Every community has its problems. Most people within the community attempt to work together to fix these problems. Now, IMAGINE being a part of a community, dealing with the same problem for over a decade. IMAGINE a problem that all those who are interested cannot understand in the same way. IMAGINE being in a community and confronting a problem that you couldn’t resolve. (pause)

Well, my fellow community members, we are here today to inform all of you that you each play an active role in such a community. And no, we are not talking about the health care bill. The community of the University of New Hampshire has been faced with the issue of underage drinking for quite some time now. Even though the problem itself hasn’t changed, the discourse among the parties involved has changed and it is worth analyzing. The changes reside in now how its being discussed, but WHAT is being discussed. Each party has an alternative view of the problem. The police, the University, Health Services, Parents and the students each recognize the federal law that no person under the age of twenty-one can consume or possess an alcoholic beverage but where they differ is on why it’s a problem and how to solve it. Each of these participants is very important and with their viewpoints placed together, they form an idea of what the public problem really is. Our analysis shows that the rhetorical communication of each contributing party suggests that the problem of underage drinking is neither agreed upon nor amenable to remedy as its currently framed.

In the following presentation we are going to discuss how the police, the University, Health Services, Parents and the students frame the issue of underage drinking. We are going to unpack the individual discourse using the deliberative stasis procedure. Stasis is the point of clash between two opposing issues, and the deliberative stasis takes the clash further by outlining what the ill, blame, cost, and remedy for each viewpoint. Admittedly through our research there wasn’t much discussion on the cost of this public problem, so we are going to focus more on the ill, or the problem, who is to blame, and how these parties seek to remedy the issue. We are using deliberative stasis procedure to sort out the different positions and to see how they differ on these issues.

Within a public, people’s discourse can affect other perspectives and impact the people within the community; we see this through the issue of underage drinking at the University of New Hampshire.
This first perspective is that of the police force.

I. Police
   i. The police define the problem as students breaking the law, which is a legal matter. Anyone consuming alcohol under the age of 21 is breaking the law.
   ii. Another point they make is that students who are intoxicated may be disruptive to the community.
   iii. Safety of the community and the alcohol consumer is put at risk from underage drinking because alcohol inhibits people’s ability to think properly.

b. Blame
   i. They blame the students for a “host of social issues” states the Durham Chief of Police Dave Kurz
   ii. They blame the students attitudes towards the problem. Kurz states “Kids are more assertive and act as though it is their “right” to get drunk, make noise in residential neighborhoods, and seemingly do what they please.”
   iii. They blame the students for knowing the law and continuously abusing it.

c. Remedy
   i. The Durham and UNH police have the right to arrest anyone under the age of 21 who has consumed or is in possession of
   ii. Kurz maintains that “Both Durham police and UNH Police maintain that underage drinking is against the law and therefore illegal, so it’s our job as police officers to take the proper precautions in managing the problem, even if this means countless arrests of students.”
   iii. University of New Hampshire Police Sergeant Steven Lee also states in the school newspaper that “the UNH police department does not issue warnings or ignore underage drinking because doing so is a liability for both the department and the University.”
   iv. Both departments have recently received a privately donated grant in order to combat the issue of underage drinking on
campus, which in turn leads to more arrests made on their part and the active role of undercover cops.

v. Even with these strict policies, Chief Kurz still states that “the challenge of understanding how to address [this problem is how to] allow some latitude for young people to experience life, live through it while not disrupting the community they live in while doing it!” They can sympathize but they are still going to enforce the law.

The police force also expects that students at the University act according to UNH policy as well as to the UNH community. This brings us to our second perspective: the University of New Hampshire Administration.

II. UNH ADMN
   a. ILL
      i. Students are continuously breaking the rules and regulations of the University.
      ii. The Drug Free Schools and Communities Act Amendments of 1989 require that “UNH, as a recipient of federal funds, including federally provided financial aid, [encourage that the] use or distribution of illicit drugs and alcohol on university property is prohibited.”
      iii. The University acts according to the federal law in its policies.
      iv. Another aspect of the problem in the University’s mind is that the intoxicated students can be hazardous to themselves and those around them and disrupt the UNH community.
   b. Blame
      i. They blame the students for basically the same reasons as the police force, in that students have a general lack of respect for the rules and regulations.
   c. Remedy
      i. For a first time offense with alcohol, the student is put on probation for one year and could possibly face eviction from UNH housing.
      ii. Students receive disciplinary meetings from their hall directors and deans of their school.
iii. When a student goes through these processes, they can face further consequences such as loss of financial aid, athletic eligibility, student organizations and studying abroad programs.

The university is foremost concerned with the safety of the students. The UNH Health Services, the next perspective, takes the problem of underage drinking in a different way. While maintaining that an underage student is breaking the law, they are less concerned with the disciplinary consequences and more so with the overall well being of the student.

