

# **Binge Drinking and Other Risk Behaviors among College Students**

## **2019**

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## Introduction

The College Risk Behaviors Study (CRBS) was administered during the 2019 spring semester to a random sample of full-time, undergraduate, University of Delaware students. Each was asked via email to follow an enclosed link and complete the online survey. These students were offered \$5 in flex credit as compensation for their time. By the end of the data collection period, 3,000 students were contacted and 1,138 students chose to participate, corresponding to a 38% response rate.

The sample is similar to the overall student body in distribution of gender and race/ethnicity<sup>1</sup>, with slightly higher percentages of female and white students in the sample than in the total UD student population. Due to the large difference in gender, the data in this report were all weighted to adjust the sample gender ratio to match that of the population. Unless otherwise noted, all reported findings are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

This report will provide an overview of some of the key findings from the 2019 CRBS. First, we will discuss overall trends in past month substance use for students at UD. Next, we present prevalence estimates related to alcohol, other drug, and tobacco product use, highlighting demographic differences in use. Finally, some select indicators will be presented regarding other related health risk behaviors among students, such as driving under the influence, alcohol use by fraternity and sorority members, and contraceptive use and substance use among sexually active students.

Characteristics of the Sample		
	Sample	UD
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	30%	42%
Female	70%	58%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	74%	71%
Black	6%	5%
Hispanic	8%	8%
Asian	9%	5%
Other*	3%	10%
<b>Residence</b>		
On-Campus	56%	
Off-Campus	44%	
<b>Class Year</b>		
Freshmen	31%	
Sophomore	26%	
Junior	22%	
Senior	23%	
<b>Age</b>		
18	18%	
19	29%	
20	22%	
21	21%	
22	10%	
23 or older	2%	

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<sup>1</sup> International students are considered “other” under race in University statistics, but associated with their self-reported race in this study, which accounts for the difference seen here in race/ethnicity proportions. International students make up approximately 3% of the study sample.

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## Overall Trends in Select Substance Use

The College Risk Behaviors Study was not the first survey of University of Delaware students. In 1993, from 1997 to 2003, and again in 2005, University of Delaware participated in the College Alcohol Study. As the trends below indicate, past month cigarette use and binge drinking have both declined over time, while marijuana use has recently risen to its former levels after a period of slight decline. Notably, after 2011 marijuana use has exceeded cigarette use among students.

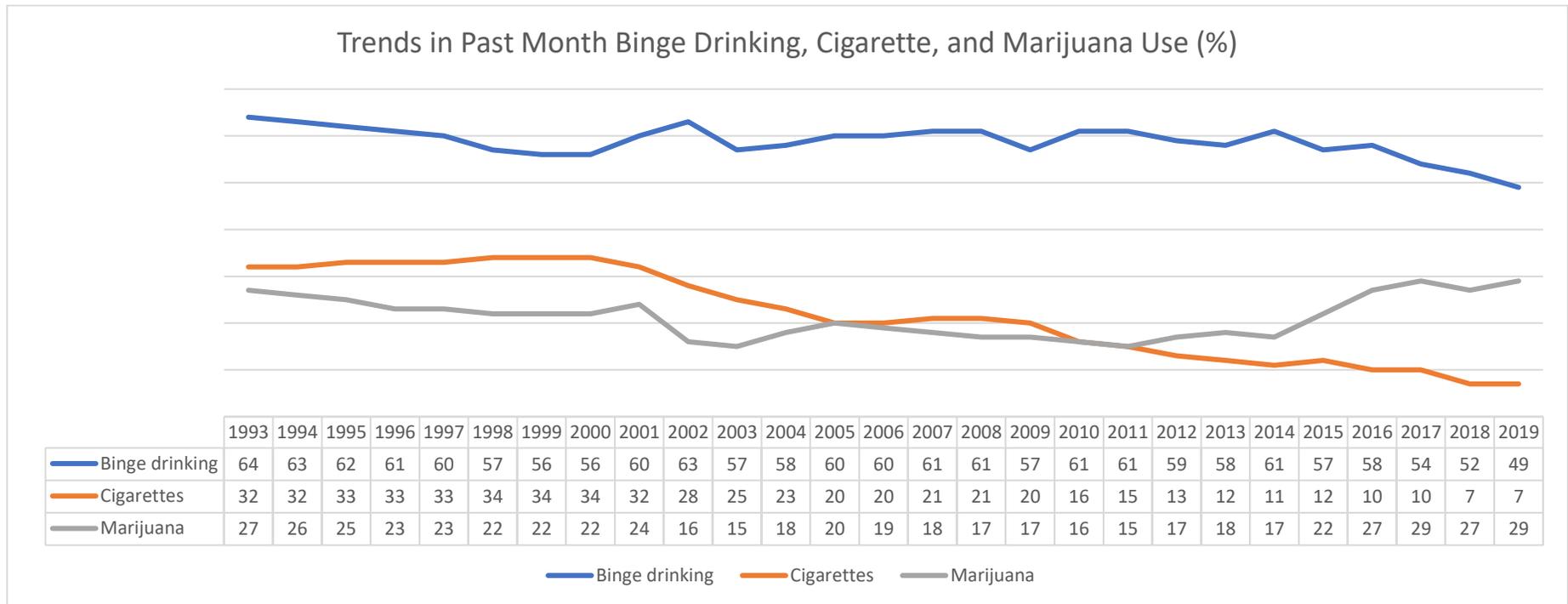


Figure 1: Trends in past month binge drinking, cigarette, and marijuana use, 1993 to present<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Note: Data from 1993, 1997-2003, and 2005 are from the College Alcohol Study. Statistics for 1994-1996, 2004, and 2006-2007 are imputed by averaging adjacent years. Data beginning in 2008 are from the College Risk Behaviors Study. For these trend lines, the data from 2011 to the present were adjusted to include weights for gender.

### Alcohol Consumption Prevalence Rates

In general, the substance of choice among students was alcohol, with the majority of students (72%) reporting using alcohol in the past month, either alone or with other drugs. More than a quarter of surveyed students report no substance use in the past month.

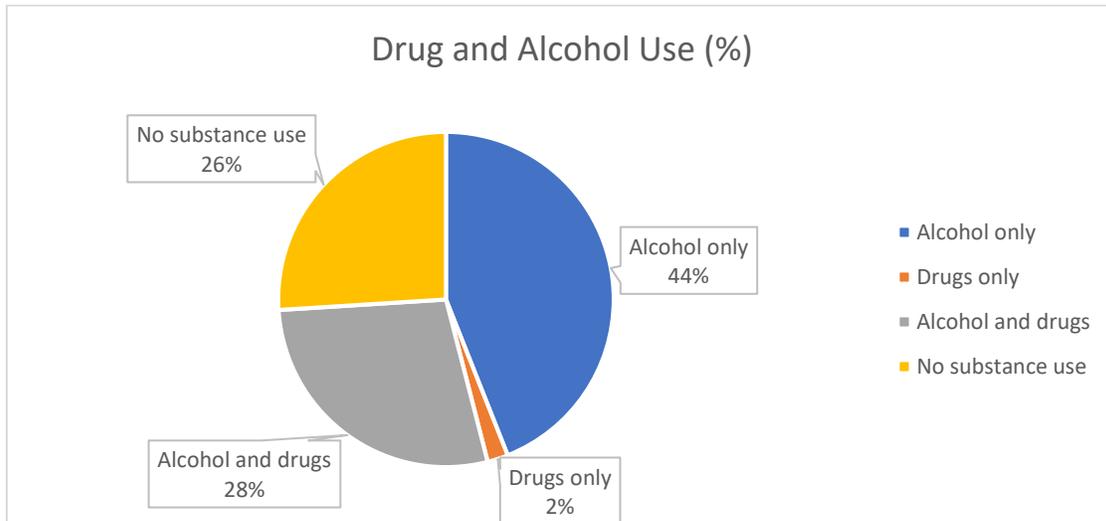


Figure 2: Past month drug and alcohol use among students

Among the surveyed students, 30% reported using drugs in the past month (28% used drugs and alcohol and 2% used only drugs but no alcohol)<sup>3</sup>. Among these students who reported drug use, the overwhelming majority reported only using marijuana and no other drugs. Only 6% reported using other illegal drugs (illegal drugs other than marijuana)<sup>4</sup>.

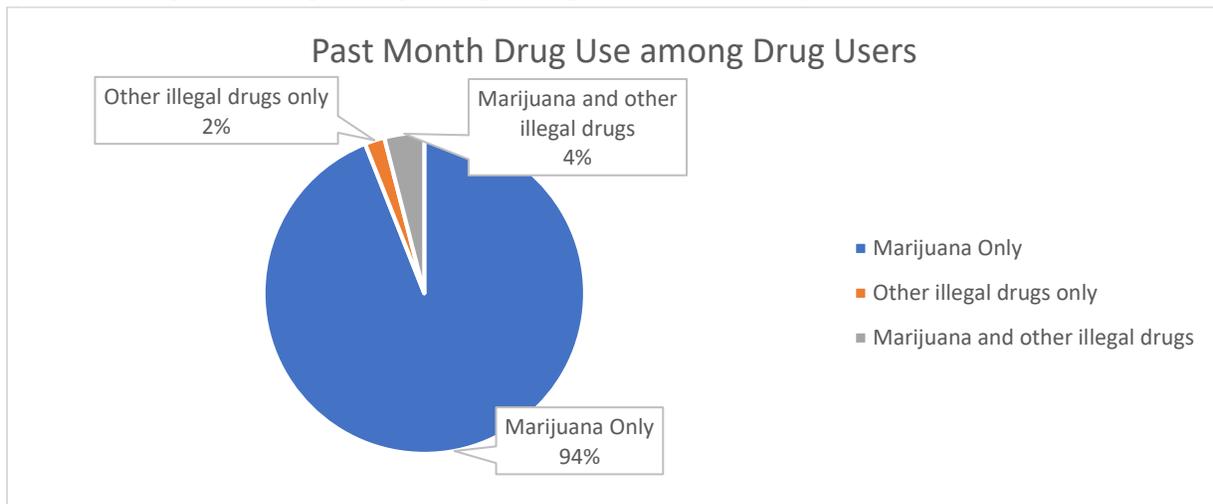


Figure 3: Type of drug use among students reporting past month drug use

<sup>3</sup> Drugs other than alcohol include marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens, opiates and other narcotics, and any prescription drugs use in a way other than prescribed.

