A sad letter to a university president highlights a deadly problem.

Binges burdening colleges

By Graham B. Spanier

"The state trooper came at 4:35 a.m. two years ago. I remember seeing my husband scream across the room and not being able to hear him because, I later realized, I was screaming also ... no one should have to go through the agony we have experienced ..."

Opening a letter from the mother of a student who died as a result of drinking too much alcohol is one of the most difficult duties of a university president. Having to call a parent or read such a letter is all too common for my colleagues and me.

Different things occupied our time before: handling student protests, debating at faculty meetings or lobbying for more funds.

High-risk drinking, also known as binge drinking, has made our jobs more complicated today, just as it has changed the social lives of the nearly half of the nation's college students who drink excessively. The many evils associated with high-risk drinking are forcing America's colleges and universities to sink enormous resources into countering this devastating problem. To be honest, we'd rather spend these resources on academics — but the problem is too big to be ignored. Binge drinking has now become a public health hazard of enormous proportions.

Of course, it has changed the lives of the survivors — the parents and brothers and sisters and friends of those who have died much too young. The friends and families live on, grappling with frustration, wondering if they or anyone else could have done anything differently.

Now my colleagues and I spend time doing TV interviews about binge drinking. We notify parents of their offsprings' roles in alcohol-fueled riots. On those shows, I'd prefer to talk about the important contributions of American higher education; I'd rather talk with parents about their children's latest academic accomplishments.

College and university presidents are not the only ones who have seen their jobs change. Staff across our campuses, along with community leaders, search for answers that do not come too easily.

University ambulance personnel are not just responding to calls about twisted ankles during Frisbee games — they're responding to calls about unconscious students found alone in the middle of the night.



JOHN OVERMYER

Student-affairs staff throughout the nation handle tens of thousands of alcohol-related student conduct cases. They provide alcohol counseling and develop alternative programming late at night, hoping to keep students away from binge drinking. Physical plant staff repair and replace furniture and buildings damaged by drunks. University rape counselors assist those who have been sexually assaulted.

Some weekends, local hospital emergency rooms in college and university towns are filled with more students than doctors and nurses. Birthday celebrations for students turning 21 often conclude in the company of strangers at the hospital instead of in the company of friends and family.

"I enclose her senior picture, taken at a time when she was looking toward the future with happy anticipation. She was the youngest of our three children, truly the light of our lives ..."

Last year, dozens of U.S. college students died in alcohol-related incidents. Hundreds more were rushed to emergency rooms and lived thanks to timely medical care. A significant proportion of our students will drop out for reasons related to drinking. And most crime in and around universities is alcohol-related.

More young people are becoming binge drinkers. More and more, they've begun even before they first set foot on campus. They've become experienced drinkers at an age most of us would find shocking.

If you have young people in your family, make sure they understand the implications of their behavior. Teach them about social responsibility and citizenship. Help them understand that almost everyone taken to the ER with an alcohol overdose thought he or she could handle alcohol.

My colleagues and I hope for a day when we don't receive any more letters from mothers and fathers groping in disbelief, trying to understand how they can live the rest of their lives with such deep sorrow.

"We are changed forever. We have made a valiant effort to carry on, but I wonder how I will get through the rest of the days allotted to me. Hearing of efforts made to spare another son or daughter's life are what cheers me now. Good luck in the battle."

Graham B. Spanier is president of the Pennsylvania State University. The quotes in this article are taken from the letter of a mother whose daughter died as a result of drinking too much alcohol at an off-campus party.

As fall nears, longing for a longer summer

By Julie G. DeGroat

I can't believe summer is almost over. The nights are cooling off. The air has a heavier, duller scent of spent flowers and dusty fields. The sun hits the porch with a tired air, too weak to really summon enough rays to matter. The night sounds are less hopeful than dire.

Lying in the hammock has lost its appeal when you need a sweater. The fan doesn't hum at night, the extra quilt is out of the cedar chest, and no one has slept in the tent for a few weeks. Summer is on its way out.

I hate that. I want summer to last longer. It did when I was a kid, let me tell you. Summer was at least three years long every year. Days stretched on endlessly. I swam and read and played and fought with my brother and sister. I went on picnics, and explored the woods behind my house, and formed clubs with the neighbor kids. This was all just the first week after school was over. The rest of the summer was crammed even fuller.

I remember one summer when we got our canoe. My dad won it with a $1.00 lottery ticket. It was so cool. We spent most of the day paddling that canoe around Butterfield Lake, which was down the big hill behind our house. Dad would drop us off at the lake in the morning with the canoe, and we would leave it there and walk back and forth to the lake and home all day. That evening, Dad would fetch the canoe with the car.

When I was a kid, the season lasted three years.

We spent a lot of time at the lake in the summer. For one thing, our well was not deep, and in the summer, we had to save water. That meant every night we went to the lake and washed our hair. You suds up and dive in. Hold your nose, swirl around under water, come spluttering to the top, push the hair out of your eyes — and do it one more time to make sure all the soap is gone.

My dad used to launch us in the water, too. That was a blast. He linked his hands, and we stood on them. Then, with a heave, we flew through the air about 500 feet (give or take) and splashed down into the water. I bet he could still launch me. I'll ask him to try it next year. I know he would do it.

My brother John loved summer. He spent a lot of time building treehouses. We weren't allowed to climb trees, so his treehouses were always on the ground, but he diligently spent days constructing shacks with splintery boards and rusty, bent nails. There was always a secret escape hatch (a loose board in the back), but it was never really clear whom or what he might have to escape from. He always let my sister and me in to play, because otherwise, mom made him tear down the shack.

I want those days back. I want summer to last three years and not three very rushed weeks. I want the days to stretch on endlessly in one hot, mosquito-bite-filled, wet-bathing-suited, cheese-crackered, tadpole-collecting, sandy-blanketed ribbon. Is that too much to ask?

Julie DeGroat is a freelance writer living near Theresa, New York. Her essay originally appeared in the Watertown, N.Y., Daily Times.

They made and shaped the news

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

News preoccupied Henry and Clare Boothe Luce much of this century. He determined what it was. She made lots of it.

He founded Time magazine and built an influential communications empire that reached a quarter of the American people. She won fame as an editor, playwright, member of Congress and ambassador to Italy (then the highest diplomatic post ever held by a woman). Officially, the Luces stayed out of each other's professional lives. Behind the scenes, each was the other's closest adviser, best friend and most severe critic. While Clare was prone to glamour and glitter and Henry to shades of gray, both possessed a superior intellect and an uncommon ambition.

The son of missionaries, Henry Luce was born in China. While in college, he and Yale classmate Briton Hadden decided the country needed a weekly news magazine. The idea came to them during World War I when, as officers in the Student Army Training Corps, they found draftees wanting in knowledge about current events. They raised $86,000 from 72 investors. The first issue of Time appeared in 1923, beginning a series of Luce publications, including Fortune (1930), Life (1936) and Sports Illustrated (1954), that helped define American popular journalism.

Couples

Standout pairs who embody the 20th century.

When Hadden suddenly died six years later, Luce put his special signature on Time. He made the magazine famous for its crisp style, reversed sentences and neologisms (e.g., *tycoon, smog* and *socialite*) and Henry Luce's particular take on events.

Like his idol, Woodrow Wilson, Luce believed America had a special role to play in the world. In an often-quoted editorial, he resolved that the 20th would be the "American century." Luce was among the first to recognize the territorial ambitions and brutality of Hitler, Tojo and Stalin. He invested every asset at his command to stop them.



GEORGE KARGER

Henry and Clare Boothe Luce published the news and made headlines.

She was the daughter of a fortune-hunting chorus girl and a violinist who abandoned the family. Trapped in a loveless marriage with an alcoholic and abusive millionaire 23 years her senior, Clare became wealthy through divorce.

Denied an interview at Conde Nast's Vogue, she commandeered an unoccupied desk and wrote captions. Soon she was on the payroll. She rose to become managing editor of Vanity Fair.

They met at a dinner party. As Henry listened to Clare lecture him on failings she found in Fortune, the stern Presbyterian father of two decided to divorce his wife.

They married in 1935. She said they conceived a child on their honeymoon: Life magazine.

Their creation put a strain on their marriage. Although the idea for a photo magazine had been Clare's, Henry's predominantly male staff would not abide a woman — let alone the boss' wife — as editor. Clare returned to an earlier avocation, playwrighting. *The Women* was her greatest box-office hit. A few years later, she served as a Republican member of the House of Representatives (1943-47).

When engaged in causes bigger than either of them (war in Europe and Asia, Republican presidential politics, her campaigns for Congress and work in Rome), the couple functioned as a team. At all other times, they were, as one biographer said, "two powerful forces moving in separate orbits." They were hardly faithful spouses and caused each other pain in their private lives — but a powerful devotion was there nonetheless.

Clare remained conscious of her role as a trailblazer for women in fields then thought to be male preserves. "She taught the world you don't have to be beautiful and dumb," her former assistant Letitia Baldridge recalls.

Observers of Hillary Clinton will find in the Luces' story evidence of a powerful man's spouse skillfully exploiting resources at his command. Time-Life researchers assisted her campaigns. When a Connecticut Senate seat fell vacant, a Florida newspaper paid tribute to this "power couple" with the headline "A Luce for Senate; will it be he or she?"

"Love is possible only among equals," Clare Boothe Luce would say. Equals the Luces were. Together and separately they helped shape a century.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures about the American presidency.

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