

**Title:**

College Students' Perceptions and Use of Marijuana

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**Session Title:**

Rising Stars of Research and Scholarship Invited Student Posters

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**References:**

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**Abstract Summary:**

The objectives were to assess perceptions and use of marijuana among undergraduate students at a faith-based university. A survey and focus groups were used. The primary motivator for use was "to

experiment.” Sixty percent believed marijuana should be legalized, and 90% believed it should be legalized for medical purposes.

### Learning Activity:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
The learner will be able to describe undergraduate college students’ perceptions of marijuana including medicinal and recreational use at a faith-based university	1) Perceptions of use a. Legalization b. Recreational vs. Medicinal c. Acceptance and popularity
The learner will be able to describe the patterns of marijuana use among undergraduate college students	1) Differences and similarities of use a. Compared to literature b. College population variables

### Abstract Text:

Marijuana is the most prevalent illicit drug used on college campuses today (Johnston, O’Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012), with 19.4% reporting use within the last 30 days (Suerken, Reboussin, Sutfin, Wagoner, Spangler, & Wolfson, 2014). Marijuana use has been increasing in recent years with young adults often initiating use during college (Suerken et al.) and is associated with high risk behaviors, such as smoking cigarettes and increased use of alcohol (Caldeira, Arria, O’Grady, Vincent & Wish, 2008). Consequences associated with marijuana use include enrollment disruptions and lower college completion rates (Fergusson & Boden, 2008).

The main objectives of this study were to assess perceptions and use of marijuana among undergraduate students at a faith-based, mid-western university and identify aspects that are associated with use on the college campus. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data. Quantitative data were collected using an investigator-developed questionnaire administered via SurveyMonkey®. Items were adapted from the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey: Long Form (Core Institute of Student Health Programs, 1994), which asks detailed questions about substance use behaviors. Additional questions specific to marijuana were developed from a study completed by Suerken, Reboussin, Sutfin, Wagoner, Spangler, & Wolfson (2014). Qualitative data were collected through four focus group sessions relating to students’ perceptions of marijuana use. A total of six consistent questions were used to guide the discussions.

Following IRB approval, all undergraduate students ( $N = 3,269$ ) during the 2016-2017 academic year were invited to participate in an online survey. A total of 1,624 students responded and 1,522 completed the questionnaire, yielding a 49.7% response rate. The majority of respondents were freshmen (29.4%), female (59.8%), white, non-Hispanic (80.5%), in the college of Arts and Sciences (49.5%), and living on campus (61.5%).

Results showed that 87.2% of students reported that marijuana use has become more common in recent years; however, 88.3% students indicated that marijuana use does not make peers more popular. The majority (59.6%) believed marijuana should be legalized for recreational purposes, and 90% believed marijuana should be legalized for medical purposes. When asked if they think legalizing marijuana would benefit society as a whole, 51.1% agreed; 34.7% indicated they would use marijuana more frequently if it was legal.

Of all respondents, 18.3% ( $n = 274$ ) used marijuana in the last 30 days with a mean of 10.3 ( $SD = 10.7$ ) times. The top three reasons for using marijuana were “to experiment” (43%), “to have fun” (26.3%), “I was encouraged to try it” (7.3%). There were differences in marijuana use based on gender with 25.7% of males using marijuana compared to 13.3% of females ( $X^2 = 37.026$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences based on year in school ( $X^2 = 3.164$ ,  $p = .539$ ). Regarding Greek affiliation, 31% of fraternity

members used marijuana compared to 16.6% of nonmembers ( $X^2 = 21.073$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Conversely, 16.3% of sorority members used marijuana compared to 18.5% of nonmembers ( $X^2 = 0.522$ ,  $p = .470$ ). Of students who participate in NCAA sports, 19.7% of athletes reported using marijuana compared to 18% of non-athletes ( $X^2 = 0.308$ ,  $p = .579$ ).

Use of marijuana on this campus is similar to the national average with the highest use in males involved in Greek life. The primary motivator for first use of marijuana was "to experiment." The majority of students believe marijuana use should be legalized, and nearly all believe it should be legalized for medical purposes. Analysis of the focus groups is currently being completed to provide detail about students' perceptions of the safety and use of marijuana for recreational and medical purposes. Findings from this study may be used to inform administrators about the current prevalence of and attitude towards using marijuana for policy development and educational programs.