

“You’re not an alcoholic until you graduate”

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If you don’t think that every college student is struggling, you’re lying to yourself. We all have homework, exams, personal lives and some of us even work too. But there are some college students that have even more on their plate. Some are battling alcoholism in an environment that glorifies it.

There is a saying that a lot of partiers like to use to justify their actions. “You’re not an alcoholic until you graduate.” This phrase loosely translates to “Everyone parties and binge-drinks in college. It’s normal. And I don’t have a problem.” This is inaccurate for a few reasons. For one, not everyone drinks in college (or at least not every weekend.) It is also inaccurate that you cannot be an alcoholic until you graduate.

Alcoholism is a disease that sees no age, gender, race or social class. I know of people who were drug addicts in high school. Not meaning that they dabbled in partying and did drugs occasionally, meaning that they could not function without being intoxicated. I guarantee that there are people on our campus who feel the same way about drugs or alcohol.

This is not to say that party culture is bad. For some people, it is a large part of the college experience. Everyone is entitled to their own actions and experiences. But there are students struggling with the use of alcohol. Addiction may run in their family, or they may have an underlying mental illness. They may be battling a personal issue which leads them to seek alcohol as an escape. Whatever the reason, if someone is struggling with alcoholism, the last thing they need to hear is that “You’re not an alcoholic until you graduate.”

Some people think alcoholism is saved for people who act out because of their drinking or are constantly drunk. This is not the case. Alcoholism can be an every night bingeing event that leads to waking up the next morning not knowing how the night ended. According to the National Institute on Abuse and Alcoholism, 20 percent of college students meet the criteria for alcoholism. Roughly 1 in 4 college students report academic consequences, such as lower grades or missing class.

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, there are resources on campus. Two programs, CHOICES: About alcohol and CHOICES: About marijuana and other drugs are here to help aid students through the recovery process.

This meaningless phrase — “You’re not an alcoholic until you graduate” — is more harmful than it seems. It may prevent people to seek help even if they think they need it. The phrase should

be more like, “You might not see yourself as an alcoholic until you graduate, where you will most likely have a hard time maintaining relationships, a job and personal health.”

If you drink to feel normal or alleviate stress, choose drinking over other things that should be priorities, experience irritability or extreme mood swings, drink alone or are becoming distant from friends and family members — you may be on your way to alcoholism. Not being able to control your drinking or your actions while drunk is something you cannot fight alone. Get help from friends, family or your campus. Don't let a phrase cause you to not seek help. It is okay to admit that you are struggling, after all, we all are.