<sup>4</sup> Other illegal drugs include cocaine, hallucinogens, opiates and other narcotics, and any prescription drugs used in a way other than prescribed.

Nearly half of surveyed students reported binge drinking<sup>5</sup> in the past month. More than three-quarters of female students reported drinking in the past month, compared with approximately two-thirds of male students<sup>6</sup>. However, although a higher percentage of female students reported drinking in the past month compared to men, men report binge drinking and heavy drinking more frequently. Heavy alcohol use was overall lower, with roughly one in five students meeting the criteria for heaving drinking<sup>7</sup>.

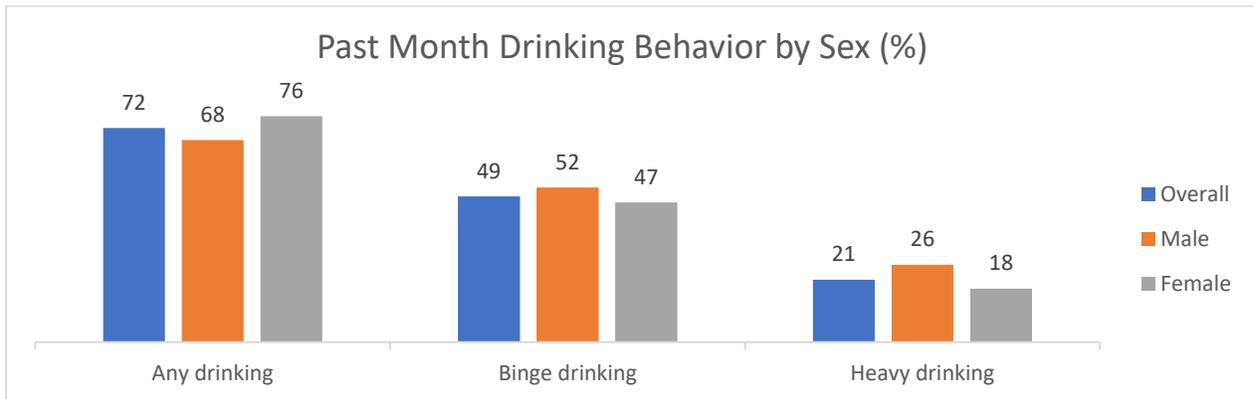


Figure 4: Past month drinking behaviors by sex<sup>8</sup>, in percentages

Additional differences emerge when alcohol use is examined by race and ethnicity. Past month alcohol consumption was highest among non-Hispanic whites. This is also true of binge drinking, with more than half of non-Hispanic white students reporting binge drinking. Hispanic students report past month drinking and binge drinking more frequently than non-Hispanic black students, Asian students, and students from other non-white racial categories. Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic students report the same levels of heavy drinking.

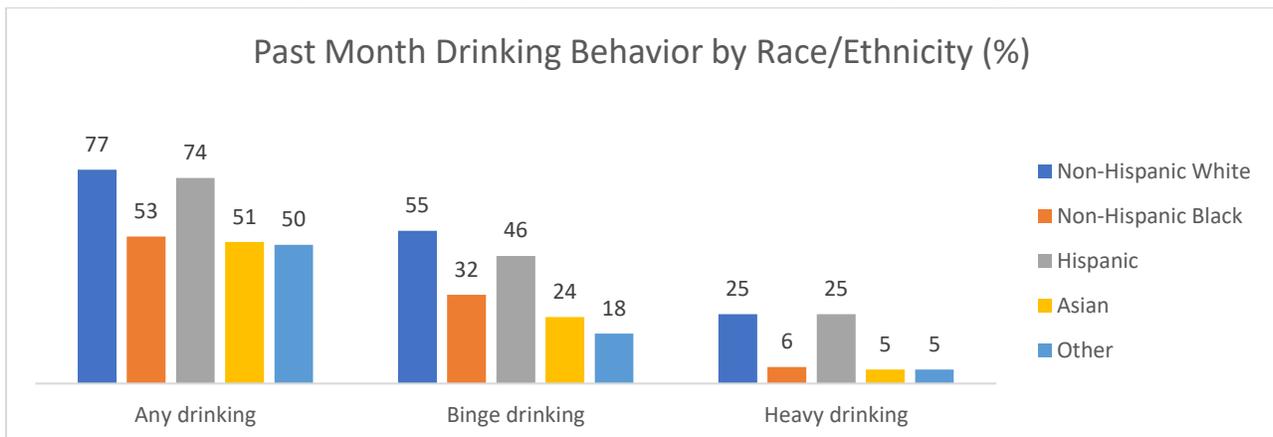


Figure 5: Past month alcohol consumption by race/ethnicity

<sup>5</sup> Binge drinking is defined in the CRBS as having five or more alcoholic drinks in a single sitting.

<sup>6</sup> The correlation between binge drinking and sex was not statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

<sup>7</sup> Heavy drinking is defined in the CRBS as binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past month. This definition was changed in 2019 to be consistent with SAMHSA's definition of heavy drinking; in previous years heavy drinking was defined in the CRBS report as drinking on at least two-thirds of the past 30 days.

When disaggregated by class year, a steady increase in alcohol consumption can be seen over time. Rates of any past month drinking, binge drinking, and heavy alcohol use increase for students with each year that they are in college, with first year students reporting the least drinking and fourth year and above reporting the most.

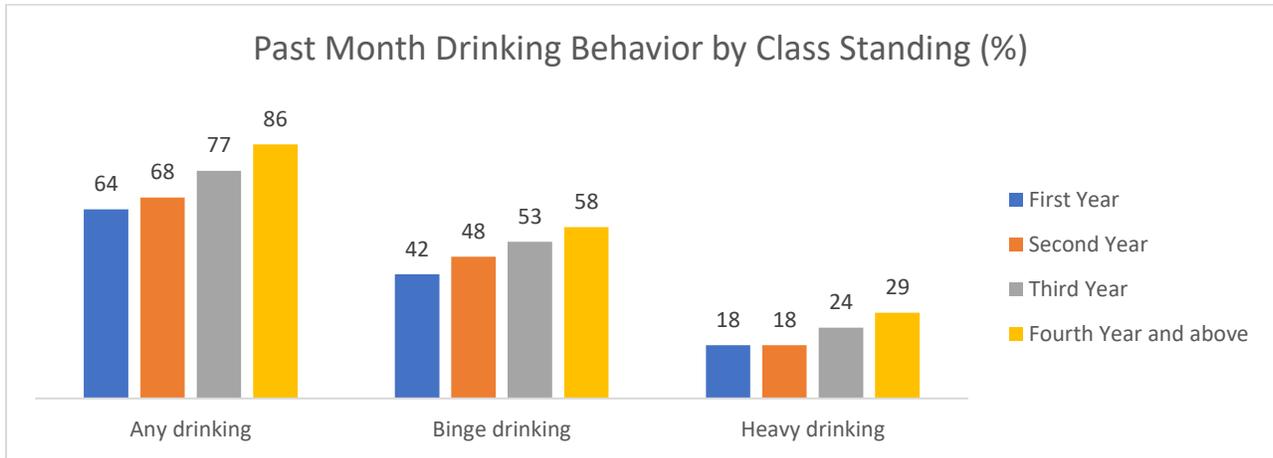


Figure 6: Past Month Drinking Behavior by Class Standing

A slightly different trend is shown when past month drinking behavior is disaggregated by age in this sample. This year, 18 year old students reported any past month drinking and binge drinking at higher rates than 19 or 20 year old students<sup>9</sup>. However, 21 year old students reported the highest frequency of past month use across all three measured drinking behaviors. Students 22 years and older tend to report drinking less than 21 year old students but still more than 18, 19, or 20 year old students.

