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**Exploring the Effects of Environmental Factors, Policy, and Enforcement on Student  
Alcohol Use at the University of Mississippi**

by  
**William Curtis McGehee**

**A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial  
fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.**

**Oxford  
May 2011**

**Approved by  
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Ubiquitous references to alcohol culture exist all around the University of Mississippi. Ole Miss has held a top five ranking in Princeton Review's annual party school ranking since 2006 (Rockler-Gladen 2008). Popular T-shirts sold on the Oxford Square read, "Oxford, a drinking town with a football problem." Wristbands given to patrons at a local bar notorious for underage drinking feature the phrase, "drinking heavy, at the Levee." During football game days, the smell of whiskey permeates the air of the Grove, Ole Miss' widely renowned tailgating space. Even "Hotty Toddy", the school's cheer, which fans of all ages shout emphatically during football games at Vault-Hemmingway stadium, shares its name with an alcoholic beverage.

College alcohol culture in Oxford is most palpable at the downtown Square on a Thursday or Friday night during the school year. The downtown area houses approximately 20 bars that serve a town of less than 20,000 people. From 10 pm until 1 am, most business transactions taking place downtown involve alcohol, as the Square teems with thousands of college students, mostly speaking in animated slurs and staggering in and out of the various drinking establishments. Even a snowstorm that shut down the City of Oxford for two days couldn't slow down alcohol culture at the Square. The crowds at bars resembled a Thursday or Friday night on a Wednesday, despite the fact that roads to the Square were almost impassable, caked with thick layers of ice and snow. In many social circles drinking alcohol is the norm in Oxford. But despite jovial attitudes at the Square and in the

Grove concerning alcohol consumption, Oxford has witnessed several tragedies involving alcohol including three major alcohol-related incidents in the past decade.

### **Oxford Alcohol Tragedies**

In 2003, Laura Treppendahl died following a collision with a drunk driver. The underage driver had a blood alcohol content of .23, nearly four times the limit for a twenty-one year old driver (Kanengiser 2003). As a result of the incident, the University of Mississippi and the City of Oxford formed an alcohol task force to investigate underage drinking. Oxford launched a plan that increased enforcement of underage drinking, multiplied sobriety checkpoints on city roads, and initiated an advertising campaign promoting awareness of drinking and driving. Due to pressure from police and local leaders, bars began to crack down on students using fake IDs and started to separate underage patrons from those of the legal drinking age to help monitor underage drinking. Also, the city of Oxford heightened the fine for minor in possession (MIP) from 237 dollars to 582 dollars, thus making underage drinking in Oxford potentially very expensive (Jurney 2004). But these efforts would not stop future alcohol related tragedies.

During an Ole Miss football game in 2004, a car struck University of Mississippi student Amy Ewing while she was crossing Highway 6. Ewing died shortly after the incident. Reports note that both Ewing and Dustin Dill, the driver, had blood alcohol limits exceeding the legal limit. Once again student alcohol use was propelled to the forefront of the public's awareness. However, many attribute

the accident to the City of Oxford's decision to allow the parking of cars on the shoulders of Highway 6 during football games. In fact, during the case involving Dill's charge of driving under the influence (DUI) causing death, Dill's defense team used this point to help influence a verdict of not guilty (Castens 2006). After Ewing's death and possibly as a result of the numerous factors present in the tragedy, City and University alcohol policies experienced little change.

Then in 2006, the horrific climax of alcohol related deaths in Oxford occurred. Early in the morning on October 21<sup>st</sup>, police officers pulled over Daniel Cummings for travelling 40 miles per hour through the University's 18 MPH speed zone (Associated Press 2008b). Michelle Thompson asked Cummings to step out of his vehicle and the officer began questioning him, but when Thompson asked for Cummings' license and registration he jumped back into his truck and attempted to flee. Then, Thompson's partner, Robert Langley, raced towards the vehicle and grasped onto the opened drivers side window of the moving truck. But, Cummings continued to speed forward as Langley held onto the vehicle, and Langley's body drug against the concrete for about 200 yards before he lost his grip on the truck and fell to the ground. Langley died hours later in the hospital. Reports show that cocaine and marijuana were found in Cummings' bloodstream after the incident (TTH 2007). Some members of the community believe the combination of cocaine use and Langley's decision to attempt to forcibly stop Cummings from fleeing might have played more of a factor in the accident than alcohol consumption.

Nevertheless, the accident and the media coverage that followed prompted the University administration to rework the school's alcohol policy.

The University of Mississippi's new alcohol policy serves as the focus of this thesis. This work will explore the effects and implications of the alcohol policy's restrictive approach to student drinking and the University's reputation as a party school. In addition, this work will consider alternative approaches to reducing student binge drinking. By reflecting on the presence and effect of environmental factors associated with heavy student drinking at the University of Mississippi, I intend to discover different and more effective ways to curb binge drinking. But in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the alcohol policy, the policy and the factors affecting the formation of the policy must be defined.

I will use autoethnographic, personal observations to describe student alcohol culture at Ole Miss, enforcement and consequences of the alcohol policy, and the presence and effects of environmental factors associated with binge drinking at colleges. The researcher is the primary participant in social research in autoethnographic research and he or she recounts life experiences gained from the direct observation of behavior to unearth local beliefs and record life history (see Bochner and Ellis 1996). Over the course of my college experience, I have witnessed many different situations involving binge drinking with various types of students including Ole Miss Hall of Fame inductees and college drop outs, international studies majors and marketing majors, Greek students and non Greek students,

sports fanatics and non sports fans, in-state students and out-of-state students, and white students and minority students. Due to these various experiences with people across the University's social spectrum, I have observed instances of student alcohol culture that represent a broad array of students' experiences with alcohol instead of the experiences limited to a narrow group of students.

Furthermore, in Chapter 2, I evaluate the presence of factors associated with binge drinking defined in studies related to The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study, a comprehensive survey of students about drinking habits at 120 different colleges and universities. The factors identified as affecting student drinking divide into two subcategories, college factors and community factors and I used existing data to evaluate the presence of each of the factors. For college factors, I found statistics for the University of Mississippi through the Common Data Set on the University website and through the Department of Education website. Then for community factors, I relied on the State Code of Mississippi, Oxford Code of Ordinances, and the Mississippi Department of Revenue to determine the presence of community factors that affect student drinking rates. I also used autoethnographic observations and newspaper articles to supplement this data. Studies related to The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study provided national averages for each of the factors.

Then in Chapter 3, I compare the presence of factors associated with binge drinking at the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia. Once again, I

obtained information regarding the presence of these concepts through existing data. For the University of Georgia, I obtained statistics for college factors from the University of Georgia Fact Book available on the University's website and through the Department of Education website. For community factors, I used the same resources for the University of Georgia, the State Code of Georgia, Athens Code of Ordinances, and Georgia Department of Revenue, to obtain information regarding community factors present at the University. Once again, I relied on newspaper articles to supplement this data. Then in the final chapter, I summarize my findings, present possible obstacles to forming an effective policy, make recommendations for future alcohol policies, and discuss the limitations of my study.

### **The Formation of a New Policy**

Ten days after Robert Langley's death, the University enacted a new alcohol policy. The University administration modeled the new Two-Strike policy after the alcohol policy at the University of Georgia, which was created in 2006 (Hutter 2010). The Two-Strike policy states that the University issues a strike to any student who violates the school's alcohol or drug policy. Campus violations include underage alcohol consumption or possession, driving under the influence, public drunkenness, distribution of alcohol without a permit, consuming beer or light wine in areas of campus outside the City of Oxford, and engaging in drinking games or rapid consumption techniques, like shots and funnels. The policy also mandates that University officials can confiscate unattended alcohol and bars items used for common distribution of alcohol (kegs) from campus. Students who obtain a first

strike receive minimum sanctions of two full semesters probation, community service, and required participation in an alcohol and drug education program. If a student acquires a second strike while on probation, then the University suspends the student for at least one semester as a minimum. The University reserves the right to apply more sanctions to an alcohol violation, but this rarely occurs. Also, the University can count off-campus conduct, especially drug charges and driving under the influence violations, as a strike against a student (The University of Mississippi 2007).

After three deaths in as many years in which alcohol was a major or contributing factor, the University became understandably concerned with alcohol's effect on students' safety. The Two-Strike policy and the University Police Department's enforcement of the University's policy on alcohol provided a visible reminder of the consequences of campus alcohol policy violations. Since 2006, the University has issued strikes to approximately 1,300 different students and twenty-five students have faced suspension (Wallace 2011). As a student during one of the first semesters of the Two-Strike policy, I observed that the policy visibly deterred some members of my freshman class from underage drinking both on campus and in town due to the possibility of a charge in Oxford counting as a strike. But the alcohol policy's prohibition of beer and light wine on campus outside of the city limits of Oxford does not seem to promote safe alcohol use among students.

However, Lafayette County law prohibits the consumption of beer and light wine, and areas of campus outside of the city limits of Oxford must follow Lafayette County law. To clarify, the buildings East of Gertrude Boulevard, such as the Ford Center, Swayze Field, and the Mary Buie museum, lie within the city limits of Oxford and thus allow the consumption of beer and wine. Yet Lafayette County encompasses a great majority of campus including many areas of frequent alcohol consumption such as residence halls, fraternity row, Vault-Hemmingway Stadium and the Grove. Prohibiting beer and light wine in these areas and across is questionable and possibly even dangerous. Common sense conveys that liquor, 1.25 ounces per serving, consumption can occur much more hastily than beer, 12 ounces per serving, and wine, around 4 ounces per serving. And from personal observation, college students don't carefully measure out 1.25 ounces of liquor for their mixed drink, rather half and half (half liquor and half mixer) drinks in 16-ounce proportions serve as the average student's definition of a mixed drink.

Also, Lafayette County's prohibition against beer and wine, Oxford's law against the sale of cold beer (more in depth discussion on both issues to come later), and the added enforcement of underage drinking on campus made liquor the drink of choice in residence halls. The difference in size between a fifth of liquor and a case of beer makes liquor especially easy to sneak past the resident hall assistants in a backpack or a laundry basket. Secondly, even if a student succeeded in sneaking beer up to her or his dorm room, the beer would take several hours of refrigeration to become cold enough to enjoy due to Oxford's law against selling cold beer. Also,

drinking liquor only leaves one bottle to dispose of whereas beer produces exponentially more. So, police enforcement and the prohibition against beer and light wine on portions of campus outside the city limits of Oxford created an unintended consequence. Students started drinking more liquor and often at a pace of two servings or more per drink.

### **College Drinking in the US**

The alcohol related tragedies and the creation of new alcohol policies reveals the presence of an alcohol culture at Ole Miss, but colleges across the nation confront many of the same alcohol related problems as the University of Mississippi. According to a report published by O'Malley and Johnston, 65% to 70% of all college students drink and 40% to 44 % of college students binge drink, consuming 5 or more drinks on an occasion for a male or 4 or more drinks on an occasion for a female (Walters 2006: 2). Despite the fact that this particular definition of binge drinking includes many students who do not incur alcohol-related problems, alcohol abuse experts set a relatively low threshold for binge drinking because students who have consumed 4 or 5 alcoholic beverages are subject to a greater likelihood of injury and traffic accidents. The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) reviewed a study of binge drinking at 120 different colleges and universities and found that binge-drinking rates differ from 1% to 76% of the student body at the institutions studied (Wechsler and Nelson 2008: 1).

AlcoholEdu, an educational program required for incoming students at the University of Mississippi, includes a binge drinking survey that allows some insight

to the binge drinking rate at the University of Mississippi. Before the fall semester of 2010, 30% of incoming students, defined as freshmen and transfer students, engaged in binge drinking at the University of Mississippi. A follow up survey given midway through the fall semester showed 36% of these incoming students reported binge drinking. According to national data from AlcoholEdu, the average binge drinking rate among freshmen midway through the fall semester was 31%. Binge drinking data for returning students at the University of Mississippi is unavailable (Outside The Classroom 2011).

Interestingly, college students drink at a greater rate than their non-college bound peers, despite drinking less while in high school (Walters 2006: 4). Several different factors might influence college students to drink heavily. *Changing the Culture of College Drinking*, a book focused on preventative measures to curb binge drinking among college students, discusses the effect movies like *Animal House* and television shows on MTV have on teaching individuals that college and abusive drinking go hand in hand (Lederman and Stewart 2005: 4). Clearly, the authors were more aware of alcohol related influences from the late '70s through the '90s, but pop culture still reinforces the notion of binge drinking at college and perhaps at a greater level than ever before.

My generation grew up watching television shows like *The OC*, a show that opened with a high school party at a beach house featuring widespread, heavy drinking, sex, and hard drug use. The high school kids today have *Jersey Shore*, a television show that focuses on the heavy drinking and outlandish clubbing habits of

Italian Americans in their 20s. One of the most popular movies of 2010 was called *The Hangover*, a film that retraces a raucous bachelor party. Child stars from my generation, such as Lindsay Lohan, have alcohol and drug rehab issues broadcast continuously through the mass media. In addition, the chorus of a popular rap song simply reads “shots, shots, shots...” (LMFAO 2008) and a book that concentrates exclusively on the author’s drinking experiences in college and law school, “I Hope They Serve Beer In Hell”, has recently reached number one on The New Times Best-Seller List. Tucker Max, the book’s author, recounts drinking escapades that often include excessive alcohol use and drunkenly berating strangers (Max 2006). Undoubtedly, pop culture often reinforces the notion that underage and abusive drinking is the norm. And maybe popular culture has begun to propagate the idea that abusive drinking is a part of high school as well as college. *Super Bad*, a successful film in 2007, tells the story of two teenagers whose attempt to purchase alcohol for a high school party leads to a peculiar series of events involving heavy alcohol consumption and drug use.

Parents, communities, professors, and students’ experiences at college also help to influence college students’ decisions regarding alcohol. Parents and communities often associate alcohol as a right of passage along with leaving home for college. Professors at college often joke about or reference with disdain students’ drinking habits and morning hangovers. Both of these behaviors reinforce college students’ belief that they are supposed to drink at college. Also, many universities require students to take alcohol education programs. The requirement

to participate in alcohol education courses serves as a university acknowledgement that underage students drink at their colleges. Students undoubtedly learn about responsible alcohol use from these programs, but these programs only last a few hours while students' observations of alcohol use at college, in high school, and in public occur much more frequently (Lederman and Stewart 2005: 8). So, the abusive practices witnessed at college outweigh the few hours spent trying to complete an alcohol education program.

