

# the RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction  
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

## Q The legal drinking age is lower in other countries and there's no problem. What's with that?

**A.** Don'tcha just love urban legends? Mister Rogers was really a marine sniper, Richard Gere had an unfortunate emergency room mishap with a gerbil, and albino alligators live in NYC sewers. Oh yeah, and this one: because many European countries have a lower drinking age, this leads to more responsible drinking habits among their young people.

However, data show that with the exception of Turkey, U.S. youth have lower reported instances of alcohol abuse than any other European nation. A recent study compared rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in the United States with those in Europe and found that both rates and frequency of drinking among European youth are higher than in the U.S.

One indicator depicting more responsible European drinking would be lower incidents of binge drinking. However, studies show that while still a significant problem here, U.S. adolescents/young adults binge drink less than their European peers. Only Portugal had a lower rate of than the U.S. Italy, Greece, and Spain had a 30-39% greater rate, and Denmark topped the survey at 61%.

In the category of intoxication, which is associated with a wide range of personal and social problems like vandalism, assaults, injuries, and death, the U.S. was below the middle of the pack compared to other European countries. Once again, Denmark topped the intoxication charts. The only category where European youth fared better were in alcohol related motor vehicle accidents, but studies show this was due to higher legal driving ages, more expensive vehicles, shorter driving distances, and greater access to public transportation.

I like so hate to burst any bubbles. But the myth that young European people, with their lower legal drinking ages and drinking socialization practices, drink more responsibly than their American counterparts is just not true. There's no real evidence to back this up. But you never know, albino alligators might still infest NYC sewers.



### wildfact

90% of UA students refuse to drive with a driver who has been drinking. (2010 Health & Wellness Survey, N=2,931)



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to [redcup@email.arizona.edu](mailto:redcup@email.arizona.edu)



[www.health.arizona.edu](http://www.health.arizona.edu)

The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LSAC, David Salafsky, MPH, Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, and Spencer Gorin, RN, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.