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# Drink with Class Initiative

“If You Choose to Drink, *Drink with Class*”



## An Overview of Culture Change in Residence at Thompson Rivers University

### Changing the Culture of Substance Use

The Drink with Class initiative was inspired from Thompson Rivers University’s involvement in Changing the Culture of Substance Use (CCSU), a project under Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses in British Columbia (BC). The CCSU project was initiated to develop capacity in BC’s campuses and a provincial support infrastructure towards changing the culture of substance use. The project is based on a socio-ecological model that encourages a multi-component approach with attention to individual behaviours, social cultures and environmental conditions. Through consultations, knowledge exchange between campuses, and co-creation of

evidence-based resources, the project is designed to facilitate action by campus change agents and a provincial infrastructure of support. The lead partners of the project are the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division and the Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

The Drink with Class initiative developed by Thompson Rivers University is a promising practice that other campuses are invited to adapt, share and implement on their own campus. The initiative described below will offer some insight into how to promote a safer and healthier alcohol culture on campus.

## Initiative Description

At Thompson Rivers University (TRU), *Drink with Class* has become a central philosophy in residence. Residence Life Coordinators (RLCs) have spread the message to all residence personnel, including resident advisors, front desk staff, housekeepers and even maintenance staff in an effort to provide one cohesive, thoughtful message to students: “Drinking is part of our culture. Not everyone drinks, but if you choose to drink, drink with class.”

As soon as residents arrive on campus, from day one, the message is apparent. The TRU residence hosts a “Classy Gala” at the beginning of the semester, within the first six weeks, where mocktails are served and students are offered the opportunity to learn what a standard drink pour looks like for various alcoholic beverages. Students are also introduced to four “alcohol identities” that they might develop at university: The Acquainted Abstainer, The Bold Boozer, The Casual Consumer and the fourth is their own as they are encouraged to consider “who they want to be”.

Further to this, the residence also places “How to be a Great Host” fridge magnets in each dorm room as a reminder to create safe and healthy social environments. These magnets detail nine points to being a great host:

1. Talk to your roommate(s) about the guest list, start/end times, clean up, etc.
2. Invite people you can count on
3. Specify a start and end time at or before quiet hours
4. Let your neighbours know about it; don't forget those above and below
5. Greet your guests and make introductions
6. If your guests choose to drink, make sure they do so safely
7. If you choose to drink, know your limits, stay within them, stay classy
8. Ensure there is no social pressure for drinking: this includes drinking games
9. At the party's end, ensure your guests get home safely

As an important part of the effort, when residents choose to host party gatherings in the first six weeks, *regardless of how well the gathering went, they are asked to have a conversation with a Residence Life Coordinator to talk about what worked well, what could be improved on and how well they did on meeting each of the nine points detailed on the magnets.* This opportunity is also used by the RLC to have an open discussion on the “alcohol identity” the hosting students are creating for themselves to ensure they do not develop a reputation as a “party room.” These conversations are also taken as a change to encourage them to consider and develop their own “alcohol identity.” This identity development process is an effort to provide them with more personal agency to consider their decisions regarding alcohol. View “**Drink with Class Components**” for a list of the multi-layered components involved with the Drink with Class initiative.

## Evaluation of the 2014/15 Effort

The *Drink with Class* initiative was evaluated by TRU Residence staff at the end of its first year in the annual residence survey. Students were asked about their awareness and behaviour with respect to alcohol. The findings have been very promising.

The survey, which gathered data from 343 residents at year-end found that **45% of students** thought their *drinking awareness was heightened* as a result of the efforts of the *Drink with Class* initiative.

The survey also found that **34.4% of students** thought that their *drinking habits had shifted* as a result of the efforts of the *Drink with Class* initiative.

These encouraging findings have resulted in a renewal of the effort in the 2015/16 academic year.

## Initiative Background and Rationale

The *Drink with Class* initiative was piloted in 2014 at Thompson Rivers University Residence in an effort to promote healthier relationships with alcohol among students living in residence. The multi-layered approach served to tackle the greater leadership challenge of creating readiness for change with respect to campus drinking culture. Outlined below are some of the theoretical reasons as to why this initiative may have worked as well as it did in the 2014–2015 academic year, along with a brief overview of the working elements at play.

### Initiative Elements and Theoretical Underpinnings

#### Challenging the Process

A lot of students and professionals at colleges and universities will attest to the expression, “that’s just how it is at my school”. In actuality, they are referring to the shared attitudes, norms and behaviours among the people that exist within the system that is their school. This can also be true for individual residences, faculties, and programs, all which generally have their own subcultures. Although the challenge is substantial, with an adequate amount of support, changing shared attitudes and behaviours, or culture, is possible.