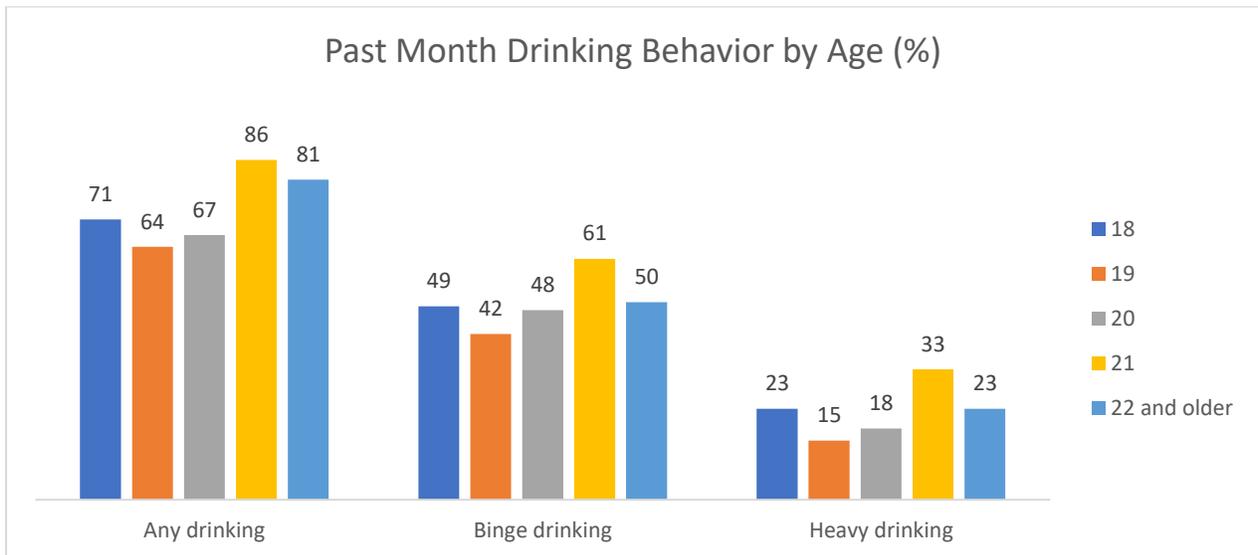


Figure 7: Past month drinking behavior by age

<sup>9</sup> In previous years 18 year old students have reported lower levels of drinking than older students; it is too soon to say whether this is an emerging trend or unique to the 2019 sample of students.

Students report getting alcohol from a variety of sources that are correlated with their age<sup>10</sup>. For those who are underage, parties, friends, and having someone else buy it for them at a liquor store are the most frequent sources of alcohol. Approximately one in five underage drinkers report getting alcohol from family, and one in ten report that they would use a fake ID to obtain alcohol from a bar, restaurant, or liquor store. Students aged 21 and older, on the other hand, report buying alcohol themselves from either a bar, restaurant or liquor store and rely on the informal sources used by underage students far less often. However, it is still common for students of legal drinking age to get alcohol from parties.

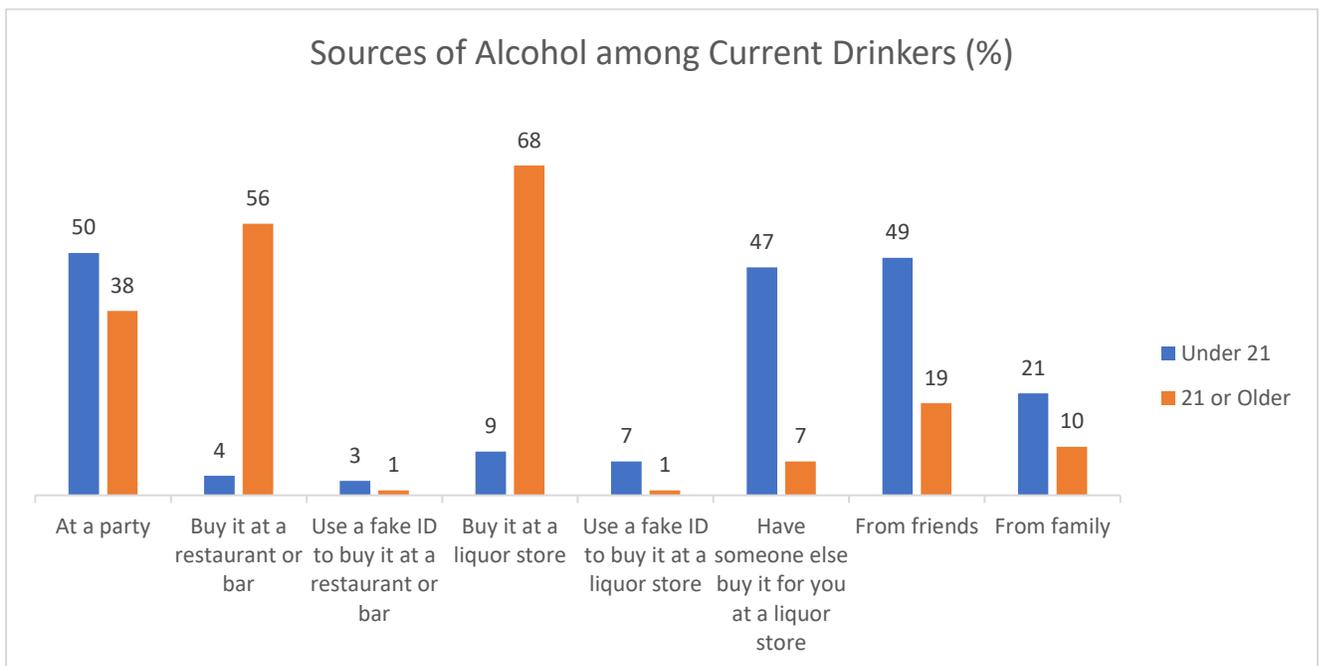


Figure 8: Sources of alcohol among current drinkers

<sup>10</sup> Students were asked, hypothetically, if they wanted alcohol, where they would get it. The percentages reported here reflect the proportion of current drinkers (those who used alcohol in the past month) who reported they would “often” or “very often” get alcohol from these sources

### Drug Use Prevalence Rates

The CRBS also collects information from students regarding the use of substance other than alcohol, such as marijuana, prescription drugs, and other illicit substances. After alcohol, marijuana is the most commonly used substance among students at UD, with approximately 29% of surveyed students reporting that they used marijuana in the past month. Marijuana use is more common among male students than female students, with 35% of male students reporting past month marijuana use compared to only about a quarter of female students.

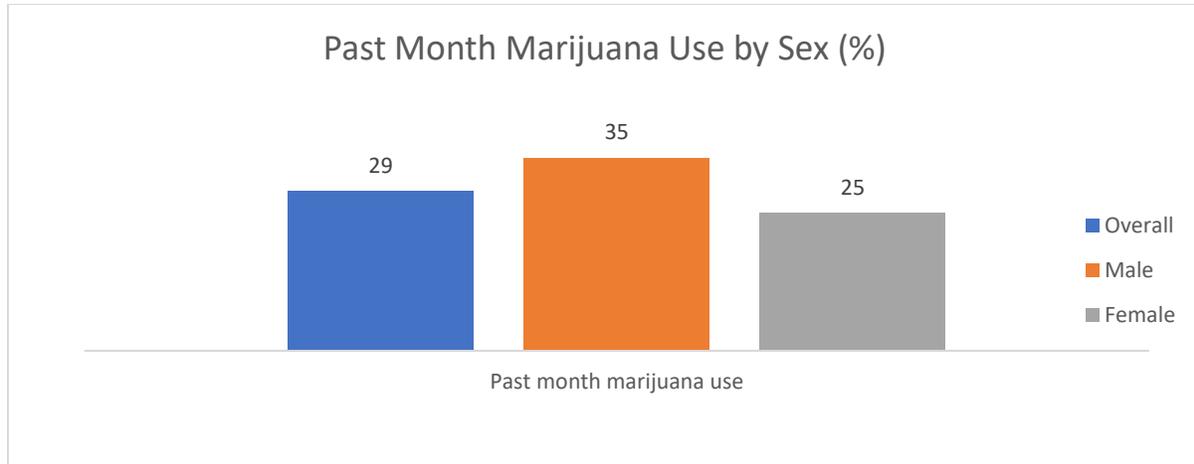


Figure 9: Past month marijuana use by sex

When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, non-Hispanic white students report the highest rates of marijuana use. Roughly one-third of white students report using marijuana in the past month, compared with 27% of non-Hispanic black students and 22% of Hispanic students who report the same.

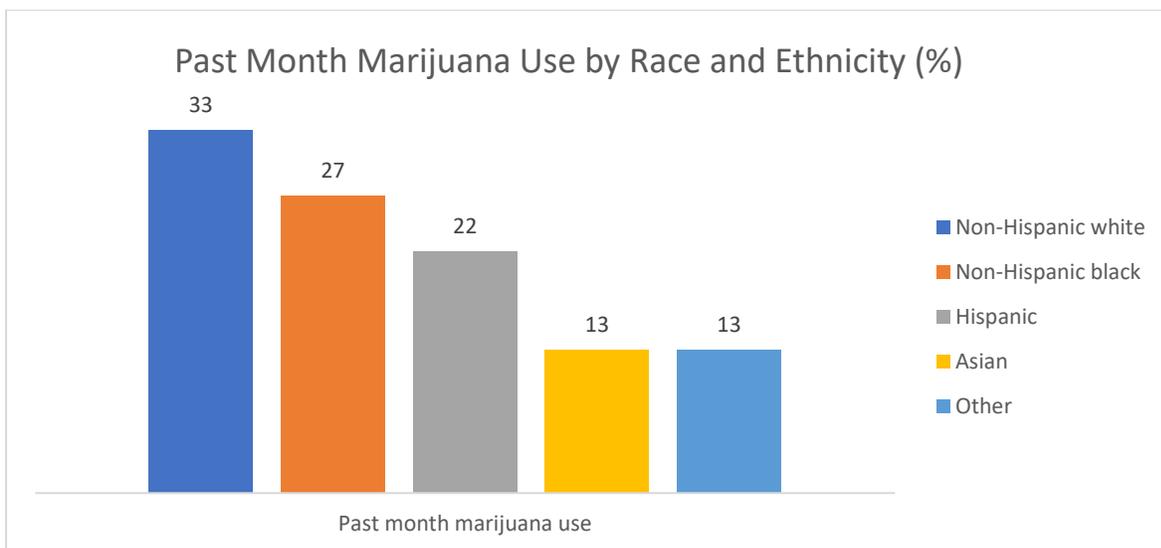


Figure 10: Past month marijuana use by race and ethnicity

Among students who used marijuana in the past month, the most common route of administration was smoking the drug. More than half of the students who used marijuana in the past month reported vaping oil or concentrates or eating marijuana edibles.

