

We all fell short

By Editorial Board | IDS | August 25, 2013

Indiana University ranks consistently high on lists of “top party schools,” and most freshmen who come here are at least somewhat familiar with that reputation.

The pressure to participate in party culture is there even before we set foot on campus.

Hearing upperclassmen’s stories about stealing cases of beer from parties and waking up for class still drunk realizes a college culture incoming students have come to expect. Cultural narratives surrounding the college years imply that this is the time for experimentation. College campuses act as satellites for Las Vegas: What happens here, we think, stays here.

IU students should party. Learning how to balance our social and professional lives is a skill that IU teaches quite well.

What we don’t learn quite as well is how to party responsibly.

The state of Indiana is to blame. The University is to blame. This publication is to blame. And in many cases, parents aren’t without blame.

Last year the Indiana statehouse passed a law called the Indiana Lifeline Law, which protects young people who are trying to get medical help for a friend from being prosecuted for underage drinking. Too little is being done to promote the existence of this law.

With its current exposure, underage drinkers might remember something called “Lifeline” exists while sober, but if they find themselves in a dangerous situation while intoxicated, this information is unlikely to pop into their hazy consciousness.

The Indiana Lifeline Law also needs to be revised to include exemptions for drug possession charges. Without this measure, students will continue to fear the help they desperately need.

The state of Indiana has an obligation to its citizens to make the contents of this law common knowledge. IU shares in that obligation.

Forcing every incoming student to take an Alcohol.edu class is almost the least IU can do. Students glide through the program so quickly it’s degraded to a well-meaning afterthought. Like cramming for a test, the information stays with us just long enough to pass.

A new program spanning several weeks that requires in-person attendance would result in students remembering lessons about safe drinking. An instructor could meet privately with everyone to talk about personal habits and how to make them safer.

To its credit, IU has tried to encourage good habits, especially through social media with well-timed tweets and posts. Unfortunately, its “Street Smart” ad campaign featuring plastic “party animals” talks down to the college students it is trying to engage. There’s a reason very few movies featuring a talking animal achieve anything higher than a “PG” rating.

The IDS has an obligation to keep students informed as well. Up to this point, we have failed in this regard. Both our international student and new student guides failed to mention the Lifeline legislation. Neither the law nor safe partying tips were included in our Welcome Week coverage. From now on we will strive to fulfill our mission to adequately inform our public.

Finally, parents should freely talk to students about their alcohol use. Often, stigmatizing something as forbidden drives young people to the very behavior being warned against. Clandestine, hazardous drinking behavior is much harder to confront than risky behavior that’s common knowledge.

Of course, students need to carefully consider how they are drinking and who they’re drinking with. But it is up to our state, school, parents and publication to give students the tools to have a

good time and come home safe at the end of the night.

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