

COUGS SPEAK – Social Norms Fact Sheet (2025-2026)

Media, Adolescents & Cannabis Research Lab

Students often overestimate how risky behavior is happening at WSU. Most Cougs make safer choices than first assumed. Below are the actual behaviors compared to perceived peer behaviors.

Top Accurate Norms (What Students Actually Do)

- Only 9.7% experienced an alcohol-related injury.
- Only 17.2% rode with a driver who was under the influence of alcohol.
- Only 6.1% of men and 4.2% of women reported driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Only 2.2% posted something negative online after drinking.
- Only 15.1% had unprotected sex after drinking.
- Only 10.2% forgot to use a condom during sex after drinking.
- Only 18.3% were more likely to have sex after drinking than when sober.
- Only 33.3% used cannabis after drinking.
- Only 7.6-8.3% said they had sex with someone they otherwise wouldn't have.

Positive Reframing

- Over 90% of students did not experience an alcohol-related injury.
- More than 82% of students avoid riding with someone who has been drinking.
- Over 94% of students choose not to drink and drive.
- About 98% of students avoid posting negative content online after drinking.
- Between 88%–98% of students do not send negative texts after drinking.
- About 85% of students do not have unprotected sex after drinking.
- Nearly 90% of students remember to use a condom even after drinking.
- Over 93% of students do not have sex with someone they don't know after drinking.
- More than 91% of students do not engage in sexual activity they would normally avoid.
- Over 80% of students say alcohol does not increase their sexual activity.
- About two-thirds 67% of students choose not to mix cannabis and alcohol.

Misperceptions (What Students THINK Their Peers Do)

- Students believe 71.5% experience alcohol-related injury.
- Students believe 66.1% ride with a drinking driver.
- Students believe 47.8% post something negative online after drinking.
- Students believe 67.2% have unprotected sex after drinking.

- Students believe 59.1 forgot to use a condom after drinking.
- Students believe 71% are more likely to have sex after drinking.
- Students believe 71.5% use cannabis after alcohol.
- Students believe 72-74% have sex with someone they don't know after drinking.

Biggest Gaps Between Actual and Perceived Norms

- Students think 72% of students get injured from alcohol — only 10% do.
- Students think 66% ride with a drinking driver — only 17% do.
- Students think 48% post something negative online after drinking — only 2% do.
- Students think 67% have unprotected sex after drinking — only 15% do.
- Students think 59% forget to use condoms — only 10% do.
- Students think 71% mix cannabis and alcohol — only 33% do.

Examples of Strength-Based Messages You Can Turn into Facts

- “Most Cougs avoid riding with a drinking driver — more than 82% make the safer choice.” (Only 17.2% ride with a drinking driver.)
- “Cougs look out for each other — risky behaviors are NOT the norm. Over 94% choose not to drink and drive.” (6.1% of men and 4.2% of women reported DUI.)
- “The real norm? Friends making sure friends get home safe — more than 82% refuse to ride with someone who has been drinking.” (Same stat: only 17.2% rode with a drinking driver.)
- “Real intimacy = consent, comfort, and communication. Over 93% of students do not have sex with someone they don't know after drinking.” (Only 7.6–8.3% did.)

Note: Please ensure you are incorporating at least one statistic from the Social Norms Data Sheet into your poster or digital campaign.