

August 24, 2007

To the Earlham Community:

Earlham College's Approach to Alcohol

Earlham is an educational community grounded in respect for all persons. We expect those who are members of this community to act with integrity and responsibility towards others. "Principles and Practices of the Earlham College Community" is our most important and most general statement of our aspirations.

This approach to living in community leads Earlham to take an unusual approach to alcohol that we want all in the community to be sure they understand. Simply stated, we ask that no one drink alcohol on our campus or in conjunction with Earlham sponsored events where students are present. This is an expectation we have of all students, faculty and staff, whatever choices people make away from the college.

The responsibility to uphold and communicate this expectation not to drink alcohol on our campus or in conjunction with Earlham sponsored events falls upon every member of the community. As Principles and Practices says, "we strive to take responsibility for our actions and decisions, and to hold each other mutually responsible for living in accordance with our principles and community agreements."

The expectation to be an alcohol-free campus is an expectation we have chosen as a college for ourselves, not one imposed upon us by others. It is not an expectation for some to take seriously and others not. That some students may occasionally fail to live up to this expectation is no indication that the college fails to be clear about what we expect.

Why do we take this approach?

The most important reason we take this approach has to do with the quality of life within the College community. Our mission is an educational one, and alcohol use does not improve teaching or learning. We want all of us to bring our whole, best selves to the educational endeavor.

A second important reason is that we know from considerable and painful experience that alcohol use (and especially alcohol abuse) can lead to destructive and harmful behavior. Earlham is generally a safe community for those who live and work here. But when there are instances of vandalism, or sexual assault or use of physical violence, we often find that the students in question have been drinking alcohol.

A third reason: the large majority of our undergraduate students are below the legal drinking age while they live in residence at the college. We aim to be one community, with all able to participate in the same activities on campus.

Nor do we take disregard of the law lightly. "Principles and Practices" asks us all to live with integrity, to "undertake all our commitments and responsibilities in good faith." That includes responsibilities we have to obey the law.

How do we uphold this expectation?

Our primary approach to alcohol use on our campus is educational. We want students to understand well the consequences of alcohol use for oneself and for those with whom one interacts. We are committed to providing alcohol education for all our students.

We treat cases of self-destructive abuse of alcohol as health matters, requiring counseling and/or medical intervention. The college will direct those who persistently abuse alcohol to treatment programs to help them overcome their problem.

Earlham will never tolerate behavior that is disrespectful or harmful to others, whether or not alcohol is involved. We have a judicial process for dealing with students who engage in such behavior. This judicial process is always intended to be educational in purpose, but may lead to students being suspended or expelled from the college. In these judicial proceedings, being under the influence of alcohol will never be taken as a mitigating circumstance for disrespectful or harmful behavior.

Those who persistently bring alcohol onto our campus in the face our expectation may also be subject to our judicial process. Such persistent disregard of our community expectations may be taken as evidence that such a student is not making the commitments of living in community that we expect of all at Earlham.

We expect students to hold each other mutually responsible for living in accordance with our principles and community agreements, including our approach to alcohol. That mutual responsibility is best exercised by speaking directly to another student (especially a friend) who is disregarding our policy. The importance of addressing the situation rises if the other person is doing harm to himself or others. In particularly difficult situations, a student may want to seek assistance from others in confronting a student disregarding our policy.

Should members of the college faculty or staff encounter a student on campus with alcohol, we expect them to ask the student to pour out the alcohol, and also to report such instances of alcohol use on campus to the Dean of Student Development.

Sincerely yours,

Deborah McNish, Dean of Student Development
Nelson Bingham, Provost
Douglas Bennett, President