#### Inspiring a Shared Vision and Modelling the Way

In order to effect change in a given system, TRU decided to make an effort to lead the way. The institution found that coming up with a philosophy such as “*Drink with Class*” had a profound effect on those within the system that created a foundation for leadership. A general shift from a preventionist approach to a positive one of **having a healthy relationship with alcohol** was helpful, as this was an idea that most people found relatable and resonant with their personal experiences of alcohol. This allowed people to be receptive to messaging and conversation on the topic, as it was a departure from the fear-based, paternalistic stances that institutions often take on alcohol. In this way,

students and staff could get behind the message, because it was relevant to their own experiences and it also allowed TRU to harness the power of appreciative inquiry. We found that developing a shared vision was important, because if everyone had a clear perception of the desired future state of the system, then everyone knew what they were working toward.

With the shared vision in sight, the next step to consider was the journey towards it. With regard to *Drink with Class*, Residence Life Coordinators, began to model the way for the Resident Advisors (RAs). We often find that there is a gap between what RAs learn in training and how they perform on the job. To close this gap, Residence Life professionals performed rounds with their student staff and engaged with the students in a manner that was respectful, compassionate, restorative and developmental. TRU found that moving in this direction, rather than taking a punitive approach towards infractions, was positively impactful on the student population. There seemed to be a cyclical reciprocity that resulted as we developed these positive working relationships between staff and students—the respect became mutual, which increased the students’ investment in the Residence Life staff, which in turn improved the staff’s level of influence on the students—including influence related to alcohol.

#### Enabling Others to Act and Encouraging the Heart

When students hosted parties in the first six weeks, TRU recommended that they have a conversation with Residence Life Staff to improve their ability to host and to positively affirm good behaviours. Asking students to greet their guests and to make introductions to other guests are examples of how students could act in accordance with the *Drink with Class* philosophy. Telling hosts that they did a great job of letting their neighbours know about their party is an example of encouraging the heart and we thought this should be celebrated.



## Considering Empirical-Rationale, Normative-Reeducative and Power-Coercive Approaches

When attempting to create readiness for change, there are three main approaches:

- providing people with knowledge (empirical-rationale)
- telling people what they need to do (power-coercive)
- empowering people and increasing their capacity to make their own choices (normative-reeducative)

### Offering knowledge as education is useful when the information is logical, uniform and simple and is not particularly difficult for folks to apply in changing a habit

There are very few examples of this in the realm of health, but more generally, an example would be “how to bake a cake”. For more complicated behaviours, we know it is not that simple. For example, we know that many people are educated on the Canadian food guide and yet, do not often use it to plan meals or guide their food consumption.

### Telling people what to do is typically an ineffective method unless the person being told is sufficiently invested in the outcome and trusts the person doing the telling.

Since investment and trust exists on a scale, we realized that these need to be proportional to the value of the ask. For instance, telling someone to change a health habit only typically works well when the individual has reached a point where it is more uncomfortable not to change than it is to change (so they are more highly invested in change) and the authority doing the telling is either highly trusted or in a position of power over the other. When it comes to matters of personal rights and freedoms around individual decision-making, there is generally an undesirable trade-off with this approach.

**Allowing people to make their own decisions seems to be the best method to encourage them to commit to a new behaviour.** Coaching and counselling efforts both take advantage of this strategy. When coupled with education, the normative-reeducative approach can be a powerful strategy to encourage students to commit to *good* behaviour. This is why the postcards *Drink with Class* used, which challenged students to embrace their own alcohol identities, seemed to be very effective tools.

## Understanding the Social Phenomenon and Maslow’s Need for Belonging

If a student makes a mental commitment to a healthy relationship with alcohol individually, it is unlikely that they will exhibit the related behaviours of this commitment on their own unless the student has a very high level of self-confidence and integrity. The more likely scenario is that the student will revert to their old drinking practices because they want to fit in and belong *when everyone else is doing it*.

**This is why TRU made conscious efforts to move entire groups of students to the desired state together.**

## Leveraging Thought Leaders

“Thought Leaders” are individuals whom the general public tends to listen to on certain topics. In the context of university, these folks can be student leaders, athletes, student staff and even the hosts of parties. When conducting the post party chats, the unintended outcome of earning the hosts’ investment in the *Drink with Class* philosophy allowed them to become ambassadors for positive relationships with alcohol and safer social gatherings. When the champions of the philosophy grow within a given system or subsystem, a tipping point is reached in which those who have not bought in tend to align in order to belong and fit in.



## Final Thoughts

The primary elements and theoretical underpinnings of the *Drink with Class* initiative are helpful for understanding why the efforts were so successful during TRU's 2014-2015 academic year. Through imperfect plans, serendipitous learning moments and a little luck, the concepts started to materialize on campus. The development of this initiative has been an iterative process, using both deductive and inductive reasoning to create a robust campus effort that might be applied and adapted to other contexts in other institutions. Furthermore, evidence would suggest that the principles could be applied to tackle other critical issues on campus such as bystander intervention and mental health promotion. With careful consideration to the unique contexts that exist in other provinces, cities and sub-cultures, the hope is that the use of this effort will offer some insight into how to promote a safer and healthier alcohol culture on campus.