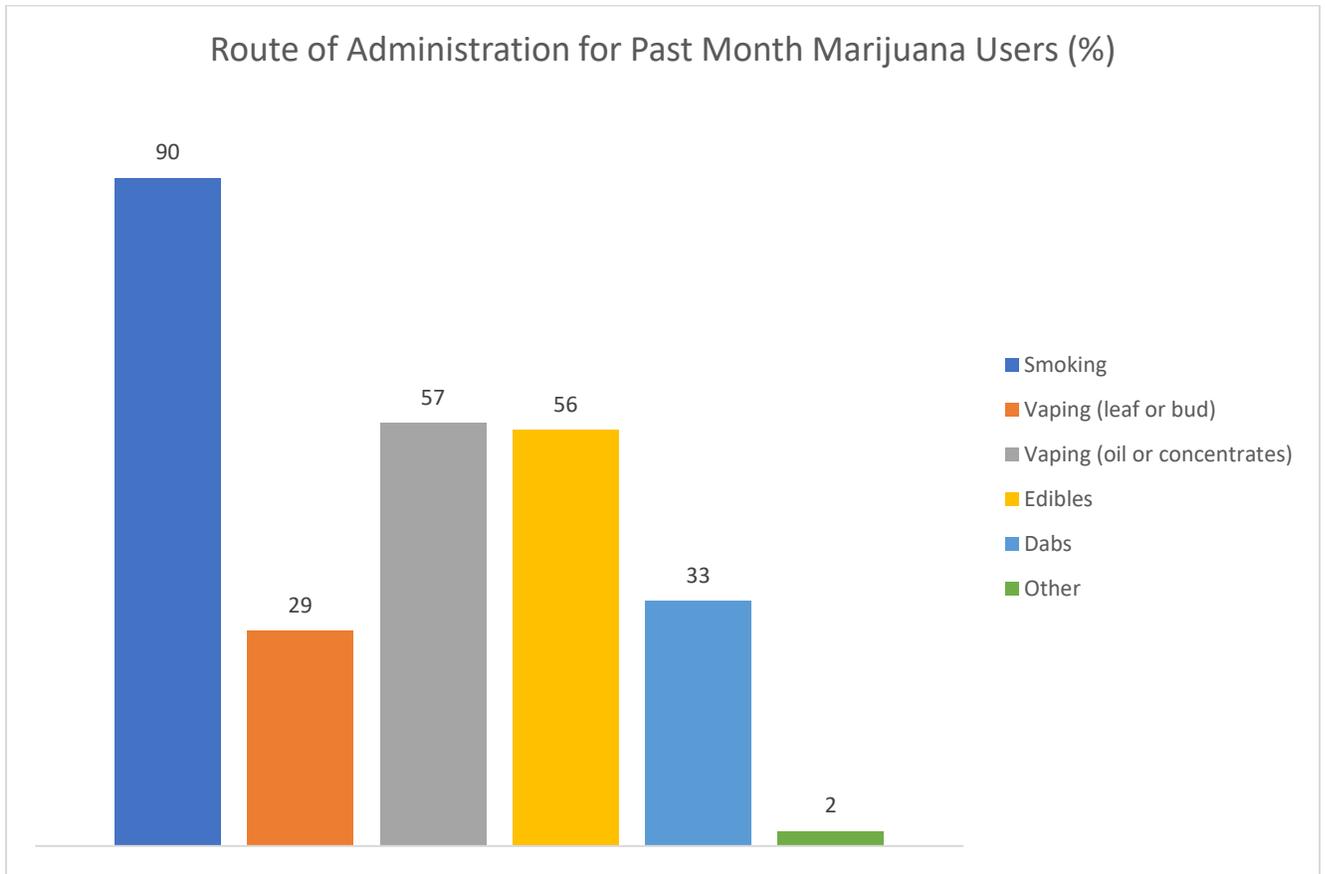


Figure 11: Most common routes of administration reported by past-month marijuana users

After marijuana, the use of prescription drugs without a prescription is the next most common substance used. Approximately 10% of students report ever using a prescription drug<sup>11</sup> not prescribed to them in their lifetime<sup>12</sup>. Students were also asked their reasons for misusing prescriptions; the majority of students who report ever misusing a prescription medication say that they used the drug to help them study. Other responses include ‘to feel better’ and ‘to get high’.

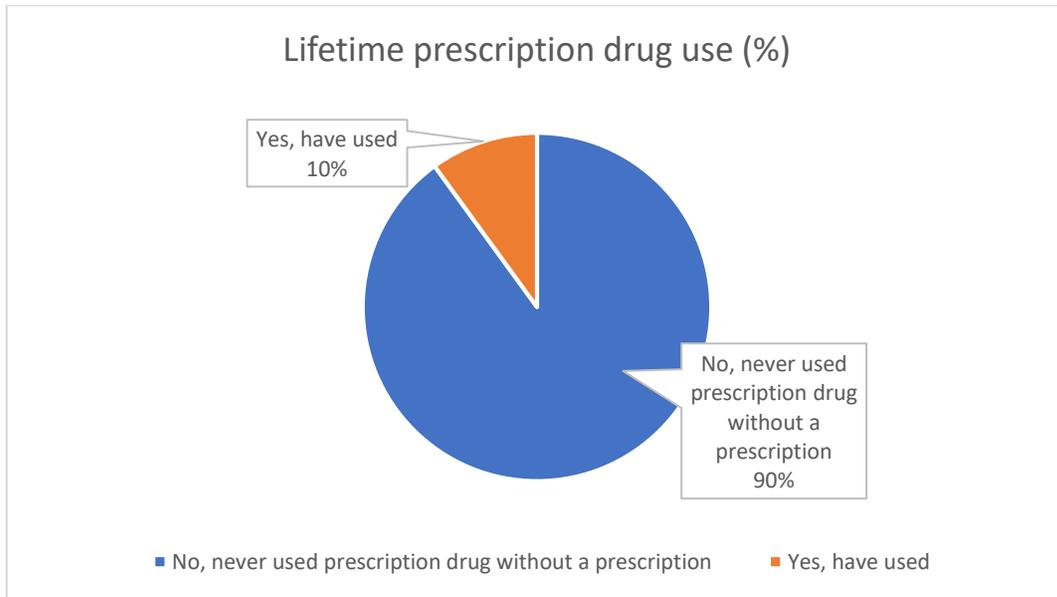


Figure 12: Lifetime prescription drug use without a prescription

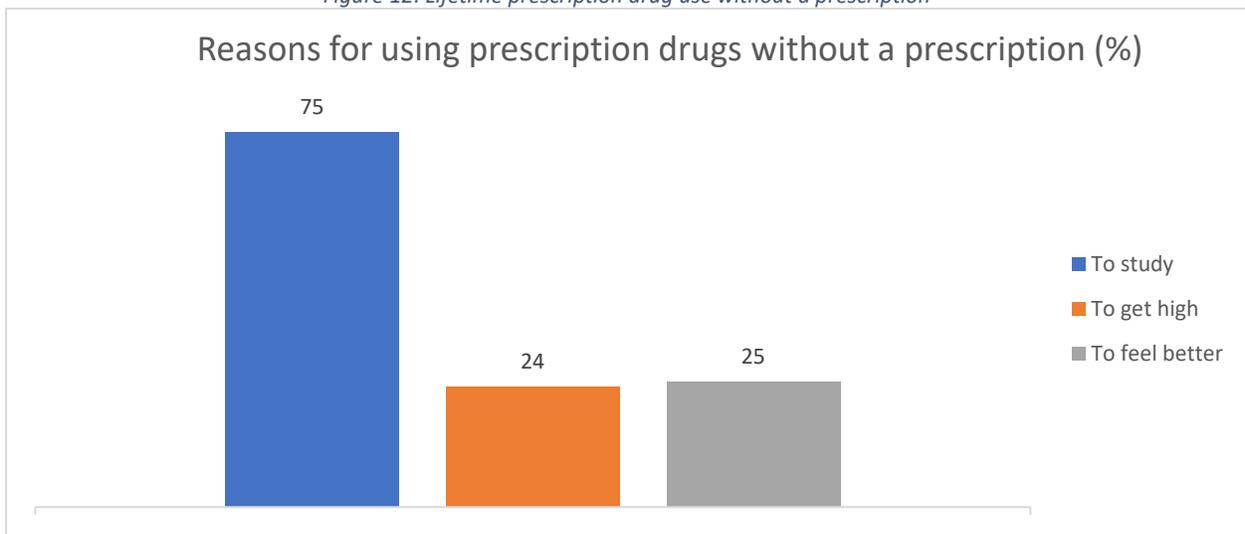


Figure 13: Reasons for using prescription drugs without a prescription<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This includes ADHD medications (such as Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta), other stimulant medications, painkillers, and other prescription drugs.

