TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL AND STUDY ABROAD

Studying off-campus is an amazing opportunity to learn about the world. Research indicates that studying abroad promotes enhanced global perspectives, cross-cultural competencies, and increased self-confidence. However, research also indicates that students who study off-campus (especially internationally) are at risk for problematic drinking. With lower drinking age limits and increased independence, many student increase their alcohol consumption. Studies have found that students over 21 report they doubled how much they drank while they were away; students younger than 21 report they nearly tripled their drinking while abroad. In addition, studies have found that the consequences of drinking excessively while abroad include being more vulnerable to theft, unprotected sex/sexual assault, sickness, physical injury, accidents and injuries as well as poor decision making.

Before leaving on an off-campus interim or semester, Calvin College invites students and faculty to talk about alcohol consumption, focusing on the questions:

- How can we understand the cultural context for alcohol consumption in the places where we will be studying?
- How can we make sure we all understand and agree to alcohol expectations on our specific off-campus experience?
- How do we take care of each other while we travl and learn together off-campus? How can we hold each other accountable to what we have agreed to?
- How do we encourage responsible use of alcohol during our time off-campus? In what circumstances do we or don’t we engage in alcohol consumption? How can we be supportive of responsible individual preferences related to alcohol consumption?

CALVIN POLICY

Calvin College’s student conduct code allows for responsible drinking (off-campus) if students are legally allowed to drink in the host country and if drinking is permitted within the context of the specific course or experience.

The decision to allow or not allow drinking during your off-campus experience is the decision of the instructor(s) and can be based on a number of different factors, including cultural context, dynamics of the group, safety, and situational specific dynamics.

Illegal, irresponsible drinking and/or misbehaving while drinking are violations of the college’s student conduct code. The Off-Campus Programs Office (in consultation with the Faculty director and Student Life) reserves the right to respond to situations involving misuse of alcohol and/or drugs on off-campus programs by sending the student home at his/her own expense.

PARTNERSHIP: THE BOTTOM LINE

Remember that we want everyone to have a fantastic experience studying off-campus. For this to happen, we need your help as partners. As a part of this partnership, think carefully about your personal rules for responsible consumption of alcohol. Talk with your group and instructor(s) about how the group will handle alcohol and how the group will support each other in adhering to group expectations. Lastly, be accountable to each other.
INSTRUCTORS
Prior to departure

- Identify the host country’s laws and standards of acceptable conduct related to alcohol. Take some time to understand the culture of alcohol in countries where the group will be traveling. Determine how best to share this information with students?

- Develop a written alcohol policy for your interim or semester. When possible, engage students in this process.

- Share a copy of this policy with students to ensure everyone understands the rationale of the policy before they commit to the program. Use this policy as a part of the terms & condition sheet that students sign.

- When possible, discuss with students how you will enforce the policy. Try to develop a implementation policy that everyone can support.

- Make sure students understand the consequences of violating the policy during their off-campus experience.

INSTRUCTORS
During the Experience

- Pay attention to the dynamics of the group; be intentional about helping the group be inclusive.

- Be involved in the life of the group, outside the classroom; take time to get to know students individually.

- Be approachable for students and encourage them to come to you if they experience problems with groups.

- If problems develop, use your resources back on campus (e.g. Off-Campus Programs Office, Student Life, etc.).

STUDENTS
Prior to departure

- Review the academic and program expectations that you signed as a part of your application process with your professor. How might these expectations be adapted for your interim/semester?

- Think about who you want to be when nobody is looking... Make your own decisions about alcohol, if you are allowed to drink. What limits will you set for yourself regarding alcohol?

- Make sure you understand and can commit to the alcohol policies of your interim or semester. Everyone should commit to these expectations prior to departure.

- Understand the interaction of any prescription drugs you may be taking with alcohol.

STUDENTS
During the Experience

- Be accountable to and for each other. If drinking is permitted, make sure to take care of each other. Discuss what this care for each other might look like.

- Discuss how you can hold each other accountable to make good decisions related to alcohol and other aspects of the experience.

- Don’t enable or encourage others to drink excessively; remember that such complicity is violating the Calvin student conduct code.

- Don’t let others talk you into things you do not want to do. Avoid hard liquors, as drinks may be mixed more strongly than you are used to. Order your own drinks, and if possible watch them being made. Don’t accept drinks from strangers.

- Be watchful for signs that alcohol is impacting an individual or the group’s overall experience (see list on this sheet). How can the group discuss "hard issues” before they derail a course?

- If something happens, reach out for help immediately with your faculty leaders, get emergency care quickly in order to assure the affected individuals are well taken care of in the moment. The person (or persons) making the call will not be subject to disciplinary action.

ALCOHOL USE

Calvin College expects that where alcohol is permitted that it will always be used in moderation. Specific examples of excessive alcohol use include:

- Missing any scheduled event because of the effects of alcohol;
- Becoming ill due to the effects of alcohol;
- Becoming intoxicated, e.g. such that one cannot walk unassisted;
- Engaging in destructive behavior toward property;
- Not abiding by the laws of the country in which he or she is studying;
- Engaging in behavior that causes embarrassment to the other members of the group, the program leader(s), or the in-country host(s);
- Physically injuring him or herself;
- Engaging in behavior that causes others concern for the safety of the individual or the group.

RESOURCES

- Alcohol abroad: A student’s perspective, from the University of Marquette: https://vimeo.com/32281703
- The interaction between prescription drugs and alcohol, National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism: https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Medicine/Harmful_Interactions.pdf