## References and Resources

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Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses is a cross-province Community of Practice managed and coordinated by the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division on behalf of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. The lead partners for Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses are the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division and the Centre for Addictions Research of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The Healthy Minds | Healthy Campuses' Changing the Culture of Substance Use project is funded by the BC Ministry of Health.



**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
British Columbia  
*Mental health for all*



**University  
of Victoria**

**Centre for Addictions  
Research of BC**



# Drink with Class at Thompson Rivers University

## Multi-Layered Components

### Purpose

The purpose of the Drink with Class initiative is to establish a positive drinking culture within Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Residence. By implementing this campaign at the beginning of the year, students become aware of the drinking philosophy at TRU and will hopefully align themselves with that philosophy at the beginning of the year, resulting in routines that last year long. Students should be aware of how they form a “drinking identity” or “alcohol identity” that will stay with them through the duration of the year in order to create positive self-practices.

By using the outlined multi-layered components of this initiative as described below, TRU has aimed to fulfill the purpose of the campaign; to establish a positive drinking environment within TRU Residence. Campus stakeholders who are interested in using the Drink with Class initiative on their own campus should consider integrating all of the components outlined below.

### Multi-Layered Components

#### Roommate Discussion Facilitation

Resident Advisors (RAs) should have the opportunity to meet with roommates to discuss expectations regarding temperature, security, guests, etc. Why not discuss drinking culture as well? Messaging should focus on creating an individual and alcohol identity as well as an identity created for an entire suite.

### Fridge Magnets

Create magnets consisting of nine key points regarding being a great host. See example image below:





## Post Party Chats

When students in Residence host a party in the first six weeks, the RAs and/or RLCs should be encouraged to have a conversation with the host(s) about creating a positive drinking environment and to be conscious of how certain drinking identities will have an impact on their year. The conversation should be supportive in tone and should aim to create a positive alcohol identity for each resident of the suite and the suite itself.

## Pop-up Banners

Each of the banners should have a different drinking archetype; one for The Acquainted Abstainer, The Bold Boozer, The Casual Consumer and the fourth is their own as they are encouraged to consider “who they want to be.” The identities, as well as the accompanying text, will serve as an opportunity for students to reflect on their own personal drinking identities. In front of the banner, place a table in the shape of a solo cup that will hold the postcards as well as markers and treats.

## Postcards

The postcards can accompany the pop-up banners and will challenge students to create their own personal drinking identity. See example below:

## Drink with Class Gala

As an Orientation week event, ask students to dress classy and get them together for an evening that is centered towards positive drinking. The event can serve alcohol for those who are of age and for those who are not, mocktails can be made available. Make this event themed by ordering custom napkins with healthy drinking tips, include a mixology class on how to make drinks in a healthy way, and ultimately provide a great time by providing a positive drinking environment.

## Tuxedo T-Shirts

Everybody likes a tuxedo t-shirt. In line with the “classy” theme, these t-shirts should serve as a fun way to engage students. Printed on the back will be a succinct and powerful statement on how the wearer commits to the philosophy of Drink with Class. This statement could be something like, “I don’t always drink, but when I do, I Drink with Class.”

## Drink with Class Drink Containers

Water bottles are a typical swag item for move-in kits, and these ones have a little twist to them. On the side of the bottle should be three lines of measurement: one showing the line for 1.5 oz, one for 5 oz and one for 12 oz.





### Commit to Class Buttons

Sometimes making a physical commitment to an idea, practice or cause is the best way to align one’s actions with the associated philosophies. By creating “commit to class” buttons, students are given the opportunity to wear them if they choose to commit to “classy” drinking. These can be worn on anything, but students could be encouraged to wear them on their backpacks where it can be easily seen on campus.

### Floor Meeting Standard Drink Activity

At each floor meeting, the Resident Advisor (RA) can facilitate an activity where they ask students to pour the amount of alcohol that they would normally pour into a solo cup for a mixed drink. The RA should then pull out some standard 1.5 oz. shot glasses and pour what is in the solo cup into those glasses to compare amounts.

### RA Training Session—The Window of Opportunity

RAs should certainly know what we know about the first day, the first week and the first six weeks of school. We know that this is when students solidify their routines and their identity and by training our student leaders on this, RAs will be more conscious and better equipped to support students in creating positive habits.

### Design Elements

In case you are interested, TRU used the following design elements to ensure consistency of the campaign, and therefore consistent messaging.

#### Fonts

Proxima Nova, Thirsty Rough

#### Colours

	<b>Dark Blue:</b> R=68 G=116 B=157
	<b>Baby Blue:</b> R=185 G=196 B=213
	<b>White:</b> R=254 G=254 B=254
	<b>Light Grey:</b> R=238 G=239 B=239
	<b>Dark Grey:</b> R=102 G=102 B=102