These influences lead students to believe that alcohol helps to attain a positive reputation at college and creates peer pressure to drink. Students believe alcohol will help make friends, assist in exploring their identity, convey maturity, and make them more sexually attractive. Additionally, many students believe alcohol will help to cope with added stress at college (Lederman and Stewart 2005: 8). Not only do these influences shape college student's ideas about positive effects of alcohol, but these influences also impact students' opinions about the negative effects of intoxication. Studies show that students don't believe missing class, vomiting, and blacking out on occasion signify a heavy drinking problem (Walters 2006: 10). Thus, many students arrive at college believing alcohol helps to achieve numerous positive effects, while expecting to experience the negative consequences of alcohol.

**Mississippi Alcohol History and Current Debates**

In addition to the perceptions of the media, society, and students about alcohol, local beliefs and ordinances also contribute to students' attitudes about alcohol. In fact, the University's stance against beer and light wine is only an extension of Lafayette County laws. Lafayette County is "dry" for beer and wine, but liquor is completely legal. Meaning the production, advertisement, distribution, and sale of beer and wine are illegal in Lafayette County. Even driving through a dry county with alcohol is illegal. Thus, driving through the Lafayette County part of campus with beer in a vehicle is technically illegal (State of Mississippi Department of Revenue 2011).

However, in the county seat, Oxford, the sale of beer is legal, but due to local regulations the beer may not be refrigerated (Oxford Code of Ordinances Sect. 14-44 (2)). The University cannot control the complexity of city or county alcohol laws or the fact that the University's location, which lies in both jurisdictions, subjects the University to different policies on different parts of campus. The stark contrast between the Lafayette County and City of Oxford's alcohol regulations and the attitudes toward alcohol of many residents and college students may seem peculiar, but given Mississippi's unique history with prohibition this type of inconsistency is unsurprising.

Mississippi began statewide prohibition in 1908, twelve years before Congress passed the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, which began nationwide prohibition (Mississippi Alcohol Prohibition Act 1908). When the U.S. ended federal prohibition

in 1933 with the repeal of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, the Mississippi Legislature legalized beer and light wine shortly after in 1934. But the legislation allowed for municipalities to determine whether to allow beer and light wine sales, and many towns and counties elected to continue with the tradition of prohibition. However, the legalization of liquor sales would come much later. The state capital under the control of conservative Baptists failed to yield to liquor sales until 1966 (Wilkie 2001: 82). The Mississippi Legislature even held strong despite a powerful speech advocating alcohol sales from Representative Soggy Sweat in 1952. Sweat's famous "Whiskey Speech" commences by labeling whiskey "the evil drink that topples the Christian man and woman from the pinnacle of righteous, gracious living into the bottomless pit of degradation, and despair", but then argues that whiskey is, "that drink, the sale of which pours into our treasuries untold millions of dollars, which are used to provide tender care for our little crippled children, our blind, our deaf, our dumb, our pitiful aged and infirm; to build highways and hospitals and schools", "the oil of conversation, the philosophic wine", then closes by recommending the end of prohibition (Associated Press 1996).

In 1966, Mississippi finally took Soggy's advice and became the last state in the union to end prohibition. The legislature created a bill that allowed individual counties to vote on becoming "wet" for liquor (Wilkie 2001: 82). This legislation allowed counties and cities complete power to shape their own policies regarding alcohol and led to the incongruence in laws between cities like Oxford and counties like Lafayette. Counties on the Coast and in the Delta immediately voted in favor of

alcohol sales after the passage of the legislation (Wilkie 2011), but many counties still remain dry in 2010. In fact, in Northeast Mississippi, Lee County is the only completely wet county. Towns in the area like Oxford, Corinth, and Aberdeen are wet, but their surrounding counties are either completely dry or dry for either beer or liquor (State of Mississippi Department of Revenue 2011).

According to the State of Mississippi Department of Revenue, 36 counties are completely dry for hard liquor, 34 counties are dry for beer and wine, 18 counties are completely dry for alcohol, and 12 counties are dry for alcohol but have at least one city that serves alcohol in some form (2011). Currently heated debates occur in nearby dry counties such as Pontotoc and Prentiss counties concerning the prohibition of beer and light wine. In Pontotoc County, petitions for a special election on the legalization of beer and wine mysteriously disappeared from four locations, preachers held up signs reading "NO BEER IN PONTOTOC", and voters put forth undemocratic suggestions like the petitioners should be made to pay for the cost of a special election, likely 35,000 to 40,000 dollars (Castens 2011). In Prentiss County a referendum to legalize beer and light wine failed by only 21 votes (Mitchell 2010). These instances emphasize the polarization of attitudes regarding alcohol in Oxford's surrounding area and also throughout the state of Mississippi.

### **Various Attitudes Towards Alcohol in Mississippi**

At the University of Mississippi where 65% of students come from instate and many more come from neighboring states with dry counties (Presley 2011),

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students come to Ole Miss with widely different views and experiences towards alcohol. Some students in Northeast Mississippi come from areas where people might have to travel for 50 miles to purchase alcohol, while students from the Mississippi Coast have attitudes towards alcohol influenced by Mardi Gras and Bourbon Street. My cousin from Leland, a small town in the Mississippi Delta, likes to tell the following story about alcohol. When he was nine, his parents went out of town one weekend. After his parents left, his older brother and sister approached him with an open beer can. They demanded he try the beer and immediately after he took a sip, his older sister demanded, "We're having a party and if you tell Mom and Dad, then I'm going to tell them you were drinking". The point of the story is that each of my cousins and many of their peers from the Mississippi Delta were already very accustomed to alcohol by the time they graduated high school. On the other hand, many of my peers from Northeast Mississippi began drinking in college. Thus, a residence hall setting at Ole Miss can easily pair seasoned drinkers with students with little or no experience with alcohol. And due to Mississippi's spirited history with alcohol and the large proportion of dry counties currently, the differences in students' experiences with alcohol is arguably greater here than elsewhere.

For example, in my residence hall some of my peers were already socialized into Ole Miss drinking norms on our first night in college. These students visited Ole Miss and other colleges frequently throughout high school. During the first week of school, my floormates from places like Jackson and Vicksburg were hosting "pre-

games" every afternoon. "Pre-gaming" means to drink before going to a bar, fraternity party, or another event. Freshman and underage students pre-game more often than older students due to the difficulty of drinking in public at restaurants and bars and to a lesser degree fraternity houses.

Since underage students lack the ability to drink legally in public spaces, underage students attempt to consume enough alcohol to sustain a state of drunkenness for the entire evening at "pre games" (Seaman 2005: 115). "Pre games" usually consist of a small group of people, normally four to eight, taking rounds of shots and participating in drinking games, one of which involves watching a James Bond movie and mandates participants take drinks every time "James" or "Bond" is spoken. This presents a problem for the University not only because freshmen are drinking dangerously behind closed doors, but also because these students set the social norms for beginning drinkers on campus. A student from a dry county who just begins drinking in college learns how to drink from the abusive behaviors present at "pre-games".

This type of behavior mirrors observations found in *Binge: What Your College Student Won't Tell You* by Barrett Seaman (2005). Seaman travels to many different colleges to study how current student alcohol culture differs from alcohol use at college during the 1970s. The overarching finding was that students binge drink, consume five or more drinks in an outing for males or four or more drinks for females, much more often now than in the '70s. He found that due to stricter

regulations students tend to drink in their rooms and consume enough alcohol to sustain a buzz for an entire night. Since policies and enforcement make drinking in public difficult for underage students, the window of opportunity for students to drink is confined to their residence halls. As a result, students began to drink more and more rapidly than in times of more relaxed policies and enforcement.

Also, Seaman found the shift to hard liquor over beer is not a phenomenon that exists uniquely at Ole Miss. He notes that students drink liquor because liquor is easier to hide. Seaman also explains that colleges like The University of Indiana, which declared a dry campus in 2001, and The University of Colorado, which had embarked on a six year long "three strikes and you're suspended policy", were named the number one party school by Princeton Review immediately afterward (Seaman 2005: 122). This trend also applies to the University of Mississippi. In 2008, The Princeton Review announced Ole Miss as the number two party school, only three full semesters after the implementation of the Two-Strike policy (Rockler-Gladen 2008).

### **Fall 2007 - My Freshman Year**

Amid the height of the University of Mississippi's own alcohol reform attempt, I moved into Stockard and began my academic career at Ole Miss on August 17, 2007. Stockard is an all male 11-story residence hall for freshman. The building has a lobby that connects with an adjacent 11-story residence hall for freshman females. These two tall buildings, often referred to as "The Twin Towers" by

students and alumni, serve as living quarters for a great proportion of the freshmen class and an overwhelming majority of future Greek students.

After moving in, a few of my friends from high school and some of our new neighbors decided to walk to a rush party on fraternity row. Collectively we were unfamiliar with campus, but we knew the general direction to fraternity row and began to walk that way. After climbing up a few sets of stairs past Kincannon, another entirely male freshman residence hall, bright flashlights and blue police sirens blinded us. Around 10 police officers circled us, an approach that I liken to an ambush, and began questioning the group. "Have you been drinking?" One of us responded, "No", which was actually the truth at the time. Then, one of the officers bellowed, "Where are you going?" We replied that we were going to a fraternity house. After a few more minutes of questioning, a few officers pulled some members of our group to the side for further inspection. Then, as our encounter with the University Police Department concluded, a policewoman exclaimed, "Well, ya'll are welcome to go to that party, but if we show up and see any of you drinking or if you look like you've been drinking, then we are taking you straight to jail." We were amazed that we were treated as criminals before even attempting to drink at college, so much so that we abandoned our original plan to attend the fraternity and went back to the dormitory.

During my first semester of college, evidence of police enforcement of the alcohol policy was unavoidable for freshman students. But like so many times

before, a tragic event involving alcohol happened despite police efforts to send a message of intolerance towards underage and abusive drinking on campus. Less than a month after I became acquainted with the University Police Department, Bradley Jameson, a member of my freshman class, died after falling 12 feet from a tree onto a fraternity house's back patio (Associated Press 2007). Jameson was throwing a football at the Beta Theta Pi fraternity, the football became lodged in a tree, and as Jameson climbed the tree to attempt to recover the football a branch broke causing him to fall (Wallace 2011). At first, police found no traces of alcohol at the incident, but a toxicology report revealed that Jameson had a blood alcohol content of .16 (WTOK News 2007). Although University officials believe alcohol did not cause Jameson's death, the University appeared to escalated enforcement and began to watch the fraternities much more closely.

However, a shift in the alcohol policy near the time of Jameson's death also contributed the perceived escalation in enforcement of the alcohol policy at fraternity houses. In the summer of 2007, University officials began discussion of how to revise the alcohol policy in order to apply strikes to student organizations (Wallace 2011). Before the fall semester of 2007 a plan was implemented, if a student organization violated the alcohol policy, then at a minimum the organization was placed on probation for the remainder of the semester and the following two semesters and the organization was required to hire an alcohol safety speaker to address organization members or pay a 1,000-dollar fine. An organization received a second strike if another alcohol violation occurred during the probationary period.

A second strike at minimum entails suspension of the organizations social events immediately and for a complete fall and spring semester (The University of Mississippi 2007). During the first half of the fall semester of 2007, University officials went to fraternity houses to present information about the new alcohol policies (Wallace 2011).

During the fall of 2007, I distinctly remember one fraternity party after Jameson's death and probably after University officials had informed all fraternities of the changes regarding student organizations in the alcohol policy. I walked up the crowded staircase and noticed four or five freshmen crowded around one active fraternity member. The member was pouring cheap vodka from a 1.75 liter bottle (a serving size for liquor is about four milliliters) into the freshmen's mouths. Later that night, police showed up at the party. Fraternity members began to push guest into their rooms, while some other members raced to the garbage cans in the hallways and dragged the garbage bags into the rooms. By the time police ascended the stairs to check out the party, all the doors were shut and locked and no one remained inside the hallways. Any warning of the police could almost instantly transform a hallway from impossibly crowded to completely empty with partygoers cramped inside members rooms like sardines. The police presence at the fraternity party serves as an example of the University Police Department's tactics to enforce the alcohol policy at fraternity houses. However, fraternities quickly formulated a response to these new police intrusions.

At the beginning of the fall semester both before Jameson's death and the University explained new alcohol policy changes to fraternities, large coolers full of cheap beer rested conveniently throughout the hallways of fraternity houses, but later in the semester many fraternities abandoned beer and began to store huge quantities of liquor in member's rooms to serve to guest. So how did the changes in the University alcohol policy cause the shift from beer to hard liquor? After the University altered the alcohol policy so that organizations could receive strikes, the University appeared to begin supervising fraternities more strictly. Due to Lafayette County's prohibition against beer, the presence of beer in a fraternity house became the easiest way to punish a fraternity for abusive alcohol practices. Liquor was completely legal on campus and every fraternity party on campus included at least a few 21 year olds that could claim ownership of bottles of liquor. However, since the alcohol policy pursuant to Lafayette County law prohibits beer, the presence of errant beer cans inside a fraternity house could lead to a strike.

Also, officers can search fraternity house common rooms and hallways more easily than private rooms. To enter a fraternity house, an officer must have probable cause, but probable cause can be satisfied relatively easily. For example, if an officer spots beer cans while looking through a fraternity house window probable cause is fulfilled. But officers cannot search private rooms in fraternity houses as easily. An officer must obtain the occupant's permission, a search warrant, or satisfy probable cause to search the individual room. Hence, fraternities cured most fears of underage drinking violations at house parties by forcing all

partygoers into member's rooms when the police arrived. So, by providing liquor, instructing guests to go inside members' rooms when police arrived, and removing trash bags that could possibly contain beer cans from fraternity common areas, fraternities alleviated most risks of receiving a strike for beer or underage drinking. While storing alcohol within member's rooms lessened the likelihood of police officers' ability to confiscate unattended alcohol.

