) successfully concluded their agreement about the certification process in early February 2003. The first class to receive certification was the second session in February/March 2003. Therefore the second objective had been accomplished.

Post-secondary education in the United States is considered by many to be the best in the world. A typical four-year program has approximately 40 courses representing a broad spectrum of educational offerings. Approximately 25 percent of the courses represent a general education consisting of English, mathematics, science, humanities, and history. Some argue that the remaining 75 percent allowed for specialization is insufficient. Many seem to feel that a university should concentrate on developing professional curricula that produce so many doctors, lawyers, engineers, chemists, managers, etc. While that goal is laudable, the idea of an educated man is still worth pursuing.

The need to include alcohol education seems to be axiomatic, especially in a program dedicated to

the creation of entry-level managers of restaurant facilities. The power and influence of alcohol on individuals is well documented. Tragic anecdotes appear on a regular basis in academic and public media. Because of the influence of alcohol on society, it would seem that educators, alcohol producers, and sales outlets need to take the lead in educating college level students to the realities of alcohol beverage service. The knowledge should not be limited to service management graduates.

References

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¹¹ www.saddonline.com

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