



# Alcohol-saturated 'fun' on campus can be lethal

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Enlarge By Adam Gerik, Peoria Journal Star via AP

Danny Dahlquist, 19, died of smoke inhalation in this West Peoria, Ill., house on Aug. 12 after four friends set off Roman candles in his room while he slept.



Enlarge AP

Rider University freshman Gary DeVercelly died in March after a night of binge drinking.

## CAMPUS DANGERS

Alcohol-saturated 'fun' can be lethal

Alcohol and fire a deadly mix on campus

In college, first year is by far the riskiest

By Robert Davis, USA TODAY

As students head to the nation's college campuses, relishing their new independence, criminal prosecutions in the deaths of two young men are a sober reminder of how quickly alcohol-fueled "fun" can spin out of control.

Charges were filed this month against students and administrators linked to the recent fire death of a 19-year-old sophomore at Bradley University in Peoria, Ill., and the alcohol poisoning of a 18-year-old freshman at Rider University in Trenton, N.J.

USA TODAY last year examined 620 deaths of four-year college and university students dating back to Jan. 1, 2000, and found that alcohol was often a factor in several types of student deaths, ranging from fires to pranks to falls. Freshmen, often living away from home for the first time, are disproportionately vulnerable.

"Young people often come to college with ongoing alcohol habits," says Tim McDonough of the American Council on Education, which represents college officials. Colleges "are trying to educate and enforce and break habits already in place. These issues are tough, but college institutions have been working on them for a long time."

A prank goes tragically out of control

In Peoria, four college students face felony arson charges in the Aug. 12 death of their friend, Sheridan "Danny" Dahlquist. Three of the students — Nicholas Mentgen, 21, Ryan Johnson, 22, and David Crady, 19 — were Dahlquist's teammates on the Bradley University soccer team. The fourth student, Daniel Cox, 20, was visiting from Illinois Central College in East Peoria.

Illinois State Attorney Kevin Lyons says that after a night of drinking, Dahlquist went to bed in a house just off campus. As a joke, prosecutors say his friends slid two Roman candles — fireworks that shoot fireballs — under the bedroom door.

While as many as 16 balls of fire, each burning about 1,500 degrees, shot into the room, Lyons says, the men ran downstairs, hoping to see their friend emerge screaming in outrage at the prank.

As they stood in front of the house, however, all they saw was the bedroom window glow orange. They were prevented by the intense heat from rescuing Dahlquist, and

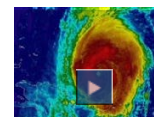
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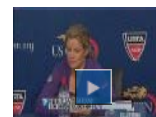
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a girl who was with them called 911, Lyons says. By the time help arrived, Dahlquist was dead of smoke inhalation.

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Cox, Crady, Mentgen and Nicholas are charged with aggravated arson and possession of an explosive or incendiary device. Lyons says he "takes no delight in plucking four young men from their futures and putting them in a trial, but that is what fairness is about. ... I'm in the business of holding people accountable."

He says he could have charged the men with felony murder because the arson resulted in death, but he chose not to because the men didn't mean to kill their friend.

Jennifer Nelson, a graduate assistant at Seton Hall University's Campus Ministry who started a fire-safety program at the New Jersey school, says students don't understand how fast flames can spread.

Students who violate Seton safety rules, such as burning a candle in a room or failing to evacuate when a fire alarm sounds, are fined \$250, put on probation and forced to take the fire-safety class Nelson started with the South Orange Fire Department.

Some students roll their eyes when they arrive at the class, she says. Then she makes them read the USA TODAY stories and look at the faces on USATODAY.com of the students who have died in fires since 2000.

#### Hazing death leads to indictments

In Trenton, three Rider University students and two administrators face criminal hazing charges after the March 30 death of freshman Gary DeVercelly. A grand jury found that a traditional fraternity ritual left DeVercelly dead from alcohol poisoning.

According to a release by Mercer County Prosecutor Joseph Bocchini Jr., DeVercelly and the pledges who participated in a March 28 fraternity initiation drank several shots and, in some cases, an entire bottle of alcohol in less than an hour. Most of the pledges were too young to drink legally, he said. DeVercelly died two days later.