So from the fraternities' perspective, continuing with the status quo of abusive drinking meant simply abolishing beer use and establishing few simple precautionary procedures. The new alcohol policy coupled with the decision to apply strikes to organizations created an unintended consequence. Fraternities began to stock entire rooms with bottles of liquor the week before parties. Then the day before parties, the bottles were distributed to the individual rooms. Members would hide bottles in their room and offer them to guests, but this process made alcohol seem scarce to guests and especially outsiders at the party. Before the new policies and increased enforcement, guests could easily stumble upon a cooler of beer, but now a party guest would have to find an active member and ask for liquor. As a result, partygoers began to mix stronger drinks and take shots due to the uncertainty of finding alcohol later and the inconvenience of the new alcohol distribution system in general. So an average night at a fraternity house, changed from sipping on 4 or 5 beers throughout the night to drinking potent mixed drinks and shots.

## Approaches to College Drinking

Experts on college drinking advocate two widely different approaches to reduce heavy drinking among students. Choose Responsibility and The Amethyst Initiative, a group supported by 135 college presidents, endorse an alcohol management approach designed to counter my observations and those outlined in *Binge*. The two groups believe the government should lower the national drinking age allowing underage students to drink publicly instead of binge drinking behind closed doors (Amethyst Initiative 2007). According to The Amethyst Initiative plan, 18 year-old students would become eligible to participate in an alcohol education course in order to receive a license to consume alcohol, a program similar to receiving a driver's license. The movement's recommendation hinges on 18 year-olds' status as adults in many other areas of life. According to Choose Responsibility, "Current drinking laws infantilize young adults" and "We should not be surprised, then, by infantile behavior from otherwise responsible adults" (Choose Responsibility 2007). The organizations believe the 21 year-old drinking age has failed to prevent underage drinking and alcohol related harms to youths and dispute the idea that the 21 year-old drinking age has minimized the number of alcohol related deaths for 18 to 20 year-olds. John McCardell, the founder of Choose Responsibility, attributes the decline in alcohol related deaths to improved automobile safety and stricter drunk driving laws instead of the minimum drinking age.

However, Henry Wechsler, an author of the famous *The Harvard School of*

Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS), adamantly opposes Choose Responsibility's policy recommendations. Wechsler claims that many colleges have not implemented measures outlined by The National Institution on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) College Drinking Task Force and these measures would curb binge drinking. The NIAAA College Drinking Task Force recommended strengthening enforcement of the drinking age, public information campaigns focused on underage drinking, added enforcement of driving under the influence of alcohol, increasing prices and taxes on alcohol, responsible beverage service policies (teaching employees about identifying underage and drunk customers), keg registration, greater police surveillance of alcohol outlets, heightened false identification consequences, and placing restrictions on alcohol retail outlets. Wechsler claims that questionable research methods led to the Amethyst Initiative's finding that the decline in alcohol related traffic deaths was not a result of the drinking age. Wechsler also questions whether a college president publicly stating disapproval of the drinking age weakens enforcement and thus causes more drinking (Wechsler and Nelson 2010). The two main theories on college drinking, stronger enforcement advocated by Wechsler and lowering the drinking age favored by McCardell, differ widely.

Both policies seem to have obvious faults at first glance. On the one hand, McCardell's theory suggests the way to solve abusive college drinking is to allow many more college students to drink legally. Thus, students who abstained from drinking because consuming alcohol was illegal could begin using alcohol legally.

Which doesn't mean each of these students will become an abusive drinker, but rather many of these students have a potential to develop abusive drinking habits - a likely scenario due to abusive drinking habits that students observe and pursue at college. The Wechsler approach, however, seems to allow or even further promote the unintended consequences of current alcohol policies, which consists of more drinking behind the closed doors of residence halls and fraternity houses. Wechsler seems to advocate doing more of what hasn't worked already. Wechsler assumes that some kids will not drink if the consequences become harsh enough, my observations suggests several students continue binge drinking after strikes, minor in possession (MIP), driving under the influence charges (DUI), or a even combination of these reprimands.

However, factors other than enforcement can affect binge-drinking and drinking rates at universities, as well. These factors include a higher proportion of male students, a greater participation in the Greek system, a younger student body, a greater percentage of students living on campus, and a greater proportion of white students. Student bodies with higher portions of these types of students binge drink more often than student bodies with lower percentages of these groups (Wechsler and Nelson 2008). Also, the school's geographic region affects drinking rates. The Northeast has the highest percentage of college drinking regionally while the South has the lowest regional percentage, but these studies note that a school's reputation is the most important factor for high drinking rates (Walters 2006: 5).

Binge drinking at college concerns university administration, parents, and society due to the negative consequences associated with binge drinking. Two of the most important goals of an institution of higher learning are providing an education and ensuring the safety of the student body. Binge drinking challenges the success of both of these objectives. Students who drink miss more classes and have lower grade point averages than students who abstain from alcohol. Also, students that drink drive and ride with others under the influence and become involved in fights more often than other students. In addition, students who drink are also more likely to experience sexual abuse, abuse others, and become injured or even die as a result of alcohol use (Walters 2006: 8).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The University of Mississippi meets many of the criteria for a heavy drinking population. Ole Miss has a high percentage of white, Greek, and traditional students. Many sophomores, juniors, and seniors elect to live off campus and as evidenced by the Princeton Review the University has a reputation of heavy drinking. However, unlike many other colleges, the University has followed many of the recommendations outlined by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS). Yet, Barrett Seaman, author of *Binge: What Your College Student Won't Tell You*, noticed a trend in increased binge drinking following stricter policies and greater enforcement at universities.

So, has the University taken the best approach to student alcohol use on campus? My thesis aims to explore Ole Miss' general policies, the University alcohol policy, police enforcement, and students' attitudes towards alcohol and how these factors affect drinking on campus. I will compare these factors with the University of Georgia, a school very similar to the University of Mississippi, national findings from sociological studies, and recommendations from established works on college drinking like The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS). After comparing factors affecting alcohol consumption at Ole Miss to those nationally, I intend to make suggestions about a more effective alcohol policy.

## Chapter 2: Environmental Factors Related to Binge Drinking at Ole Miss

The extent of college drinking present at the University of Mississippi is not representative of universities nationally. As noted before, The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) found that binge-drinking rates differ from 1% to 76% of the student population. However, many of the schools studied in the CAS differ from the University of Mississippi in size, region, religious affiliation, and sources of funding, but the cumulative data from 119 colleges and universities provides the best representation of college drinking available. Since CAS researchers guaranteed confidentiality to participating colleges and universities, a comparison of Ole Miss to individual universities with shared similarities is impossible. With the help of data from the Harvard study, many different studies related to college drinking have found several factors at colleges, within college communities, and in university, local, and state policy that affect student's alcohol use at college (Wechsler and Nelson 2008: 5). In order to better understand student alcohol use at Ole Miss, I shall compare the presence of these environmental factors at the University of Mississippi to the presence of the same factors found nationally. *College level* factors include supervision of residence, student affiliation, demographics and social capital, while high-volume and underage drinking laws, price, access, and price discounting of alcohol constitute *community factors* that affect binge drinking.

Of the four types of college factors, I found information concerning student body demographics, student affiliation, and student residence at the University of Mississippi through The Common Data Set from the University of Mississippi website and the US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics website. I obtained further information about student affiliation, specifically the presence of student sports fans, through student season football ticket sales as recorded by *The Daily Mississippian*, and the value of broadcasting rights for The Southeastern Conference, an athletic conference in which The University of Mississippi competes. Data concerning social capital, the final college-level factor, was obtained from the University website and from autoethnographic observations of the University as a student.

The Oxford Code of Ordinances and The State Code of Mississippi provided the bulk of information related to community factors. However, a few exceptions exist. I used the presence of special alcohol-related promotions advertised in *The Daily Mississippian* to determine the presence of alcohol promotions in the community. Also, images of bars practicing price-discounting specials derived from personal observation. I accessed tax rates and state policies that affect the price of alcohol through the Mississippi Department of Revenue website. The presence of alcohol outlets around the University, hours of operation for alcohol outlets, and restrictions on alcohol sales found in the Oxford Code of Ordinances helped to determine students' ease of access to alcohol. Lastly, I obtained the binge drinking rate among adults in Mississippi on the American Health Rankings website (a

division of the United Health Foundation). This information was compared against national statistics found in several studies cited in the works cited page.

## **COLLEGE FACTORS**

### **Supervision of Residence**

A study by Wechsler, Lee, Nelson, and Kuo affirmed that drinking habits among college students vary depending upon the level of supervision of their living quarters (2002). Specifically, students living in residences with the most supervision – students living at home with their parents followed by students living in substance-free dormitories – had lower rates of drinking, binge drinking, and consequences related to alcohol use (Hartford, Wechsler, and Muthén 2002: 277). Students living in residences with little supervision, specifically fraternity and sorority houses and off-campus housing, had higher rates of binge drinking (Wechsler et al. 2002). In fact, 80% of fraternity house residents and 69% of sorority house residents engaged in binge drinking whereas only 44% of college students binge drink (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 35).

At the University of Mississippi, 27% of undergrads live on-campus, while 73% of students dwell in off-campus housing (The University of Mississippi 2010). However, the 27% of undergrads living on-campus includes students that live in residences of low supervision, such as Greek houses and on-campus apartments, like Campus Walk and Northgate. The University's campus features 13 fraternity houses and 9 sorority houses, the majority of which serve as residences for approximately 50 students. The remaining on-campus students live in University

apartment complexes or the University's substance-free dormitories (ibid 2010). Of the 73% of students that live off-campus, only 12% of freshmen live off-campus and these students live with parents or guardians (ibid 2010). Freshman residence choice stems from a University policy mandating that undergraduate students with less than 30 credit hours must live on campus, but grants an exception to students that live at home with their parents if the residence is within a 60-mile radius of the University (ibid 2010). No statistics are available concerning the percentage of the total student body that lives with their parents. But, by comparing the percentage of freshman residing with their parents to the entire undergraduate commuting population, one could deduce that at least 60% of undergraduate students live off-campus and away from their parents.

Hence, when considering the number of students living on-campus in the 22 Greek houses with at least 60% of off-campus commuters living away from their parents, a large majority of students live in residences of low supervision. And based on several studies, these students face a greater likelihood of dangerous alcohol use than students living in substance-free housing (Hartford, Wechsler, and Muthén 2002; Wechsler and Nelson 2008; Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 35). Another matter of concern stems from a study by Hartford, Wechsler, and Muthén that found students living off-campus with or without their parents drink and drive more often than students who live on-campus (2002: 277). Thus, 73% of Ole Miss students have an increased likelihood of drinking and driving.

**Table 1. Student Residence Choice and Level of Supervision**

Residence	Ole Miss	National Average	Level of Supervision
On-Campus:	27%	34%	
Single Gender Dorms	10 traditional dorms and 2 residential colleges		High
Co-ed Dorms	None		Low
Apartments	3 apartments, one designated for family housing		Low
Greek Houses	13 fraternity houses, 9 sorority houses		Low
Off-Campus:	73%	66%	
With Parents	Freshman required to live on-campus or commute from home only 12% of freshman live off-campus		High
Without Parents	Large majority of students living off campus		Low

The level of supervision at living arrangements not only affects the resident, but unsupervised residences also provide venues for other students to binge drink. The heaviest drinking occurs at off-campus houses, off-campus bars, and fraternity houses (Wechsler and Nelson 2008: 5). Since the University has such a large number of commuters, many of whom live away from their parents, a greater number of possible locations for off-campus house parties exist. Also, Wechsler and Nelson note that fraternity party attendees engage in binge drinking at a greater rate than at any other college drinking setting (2008: 5). So, each of the University's 13 on-campus fraternity houses provides especially dangerous opportunities for students to drink abusively.

Despite the large number of drinking venues off and on-campus, the University has increased residence opportunities in substance-free housing with the addition of the residential college in 2009. The addition ensured more Ole Miss students will live in residences associated with lower binge drinking in the future. However, the University of Mississippi witnessed a surge in freshman enrollment in fall of 2010 and expects an even larger freshman class in fall of 2011. Traditionally, Crosby, one of the University's female dormitories, housed sophomore sorority members for eight of the University's sororities along with freshman females. Yet, the expansion of freshman enrollees prompted the University to discontinue the practice of reserving floors in Crosby for the different sororities' sophomore classes (Phifer 2011). The huge freshman class of this year and the increase in freshman enrollment expected next year has caused University housing to become sparse for sophomore and upper class students who prefer to live on-campus. The shortages in on-campus housing force many students to unwillingly find residences off-campus with less supervision. Thus, the on-campus housing shortage subjects these students to a higher likelihood of binge drinking.

### **Student Affiliation**

Like residence, student affiliation also significantly affects drinking habits at universities. A higher percentage of students that participate in Greek organizations and athletic teams engage in heavy drinking than students not affiliated with these groups (Wietzman, Nelson, and Wechsler 2003). Wechsler and Wuethrich report that 73% of fraternity members, 57% of male student athletes and sorority

members, and 43% of female student athletes partake in binge drinking, compared with 44% of college students in general who engage in binge drinking (2002: 6). Also, student sports fans exhibit many characteristics indicative of dangerous drinking. For instance, student sports fans binge drink on 53% of occasions involving alcohol, while students who do not describe themselves as sports fans binge drink less than 40% of the times they choose to drink. Student sports fans also drink with the intention of getting drunk and report drinking on 10 or more occasions in the past 30 days more frequently than student non-fans (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 59).

According to the department of Institutional Research and Assessment at the University of Mississippi, 36% of the male undergraduate population participates in fraternities, while 34% of women have membership in sororities. For freshman Greek affiliation holds even greater importance; 43% of freshman males and 52% of freshman females join Greek organizations (The University of Mississippi 2010). These numbers suggest that many freshmen join Greek organizations and either fail to become initiated or drop out of Greek organizations as sophomores or upper classmen. However, even though some freshman students may eventually leave Greek organizations, they still experience the heavy drinking atmosphere associated with Greek life. These experiences with fraternities and sororities contribute to the development of these students' alcohol use habits.

The University of Mississippi boasts 224 male student athletes and 139 female student athletes and participates in the celebrated Southeastern Conference (SEC) (National Center for Education Statistics 2010b). Cable network giant ESPN took notice of the numerous rabid sports fans at Ole Miss and the 11 other schools that make up the SEC in 2008, and signed the conference to a 15 year deal worth over 2 billion dollars for broadcasting rights of men's football and men's and women's basketball (Associated Press 2008a). In addition, the University created an all-sports student pass for the 2010-2011 season, which allowed students to attend all men's football, basketball, and baseball games, these passes sold out in only 8 days. Also, all 7,500 football student season tickets sold out in each of the past two seasons. Based on football student season ticket sales alone, 7,500 students or nearly half of the undergraduate student body are sports fans (Fuller 2010). But this estimate ignores the fact that some fans might purchase football tickets for individual games, tickets for other sports but not football, or some student fans might not be able to afford tickets to athletic events. Thus, the estimate probably underestimates the actual number of student sports fans at Ole Miss.

