

Reshaping Fraternity Tailgating

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Announcing to fraternity/sorority professionals that we, as staff members, would be responsible for managing the IFC tailgate experience was confusing to staff. It was puzzling for staff to comprehend, similar to how student affairs professionals try to help our families understand what it is we do with our careers. The concern of managing the tailgate experience includes the sheer size — with over 20 chapters and an average of 3,000 attendees the tailgate experience is a lot to manage. Add the issues of trash up to your shins, tense competition to have the best space, dangerous amounts of alcohol consumption, disorderly conduct, and public urination — you can imagine the chaos and why staff would be hesitant to take on this responsibility.

In 2014, the State Fairgrounds of North Carolina approached NC State's athletic and fraternity/sorority life departments about addressing the problematic behaviors occurring on their property during tailgate season. Initially, the committee tasked with addressing these issues began meeting without any student representation from the Interfraternity Council (IFC), but it was **with** the student leaders of this council that we created one of the more sustainable and successful culture shifts to occur in our IFC community. A major part of the success of this initiative stems from the development of a student IFC Tailgate Committee. Each year, five men are selected to lead, manage, and create change related to tailgate culture. These students are a part of every conversation focused on exploring, designing, and leading initiatives addressing tailgating behavior from year to year.

Another key to our success in changing the culture resides in the simplicity of solutions. We recognize the issues related to tailgating behavior are complex and multi-layered, and the approaches have also been multi-faceted, but we try to maintain a level of simplicity when strategizing. A favorite example of a simple solution comes to mind when reflecting on public urination and the citations resulting from this type of disorderly conduct. When this topic was discussed, the tendency was to go down what seems like an endless rabbit hole of reasons why the behavior occurs; however, a quick look at the highly disproportionate ratio of portable restrooms to students showed there simply were not enough bathrooms. When more restrooms were added, the behavior and citations associated with public urination were significantly reduced.

Our concerns around alcohol consumption are one of the more complex issues. According to the Journal of American College Health, sports fans are less likely to abstain from alcohol use

and are more likely to drink excessively than non-sports fans (Glassman, Werch, Jobli, & Bian, 2007, p. 255). This increased likelihood of alcohol consumption because tailgates are inherently attended by sports fans, combined with the fall being the primary recruitment period for our IFC and Panhellenic Association, creates concerns around members' first social interaction with alcohol and their respective organization. Our hypothesis was it reinforced misperceived norms around alcohol use and appropriate behavior. Prior to the Tailgate Initiative, it was not uncommon for a university staff member or law enforcement officer to have to intervene in multiple situations where students who had consumed excessive amounts of alcohol and were beginning to experience negative consequences of such consumption. It was particularly concerning that students were not seeking help for themselves or their peers when faced with potentially dangerous amounts of alcohol consumption. Prior to the initiative, there were consistently high numbers of student conduct referrals issued for alcohol violations in the Greek tailgate area. Each year since the start of the initiative, those numbers have decreased over time and continue to have a downward trend as students become clearer about the expectations around alcohol use and behavior at tailgating.

Through marketing efforts with NC State's Department of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Education, fraternity and sorority members learned about the university's Howl for Help Protocol, which encourages students to seek health interventions for alcohol and other drug related emergencies. The creation of the IFC's Tailgate Committee has also created peer-led interventions for members and guests. The peer monitoring and interventions have helped to decrease issues with alcohol in the tailgate lot and have increased help seeking behavior demonstrated by those in the tailgate area.

This initiative continues to evolve as new students become involved and collectively define acceptable behavior for their community as it relates to campus pride and traditions. Regardless if we are talking about alcohol, space reservation issues, maintaining a high level of safety in the equipment used and inspected for tailgate, trash, transportation, disorderly conduct, or accountability issues, our tailgate reform initiative has created a number of healthy and positive changes for our community. However, as we work **with** the students and members of the tailgate committee alongside our campus partners, we continue to see a high level of sustainable success.

References

Glassman, T., Werch, C., Jobli, E., & Bian, H. (2007). Alcohol-Related Fan Behavior on College Football Game Day. *Journal of American College Health, 56*(3), 255-260.