<sup>12</sup> For prescription misuse, lifetime use rather than past month use was estimated because past month use was too small of a figure.

<sup>13</sup> Among students who report ever using a prescription drug without a prescription

Among students who reported ever using prescription drugs without a prescription, the most common prescriptions used were ADHD medications such as Ritalin, Concerta, or Adderall. Over 90% of prescription misusers report the use of these particular types of drugs. This finding is unsurprising given the previous findings that the majority of students report misusing prescriptions to help study, and ADHD medications such as these are commonly used as ‘study drugs’. Approximately one in four students who use prescriptions not prescribed to them have used painkillers.

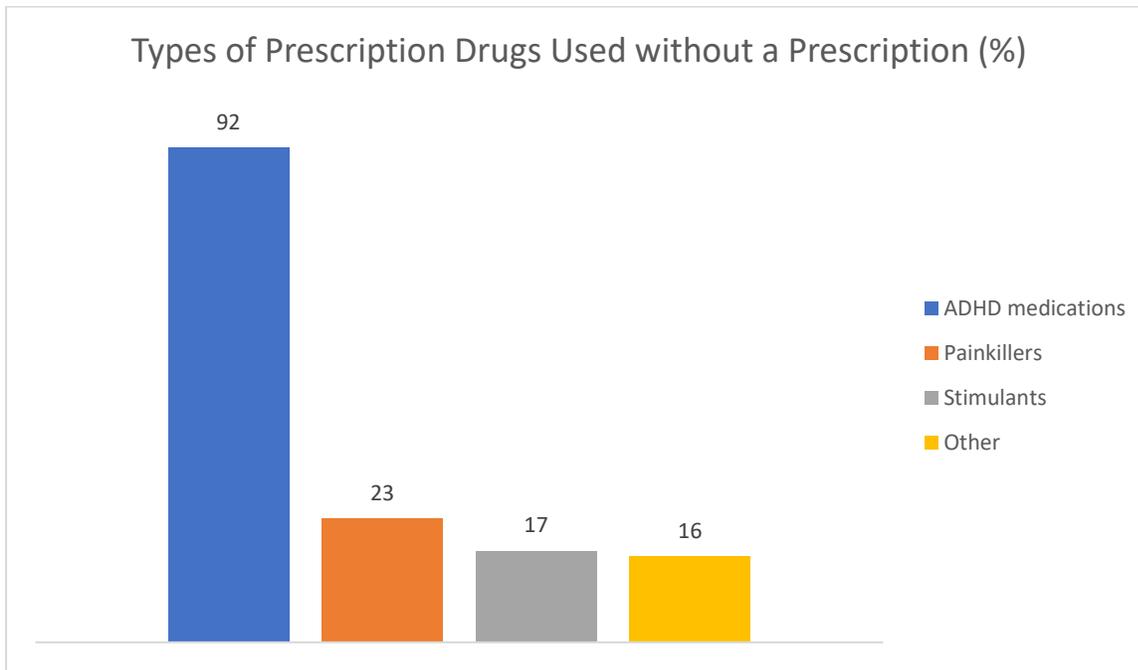


Figure 14: Types of prescriptions drugs used without a prescription<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Among students who report ever using a prescription drug without a prescription

### Tobacco and Electronic Cigarette Prevalence Rates

Overall, cigarette use among University of Delaware students has declined substantially over the past two decades, as shown in Figure 1 on page 4 of this report. Roughly 7% of overall students surveyed reported past month cigarette use, with male students and Hispanic students reporting smoking at the highest rates.

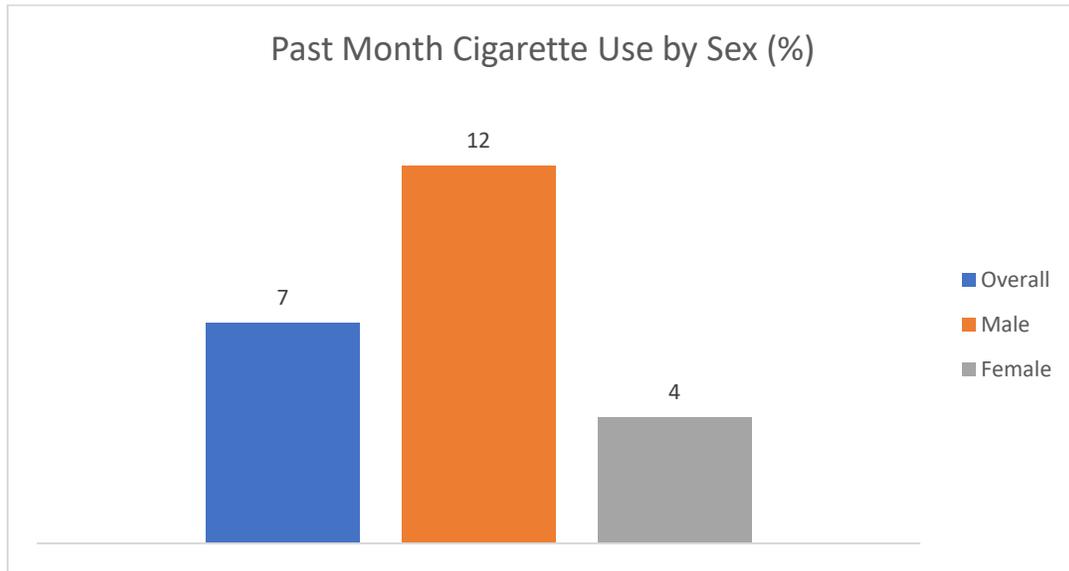


Figure 15: Past month cigarette use by sex

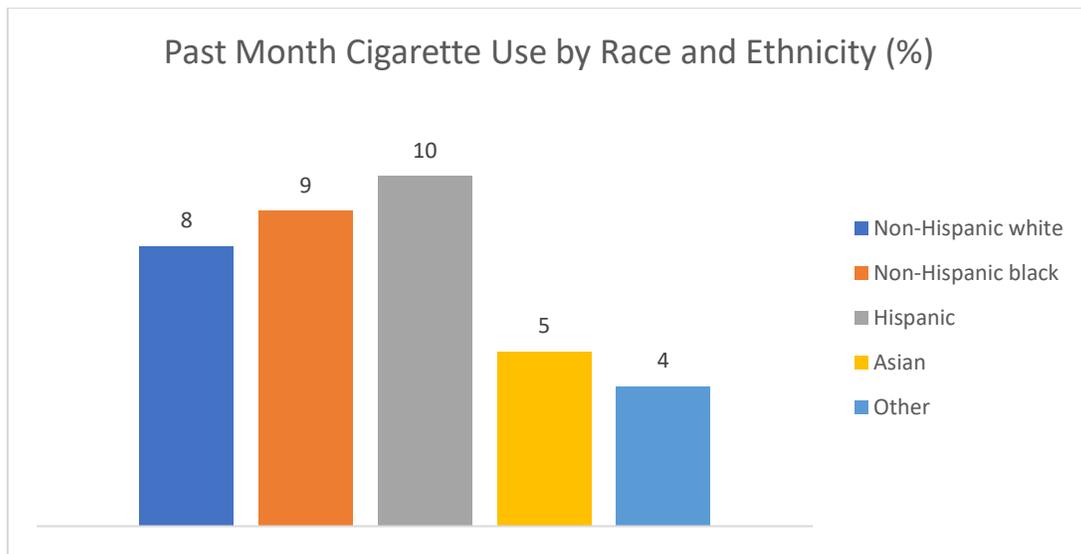


Figure 16: Past month cigarette use by race and ethnicity<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The correlation between past month cigarette use and race and ethnicity was not statistically significant.

When comparing self-reported daily use of various substances, only 1% of students report smoking cigarettes on a daily basis, while 7% of students report using marijuana daily and 2% of students report daily alcohol use.

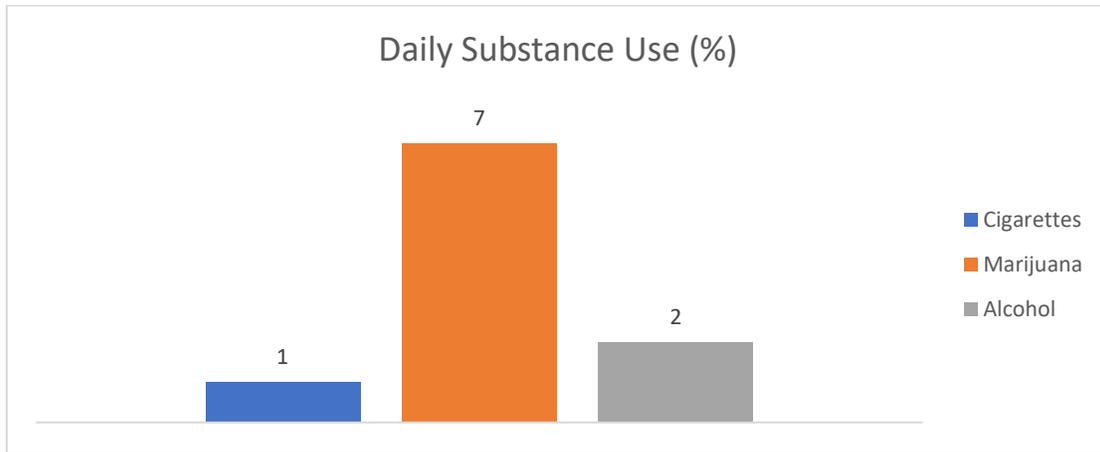


Figure 17: Comparison of daily use of cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol among surveyed students

Although cigarette use has been declining and rates of self-reported use remain relatively low, in recent years electronic cigarettes have become more popular among young people. Among the students surveyed at the University of Delaware, nearly a quarter report using an electronic cigarette or vaping device in the past month. As with traditional cigarettes, a higher percentage of male students report electronic cigarette and vape use than female students.

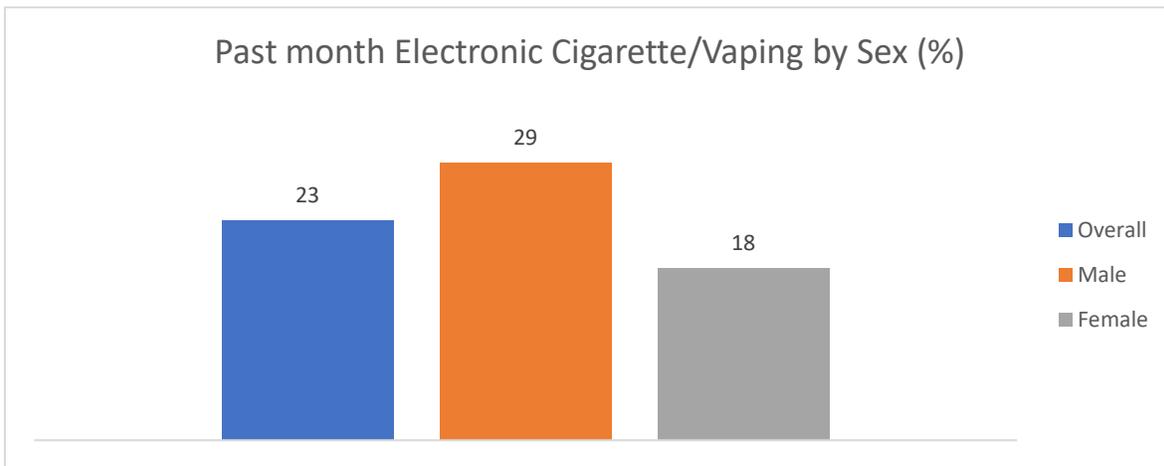


Figure 18: Past month electronic cigarette and vape use by sex

### Risk Behaviors and Other Indicators

In addition to the substance use prevalence data summarized above, the College Risk Behaviors Study collects information regarding other risk behaviors of students, such as drinking and driving, contraceptive use and other sexual health behaviors. It also measures student involvement with campus communities such as Greek life, as well as self-reports of victimization experiences on campus among students. The following section provides a brief overview of some of these points from the 2019 study.

#### *Driving Under the Influence*

One in ten students reported driving after drinking alcohol in the past year. Roughly 15% of students report ever driving after using marijuana. Among those who have driven after drinking, the majority report only having one drink.

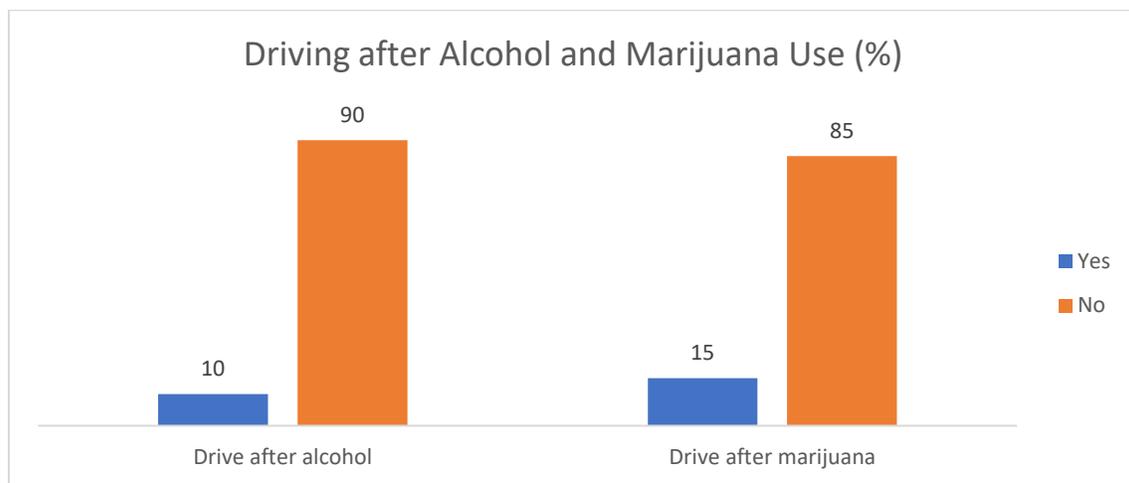


Figure 19: Driving after alcohol and marijuana use

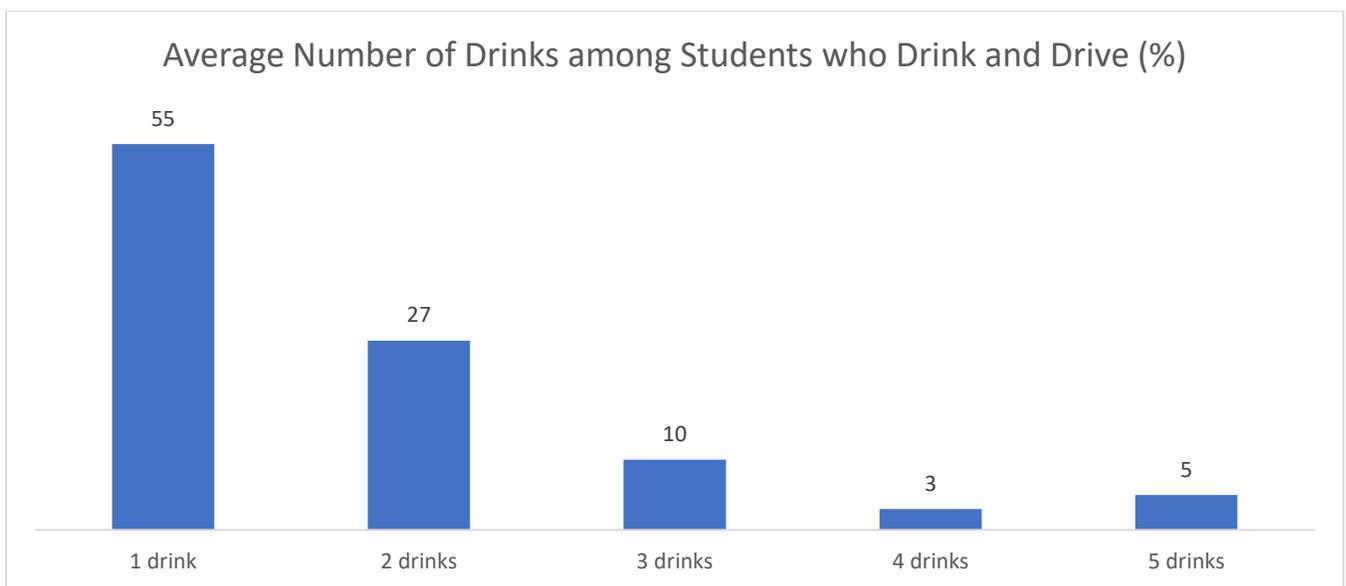


Figure 20: Average number of drinks among students who drink and drive

### *Greek life and Alcohol Use*

There is a large and active Greek community at the University of Delaware, with dozens of active sorority and fraternity chapters on campus. More than a quarter of the students surveyed by the CRBS were members of a sorority or fraternity. Compared to students not involved in Greek life, students in fraternities and sororities reported higher levels of past month alcohol use, binge drinking, and heavy drinking. When disaggregated by sex, female and male students involved in Greek life report similar levels of past month drinking<sup>16</sup>, but male students far exceed female students when it comes to binge drinking and heavy drinking.

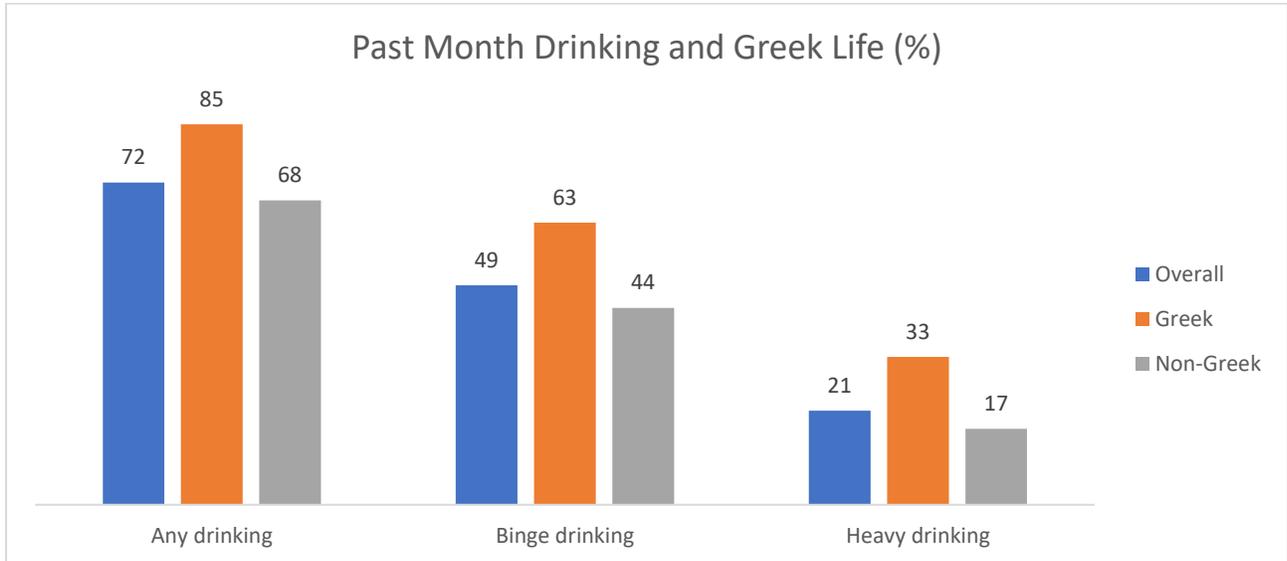


Figure 21: Past month drinking and Greek life

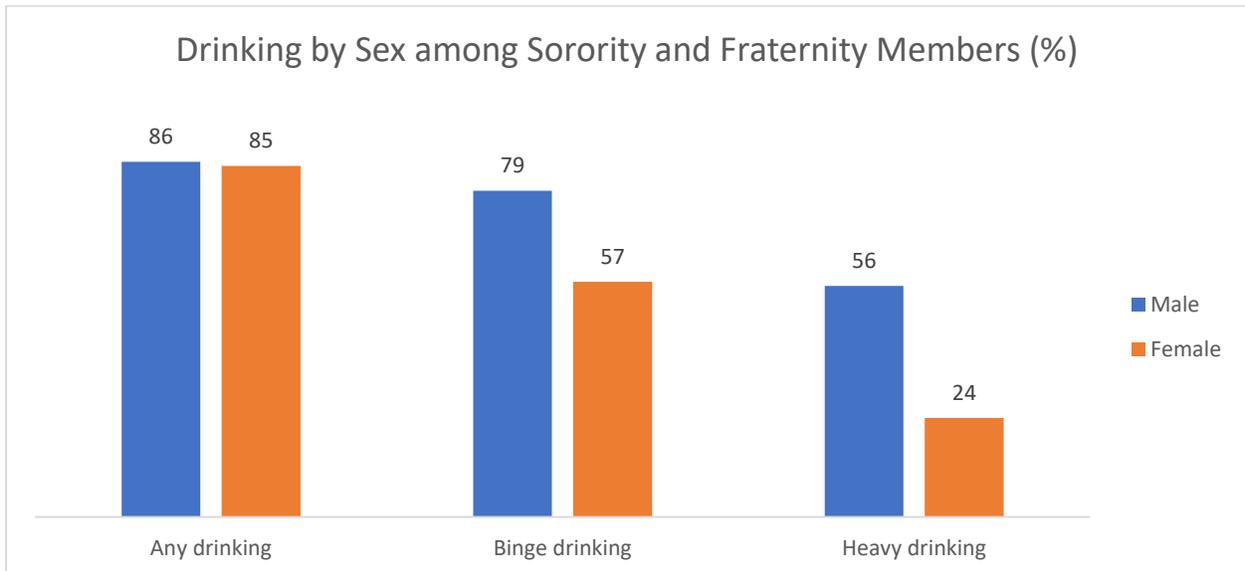


Figure 22: Past month drinking by sex among sorority and fraternity members

<sup>16</sup> The correlation between sex and any past month drinking among fraternity/sorority members is not statistically significant, but binge drinking and heavy drinking both are highly significant.

### Sexual Health and Risk Behaviors

More than half of students surveyed report being sexually active in the past month. Among those students who were sexually active, 98% reported using some form of contraception to prevent pregnancy the last time they had sexual intercourse.

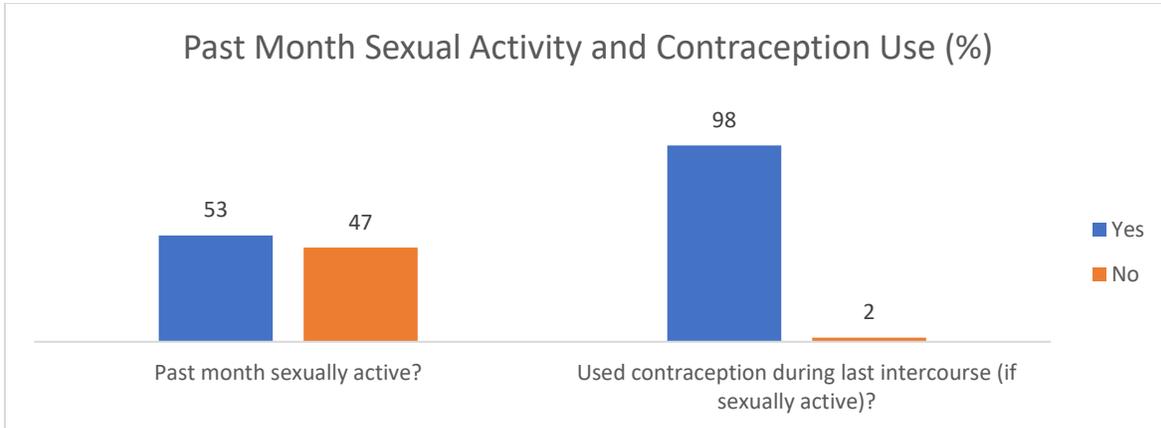


Figure 23: Past month sexual activity and contraceptive use

The most popular reported methods of pregnancy prevention used by students during their last sexual activity were birth control pills and condoms, followed by the withdrawal method. A smaller percentage of students report using IUDs and the shot, and the remaining students were given the option to write in their method of contraception. Other responses here included spermicide and pulling out and implants such as Nexplanon. A few respondents also wrote that they did not use any method of pregnancy prevention because they had a same-sex partner.

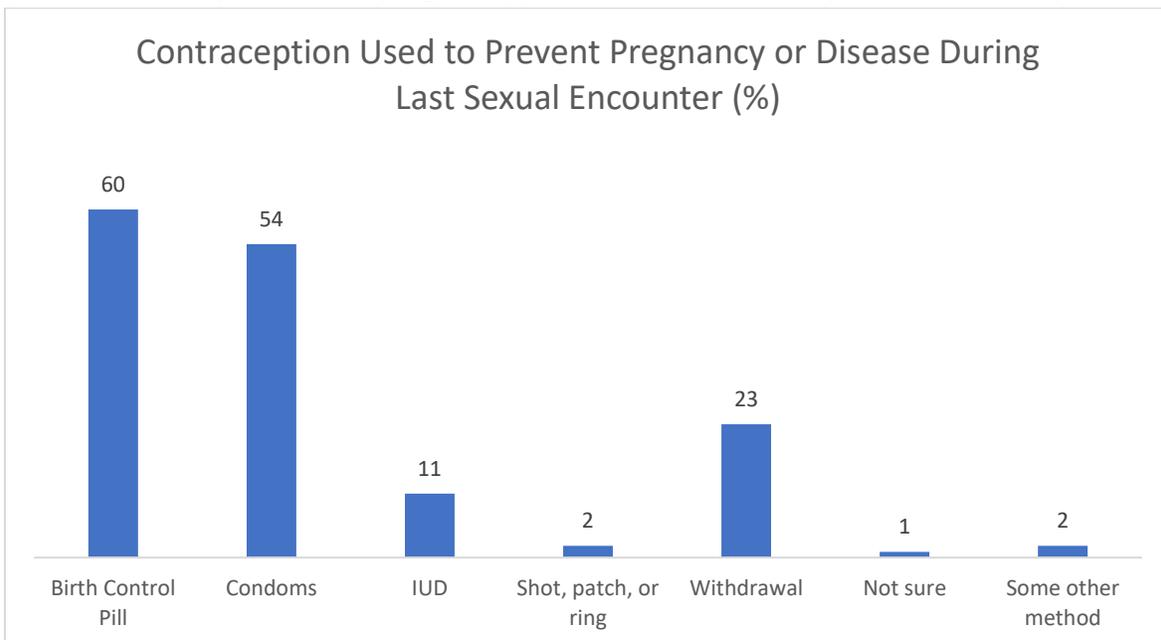


Figure 24: Pregnancy prevention method used during last sexual encounter (among currently sexually active students<sup>17</sup>)

<sup>17</sup> Currently sexually active students are those students who report engaging in sexual activity in the past month.

Students less frequently report using contraceptive methods to prevent disease. Among currently sexually active students, less than two-thirds report using some method to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and infections during their last sexual encounter.

