



Watering Down at Clark

By Jonathan Messinger

Whenever a new “crisis” on campus and the community arises, the student and professional press are always quick to cover it. Opinions are given defiantly, logic is blurred religiously, and as always committees, not heroes, emerge. Such is the case with the recent college drinking debate. With the coverage it’s been getting in the local media, as well as the opinions page of *The Scarlet*, you would think that this was a serious issue that must at once be addressed. Welcome to Worcester. Welcome to our latest invention.

It’s hard sometimes. I have wanted to write about this topic ever since I saw an editorial in *The Scarlet* a few weeks ago that claimed if Grind Central started serving beer again, Clark would be taking a step towards addressing the problem of underage drinking. The quote actually appeared as follows, “By not serving beer [in Grind Central], Clark University is doing absolutely nothing to

curb alcohol abuse and underage drinking. What Clark is doing is sending students out into the community to abuse alcohol and drink underage,” (2/5/98).

I kept praying that this was satire, and that eventually I wouldn’t be able to control my laughter.

In fact, I still hope it was satire, and that I am making a fool out of myself by treating this quote as sincere. I couldn’t believe that the editorial board of our student newspaper all agreed that serving beer in Grind Central was something the University not only could, but should do to curb the abuse of alcohol.

When I mentioned this to a few people, I was sat down and explained to that it does make sense, because there would be a limit placed upon the number of drinks served to a student in one



That’s not his hand.

night. So effectively, Clark would be serving a number of drinks to its patrons; then once they were cut-off, those who wanted to abuse alcohol still very well could do so at a local bar or off-campus party (assuming that is what is meant by community). Thus “what Clark is doing is sending students out into the community to abuse alcohol” already with a few drinks in them. I won’t say anything concerning the mark that it would curb underage drinking. I don’t understand.

Soon after the editorial in *The Scarlet*, articles appeared both in

Worcester Magazine and *The Worcester Phoenix*, (I don't mean to imply a causal relationship between the editorial and the articles, this is just how it happened chronologically). There is now a 19-member committee whose purpose is to survey the state of college drinking, and report back to the another committee, the License Commission, who will then probably form another committee to analyze the results and brainstorm a solution. *The Worcester Phoenix* reports, "Worcester is in the midst of a furor over college drinking," and it doesn't stop in the city. Opinions have surfaced in recent *Scarlets* addressing this recent "furor" and the backlash seems well-founded but ill-executed.

If you haven't been watching this "crisis" too closely, here is the argument stated from both sides:

The committees, etc.: *Underage and "binge" drinking is plaguing the area campuses. We can't stop everyone, but we're going to try, darn it!*

The students: *You can't stop us, so shut up.*

Like I said, it's hard sometimes. I've wanted to write about this for a long time, and in fact have written a number of different versions of this article, simply because I couldn't put my finger on what it was I wanted to say about it. You would think that the drinking issue would be something very easy to pick a side on and then write about. The question is though,

what do you do when you don't agree with either side? And furthermore, how do you write upon something that has been argued so fervently, when you come to the realization that you hold no opinion on the matter remotely comparing in intensity? What does one say in such a situation?

"Stop it," I say. "It simply isn't that big of a deal." It seems the commissions and committees all admit that they can't stop students from drinking, and students insist defiantly that this is true. So what this leaves us with are sanctimonious committees improving their public image and students fighting for a cause that doesn't exist. Both sides are right, both sides are wrong, so neither is making any headway.

It seems to me that this is a case where the old system works the best for all. That is, the system that has been in existence at Clark all year. Students drink whenever they want, so long as it doesn't affect others. Once it begins to affect others, in such cases as loud and large off-campus parties, or loud and sometimes destructive dorm parties, Campus Police shows up and ends it. I see no better solution.

The greatest health risks concerning alcohol do not seem to be alcohol poisoning (most people learn their tolerance in high school, or very quickly in college) but rather what occurs *between* drunks. Fights, sexual assault and the like are perhaps of greatest concern, especially considering recent altercations

between students and non-students. Large groups of drunks can be extremely dangerous at times, and I can't imagine why people wouldn't expect Campus Police to disperse a drunken crowd.

Drinking on college campuses is nothing new, and it certainly is not something that hasn't stirred controversy before. With the recent deaths of students at UMass-Amherst, MIT, and locally at Holy Cross (all alcohol related), Worcester is up in arms over the state of college drinking. What no one seems to realize is that the further the argument progresses, the more fuel they are adding to a false fire.

Committees press on, students speak more brazenly about their drinking habits, so committees press harder, so students become more upset and speak even more brazenly about their drinking habits... until it goes beyond absurd. Add into the equation the local media's fervent coverage, tarnishing both the committee's and the students' images, and we have ourselves a crisis.

Lost in all of this is the fact that a good number of students drink responsibly, or don't drink at all. Apparently people like crises so much, they find it necessary to create them whenever possible. And while everyone involved is busy shooting at ghosts, money is being spent and students continue to drink. Well, at least it gives folks something to chat about over a couple of beers. •