**Table 2. Presence of High-Risk Student Groups at Ole Miss**

Student Affiliation	Ole Miss	Binge Drinking Rate
Sorority	36%	57%
Fraternity	34%	73%
Sports Fans	7,500 student season football tickets sold in 2009	Binge drink 53% of times when consuming alcohol
Male Athletes	224	57%
Female Athletes	139	43%

Ole Miss' student body is composed of large proportions of each of the student affiliations mentioned as high-risk for binge drinking in Wechsler and Weitzman's respective works (2002; 2003). Weitzman writes that more students tend to acquire binge drinking habits at colleges with the mere presence of NCAA division I athletic program (Weitzman, Nelson, and Wechsler 2003: 29). Weitzman does not address whether a school's devotion towards division I athletic programs further encourages heavy drinking among students. The University not only supports a division I athletic program, but the administration, alumni, and students also provide high levels of support towards the University's athletic programs. Once again, a large portion of The University of Mississippi's student body classifies as high-risk for binge drinking.

## Demographics

Demographics constitute yet another factor at colleges that influences the rate of binge drinking on campus. Wechsler and Kuo found that a greater presence of older (defined as 22 and older), female, and minority students lowers the rate of binge drinking among students at high-risk for heavy drinking such as white, underage, and male students (2003: 1929). Also, the presence of commonly low-risk binge drinking students - older, female, and minority students - decreases the likelihood that white, male, and underage students who did not binge drink in high school will acquire heavy drink habits in college and decreases the frequency of binge drinking among white, male, and underage students who already began binge drinking in high school (Wechsler and Kuo 2003: 1929). However, the study notes that presence of female students does not significantly affect binge-drinking rates among high-risk students at universities with a student population over 10,000 (ibid: 1931). According to The Harvard Binge Drinking Study, colleges consist of 54.3% females, 32.8% older students, and 27% minority students on average (ibid 2003: 1930).

The University of Mississippi differs demographically from other schools across the nation in a way that may contribute to high rates of binge drinking among students. The composition of students at the University of Mississippi includes 53% females, 21% minorities, and 35% students 22 and older (National Center for Education Statistics 2010b; Jones 2010). Ole Miss experiences a major deviation from the average in terms of ethnic diversity. Many observers often cite the

numerous symbols around the Ole Miss campus, like the statue of a confederate soldier that welcomes students to the circle, and traditions associated with athletic events, like chanting “The South will rise again” after the band plays “Slow Dixie” at football games, as reasons black and other minority students choose to attend other universities. In fact, other large, public in-state universities experience significantly more success with minority enrollment. The University of Southern Mississippi boasts a student body that includes 39% minority students and 30% black students, while Mississippi State University consists of 27% minorities and 21% black students (National Center for Education Statistics 2010b). The University of Mississippi, however, has a student body composed of only 15% black students. Both Southern Miss and Mississippi State obtain around 75% of their students from the state of Mississippi, while only 65% of Ole Miss students hail from Mississippi (ibid 2010b; Presley 2011). So, concluding that black Mississippians just prefer other large state universities such as Mississippi State and Southern Miss to Ole Miss is not an unreasonable suggestion.

**Table 3. Presence of Low-Risk Binge Drinking Groups On-Campus**

Diversity	Ole Miss	Nation
Minorities	21%	27%
Older students (22 or older)	35%	32.8%
Females	53%	54.3%

However, the University of Mississippi has taken steps towards racial inclusiveness in recent history. Some examples include the banning of flag sticks at athletic venues, thus eliminating the display of Confederate battle flags at sporting events, and the removal of "Slow Dixie" from the band's repertoire, which eradicated fan's opportunity to shout "the South will rise again" during football games. These measures have helped to distance the University from an association with racial intolerance. Despite progress towards racial inclusiveness at Ole Miss through removing images of the Old South, there must still exist some other reasons why black students choose Southern Miss and Mississippi State in such greater numbers. Addressing these issues could enable greater success with recruiting black and other minority students and could greatly contribute to the quality of life and educational experience, as well as potentially lower student binge drinking rates at Ole Miss. Student binge drinking rates could decrease because minority students binge drink less than white students and a larger presence of minority students lowers the binge drinking rate among high-risk students (Wechsler and Kuo 2003: 1929).

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is the final college-level factor that affects students' rates of binge drinking (Weitzman and Chen 2005: 303). Weitzman and Chen define social capital as voluntary activities within the community and civic involvement, for example volunteering at soup kitchens and voting (2005: 303). The two authors found that universities with student bodies who volunteer above average time to

community service daily have lower rates of binge drinking, less frequent and intentional drunkenness, and fewer students acquire binge drinking in college. Also, the study found that even a 15 minute increase in the amount of volunteer work students perform per day decreases college students' risk for alcohol abuse by 11% and decreases college students' risk of alcohol related harm by 12%. Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study was that the difference in binge drinking rates between Greek students and non-Greeks was almost offset at schools with high levels of social capital (ibid 2005: 308). The authors believe social capital increases engagement, fosters cohesion and builds trust between students.

Based on personal observation, the Ole Miss student body lacks well-publicized opportunities to participate in community service in large groups. Yet, The Big Event, a daylong community service event scheduled for March 26, 2011 with the focus of cleaning up the community of Oxford and assisting the elderly, may signify a change in the availability of social capital at the University (The University of Mississippi 2010). Also, some departments, specifically the Honors College, require students to perform a certain amount of community service hours per semester. Individually these departments frequently publicize and provide opportunities for community service. In addition, fraternities and sororities host annual philanthropy events, but these community service activities are limited to members of Greek organizations. However, the most visible instances of student cohesion and engagement occur at football games and evenings on the Square. Thus, drinking on the Square and in the Grove before football games may fill the

void left by an absence of social capital opportunities, which allow students to engage with their peers in settings without alcohol.

## **COMMUNITY AND POLICY FACTORS**

### **Access to Alcohol**

Heavy concentrations of bars and liquor stores often fill the two-mile radius surrounding many college campuses (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: xi). Consequently, many college students report that obtaining alcohol is easy or very easy. Students who have difficulty finding alcohol drink less and drink heavily less frequently than students who find alcohol easily (Wechsler et al. 2000). The boundaries of Ole Miss' campus resemble the descriptions of college campuses provided by Wechsler. Several gas stations with super-sized beer aisles litter the two-mile radius surrounding the University of Mississippi, local liquor store Star Package and a Miller Lite beer distributor lie practically within the parking lot of the Ford Center, and the 20 bars at the downtown Square also rest within a two-mile radius of campus. Despite the quantity of alcohol outlets near campus, the City of Oxford enforces several regulations that restrict students' and the general population's access to alcohol. A few of these regulations include keg registration, restrictions of the sale on cold beer, and prohibiting alcohol sales on Sundays.

The prohibition of alcohol sales on Sundays reduces access to alcohol by one day a week, while keg registration limits beer sales in high volumes. These two measures limit alcohol directly by restricting the time and manner of alcohol sales. But, Oxford's restriction on the sale of cold beer limits access to alcohol indirectly.

College students drink heavily with beer 80% of time and about one half of college students prefer beer over other alcoholic beverages (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 23; Wechsler et al. 2000). Since beer is normally served and consumed cold, Oxford's ordinance against cold beer sales disables the ability to immediately consume beer of a preferred temperature immediately after purchase. Instead, beer drinkers usually elect to allow their beer to refrigerate before consumption. Since warm beer takes an hour or longer to cool, liquor, which users often mix with ice, or wine, which is often served at room temperature, are the most accessible types of alcohol in Oxford for immediate consumption. Thus, the city's beer laws may make beer, the most popular alcoholic beverage consumed among college students, more difficult to obtain for immediate consumption than other higher volume types of alcohol beverages.

These regulations cause students to buy alcohol for instant consumption at liquor stores as opposed to gas stations. Liquor stores have higher surveillance and greater awareness of underage alcohol purchase attempts. Enforcement agencies recognize that liquor stores sell only alcohol while gas stations provide several different products. Thus, monitoring underage alcohol purchases for both cashiers and enforcement agencies becomes easier at liquor stores because all transactions involve alcohol. For example, a store clerk at a convenience store may become unaccustomed to checking IDs for alcohol sales after ringing up several consecutive snack food purchases or a policeman might choose to watch a liquor store for

underage purchase attempts instead of a gas station because a greater percentage of alcohol sales occur at liquor stores.

The fact that more students purchase alcohol at areas of high surveillance holds great significance because 50% of underage students obtain alcohol from other underage students and 27% of underage students purchase alcohol without a proof of identity (Wechsler et al. 2000). Thus, Oxford's ordinance prohibiting the sale of cold beer forces many drinkers to purchase alcohol for immediate consumption from liquor stores, which may deter some underage students from attempting to purchase alcohol. Although the law may deter some alcohol attempts, the restriction most likely affects underage drinking similarly to increased enforcement of the University's alcohol policy. Cold beer restrictions likely deter undetermined drinkers from consuming alcohol, while the policy probably has no affect on frequent, heavy drinking students.

**Table 4. Factors Affecting Access to Alcohol**

<b>Elements Affecting Access to Alcohol at Ole Miss</b>	<b>Enabling or Limiting</b>
High Density of Alcohol Outlets	Enabling
Limited Hours of Sale	Limiting
Prohibition on Cold Beer	Limiting
Keg Registration	Limiting
No Sunday Sales	Limiting

## **Price**

Like the relationship between binge drinking and students' ease of access to alcohol, studies of the general population conclude that higher prices of alcohol reduce overall alcohol consumption and heavy alcohol consumption. The price of alcohol affects drinking among underage students in college, but price adversely affects drinking rates among moderate drinkers and women the most (Wechsler et al. 2000). Price discounting and special promotions also affect college drinking. Studies show that heavy and light drinkers drank over twice as much at bars during "happy hours" than times without promotions. Other marketing techniques like volume discounts, advertised price specials, and coupons significantly increased student binge-drinking rates (Kuo et al., 2003: 205-207). An example of volume discounts includes selling a pitcher of beer for a lesser price than ordering the same quantity of drinks separately. Lastly, greater advertising of alcohol promotions outside of alcohol venues increased rates of binge drinking.

As far as alcohol price, the State of Mississippi has a high alcohol tax rate. The State of Mississippi taxes beer 42.68 cents per gallon, subjects liquor to a 27.5% markup from wholesale price, and applies state sales tax to all alcoholic purchases (State of Mississippi Department of Revenue 2011). According to The Center for Science in the Public Interest, Mississippi's beer tax ranks eighth highest among states and hovers nearly 15 cents above the national average, also Mississippi's 7% sales tax on alcohol nears the very top of the national sales tax range on alcohol – 2.9% to 8% (2004). The state experiences high liquor cost, as well. Mississippi does

not apply an excise tax on liquor. Instead, the state purchases liquor wholesale then sells liquor to distributors with a 27.5% markup in price. The state average for liquor excise tax is \$3.97 a gallon and a liter of liquor usually costs more than ten dollars and a gallon consists of approximately four liters. So, a 40-dollar gallon of liquor would cost \$43.97 after applying the state average for liquor excise taxes, while the same bottle in Mississippi would cost 51 dollars without sales tax. Thus, according to national findings, Oxford's higher alcohol prices should help to dissuade students from drinking and heavy drinking, especially among moderate drinkers and female students.

**Table 5. Price of Alcohol in Mississippi**

Price	Mississippi	State Average
Sales Tax	7%	4.97%
Beer Excise Tax per gallon	\$0.4268	\$0.278
Liquor Excise Tax per gallon	None, instead liquor is marked up 27.5% then sold to retailers	\$3.97

### **Price Discounting**

Despite high alcohol prices, Oxford bars use *The Daily Mississippian* to communicate recurrent alcohol promotions. However, marketing practices of Oxford bars differ from alcohol promotion norms in university communities found in college drinking studies. Kuo noted that nearly 3 out of 4 alcohol outlets near campus provide discount specials on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday (2003: 208).

Oxford alcohol outlets tend to advertise price discounts on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Perhaps Oxford alcohol outlets assume good business will occur closer to the weekend without special promotions. For instance, the Tuesday, March 8, 2011 edition of *The Daily Mississippian* printed several alcohol promotions. Funky's, a daiquiri bar just off the Square with a heavy drinking clientele, presented six different special promotions within a single ad including one-dollar Bud Light drafts and two-dollar shots along with special promotions to celebrate Fat Tuesday, like a one-dollar raffle to win a 100 dollar bar tab and a 25 dollar bar tab for the person that finds the baby in the king cake. Four other bars and one restaurant ran alcohol specials in the same edition. On March 9, 2011, a day with no special significance, four different bars ran ads in *The Daily Mississippian* for special promotions that included four happy hours and one "Whiskey Wednesday", which offered half-off whiskey drinks for the entire night.

Every Monday night Rooster's Blues House runs a two-dollar pitcher of beer promotion in *The Daily Mississippian*. Rooster's anchors the Northwest corner of the Oxford Square and the restaurant and bar occupies two floors, the first of which serves as the restaurant while the bar occupies the second floor. Before Rooster's two-dollar pitcher special, only a small number of students went to the Square to drink on Monday nights, but after the commencement of the two-dollar pitcher promotion attendance at Rooster's on Monday nights skyrocketed. Students flocked to Rooster's due to the enormous discount on beer – a pitcher contains approximately five 12 oz. beers and could be purchased at a price lower than the

normal cost of a single 12 oz. beer on the Square. Due to the huge price discount, students began gulp down pitchers and reach states of hazy drunkenness unmatched at other bars and at other times of the week at Roosters on Monday. Patrons struggle to access the bar and even find walking lanes as students occupy nearly every square-foot of the long, open rectangular room and wide outside balcony that runs parallel to Jackson Avenue on especially busy Mondays. Rooster's serves as an example of how a single volume discount can transform a relatively uneventful night of the week into a night devoted to heavy drinking.

