Research-Based Findings
Using Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) to Find Community:

- Off-campus partying is an opportunity for risk- and fun-seeking that’s developmentally expected for younger college students, especially first-years who are focused on establishing friendships and social networks and experimenting with adult behaviors.
  - This underscores the importance of alternative means for finding friends.
  - New students who have the fewest social connections may be especially vulnerable to harm from the party experience.
- Pregaming is when someone drinks large amounts of alcohol before attending a party or event (e.g., formals, sporting events). Pregaming accounts for a large percentage of the number of drinks that are consumed over the course of an evening or occasion. Students pregame in order to get drunk, reduce social anxiety, make bonding and romantic connections easier, save money and when alcohol is not available at the target destination.
- Students are drawn to Greek life for its emphasis on social events, group life, community service and leadership. However, Greek involvement has been identified as a risk factor for increased AOD use, including marijuana and prescription drugs. This is especially true for men and leads to personal and social harms, including violence and property damage.
- Students who report misusing prescription drugs are more likely to report lower feelings of control over their circumstances, negative self-image, high distress, lower popularity and/or decreased stigma around mental health issues. In addition, friend subculture has a significant impact on prescription drug misuse.
- A student’s perception of their same-gender closest friends’ marijuana use is highly predictive of their own marijuana use.

Engagement is Protective:

- Students who have rewarding activities during the day may be less likely to drink because they are invested in their success in the activity. Students who spend more time participating in community service or prosocial activities (e.g., volunteering, youth mentoring and outdoor recreation) report lower alcohol use.
- Being part of a goal-oriented group (e.g., a cappella groups, service organizations and leadership groups) that doesn’t use alcohol as a primary tool for bonding decreases the odds of attending off-campus parties.
- Campuses with higher total rates of volunteering have lower rates of drinking and of secondhand alcohol-related consequences (the harm caused by excessive drinking to those around the drinker, such as damage to property, violence, noise and arguments).
  - This underscores the importance of helping students get engaged in volunteering and other co-curricular activities.
Other Findings:
- Binge drinking (consuming 5+ drinks) is associated with high status groups (white, male, affluent) and is one way to display power, money and time and to demonstrate “skill” at obtaining and consuming large amounts of alcohol. This especially occurs in the pregame context. Students from lower status groups (women, racial/ethnic minorities, GLBTQ) may binge drink to enhance their social standing.
- According to the 2012 Senior Survey, 43% of CU graduating seniors wish they had gotten more involved with extracurricular clubs and activities. In the 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement, only 28% of seniors agreed that CU-Boulder provided the support they needed to “thrive socially.” This indicates an opportunity to help students become more involved, which in turn may help reduce AOD use.

Current Efforts
At CU-Boulder:
- Student Affairs departments offer late night and other community-building programs, including concerts, game nights, tours and mentoring for middle and high school students considering college, coaching for first-generation and underrepresented students, the CU Collegiate Recovery Center, and community service and leadership opportunities.
- Student Affairs programming and dining events are scheduled to coincide with high-drinking events, such as key football games and Halloween.
- Residence Life recently refocused resident advisors’ work on building one-on-one relationships with residents because of the demonstrated protective impact of student connection and meaningful activities.

Future Opportunities
Increasing Engagement and Connection:
- Increase coordination and consider expansion of events and tools that improve pathways for student connection, such as:
  - Enhance usability of the CU-Boulder Events Calendar
  - Extend Week of Welcome activities
  - Extend and coordinate late night programming on high consumption days (Thursday-Saturday) and predictable drinking events (Homecoming, St. Patrick’s Day)
  - Improve Student Organizations and Finance Office website to be more user-friendly
  - Disseminate late night and event programming information throughout Student Affairs

Other Opportunities:
- Equip all students with strategies and skills for reducing harm and risk (e.g., eating before drinking, putting someone in the Recovery Position) through an AOD skills introduction training done with student groups, leadership programs and other intact groups.
- Evaluate the feasibility of an annual integrated online health assessment for students.
- Provide outreach efforts to students who seek to join the Greek system, but ultimately don’t or choose to disengage.