Kyla McKown

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PAR Story 8 In-depth Story

 An OSU business sophomore works on making Stillwater a more safe and responsible town.

 Alexis Elliott, a business sophomore, has been going to school while finishing up her DUI court-ordered classes through OSU.

 Elliott said after receiving her DUI last New Year’s Eve, she has been working with her mother on making changes to the OSU campus and its alcohol and drug abuse concerns.

 “After I got my DUI, I realized it was wake-up call that no one expects until it actually happens to them,” Elliott said. “I’ve been talking with my mom and boyfriend about starting a safe-driving service here at OSU that would allow students to get rides from a designated driver after they have been drinking.”

 Elliott said a lot of college towns offer this kind of service but believes OSU especially needs a system like this since there are a limited number of taxi services in town.

 Elliott is not the only student concerned for the safety of the town. Jana Swain, a Stillwater resident and storeowner, said living in a college town makes a parent have to worry about their own children after dark.

 “All of my kids have grown up in Stillwater and ended up attending OSU,” Swain said. “With such a large amount of 20 and 21 year olds driving around town and partying, it is really alarming to have your kids out there driving at night, or even myself for that matter. There’s no telling the amount of drunk drivers that don’t think they’re really that drunk and drive home after a party. “

 Swain said it’s not just the college students you have to worry about; it’s the residence too. Swain and Elliott both mentioned an interest in a safe-driving system that could save lives.

 Aside from the drinking and driving issue, others are concerned about the health of these college students. Binge drinking is another concern that has people on campus worried about students and their safety.

Kim Poslick, Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center coordinator, said the program doesn’t point the finger at students for what they have done or what they shouldn’t do.

 “The key to keeping alcohol and drug abuse at OSU in control is to harp on the students to drink in moderation,” Poslick said. “There’s no need to binge drink and it takes a lot fewer drinks to impair your decision making than you think.”

 There are about 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 that die from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes each year, according to collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

 Some other alarming numbers are also posted on the College Drinking Prevention website. For example, 3,360,000 of students between the ages of 18 to 24 have driven under the influence of alcohol.

 But there is help, and there are programs available on OSU’s campus that students can visit for help on drinking and drug use. The University Counseling Services is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and appointments for counseling can be made calling 405-744-7007 or the Reach-Out Hotline at 1-800-522-9054, for someone to talk to.

OSU’s ASAC is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.. Students are also offered four individual counseling sessions at no charge. If a student would like more, sessions five through 12 are $10 each.

Services from individual and group counseling to consultation with concerned faculty, staff, students and parents, is offered at ASAC to students enrolled in OSU and NOC Stillwater classes.

Poslick said court-ordered alcohol and drug assessment is offered to students for who have not had their driver’s license revoked for $100. For students who have had their license revoked by the court, are offered the $160 DUI assessment.

There are plenty of out-reach programs available to anyone who is suffering from alcohol and drug abuse. The U.S. Department of Education’s Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention, offers ideas and strategies to minimize the amount of binge-drinking on campuses across the U.S..

“While bearing in mind the important aspects of the campus environment that may precipitate students’ other drug use, prevention professionals should also consider the important differences in the use of one drug over another, the manner in which the drugs are accessed, the risks they bear, the “culture” of their use, and the characteristics of the students who use them,” according to ED.gov.

Elliott said she also agrees that the drug being used and the student must be considered before taking actions.

As for the safe-driving type of system in Stillwater, OSU Master Police Officer Adam Queen, said a designated driving program would be helpful but the problem arises because of the liability.

“Any type of program that deals with intoxicated people, is a liability waiting to happen,” Queen said. “I know a couple years back there was a private organization that had a program similar that was available for students, but it didn’t last.”

Although Queen said a system like this would be hard to keep running, Elliott said the idea of a safe-driving system would be for all students interested to volunteer their phone numbers into a system that if someone needed a ride from the bars back to their place, they would be connected with one of the volunteer drivers.

There are other options available on campus that promote putting a stop to binge-drinking. AlcoholEdu is a computer system that was introduced a couple of years ago that offers a confidentional, personalized experience for each student that informs them on alcohol and drug abuse.

Christopher Tiberg, residence director for Conduct Education, said the computer software offers alcohol-related content with videos, blogs, comics, chat and more for OSU Residential Life students.

“There are also helpful tools available, like a Blood Alcohol Concentration, or BAC, calculator and a map of U.S. laws,” Tiberg said. “And safe partying strategies and tips on how to help a friend in need.”

Students can learn more about binge drinking and AlcoholEdu at the website, reslife.okstate.edu/alcoholedu. The Website also lists facts and information about the health risks and prevention of alcohol abuse.

Aside from the general issue of binge drinking, studies have found that college students have higher rates of alcohol or drug addiction than the general public, according to USA Today.

“Thirty percent of students meet the medical definition for alcohol or drug abuse or dependence- a compulsive use of a substance despite negative consequences, compared with 8.5 percent of all people 12 and older,” according to USA Today.

The OSU Police department isn’t the only authorities that say there is an alcohol and drug abuse problem at the OSU campus. Stillwater Police Department Capt. Randy Dickerson, said the amount of disturbing the peace calls is out of control.

“You can tell it’s a college town when you get a ridiculous amount of disturbing the peace calls, even before 10 p.m.,” Dickerson said. “You can also tell because of the large number of alcohol-related crimes Stillwater has.”

Dickerson was unable to pull up any numbers and statistics on the number of alcohol-related crimes.

Headline: OSU focuses on how to limit the alcohol and drug abuse on campus.

Info Box: The Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center on campus offers a variety of services from counseling to offering court-ordered classes to be taken on campus.

Minority Source: None.

Internet Links: [www.okstate.edu/ucs/asac](http://www.okstate.edu/ucs/asac), [www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov).