Slope of Change

An Environmental Approach to Reduce Drinking on a Day of Celebration at a US College

Since 1997, generations of Cornellians have enjoyed annual spring celebrations—from sports and carnivals to picnics and concerts.

Slope Day is the latest version of the celebrations. Its hallmark is a large concert that takes place on an open hillside—Libe Slope—located below the main university library.

The majority of students enjoy the day safely. However, the partying associated with the event is notorious for high-risk drinking. As a result, each year both the university health service and the local hospital treat a significant number of students for acute alcohol poisoning—primarily from alcohol consumed before the event.

Lauras Santacrose, MPH, Timothy Marchell, PhD, Jennifer Austin, MPH

WHAT IS SLOPE DAY?

Cornell's main campus, located in rural, centrally-isolated Ithaca, New York, includes:
- 14,500 undergraduate students
- 7,500 graduate & professional students
- 33% of undergraduate students identify as a member of an ethnic/ racial minority group

3 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. A comprehensive environmental approach has reduced high-risk drinking on Slope Day.
2. The increased drinking taking place before the event—which occurred after the environmental interventions of 2005—has been more than offset by the reduction of drinking at the event.
3. Investment in non-traditional interventions (e.g., hiring national headlining performers to come to campus concert) is a critical public health strategy.

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<th>BY THE NUMBERS</th>
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- 16,000: the typical size of a current Slope Day crowd
- 20-35: typical number of individuals treated for acute alcohol poisoning each year
- 2,400: the number of free breakfast sandwiches given to students in 2016
- 18 dollars: the amount of the undergraduate student activity fee per person allocated to the Slope Day Programming Board to cover a percentage of the event costs
- 200+: the number of staff and faculty who volunteer or “work the slope” on Slope Day

#### DATA TRENDS FROM SLOPE DAY SURVEYS

- Trend in pre-event and at-event drinking on Slope Day
- Risky alcohol consumption behaviors on Slope Day by legal drinking status

#### KEY ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES ON SLOPE DAY (03–16)

1. Fence around the Slope with designated gate entries
2. Entertainment on Slope (e.g., concerts with 3,500+ acts)
3. SlopeFest carnival with activities, prizes, food and drinks
4. Enforcement of Slope Day rules (e.g., no outside food or alcohol allowed inside, more large bags, etc.)
5. ID check and beer service for those 21+
6. Partnerships with local law enforcement and security companies to enforce policies and laws
7. Widespread distribution of key harm-reduction messages
8. Slope Day BreakFest (before students start drinking)
9. Bystander action: volunteers on the Slope able to identify types of alcohol poisoning; partnerships with local EMTs to increase detection of those in need
10. Marketing of Good Samaritan Protocol and NY State Law to support help-seeking behavior
11. Event held on a class day (03-14)

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Since 2001, self-report, anonymous surveys of the undergraduate student experience on Slope Day have been done using a stratified, random sample. Response rates range from 21% (when the survey was conducted by mail to 81% when conducted online.
2. Health Services tracks the number of individuals treated on Slope Day and/or transported to the hospital for alcohol poisoning. The number of transports has remained relatively stable over time (with the exception of the increase in 2014).
3. The university tracks attendance at Slope Day. Over the years, attendance has more than doubled—from 6,500 to as high as 18,000.
4. Cornell University
5. Cornell Sloan

### 115 YEARS OF SLOPE DAY HISTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>First recorded Spring Day took place in May, became a Cornell tradition for approximately 50 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>A Springfest took place on the last day of classes; Cornell Dining offered a free BBQ with beer on Libe Slope (origin of Slope Day).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Congress passed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act.</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>NY State raised drinking age to 21 on December 1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Cornell announced Springfest would be held in a fenced-in area on the other side of campus (instead of the Slope).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Students organized a Take Back the Slope campaign, 4,500 students boycotted Springfest and went to the Slope instead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Slope Day became an unofficial student gathering—not recognized by Cornell—with students bringing their own alcohol to the Slope.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Beer bags were banned from the Slope.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>SlopeFest, an alcohol-free carnival event, was held for the first time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>University Medical Amnesty Protocol established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Alcohol on Slope limited to six cans per person.</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>No restriction in access to event.</td>
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### IMPLEMENTATION CHANGES

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Change to Slope Day schedule</th>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>Cornell academic calendar changed, resulting in Slope Day moving from the last day of classes to the day after the last day of classes.</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Implemented Slope Day BreakFest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Expanded SlopeFest earlier to draw students from off-campus parties.</td>
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### RESEARCH METHODS

- Use of self-report, anonymous surveys of undergraduates' Slope Day experiences.
- Tracking of individuals treated for alcohol poisoning.
- Monitoring of Slope Day attendance.

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Videos on the history of Slope Day: Cornell.edu/sloan/slope-day-history
More information: Cornell.edu/search [“Slope Day”]