Anthony Campbell, 51, dean of students, and Ada Badgley, 31, director of Greek Life, face aggravated hazing charges even though the university says they were not present at the Phi Kappa Tau fraternity.

Douglas Fierberg, a Washington, D.C., attorney who specializes in hazing law and is representing the DeVercelly family, says one of the indicted students was a university employee. Adriano DiDonato, 22, also charged with hazing and named by prosecutors as the residence director/house master of Phi Kappa Tau, was paid by the university and reports to Badgley, Fierberg says.

The grand jury also indicted the fraternity's pledge master, Dominic Olsen, 21, and its president Michael Tourney, 21.

Campbell and Badgley are on paid leave from the university, which formed a task force to look at alcohol issues on campus. McDonough says that many other colleges are reviewing safety measures. "Whenever there is an incident, no matter how small, they go back and revisit what they are doing," he says. "People are dedicated to keeping these campuses safe and healthy learning environments."

Jeffrey Parsons, a professor of psychology at New York's Hunter College who focuses on drug and alcohol addiction, says some students go wild and act crazy as they enjoy freedoms allowed by parents and universities, who are pointing fingers at each other.

Parents assume the colleges are enforcing drinking rules, he says, while school officials assume that parents have taught their children to behave responsibly.

Students feel free to take huge risks, he says. "They're not in an environment where somebody is patrolling their behavior."

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[PoliceChick](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/26/2007 6:32:31 AM  
menace-

Its so funny you say that about WI...lol I live in southern wisconsin and I just graduated frm a technical college. There is just as much bad stuff at a university as there is at a technical college. Granted, most people who go to a technical college stay at home (like me) and save lots of money and other things...BUT, I have numerous friends whom invited me to their doors to drink and party. There are partys that go on still close to home andall that kind of stuff. Being around your parents while a student can deter your kid from drinking and all the other bad stuff but, Dont let anything fool ya. The bad stuff is EVERYWHERE!

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[GeoffALafayette](#) (1 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/24/2007 9:40:57 PM

As a documentary film maker who just made a movie about the effects of alcohol that resulted in the deaths of 3 out of state students on Halloween night 2006 in Madison, WI, (See below) I can't stress enough the pressure of higher education costs in driving students to over drink. Students are drinking more to help lesson the impact of education's mounting cost. Try thinking about paying off an \$70,000 loan with a graduate degree in Philosophy and you might get "Alcohol-saturated."

Geoff Lafayette  
Writer/Director/Producer  
BUCKYSTEIN (Madison Wisconsin DRINKING DEATHS) now on YouTube at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yswquohSRc>  
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[hootie1fan](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/24/2007 12:02:25 PM

These are adults and not children. At some point they must behave as adults.

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[badmikey](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/24/2007 8:51:57 AM

It's time to return to the 18yr old drinking age if not 17, prohibition never works. Many countires young adults 16+ are allowed to drink and it is a part of daily life and these countries have alot less problems. Young adults being treated as second class adults will drink but will do so in a binging fashion and there is nothing anyone has been able to or can do to stop them. Also college students as adults are free to do as they choose they are not children and parents only have as much say as the student allows.

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[mel](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/23/2007 3:49:52 PM

College kids are immature in many ways, drinks, have sex and do stupid things. Sometimes they find bad religion too. It is all part of the college scene.

Freshmen specially, can save themselves if they are cognizant and avoid this scene altogether.  
BEWARE.

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[traveljohn](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/22/2007 7:08:57 PM



Hi public transit is a great option for students and this site might help.  
<http://www.transitguru.com/>

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**Christi\_11** (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8/22/2007 6:27:41 PM

GeneFrenkle.....Well my parents taught me responsibility. Not everyone that drinks becomes a raging drunk and tears apart their families. I am sorry that was your situation and good for you if that is how you choose to live your life, but I am able to go to dinner and have a drink with my family or friends. I know how to control my consumption of alcohol because that is what I was taught. On the other hand, I have friends whose parents kept them shielded from any type of alcohol and when they got into the real world they did not know how to responsibly handle themselves and did drink unresponsibly. This led to alcoholism which does lead to families being torn apart.

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