#### **Adult Binge Drinking Rate**

Heavy drinking is not a phenomenon limited exclusively to students in Oxford. After all, bars, restaurant bars, and the Grove have adult visitors as well. For example, one Saturday my mother and sister came to town for a college visit and an interview. After my sister's college visit, I met them for lunch at a restaurant on the Square. That particular afternoon the restaurant patrons consisted of mostly adults many of whom sat at tables cluttered with beer bottles, mimosa glasses, and Bloody Marys. Both my mother and sister commented on the amount of drinking among adults at lunchtime with surprise as significantly fewer adults drink in public in our hometown. Despite adults' affinity for alcohol in Oxford, only 10.3% of Mississippians binge drink, a figure that ranks fourth lowest among states in the US (America's Health Rankings 2010). Typically, the percentage of heavy drinking among adults corresponds with the percentage of heavy drinking among college

students (Wechsler and Nelson 2008: 5). In fact, only 36.1% of students binge drink among the ten states with the lowest adult binge-drinking rate, while 52.7% of students binge drink in the ten states with the highest adult binge-drinking rate (Nelson et al. 2005).

Access to alcohol likely contributes to Mississippi's low adult binge-drinking rates. Surely, state restrictions on access to alcohol decreases adults' binge drinking rates similarly to the observation that students' alcohol use decreases with less access to alcohol (Wechsler et al. 2000: 27). However, unlike the 36 of 82 total Mississippi counties that are dry for alcohol in some form, Oxford residents have no such difficulty accessing alcohol. In a state full of inconsistent alcohol sales policies, Oxford has become a weekend escape for many adult drinkers. Many alumni own residences in Oxford and travel to Oxford for sporting events and community events, like Double Decker weekend. At football games, adults supply overwhelming quantities of alcohol while tailgating at the Grove. Some of that alcohol often finds the mouths of underage offspring and their peers. Also, adults take advantage of less strenuous security checks at non-student gates by sneaking flasks and small containers of liquor into Vault Hemmingway stadium. On Double Decker weekend, adults fill bars around the Square and stroll around downtown Oxford with red, plastic cups containing alcohol beverages in hand.

Also, excellent restaurants, nostalgic reunions with college friends, and numerous quality entertainment opportunities provide adults additional excuses to

travel to Oxford. The binge-drinking rate of adult Mississippians does not reflect the habits of adult visitors and residents of Oxford. Students have a greater opportunity to learn about alcohol use from adults in Oxford than from adults in the rest of Mississippi, thus students' behavior towards alcohol likely reflects the behavior of adults living in or frequenting Oxford. Therefore, the University of Mississippi should not expect a lower drinking rate among college students due to a low rate of binge drinking among Mississippi adults.

### **High-Volume and Underage Alcohol Laws**

Lastly, state and local laws affect binge-drinking rates among college students. These distinct types of laws include underage and high-volume laws. Underage drinking laws consist of ordinances prohibiting underage consumption, attempts to purchase by underage citizens, use of fake identification, persons under 21 to sell alcohol, and persons under 21 to be clerks (a cashier at a convince store) along with laws requiring alcohol outlets to post warning signs of the consequences of violating alcohol laws. The presence of four or more of these ordinances resulted in significantly less alcohol use among students. Specifically, only 57.5% of students used alcohol in the past 30 days compared with 67.3% of students at colleges with less than four underage alcohol laws (Wechsler et al. 2002). According to the Oxford, Mississippi Code of Ordinances, Oxford employs four underage drinking ordinances specified by Wechsler. These ordinances include prohibiting underage consumption (Sec. 14-49a), prohibiting attempted purchases by underage students

(Sec. 14-2c), prohibiting the use of false identification (Sec. 14-50a), and prohibiting persons under 21 to sell alcohol (Sec. 14-8).

High-volume laws include ordinances restricting beer sold in pitchers, limits on happy hours, restricting billboards advertising alcohol, requiring keg registration, prohibiting open containers, and implementing .08 BAC per se blood alcohol concentration laws for driving under the influence – meaning a certain blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level signifies a person is legally impaired. A presence of four or more high-volume laws affected the percentage of college students that drank in the past 30 days to a greater degree than the presence of four or more underage laws. Only 50.7% of students drank in the past 30 days in communities with four or more high-volume laws, whereas 65% of students drank in the past 30 days in communities with less than four high-volume laws (Wechsler et al. 2002). The State of Mississippi and the City of Oxford employ four alcohol laws with lack of restrictions on pitchers and happy hours comprising the obvious exceptions. The City of Oxford Code of Ordinances requires keg registration (Sec. 14-88) and prohibits open containers in public (Sec 14-48). Also, according to Section 14-44 (4) of The Code of Ordinances, “It shall be unlawful in the city, for any owner, proprietor, manager or employee of any establishment which has a privilege license authorizing the sale of light wine or beer at retail to...Display any outside sign or signs advertising the sale of light wine or beer within the city.” Thus, the city ordinance exceeds the ordinance concerning billboards in Wechsler’s study by restricting other mediums of advertisement. Additionally, the State of Mississippi

enforces a per se blood alcohol concentration (BAC) law of .08. Oxford has implemented both more underage and more high-volume alcohol laws than the average university communities. Thus, the city of Oxford has met many of the policy recommendations offered by college drinking studies related to The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study.

**Tables 6 and 7. Underage and Volume laws in Oxford**

Volume Laws	Yes/No
4 or more laws present	Yes
Ban on Pitchers	No
Ban on Happy Hours	No
Keg Registration	Yes
Ban on Billboard Ads	Yes
Open Containers	Yes
.08 BAC laws	Yes

Underage Laws	Yes/No
4 or more laws present	Yes
Fake IDs prohibited	Yes
Underage consumption of alcohol prohibited	Yes
Attempts to buy alcohol underage prohibited	Yes
Must be 21 to sell alcohol	Yes
Warning signs posted at alcohol outlets	Yes
Must be 21 to clerk	No

Despite, the presence of recommended policy measures, high alcohol prices, and restrictions on the access to alcohol the reputation of heavy drinking at Ole Miss persists. Possibly, community and policy factors have less of an effect on heavy drinking at college campuses with college-level factors indicative of binge drinking. As far as college-level factors, the University's characteristics resembled universities

with high student binge-drinking rates in each of the four subsets. The combination of all high-risk for heavy drinking college factors, like lack of diversity, high proportions of Greek-affiliated students and sports fans, low supervision of residence for the majority of the student body, and lack of opportunities for social capital, could overshadow any beneficial affects of restrictive community policies. Since, Ole Miss' student body resembles a campus with high rates of binge drinking based on college environmental factors and a campus with low rates of binge drinking based on community environmental factors, a comparison to a similar school with a similar party reputation and college-level characteristics could confirm or disconfirm the lack of importance of community-level factors to colleges like Ole Miss.

### **Chapter 3: A Comparison of Environmental Factors Related to Binge Drinking at the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia**

In order to discover further strengths and weakness of the University Mississippi's approach to student drinking, a comparison to a more similar university is warranted. The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study includes many different colleges that vary in many different characteristics such as geographic region, student body size, religious affiliation, and the institution's funding source. However, the University of Georgia serves as a natural comparison with Ole Miss. Both schools are large public universities, members of the Southeastern Conference, and have undisputed reputations as party schools. The University of Georgia currently holds the number one party school ranking from The Princeton Review and has held a spot in the top ten of The Princeton Review's rankings for each of the past three years, whereas the University of Mississippi has received a top five ranking for each of the past four years (Rockler-Gladen 2006). The University of Georgia instituted a strike policy very similar to the University of Mississippi, in fact UGA's policy helped to shape the current policy at Ole Miss. Also, both schools' student cultures include fraternities, local music scenes, football, and nightlife. However, the State of Georgia does not have any dry counties and beer and light wine are legal on the University of Georgia's campus. Since a majority of in-state students attend the University of Georgia and the state lacks dry counties, students at the University of Georgia should have more similar attitudes towards alcohol than students at the University of Mississippi. In addition, the University of

Georgia differs from Ole Miss due to the University's greater academic reputation and a significantly larger student body.

I will compare the presence of college-level factors (supervision of residence, student affiliation, and demographics) and community factors (low price, price discounting and adult binge drinking rates, volume and underage drinking policies) defined in the previous chapter at the two schools. One factor mentioned in the previous chapter, social capital, will be excluded from the comparison and another factor, access to alcohol, will be addressed only briefly due to lack of available evidence. Analysis of social capital and access to alcohol at the University of Mississippi provided in the last chapter derived from familiarity with the University and the City of Oxford. Thus, lack of familiarity of the University of Georgia limits an in depth comparison of the two universities to the nine other factors discussed in the previous chapter. Also, the respective universities' alcohol policies and police enforcement will be considered in the comparison. A comparison of enforcement may reveal whether the universities employ restrictive or lenient approaches towards student drinking.

College level factors including student body demographics, student affiliation, and student residence were obtained through The Common Data Set for Ole Miss, the University of Georgia Fact Book, the University of Georgia website, and the US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics website. I used the universities' respective school newspapers (*The Daily Mississippian* for Ole

Miss and *Red and Black* for UGA) to obtain student season ticket sales in order to gauge the presence of sports fans at each university. The respective universities' websites provided the universities' alcohol policies. Information regarding enforcement of the alcohol policy derived from campus arrest reports. The University of Georgia publishes annual arrest records and two newspapers, *The Daily Mississippian* and the *Laurel Leader-Call*, reported arrest figures for the University of Mississippi. I found most of the information about alcohol laws, price, taxes, and access in The Athens Code of Ordinances, The Oxford Code of Ordinances, and The Mississippi and Georgia Department of Revenue websites. In addition, I obtained information concerning price discounting in Athens, GA from a section from The Athens Code of Ordinances concerning price discounting. Lastly, the American Health Rankings website proved the adult binge drinking rates for the two respective states.

## **COLLEGE FACTORS**

### **Demographics**

Both universities share a high prevalence of Greek life, reverence for college athletics, status as hotspots for independent music, a widely renowned party reputation, and a varied nightlife to support each of the other shared qualities. But the universities differ in academic reputation, student population, and state attitudes towards alcohol. Yet how do the universities compare with each other and the national average as far as college-level factors that affect binge drinking? First, how do the two universities differ with respect to student body characteristics?

Wechsler and Kuo found that students' binge drinking habits varied along with characteristics like age, gender, and ethnicity. Women, minorities, and students ages 22 and older exhibited a lower risk for binge drinking and a greater presence of these types of students decreased the risks for binge drinking among students ages 18 to 21, white students, and male students – students at high-risk for binge drinking(2003: 1929). Differences in the presence of women form one major difference between the two universities demographically. UGA's student population contains 58% women, five percentage points more than the percentage of female students at Ole Miss (National Center for Education Statistics 2010a; 2010b). However, the proportion of females at a university affects binge drinking rates among high-risk students less significantly at schools like UGA and Ole Miss than at smaller schools (Wechsler and Kuo 2003: 1931).

Both UGA and Ole Miss have student bodies composed of 21% minorities (National Center for Education Statistics 2010a; 2010b). The University of Mississippi has less minority students when compared to other large in-state universities such as Mississippi State and Southern Miss, but the University of Georgia, a school without well-known historic and current racial controversies, enrolls an equal percentage of minority students. This comparison seems to alleviate some concern about racial tensions affecting the recruitment of minority students at the University of Mississippi. In fact, the student body of the University of Georgia consists of only 7% black students, whereas the University of Mississippi student body includes 15% black students (National Center for Education Statistics

2010a; 2010b). However, according to the 2010 Census, Mississippi's African American population is 7 percentage points higher than Georgia's. The comparison suggests that some other factors besides racial tensions might dissuade minority students from attending universities like Ole Miss or UGA or other factors persuade white students to choose Ole Miss or UGA in greater numbers than minority students.

Due to inconsistency of statistics categories between the two colleges, a direct comparison of students 22 or older becomes difficult. At the University of Mississippi, 35% of underage students are 22 or older, while only 5% of the undergraduate student population at the University of Georgia is 25 or older and 44% of students in undergraduate programs at UGA are between 21 and 24 (The University of Mississippi 2010; The University of Georgia 2010; Jones 2010). Although the undergraduate populations seem to have a similar proportion of older students, the presence of graduate students at the University of Georgia ensures UGA has a larger proportion of older students than the University of Mississippi. Graduate students at UGA account for 25% of the entire student population, whereas only 17% of Ole Miss students are grad students (The University of Georgia 2010; National Center for Education Statistics 2010b). When taking the entire student body population into account, 21.5% of students are 25 or older and 43% are between ages 21 and 24 at the University of Georgia (The University of Georgia 2010). Graduate school programs provide opportunities to increase the prevalence of older student on college campuses, since a college degree precedes graduate

school as a pre-requisite, nearly every student enters graduate studies at 22 or older. An effort to increase the recruitment, funding, and enrollment of graduate programs would also provide the University of Mississippi the opportunity to gain a greater percentage of older students, who decrease binge drinking rates among high-risk students.

**Table 8. Presence of Low-Risk Binge Drinking Students at Ole Miss and UGA**

Diversity	Ole Miss	UGA	Nation
Minorities	21%	21%	27%
Older students (22 or older)	35%	49% 21 and older	32.8%
Females	53%	58%	54.3%

### **Supervision of Residence**

Secondly, supervision of residence differs significantly between the two universities. Drinking habits vary among college students with respect to the level of supervision of students' residences (Harford, Wechsler, and Muthén 2002: 277). Fewer students living in residences of high supervision, such as substance-free, same gender residence halls, binge drink than students living in places of low supervision, like fraternity houses (Wechsler et al. 2002). Akin to Ole Miss, UGA also requires first year students to live on campus. But, more students (32.7%) live on campus at the University of Georgia when compared to students living on campus at the University of Mississippi (27%) (The University of Georgia 2010; The University

of Mississippi 2010). However, 69% of University of Georgia students who reside on-campus live in coeducational dorms (The University of Georgia 2010). Students living in coed dormitories or fraternity and sorority houses faced an increased likelihood of heavy drinking than students living in single sex dorms (Harford, Wechsler, and Muthén 2002: 271). And, another 17.5% of students living on campus reside in fraternity and sorority houses. Thus, less than one quarter of students living on campus at the University of Georgia reside in residences associated with low binge drinking (The University of Georgia 2010).

**Table 9. Differences in Supervision of Residence at Ole Miss and UGA**

Residence	Ole Miss	UGA	Level of Supervision
On-Campus:	27%	32.7%	
Single Gender Dorms	10 traditional dorms and 2 residential colleges	4.4%	High
Co-ed Dorms	None	22.7%	Low
Apartments	3 apartments, one designated for family housing	n/a	Low
Greek Houses	13 fraternity houses, 9 sorority houses	5.7%	Low
Off-Campus:	73%	67.3%	
With Parents	Freshman required to live on-campus or commute from home only 12% of freshman live off-campus	n/a	High
Without Parents	Large majority of students living off campus	n/a	Low

Despite having a smaller proportion of students living on-campus than the University of Georgia, the University of Mississippi only provides single gender

dormitories. Thus, every student living on-campus outside of Greek houses and the few University owned apartments has a lower likelihood of engaging in heavy drinking. The lack of coed residence halls at the University of Mississippi signifies a strength of the University's policy towards binge drinking when compared to the University of Georgia because many students who live on campus reside in a location associated with lower risks for binge drinking. Whereas UGA has more students living on-campus, living arrangements at Ole Miss ensure on-campus students greater protection from the risks associated with binge drinking. However, much room for improvement still exists. The University of Mississippi fails to provide enough housing to meet student demand to live off campus and well over 60% of the student body lives in residences of low supervision.

### **Student Affiliation**

Lastly, the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia share many similarities with regards to student affiliation. Fraternity and sorority members, student athletes, and sports fans engage in heavy drinking more and more often than students absent of these affiliations (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 6,55). A high prevalence of Greek organizations exist at both universities, but 35% of Ole Miss students participate in fraternities and sororities while only a quarter of UGA students are actively involved in Greek life (The University of Georgia 2010, The University of Mississippi 2010). Contrary to the relationship between students engaged in Greek life at the universities, a greater percentage of University of Georgia students classify as sports fans when compared with students at the

University of Mississippi. Whereas Ole Miss provides 7,500 student season football tickets, a figure that allows a seat for 47% of the student population at football games, UGA allots 18,026 football season tickets to students enabling 52% of the student population to attend football games (Fuller 2010; Burnett 2009).

The demand for tickets at the two universities differs significantly as well. The University of Georgia Athletic Department reserves the right to split season tickets if student demand for tickets outpaces supply, also the athletic department opened season ticket sales to students for only 48 hours during 2010, a move that left many students interested in UGA football without tickets. In 2009, 22,852 students or 66% of the student body attempted to purchase season tickets (Burnett 2009). Ole Miss employs no such 48-hour time span to purchase ticket nor announces disclaimers about the possibility of splitting tickets, a fact that attests to a lower demand for season tickets and a lower prevalence of sports fans in general. Both universities have roughly the same proportion of athletes with 1.8% of UGA students and 2.2% of Ole Miss students participating in NCAA Division 1 Athletics (National Center for Education Statistics 2010a; 2010b). Of the major types of student affiliation, the higher presence of fraternity members at the University of Mississippi causes less concern than a high concentration of sports fans because social capital has been shown to help lessen the rate of heavy drinking among fraternity members, but no such relationship exists with sports fans (Weitzman and Chen 2005: 308).

**Table 10. Differences in High-Risk Student Affiliation at Ole Miss and UGA**

Student Affiliation	Ole Miss	UGA	Binge Drinking Rate
Sorority	36%	26%	57%
Fraternity	34%	21%	73%
Sports Fans (Student Football Season Ticket Sales)	7,500	18,026 with demand outpacing supply	Binge drink 53% of times when consuming alcohol
Male Athletes	224	306	57%
Female Athletes	139	308	43%

### Policy and Enforcement

A comparison of college-level factors shows both universities' demographics, student affiliations, and supervision of residences mirrors colleges with high binge drinking rates. Also, both universities have recently constructed or revised alcohol policies to address their respective student bodies drink habits. After a series of alcohol-related tragedies, the University of Mississippi formed an alcohol policy in the fall of 2007. Ole Miss created a two-strike suspension policy for violations of the alcohol policy influenced by a similar policy at the University of Georgia (Hutter 2010). However, in 2010 administrators at the University of Georgia moved away from the two-strike policy that motivated Ole Miss' alcohol policy (The University of Georgia 2010).

Under the current policy, a University of Georgia student with two alcohol violations no longer faces an automatic suspension. Instead, the student may be

assigned to an alcohol and other drug education program, community service, or additional probation. Additionally, the UGA alcohol policy designates different levels of severity to alcohol violations, similarly to how state and federal governments apply harsher penalties to driving under the influence (DUI) charges than minor in possession (MIP) charges (The University of Georgia 2010). For example, an underage student caught possessing alcohol must complete an alcohol education program and receives a 6-month probation, while underage consumption of alcohol entails 12 months probation and an alcohol education program, and any student who receives two DUIs while in college at UGA faces immediate suspension. At Ole Miss, a student caught for underage possession, underage consumption, or driving under the influence receives the same minimum punishment of an alcohol education program and probation for the current semester and two following semesters regardless of the severity of the offense while the amount of community service hours assigned typically varies with respect to the severity of the violation (The University of Mississippi 2010; Wallace 2011).

In addition to new differences in the mechanisms of punishment at the universities, violations of the University of Georgia alcohol policy includes only unlawful activities such as possession and consumption by a minor, distribution of alcohol to a minor, and driving under the influence, whereas Ole Miss includes prohibitions on unlawful activities as well as abusive activities such as drinking games, rapid consumption techniques, and possession of items for the common distribution of alcohol and allows for the confiscation of unattended alcohol (The

University of Georgia 2010; The University of Mississippi 2010). Based on the presence of stricter punishment for lesser violations, such as underage consumption of alcohol, and the inclusion of abusive behaviors to the list of alcohol violations in addition to illegal behaviors, the University of Mississippi clearly employs the more restrictive policy. However, according to Shearer, administrators from the University of Georgia lessened student punishment for alcohol violations immediately following number one party school ranking in The Princeton Review (2010). The Princeton Review faces criticism from many university officials because the company refuses to disclose the methods used to determine the party school rankings. But colleges refuse to release information concerning heavy student drinking on their campuses. According to Baer and Walters, The Princeton Review and other party school rankings perpetuate student drinking more so than other environmental factors (2006: 5). So due to a lack of available data, the possibly unreliable Princeton Review becomes a good indicator for heavy student drinking. UGA witnessed a steady incline in party school reputation since 2008, moving from 7<sup>th</sup> among party schools in 2008 to 4<sup>th</sup> in 2009 and finally reaching number one in 2010 after implementing their two-strike alcohol policy (Rockler-Gladen 2010). Barrett Seaman's finding that party school reputation increases as alcohol policies become more restrictive and UGA's decision to lessen alcohol punishment after a number one party school ranking seems to suggest that the University of Georgia decided a less restrictive policy would help to reduce the

University's party reputation and student binge drinking more so than a restrictive two strike-policy (Seaman 2005: 122).

Seaman also noted heavier enforcement at universities promoted underage drinking in dorm rooms where students often attempt to drink heavily enough to maintain a drunken state of consciousness for an entire evening due to a lack of opportunity to drink in public (Seaman 2005: 115). However, a strict alcohol policy does not guarantee stringent enforcement of a university's alcohol policy. So, how do the University of Georgia and the University of Mississippi compare as far as police enforcement of the underage drinking policy? During 2009 and 2010 more DUI arrests per student population were made on the University of Georgia campus, but public drunk arrests per student population at the University of Mississippi eclipsed the public drunk arrest rate at UGA by more than tenfold in both 2009 and 2010. In addition, DUI arrests per student population tripled at Ole Miss and alcohol-related arrests in general at University of Mississippi and public drunk arrests per student population at UGA both doubled from 2009 to 2010 (Madden 2011; Schnugg 2011; The University of Georgia 2010).

**Table 11. A Comparison of Arrests at Ole Miss and UGA Between 2009 and 2010**

Arrests	MIP	DUI	Public Drunk	Total
UGA 2009	150	118	8	276
UGA 2010	203	142	16	361
UGA % Change	+35%	+17%	+50%	+31%
UM 2009	n/a	20	57	80
UM 2010	n/a	71	97	183
UM % Change	n/a	+255%	+70%	+129%

But these comparisons ignore the changes in alcohol policy at the University of Georgia in September of 2010. Thus, a comparison of arrests made in 2009 and 2010 at UGA between the dates September 1<sup>st</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup> shows a 50% decrease in public drunk arrests and a 39% decrease in underage possession of alcohol citations from 2009 to 2010. This statistic implies that although alcohol related arrests increased in 2010, the majority of these alcohol arrests occurred before the alcohol policy changed and then alcohol arrests declined significantly after the policy revisions. The University of Georgia appears to have responded to their number one party school ranking in 2010 by creating a less restrictive alcohol policy and reducing enforcement of underage and public alcohol use. These policy decisions may represent an acknowledgement of the failures of strict enforcement and restrictive policies to reduce binge drinking among college students and party reputation at universities. However, enforcement of alcohol related crimes

continues to rise at Ole Miss as evidenced by the tripling of DUI arrests on-campus from 2009 to 2010.

**Table 12. Differences in Alcohol-Related Arrests at UGA Between Fall of 2009 and 2010**

Fall Arrests at UGA	MIP	DUI	Public Drunk
2009	46	20	8
2010	28	20	4
% Change	No change	-39%	-50%

## COMMUNITY FACTORS

### Price Discounting

The town of Oxford and the city of Athens differ in population similarly to the two respective universities the communities contain. While inhabitants of Oxford number around 20,000, well over 100,000 citizens reside in Athens. Furthermore, the respective local governments take incongruent approaches towards price discounting at alcohol venues. In the previous chapter, I provided an example of low-priced pitchers to emphasize price discounting among bars in Oxford, but The Code of Ordinances of Athens prohibits this type of marketing for Athens bars. Section 6-3-11 of The Code of Ordinances of Athens contains several regulations that effectively eliminate happy hour type promotions at local bars. The Code of Ordinances mandates that higher volume alcoholic drinks must be priced in proportion to regular-sized alcohol beverages. So, if a bar offers a beer for 3 dollars and a pitcher contains 5 beers, then a pitcher of beer must cost 15 dollars. Other

regulations include prohibitions against free alcohol, selling alcoholic beverages for less than a dollar, offering reduced price beverages after 11 P.M., offering two or more beverages for a fixed price, or even offering two or more beverages for a substantially similar price, like offering one beer for 3 dollars, but 2 beers for 4 dollars.

*The Oxford Code of Ordinances* fails to address price discounting at establishments that provide alcohol. Such an addition to the community policy could greatly affect college drinking culture at the Square. If Oxford adopted Athens' approach to price discounting, then the price of alcohol at the Square would increase by a great margin. Each of the policies mentioned would address types of promotions frequently used by bars on the Oxford Square. On Thursday nights, Irié, a restaurant and bar on the Square, offers \$1 dollar draft beers from 11 P.M. until 12 A.M., but a provision against price discounting after 11 P.M. would prohibit this practice. Several different bars and restaurants, most notably Proud Larry's, offer "Two for Tuesday" specials where patrons can buy two beers, wines, or mixed drinks for the price of one, yet laws against offering two drinks for a fixed price and two drinks for substantial the same price would eliminate such promotions. Finally, Rooster's ever-popular two-dollar pitcher special would effectively become a ten-dollar pitcher special by implementing elements of Athens' alcohol policy. Special promotions influence students to drink more heavily and occur frequently on weeknights in Oxford. Laws aimed at curbing such promotions could increase

students' likelihood to stay away from binge drinking during the school week and contribute to better performance in school.

### **Price**

Price discounting at bars affects alcohol price in one entity of alcohol venues within a community, but state and local taxes apply to alcohol purchased both in bars and restaurants as well as alcohol purchased from liquor stores and beer retailers. The State of Georgia places the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest excise tax on beer of all states and taxes beer by the gallon at a rate nearly 2.5 times greater than the State of Mississippi, 8<sup>th</sup> highest in beer excise taxes, but differences in sales taxes render beer more expensive in Mississippi (The Center for Science in the Public Interest 2004). Georgia's \$1.01 per gallon of beer excise tax adds 9 cents to the cost of beer, then the 4% state sales tax is applied to the purchase. So, if a single beer cost 3 dollars before tax, then after adding excise and sales taxes the beer would cost \$3.21. While, Mississippi's roughly 43 cent per gallon excise tax and 7% sales tax adds 25 cents to a 3 dollar beer.

Also, prices for liquor in Mississippi exceed the prices in Georgia. Mississippi operates state-run liquor stores where the state buys liquor from wholesale businesses, subjects the liquor to a 27.5% markup in price, and then sells the alcohol to liquor stores within the state (State of Mississippi Department of Revenue 2011). Instead, the State of Georgia practices independently managed liquor stores. The state government of Georgia places a \$3.79 per gallon liquor excise instead of acting

as a "middleman" like the state government of Mississippi (The Center for Science in the Public Interest 2004). But, once again Mississippi's combination of markup and sales tax levies a heavier fee on liquor than the State of Georgia. Most liters of liquor cost more than \$10, and a gallon consists of nearly 4 liters, so assume the average price for a certain gallon of liquor equals \$40. In Georgia, after excise and sales taxes this gallon of liquor would cost \$45.54, while in Mississippi, applying relevant taxes to the same gallon of liquor would yield a bottle priced \$54.57. Thus, alcohol purchases are more budget effective at alcohol venues for students at UGA in comparison to Ole Miss students. Hence, state tax rates and policies on alcohol in Mississippi function to dissuade students from drinking, but lack of legislation addressing price discounting at bars and restaurants presents a major loophole for low-priced alcohol. Consequently, high alcohol prices at retail stores coupled with price discounting at bars and restaurants influence students to drink at bars in Oxford to spend less and allow an escape from normally high priced alcohol.

