Introduction

The abuse of alcohol has resulted in many problematic and in some cases deadly events for Universities around the country. Although a recent study found that the majority of UC Davis students avoid the unsafe use of alcohol, last year David Thornton, a UC Davis junior died from alcohol poisoning on his 21st birthday. His death underscores the dangers of alcohol abuse.

In an effort to empower students with information and thus prevent additional alcohol related injuries and deaths, the University of California, Davis distributes an electronic birthday card (referred to as the David Thornton e-card) to students who are turning 21 years of age. This e-card, which includes a precautionary notice regarding the danger of abusing of alcohol, is disseminated approximately one week prior to the 21st birthday.

The centerpiece of the e-card is a photo of the late David Thornton and a statement indicating that his untimely death, which occurred on his 21st birthday, was due to alcohol poisoning. This e-card also emphasizes the importance of consuming alcohol responsibly by those who choose to drink. Furthermore it provides a link to a website, sponsored by the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Program (CADAPP), where students can access detailed information on alcohol safety.
Program Goals

The main objective of this program is to encourage students to refrain from the unsafe consumption of alcohol. To this aim, an overt reminder to be safe is conveyed and students are provided with information on alcohol safety and abuse.

During the fall 2000 quarter, the David Thornton e-card was electronically mailed to over 1400 students. To gauge their opinions regarding the e-card and assess whether the program is achieving its’ goals, Student Affairs Research & Information (SARI) constructed and electronically mailed a questionnaire to a sample of 270 of the aforementioned students: 27% of those contacted responded. The survey results and questionnaire are presented below:

Findings

- Most respondents (92%) recall receiving the David Thornton e-card prior to their 21st birthday; in addition, many (57%) heard other students make mention of the e-card.

- When asked how they felt about the University’s message to celebrate responsibly, over half respond approvingly. As shown, 24% appreciate the message very much and another 27% appreciate it somewhat. Conversely, a small proportion of students (3%) do not appreciate the content of the e-card and some (12%) even find it intrusive. Thirty percent are indifferent and selected neutral. *(See Figure 1)*

- Undoubtedly the David Thornton e-card is promoting dialogue among a number of students. As indicated, 57% of respondents heard others mention receiving the e-card and another 50% discussed it with friends or relative. *(See Figure 2)*

- There is no substantive information on alcohol safety or alcohol poisoning presented on the actual e-card and none of the respondents to the questionnaire referred to the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Program’s website in pursuit of this material. Foreseeably, very few students (7%) report learning new information about alcohol poisoning as a consequence of receiving the David Thornton e-card. *(See Figure 2)*

- Most students do not report a significant change in behavior as an outcome of receiving the David Thornton e-card. Few (15%) consumed alcohol in a more responsible manner or drank less than they would have otherwise (7%) and many (65%) report that their birthday celebrations did include alcohol. Notwithstanding these results, it’s important to acknowledge that the goal of this program is not to curtail drinking as a whole, rather to discourage unsafe practices. Additionally, due to their conscientious and limited consumption of alcohol, many respondents allege that they have no cause for alcohol-related behavioral changes. *(See Figure 2)*

- Most students support the David Thornton e-card program. Overall, 84% of respondents think that UC Davis should continue sending the e-card to students who are turning 21 years old and most (50%) appreciate its message. Even a majority (88%) of those who feel indifferent or neutral about the e-card’s message support the continuation of the program. All of those who find the e-card intrusive would like for UC Davis to discontinue the program. *(See Figure 3)*
Recommendation

Display Alcohol & Safety Facts Directly on E-card
To reach those students who are not going to take advantage of the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Program’s website, which in this study was a majority of respondents, safety-tips and other particulars relating to alcohol precaution and poisoning should appear directly on the e-card.

Find an Alternate Image for E-card & Delete the Picture of David Thornton
Consider displaying something other than the image of David Thornton on the e-card. Although some found this depiction acceptable because of its utilitarian feature, many found it disturbing and even exploitative. Moreover, as time proceeds, fewer students will be familiar with this tragic incident so the impact of this image will lessen.

Emphasize the Safety Theme Rather Than the Death of David Thornton
Some feel as though the University is employing a parental scare tactic to stop them from drinking rather than stating the truth -- most UC Davis students do not binge drink, but for those who do the consequences can be deadly. As one respondent stated it would be more honest and effective to simply state Happy Birthday -- We want to remind you to celebrate responsibly on your 21st birthday, rather than to show the picture of a dead guy.

Charts

Figure 1: Student Reaction to the David Thornton E-card
Figure 2: As a result of the David Thornton E-card, Did you:

- Discussed the e-card with friends or relatives: 50%
- Consumed alcohol in a more responsible manner: 15%
- Thought about the card's message while celebrating birthday: 11%
- Drank less than would have otherwise: 7%
- Learned new information about alcohol poisoning: 7%

Figure 3: Should UC Davis Continue Sending the David Thornton E-card

- Appreciated: 100%
- Neutral: 20%
- Did not Appreciate: 0%
Survey Results

Celebrate Your 21st Birthday Responsibly

1. Prior to your 21st birthday, did you receive an e-card from the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Program (CADAPP) encouraging you to celebrate your birthday responsibly?
   (If you don’t remember the card see: http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/ecard/ecard.html )
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>93%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>07%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Have you heard other students mention receiving this e-card?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>57%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. How did you feel about receiving the University’s message to celebrate responsibly?
   
   | Appreciated it very much | 24% |
   | Appreciated it somewhat  | 26% |
   | Neutral                  | 35% |
   | Did not appreciate it    | 03% |
   | Felt it was intrusive    | 12% |

4. As a result of the e-card, did you go to the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Program’s (CADAPP) website to read any of the alcohol related literature?
   
   | No | 100% |

5. How would you rate the information on alcohol consumption/abuse presented at the Campus Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention Program’s website?
   
   Not Applicable
   
   o Very useful
   o Somewhat useful
   o Neutral
   o Not particularly useful
   o Not at all useful

6. As a result of the e-card,
   o Fifty percent discussed the card/information with your friends or relatives.
   o Seven percent learned new information about alcohol poisoning.
   o Eleven percent thought about the card’s message during their birthday celebrations.
   o Fifteen percent consumed alcohol in a more responsible manner at their celebrations.
   o Seven percent drank less alcohol than they would have otherwise.

7. Should the University continue to send the e-card to students who are turning 21 years of age?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>84%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16%</td>
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8. Did you celebrate your 21st birthday with alcohol?
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>66%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34%</td>
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