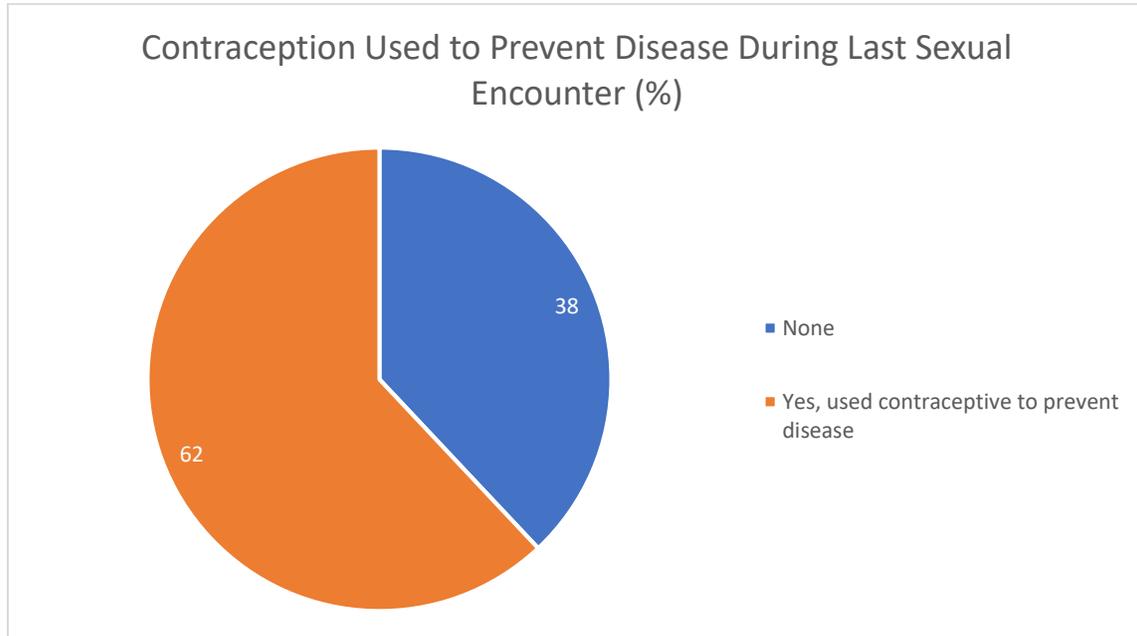


Figure 25: Prevalence of contraceptive use to prevent disease during last sexual encounter (among currently sexually active students)

When analyzing the reported substance use among sexually active students, among sexually active students, 46% reported that they were drunk or high during at least one sexual encounter in the past month and 43% reported that they had at least one sexual encounter with another person who was under the influence. This behavior did not substantially vary between male and female students<sup>18</sup>.

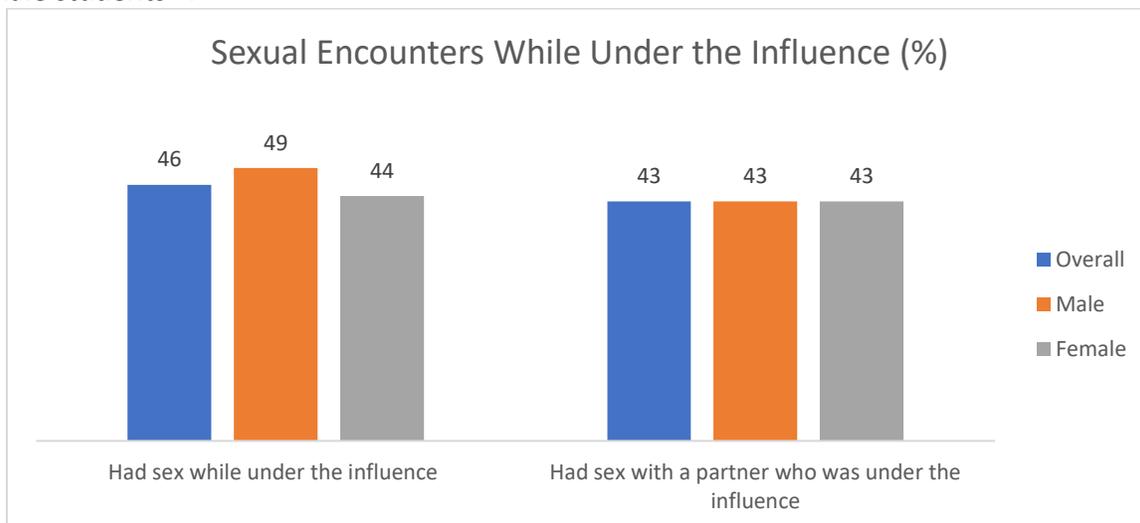


Figure 26: Sexual encounters while under the influence among currently sexually active students

<sup>18</sup> The correlation between sexual activity under the influence and sex was not statistically significant.

*Trends in Physical and Sexual Assault Victimization*

In the last decade, the percentage of students reporting that they have been a victim of sexual assault<sup>19</sup>, while fluctuating slightly each year, has overall remained about the same. Female students tend to report sexual assault victimization at greater levels than male students.

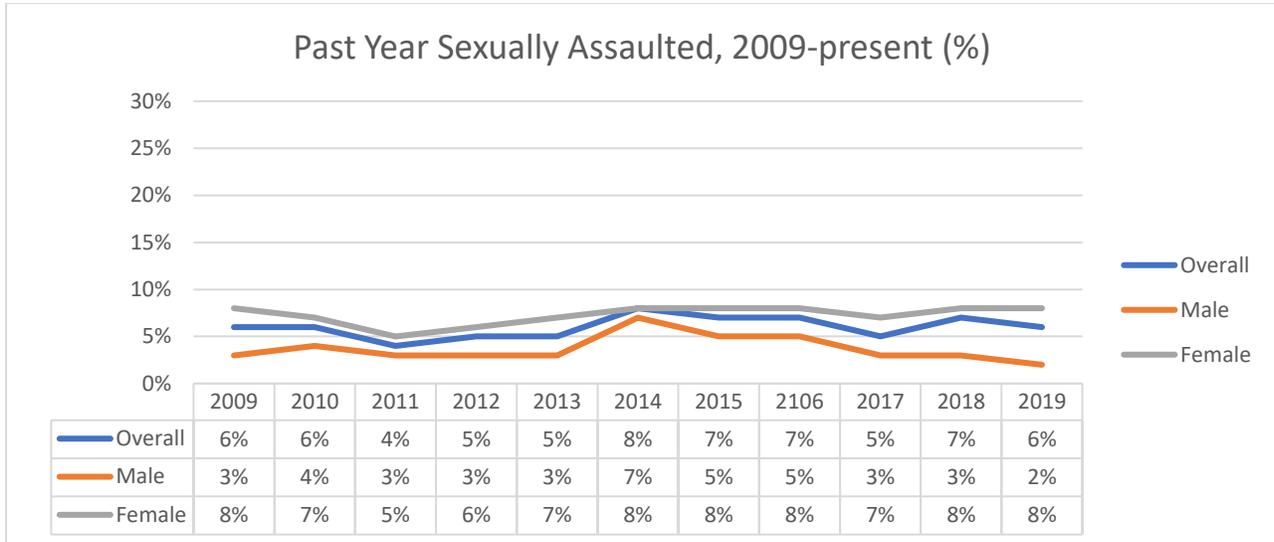


Figure 27: Trends in self-reported sexual assault, 2009-present

Data related to physical assaults or threats of assault<sup>20</sup> suggest that the prevalence of these types of incidents among UD students has declined in the last decade. Reports of physical assault or threats of assault are more prevalent among male students than female students.

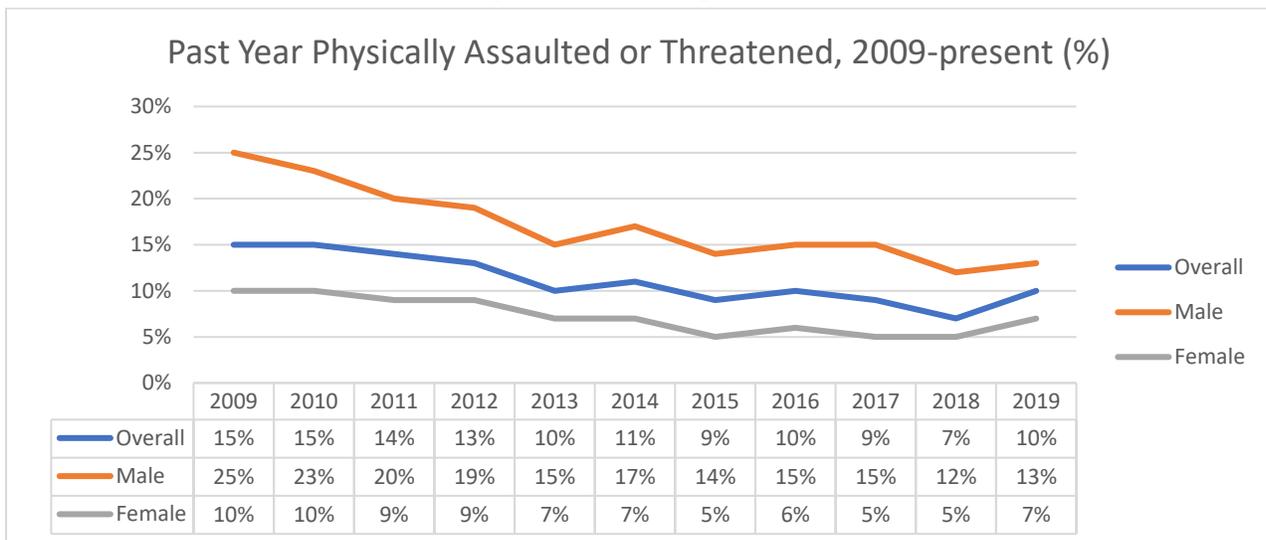


Figure 28: Trends in self-reported physical assault or threats, 2009-present

<sup>19</sup> Sexual assault is defined as being forced or coerced into unwanted sexual activity of any kind by someone unknown to the student, a casual acquaintance, a friend, or an intimate partner in the past year.

<sup>20</sup> Students are asked if in the past year they have been attacked or threatened in any of the following ways: with a weapon; by something thrown; grabbing, punching, or choking; face-to-face threats; or any attack or threat of use of force by anyone at all.