

More at Harvard try to drink away woes

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Photo by Ted Fitzgerald

The troubled economy is driving more Harvard University students to drink as they worry about job prospects and their parents' ability to pay for tuition.

Undergraduates seeking treatment for alcohol-related illnesses at the school's University Health Services is expected to increase for the second consecutive year, Harvard's Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Services told the Harvard Crimson. About 200 students will have needed to get help by the end of the spring term - a 43 percent rise compared to two years ago.

The Ivy League school is not alone in seeing an uptick in alcohol-related troubles. The recession, which has seen the Bay State's unemployment rate soar to nearly 10 percent, has taken its toll on many families.

"Since the economy crashed more than a year ago, we're seeing a significant rise in alcoholism and homelessness," said Jonathan Scott, executive director of Victory Programs, which operates treatment centers in Boston. "A job loss or the inability to find one could lead someone to use alcohol and drugs in a way they might never have before."

Vic DiGravio, chief executive of the Association for Behavioral Healthcare, an advocacy group representing mental health and substance abuse providers, said the Patrick administration's proposed \$2.5 million cuts in substance abuse programs for 2011 will exacerbate the problem.

"Tough times increase the need for our services," he said. "Cutbacks at a time when the need for services is rising are a double whammy."

Kevin Galvin, a Harvard spokesman, declined to provide the Herald with data on student drinking and Ryan Travia, director of Harvard's Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Services, did not return a call seeking comment.

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