**Table 13. Differences in Alcohol Taxes and Markup Between Mississippi and Georgia**

Price	Mississippi	Georgia	State Average
Sales Tax	7%	4%	4.97%
Beer Excise Tax per gallon	\$0.4268	\$1.01	\$0.278
Liquor Excise Tax per gallon	None, instead liquor is marked up 27.5% then sold to retailers	\$3.97	\$3.97

## Access

In addition, both colleges share several similarities and a few differences regarding access to alcohol. Both locations prohibit Sunday alcohol sales, but offer a few exceptions. In Athens, local authorities permit alcohol sales at restaurants and hotels (Sec. 6-3-5 (i) 7 Athens Code of Ordinances) and Oxford allows alcohol sales on Sundays after home football games and on holidays that occur on Sundays (Barnes 2011). Oxford practices more restrictive policies through limiting hours of operation for alcohol venues and prohibiting the sale of cold beer. Liquor stores in Athens can operate from 8 A.M. until 11:30 P.M. Monday through Saturday and bars and restaurants may serve alcohol from 7 A.M. until 2 A.M. Monday through Saturday (Sec. 6-3-5 (i) 1,3,4). However, liquor stores in Oxford must close by 10 P.M. Monday through Saturday and bars and restaurants are limited to serving alcohol between 7 A.M. and 12 P.M. Monday through Saturday except on Thursday and Friday when bars may remain open until 1 P.M. Also, Oxford limits access to alcohol with restrictions on cold beer and keg registration laws, while Athens effectively bans happy hours and pitcher sales at bars. Athens' ordinances place more limitations on alcohol consumed in public through regulating price discounting at bars, while Oxford's keg registration ordinance and prohibition of cold beer limits access to alcohol for home and off-premise consumption.

**Table 14. Differences in Access to Alcohol Between Oxford and Athens**

Access	Ole Miss	UGA
High Density of Alcohol Outlets	Yes	n/a, but probably
Limited Hours of Sale	Outlets: 8 A.M. – 10 P.M. M – Sa	Outlets: 8 A.M. – 11:30 P.M. M – Sa
	Bars: 7 A.M. – 12 A.M. M- W and Sa 7 A.M. – 1 A.M. Th and F	Bars: 7 A.M. – 2 A.M. M – Sa
Prohibition on Cold Beer	Yes	No
Keg Registration	Yes	No
Sunday Sales	No, except on special Sundays	No, except at restaurants and hotels
Ban on Happy Hours	No	Yes
Ban on Pitchers	No	Yes

**High-Volume and Underage Drinking Laws and Adult Binge Drinking Rates**

The two cities also differ on implementation of volume and underage alcohol laws. Both cities employ four or more of each of the respective types of laws, which should significantly reduce drinking among students. However, the two cities impose different combinations of volume laws and Oxford employs more underage alcohol laws. Oxford enforces a keg registration provision and lacks a regulation prohibiting pitchers, while Athens severely restricts happy hours and effectively bans the benefit of pitchers but allows unregulated kegs. Also, while Athens employs several underage drinking laws, the city allows persons younger than 21 to

serve and sell alcohol. Yet, Sec. 14-8 prohibits underage persons from selling alcohol in Oxford. As mentioned before Oxford could benefit from a law mandating proportional pricing for higher volume beverages to eliminate the cost benefit of pitchers and a law addressing special promotions, but other volume and underage drinking policies in Oxford associate with lower drinking among students.

**Tables 15 and 16. Presence of Underage and Volume Drinking Laws at Oxford and Athens**

Volume Laws	Ole Miss	UGA
4 or more laws present	Yes	Yes
Ban on Pitchers	No	Yes
Ban on Happy Hours	No	Yes
Keg Registration	Yes	No
Ban on Billboard Ads	Yes	No
Open Containers	Yes	Yes
.08 BAC laws	Yes	Yes

Underage Laws	Ole Miss	UGA
4 or more laws present	Yes	Yes
Fake IDs prohibited	Yes	Yes
Underage consumption of alcohol prohibited	Yes	Yes
Attempts to buy alcohol underage prohibited	Yes	Yes
Must be 21 to sell alcohol	Yes	No
Warning signs posted at alcohol outlets	Yes	Yes
Must be 21 to clerk	No	No

Lastly, the binge drinking rates among adults in Georgia and Mississippi rank below the national average. Both states rank in the top 10 states as far as low drinking rates with Mississippi placing 4<sup>th</sup> and Georgia in 9<sup>th</sup> (America's Health Rankings 2010). In the ten states with the lowest rates of adult binge only 36% of students binge drink, a considerable deviation from the 44% of college students who binge drink nationally (Nelson et al. 2005). However, this factor appears to influence binge drinking at neither the University of Mississippi nor the University of Georgia. Perhaps, Athens provides an alluring place for adults to drink heavily like Oxford.

Furthermore, based on each of the community-level characteristics both colleges appear to resemble colleges and universities with low rates of binge drinking among students. So, despite well-known party school reputations at UGA and Ole Miss, the cities around them have acted in nearly perfect accord with regulations outlined by many binge drinking studies. The two colleges match heavy drinking universities as far as college factors, but the communities around them mirror universities with low binge drinking. Yet, these restrictive community policies have not led to a decrease in party reputation among the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia. Thus, college-level factors seem to more heavily influence binge drinking rates at the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia, and this comparison supports the supposition that

community and policy factors significantly affect binge drinking rates at universities with high-risk college-level factors for heavy drinking.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

### **Findings and Analysis**

In the last chapter, I compared the factors associated with student binge drinking outlined in chapter two and the alcohol policies and police enforcement at the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia. The comparison revealed that both of the communities surrounding the large, public, Southeastern institutions have implemented many measures to restrict binge drinking by price, access, price discounting, volume drinking laws, and underage drink laws. However, the two universities' college-level factors such as demographics, supervision of residence, and student affiliation (Greek, athletes, and sports fans) appeared to promote binge drinking among students. The two universities closely followed the restrictive approach advocated by Henry Wechsler and the NIAAA College Alcohol Task Force for the past several years, but party school reputation remained constant for Ole Miss and rose at UGA. The relationship between restrictive regulations advocated by the NIAAA at the two universities has not appeared to affect the reputation of the colleges.

In fact, many other examples exist of universities employing more restrictive alcohol policies and party school reputation increasing. Much like Ole Miss, Indiana University implemented a change in alcohol policy by declaring a dry campus in 2001 after two student deaths involving alcohol. During the next year and a half after the new alcohol policy, alcohol arrests quadrupled at Indiana and the

University received recognition as the number one party school for the 2002-2003 school year from The Princeton Review. The following year, The Princeton Review bestowed the number one party school ranking on the University of Colorado. In 1997, the University of Colorado began a 6-year three-strike policy similar to the policies at UGA and Ole Miss. The final year of the policy yielded a number one party school ranking and discouraging results – the binge drinking rate among students remained unchanged from before the alcohol policy (Seaman 2005: 122).

The trend of changes in alcohol policy and increases in alcohol-related arrests leading to a number one party school ranking also applies to the University of Georgia. In the previous chapter, I noted the increase in arrest rate from 2009 to 2010. However, the arrest rate at the University of Georgia increased from 2009 to 2010 despite a significant drop off in arrests from September 1 through December 15 of 2010, the period after UGA created and implemented a less restrictive alcohol policy, when compared to the same period in 2009. In 2010, DUI arrests rose by 20%, MIP arrests rose by 36%, and public drunk arrests doubled, despite a 39% decrease in MIPs and a 50% decrease in public drunk arrests in the fall of 2010 when compared with the fall of 2009 (The University of Georgia 2010). The decrease in arrests during the fall of 2010 implies that most of the arrests at UGA in 2010 occurred during the spring semester – the semester immediately preceding the University of Georgia's number one party school ranking. Therefore, UGA possibly decided to decrease underage drinking enforcement and lessen alcohol

violation sanctions after the number one party school ranking in order to approach the problem of student drinking differently.

Yet unlike in 2007 when the University of Mississippi elected to model their alcohol policy after the University of Georgia, now the universities take quite different approaches to curb binge drinking. Alcohol arrests on campus at Ole Miss rose considerably from 2009 to 2010 as evidenced by alcohol-related arrests doubling from 2009 to 2010 (Madden 2011; Schnugg 2011). The rise in arrests at the University of Mississippi presents several concerns. First, as with UGA and Indiana party school reputation increased along with an increase in alcohol-related arrest. Second, at the University of Colorado restrictive policies and increased enforcement yielded no change in the binge drinking rate among students. The University of Mississippi seems to be following the same approach that led to an increased party school reputation at Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana. Once again, party school reputation encourages binge drinking more strongly than other environmental factors (Baer and Walters 2006: 5).

The trend in increased enforcement and more restrictive alcohol policies associating with an increased party school reputation among larger schools like Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana appears to dispute the claim that heavy enforcement and community-level factors matter at large universities. In the previous chapter, both UGA and Ole Miss only resembled colleges with heavy binge drinking rates among college-level factors. In fact, each college implemented each restrictive

community-level factor defined in chapter two, except for price discounting in Oxford, and both states rank in the top ten as far as low binge drinking among adults. Athens' extensive price discounting restrictions that effectively ban happy hours and cheap pitchers have yet to reduce the University of Georgia's reputation as a party school over the past decade. Also, Oxford's ban on the sale of cold beer, limited bar and alcohol outlet hours, and keg registration requirements have not significantly reduced the University of Mississippi's reputation as a party school. So, logic suggests that price discounting regulations in Oxford will not cure the alcohol problem at Ole Miss just as the same regulation in Athens have not diminished UGA's party school reputation.

However, the comparison between the University of Mississippi and the University of Georgia suggests that college-level factors contribute to student alcohol culture at the two similar universities. Both schools lacked a significant proportion of minority students whose presence reduces the rate of binge drinking among high-risk students (National Center for Education Statistics 2010a; 2010b). Also, a large majority of the student bodies at both universities live in residences of low supervision. The University of Mississippi almost exclusively supplies single-gender substance-free residence halls associated with low binge drinking for students living on-campus, but around 73% live off-campus under low supervision (2010). While the University of Georgia's designation of a great number of coeducational dormitories fails to supply a substantial amount of low supervision housing on campus (2010). Also, the University of Mississippi lacks well-advertised

opportunities to build social capital among students through volunteer activities. An increase in such activities is associated with a lower binge drinking rate among members of Greek organizations (Weitzman and Chen 2005).

Emphasizing greater diversity, high supervision of residence, and social capital allows a university to combat drinking culture without significantly affecting recruitment or angering alumni. However, any approach to decrease binge drinking by altering trends in student affiliation could alienate alumni and impair recruitment. Nationally, 11% of formerly Greek affiliated alumni donate between one and five thousand dollars to their alma maters, whereas only 1.4% of non-Greek alumni donate the same amount (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002: 50). An attempt to discourage Greek recruitment could anger many of these Greek affiliated alumni and cause donations to the University to decrease. Also, the high participation in Greek organizations among freshmen at Ole Miss suggests that the opportunity to participate in fraternities and sororities influences many freshmen students to choose the University of Mississippi. In addition, social capital can help to decrease binge drinking among fraternity and sorority members (Weitzman and Chen 2005). A social capital approach to binge drinking addresses the problem of heavy drinking among Greek students directly, while discouraging or diminishing fraternity recruitment affects philanthropy, community service, and encouragement to participate in on-campus organizations which Greek organizations foster.

In addition, an attempt to diminish the presence of the student athlete or sports fan could cause further alienation among alumni and stifle student recruitment. On Saturdays of home football games during the fall, thousands of alumni travel from across Mississippi and all over the nation to enjoy a day in the Grove and an Ole Miss football game. Also, the pageantry surrounding athletics associated with universities of the Southeastern Conference provides the University of Mississippi an advantage over other schools in the competition for students. In fact, the national media often cites the Grove as one of the best tailgating locations in the nation (Hamilton 2006; Ward 2010). Athletics provides the University consistent exposure in the national media and a means of distinction from other colleges and universities. In fact, after the Ole Miss football team achieved considerable success in 2008 and 2009 student enrollment rose considerably for the 2010-2011 school year. Many other factors, like the economic downturn, recognition as a school with great educational value, and exposure from the 2008 presidential debate, surely contributed to the increased enrollment as well. But, success in athletics brings more media coverage for a university on television, in newspapers and magazines, and on the Internet.

### **Obstacles to Creating an Effective Alcohol Policy**

Economic conditions such as the lack of government funding for institutions of higher learning and the economic downturn, which affects donations to universities creates, increased competition among universities for students in order

to obtain tuition and other fees to supplement underfunded budgets. This phenomenon creates the commercialization of higher education. Universities begin to make policy decisions to attract students in order to balance budgets rather than to satisfy the major institutional goal of providing education (Lazerson 2010). College students grow up in a world that fully endorses the idea that college life includes alcohol, and due to this environment perpetuated by the mass media many college students come to universities with the expectation of drinking (Leaderman and Stewart 2005: 5). Thus, any attempt to address college binge drinking at a particular college could create a disadvantage in the competition for students. Students who view college as a place to engage in drinking might begin to favor other universities over a university that decides to curb college drinking.

Also, news stories about heavy drinking among college students and numerous alcohol-related tragedies, like Ole Miss experienced in the years leading up to the Two-Strike alcohol policy, can trigger a moral panic. Moral panics involve issues considered taboo among the general population, like mischief performed by deviant youth subcultures or heavy alcohol use among underage college students, which appear to threaten societal norms or values. A moral panic begins with a media report that misrepresents an issue so that the perceived threat exceeds the actual hazard. As a result of media attention, the public grows more worried about the issue and local police forces become sensitized to the matter. Thus, police begin to make more arrests causing an increase in news stories on the subject. Finally, the

distorted reports by the media and subsequent response from government agencies generate more deviance (see Cohen 1993).

Many factors contributed to the deaths of Laura Treppendahl, Amy Ewing, and Officer Robert Langley, but underage and excessive drinking received the majority of the blame in each case. For example, lack of affordable or government-subsidized transportation for bar patrons or poor enforcement of DUI laws could have become a central issue in Treppendahl's death (Kanengiser 2003). Also, the media could have pinpointed the effect of parked cars on the side of Highway 6 during game days on a driver's vision or lack of police presence to direct traffic as a central cause of Ewing's death (Castens 2006). In addition, cocaine and other drug use or questionable police practices both had the potential to become a central issue after the death of Robert Langley (TTH 2007). However, since the media singled out student alcohol abuse as a major factor in each of the separate deaths, which were all subject to a different combination of factors, public concern over student drinking arose and the police became more watchful for student alcohol abuse. Thus, more arrests may have occurred, which caused more media reports about student alcohol use, and led to greater public anxiety.

In a state with a heavy population of Southern Baptists, 36 dry counties, and ongoing debates about the sale of alcohol, the controversy surrounding alcohol use and especially underage alcohol use exceeds other states in the nation (Wilkie 2001; Hanson 2010; Mitchell 2010). Also, the discussion surrounding the issue of

allowing alcohol sales on Sundays or even alcohol sales in general in many cities and counties across Mississippi has produced heavy religious opposition, which almost exclusively cites moral values as a reason to oppose alcohol sales (Mitchell 2010; Castens 2011; Barnes 2011). Thus, the controversy already surrounding alcohol prompted greater media coverage and public concern about alcohol rather than the other factors involved in the three deaths. Due to the public concern and media coverage concerning alcohol's relationship to the three deaths, the University of Mississippi faced greater pressure to address alcohol use on campus. So, the Two-Strike policy was developed in-part due to the public and the media's response to alcohol's relationship in the three deaths.

When an institution creates a policy in response to citizens' concerns and fears, that institution engages in symbolic politics. The institution constructs the policy to appeal to citizens and gain popularity by using oversimplified arguments and half-truths, but actually changes little. This response often lacks a logical substance, but rather creates a political spectacle that serves the function of alleviating public concern about an issue (see Edelman 1988). The University of Mississippi's Two-Strike policy has the appearance of symbolic politics. The Two-Strike policy addressed a moral panic regarding excessive alcohol use by college students by providing concrete minimum sanctions for certain behaviors, but allowed unintended negative consequences like dangerous drinking in residence hall rooms and heavy liquor consumption at fraternity houses to continue. Neither the policy nor the University expressively addressed issues like on-campus housing,

opportunities for social capital, recruiting a more diverse student body, and providing affordable transportation to and from bars.

However, these issues indirectly address student alcohol use and regardless of effectiveness, indirect approaches to an issue fail to convince the public that the institution addressed the problem to like direct sanctions for violations. Also, sanctions for alcohol violations provide tangible examples of "progress" in the new alcohol policy for the concerned public, whereas an institution faces difficulty documenting and communicating the success of indirect measures to the concerned public. For instance, if the arrest rate increases, then local media can easily assert that Ole Miss stepped up enforcement of underage drinking. These headlines help to put citizens' concerns about student drinking at ease. However, a headline reading "Ole Miss breaks ground on new dormitories" fails to reassure the public that the University is focused on underage drinking. Thus, public anxiety about alcohol use at the University of Mississippi not only motivated in-part discussion about the policy, but also somewhat dictated the ways the University can address the alcohol problem. But universities serve the public as educators and have frequent and consistent access to the press. The University could use the press to inform the public of environmental effects on binge drinking and how indirect measures could help to lessen heavy student drinking. This approach to binge drinking teaches the public about solutions, alleviates citizens' fears, and allows the University to effectively focus on minimizing student binge drinking.

## Recommendations

Fortunately, no major alcohol-related student death has occurred in Oxford or at the University to arouse public concern over student drinking at Ole Miss since Bradley Jameson's death in the fall of 2008. The lack of publicity and a lesser need to satisfy public anxiety about college alcohol culture enables the University to implement changes to University policy and lobby for changes in community policy without a demand for positive results. In fact, the University can address several college-level factors without the appearance of focusing on dangerous student drinking. The University of Mississippi lacks a large presence of minority students, well-supervised student residences, and community service activities present at colleges with lower rates of drinking. Addressing these shortcomings will benefit the University not only by helping to lower the drinking rate, but also by improving the quality of life and education for students.

First, the University must address ethnic diversity. Wechsler and Kuo found that a greater presence minority students lowers the rate of binge drinking among students at high-risk for heavy drinking such as white, underage, and male students. Also, minority students historically drink at lower levels than white students (2003: 1929). Thus increasing the minority and African American population on campus would reduce the overall binge drinking rate because minority students binge drink less and appear to influence high risk groups to binge drink less often, thereby diminishing Ole Miss' party school reputation which would help to reduce the

University's alcohol culture. The ethnic demographics of the State of Mississippi and other large state universities suggest that Ole Miss has the potential to improve diversity easily. Minorities constitute 40% of Mississippi residents and the student bodies of Southern Miss and Mississippi State include 39% and 27% minorities respectively (National Center for Education Statistics 2010; US Census Bureau 2010). The minority composition at Ole Miss is only 21%, but providing financial incentives, promoting greater awareness of unique opportunities at Ole Miss, and maintaining efforts to remove symbols of racial intolerance could improve the proportion of minorities.

Creating more scholarships and increasing availability of scholarships for in-state minority students would help provide financial incentive for minority students to attend Ole Miss. Such a scholarship would also eventually increase the numbers of minority students at Ole Miss and would make the University more appealing to minority students not receiving a special scholarship. Also, the University of Mississippi has several reputable departments and programs not present at other in-state universities, like Croft, the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, Accounting, Pharmacy, and Masters and Professional programs. The University should advertise these specific programs to in-state minority students to distinguish Ole Miss from the other in-state universities and the historic racial tensions in the University's past. Additionally, Croft provides a great tool for recruiting minorities in Mississippi, nationally, and internationally. A marketing program focused on attracting 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation American citizens and international students to

Ole Miss' celebrated international studies programs could yield further diversity. These students already have an understanding of the world outside of the US from personal and family background, thus these students may have a natural interest in international studies. Lastly, Ole Miss must maintain the progress made in removing symbols associated with racial intolerance, and other steps, like allotting space for historically black fraternities and sororities on fraternity and sorority row, could show greater inclusiveness.

Secondly, the University must address scarcity of on-campus housing. Increased freshman enrollment has begun to force sophomores and upperclassmen out of on-campus residence halls as evidenced by the University's decision to designate Crosby, a traditional residence for sophomores in sororities, as a freshman dormitory in 2012 (Phifer 2011). Without available on-campus housing for sophomores and upperclassmen, these students must live off-campus in residences of low supervision. Also, student housing provides more affordable residences for students because on-campus leases only cover the time periods when students attend school. Thus, students avoid paying rent for summer and winter months while away from school. Once the University provides adequate housing for the student body, some non-freshmen students will choose to live on campus for the lower price and benefits of living closer to campus.

Additionally, the University must build more dormitories to provide adequate housing for the student body, and adding certain amenities to these new

residence halls would help to attract more non-freshman students to live on campus. Many of the complaints of residence hall life include sharing bathrooms and lack of privacy. So, the addition of single occupancy rooms to provide more privacy and personal bathrooms would encourage more students to live on campus. Also, less restrictive visitation policies at dormitories for sophomores and upperclassmen would provide some of the freedom of living off-campus in an area of higher supervision. . Also, the University must continue to designate any new dormitories as single gender due to state law. Binge drinking rates among residents of coeducational residence halls near levels of fraternity house residents, so the state law benefits the University's efforts to reduce student binge drinking (Harford, Wechsler, and Múthen 2002: 271).

Lastly, Ole Miss should provide more opportunities for students to participate in community service. Community service opportunities carry special importance at Ole Miss due to the student body's high rate of participation in Greek organizations. At colleges where student perform more community service, the binge drinking rates among Greek affiliated students matches the binge drinking rate of non-Greek students (Nelson et al. 2005). The University can provide more opportunities for community service by supporting and organizing more Big Event-type events. Individual departments can increase community service hours by following the Honors College's example and requiring their students to perform a certain amount of community service hours per semester. Also, the University could provide incentives for students to participate in community service. For example,

Ole Miss could offer scholarships or awards for students who complete a certain amount of community service per semester.

However, the University must also begin to pressure the City of Oxford and Lafayette County to implement laws favorable to addressing the dangers of student alcohol culture. The University of Mississippi provides many jobs and benefits for the residents of Lafayette County. Also, the University draws students, faculty, alumni, and sports fans to the community who enrich the quality of life in the community and bring dollars to spend at local businesses. Hence, Ole Miss should demand a greater voice in the development of local laws. Several changes to laws in the surrounding area would increase safety among students who choose to drink and lower binge drinking.

Lafayette County's status as dry for beer presents a huge obstacle for the University's alcohol policy. Lafayette County's prohibition of beer affects the two heaviest drinking areas of the Ole Miss campus, the Grove and Fraternity Row. The prohibition on beer causes concern at fraternity houses in particular because the University tends to impose strikes on fraternities for the presence of beer at fraternity houses. Thus, fraternities begin to prohibit or limit their members from having beer in the fraternity house and members decide to provide exclusively or mostly liquor at parties. When fraternities provide mostly liquor at parties, the amount alcohol appears scarce to guest because fraternity members keep the liquor in their rooms as opposed to keeping coolers of beer in the hallways during times of

low enforcement. The combination of the appearance of scarcity of alcohol and the tendency of college students to mix stronger than recommended liquor drinks yields students consuming potent mixed drinks and shots.

In the Grove, liquor creates problems because tailgaters often leave coolers unattended and unlocked during football games. Underage students and guest sometimes find this unattended alcohol. Beer takes up considerably more space per percentage of alcohol in a cooler than liquor and beer is more difficult to discretely conceal in large quantities than liquor – imagine an underage kid attempting to sneak 12 beers through the Grove during a game as opposed to a single bottle of liquor. However, the Lafayette County law dissuades tailgaters from bringing beer to the Grove. The alcohol policy pursuant to Lafayette County law designates beer as illegal and throughout my college career, I have witnessed police officers pouring out massive coolers full of beer at the Grove many times. Allowing beer in the Grove would lessen the percentage of liquor left unattended, and thus lessen the risk of underage students taking and consuming large quantities of alcohol. Several possible solutions to the beer dilemma exist: the University or student groups could encourage voter registration in Lafayette County in order to pass a beer referendum in Lafayette County to become wet for beer or simply designate the town of University as wet for beer.

In addition, Ole Miss and the community should address the lack affordable transportation from the Square to off-campus residences. Rebel Ride provides

transportation for on-campus students to fraternity houses, dormitories, and the Square, but Rebel Ride fails to benefit the 73% of Ole Miss students live off-campus. Several different businesses provide transportation from the Square to off-campus residences, but these businesses normally charge a \$25 dollar flat rate fee for transportation home from the Square. When compared with the average price of a taxi ride in other cities, \$25 dollars is a very expensive two or three-mile ride home and especially expensive for students with a limited budget. Expanding Oxford-University Transit (OUT) hours provides the best solution to combat the high price of transportation from the Square. An expansion of OUT hours would allow the University to discontinue funding for Rebel Ride because OUT would transport students back to campus as well.

Other colleges and college towns practice using public transit to transport students home from bars, but Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina provides an exceptionally good example. The proximity of bars to campus at UNC is very similar to Ole Miss, and during a night downtown in Chapel Hill only a few minutes pass before one witnesses baby blue buses filled to capacity with students. Chapel Hill Transit runs from 5 A.M. to 1:15am Monday through Friday, but provides a "Safe Ride" program on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday that extends hours of operation until 2:30 enabling students leaving bars to ride home safely and affordably (Town of Chapel Hill 2011). Also, UNC and Chapel Hill confront parking shortages similar to Ole Miss and Oxford. If students began using OUT buses at night to return from the Square, then students would learn firsthand about the ease

and efficiency of using public transit. Thus, students would become more likely to use OUT during the day and help to alleviate many of the campus' parking problems. Expanding OUT hours may prove to be a costly venture, but several lesser alternatives exist to lower the cost of transit from the Square. For example, the University could lobby the City of Oxford to provide financial incentives to private transit companies to help drive down operating cost and to foster increased competition to further lower the cost of services by drafting a plan and meeting with the mayor and council members or by supporting a student organization in favor of such legislation.

However, the University lobbying the city and the county for legislation to improve the safety surrounding student drinking may seem like bad politics to the public. Citizens may perceive these policy suggestions as fostering an environment conducive to binge drinking. But the University's easy access to the media would allow the University to frame the policy changes as in favor of safety to the public. The University has a forum to explain that allowing beer and wine on the entire campus and providing affordable, safe rides for bar patrons does not guarantee an increase in the number of students drinking, but these measures will decrease alcohol-related vehicle collisions and reduce heavy consumption of liquor at fraternity houses.

A focus on environmental factors and safety for students who do engage in heavy drinking can supplement a restrictive or lenient alcohol policy. Whether the

University continues to enforce alcohol violations at a high rate, or the University decides to follow the University of Georgia's lead by reducing arrests these recommendations complement both approaches. However, I do believe the University of Georgia's newly reformed policy provides more flexibility for administrators to determine appropriate punishment for student alcohol violations. Implementing a policy that assesses increasing levels of putative measures to crimes of increasing seriousness seems more inline with state and federal governments approach to alcohol violations. I also believe students would regard an alcohol policy with greater flexibility as more fair, and greater student approval of the University's alcohol policy could lead to increased compliance. As evidenced by the finding that people regard a law's legitimacy as important to compliance than deterrence factors (see Tyler 2006).

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, universities are reluctant to publish binge drinking statistics. In fact, researchers guaranteed confidentiality for colleges and universities that participated in The Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study. While embarking on this study, I intended to compare Ole Miss to four other colleges in the SEC. This study would provide greater confirmation of which environmental factors appear to affect the drinking rate at Ole Miss most significantly. For instance, assume Mississippi State and Auburn shared all environmental factors with Ole Miss except for greater diversity and had lower

party reputations or binge drinking rates. Then, the assertion that increased diversity would decrease binge drinking at Ole Miss would hold a greater significance.

In fact, future studies could compare environmental factors at all SEC schools to determine the impact of these different factors on these similar schools. Such a study could possibly create a hierarchy of these environmental factors with regards to greatest affect on party reputation. And, if binge drinking rates were available, then such a study could determine the same hierarchy with regards to binge drinking rates. However, lack of availability of arrest records would hinder such a study. The University of Georgia was chosen for a comparison in part due to the availability of arrest records. Many schools, specifically Vanderbilt University, do not publish student arrest records.

Also, an adjustment of the scope of this study could provide valuable information about student drinking at the University of Mississippi. Alcohol Edu, an alcohol education program required for many freshman students, provide binges drinking information about incoming students for each of the years the University used the program. Annual binge drinking rates could be compared to possibly determine the effectiveness of the University's Two-Strike policy. In addition, a comparison of binge drinking rates between Ole Miss and Georgia would evaluate the effectiveness of Ole Miss' more restrictive alcohol policy as compared to UGA's newer, more lenient alcohol policy. However, this approach assumes information

about student binge drinking rates for several years could be obtained for the University of Georgia.

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