III. HEALTH

a. Ill

   i. They define the problem as a health issue.
   ii. They are concerned with the safety of the student who has consumed alcohol and the safety of those around him or her. Kathleen Grace-Bishop, who is the Director of Education and Promotion at Health Services states that since alcohol inhibits your ability to think properly and make smart, healthy decisions, continuously drinking under the age of 21 can lead to “drinking and driving, high risk use of alcohol and therefore more negative consequences to health and well-being and an increase risk of addiction later in life,”

   iii. Grace Bishop also states that she believes in enforcing the laws and that “research and data has shown that the drinking age does make a difference” in decreasing the risks associated with underage drinking but there are health issues that are enabling more and more students to partake in it.

b. Blame

   i. For instance, peer pressure is a big cause of underage drinking.
   ii. They also blame lack of education around campus on alcohol use.
   iii. They also blame the parents of students for their lack of education and now preparing them for the pressures and risks of college life.

c. Remedy

   i. Health Services stresses the need for more education on the health factors for drinking. Because there is not quite enough
education on this topic, the remedy would be to get the message more clearly out to students that there are many opportunities and chances to get educated on this subject. Although there are many resources available to students, they may not be aware of them and therefore don’t access them.

ii. Grace Bishop says that she is “very committed to the role of prevention, of assisting others in self-care and decision making that enhances their health and well-being.” On this note she will try to prevent students from drinking under the age of 21 to keep them healthy.

iii. Another remedy for this would be that the parent’s need to teach their children responsibility for their actions before they come to college, which in turn translates into the child exercising in responsible drinking.

IV. Parents
a. Ill
i. In the parents eyes the problem lies within the policies and laws being too strict and not practical to suit the situation.
ii. We interviewed Lynne Erb, a parent of a UNH sophomore, and we selected this opinion because we believe this viewpoint is typical of a UNH parent.
iii. Lynne Erb believes that the police are misdirecting their resources in only focusing on catching underage students who are under the influence. She is worried about the rising number of physical and sexual assaults on campus.

b. Blame
i. “There is a difference between being drunk and dangerous, one that the UNH police do not recognize.”
ii. Erb is worried about the rising number of physical and sexual assaults on campus and the fact that the police have not solved those cases because they are too busy focusing on arresting intoxicated students for stumbling or falling.

c. Remedy
i. Her remedy for this situation is a more nuanced enforcement of law, in that they use their discretion to arrest individuals who
pose a danger to themselves and to those around them by their level of intoxication.

ii. Mrs. Erb believes that the logical approach to handling this situation is to not arrest every individual that the police find intoxicated or seeking out these students, but to monitor the situation and only get the students who are being dangerous or creating a dangerous situation for others.

iii. She believes that regardless of the rules, students will still choose to drink because this has been happening for decades and the only logical approach to this situation is to try to monitor it and keep the students from injuring themselves and others, not to try to change it.

d. Cost

i. We found in our research that parents gave significant attention to the costs, or potential losses procured from underage drinking.

ii. Lynne Erb highlighted that her biggest concern is the future of students who get in trouble for just having a couple drinks, for they have a criminal record that will potentially keep them from getting a job or succeeding later in life and the consequences they have to deal with following an arrest or eviction takes their focus away from the most important part: their academics.

The final and possibly most important perspective is that of the students. In almost every case the students are considered the blame, but in order to be able to stray away from the problem they need to be part of the solution. Therefore the other participants need to recognize the argument of the students.

V. Students

a. Ill

i. Based on the several interviews of students, they believe the problem as inevitable. They maintain the position that they are young and they are going to keep drinking, regardless of the rules. They state that this is what has always happened and kids at this age have always drank.
ii. The majority of students here at UNH believe it should not be a problem, that underage drinking should not be a concern.

iii. The problem here is that the police are trying to resolve the problem of underage drinking by making many arrests, when in fact underage drinking has a cause that can’t be resolved by police action.

b. Blame

i. They blame the police for making the situation worse than it should be. With so many strict policies and so many more arrests, students are still finding ways to sneak around the law such as binge drinking etc.

ii. They blame police and university administrators for making students always feel guilty about doing something even when they haven’t done anything at all.

iii. Students also blame the University for neglecting to foster a relationship between students and other community members because of them living in constant fear of getting in trouble because college students have a stigma of always doing something wrong.

c. Remedy

i. Students agree with parents that police need to re-evaluate their priorities in that they use discretion and monitor situations on campus.

ii. They also believe that the remedy of law enforcement won’t solve the problem.

iii. Students need to be considered worthy of being part of this discussion. As of now, they are considered by each participating party, including themselves, as the cause of the problem and each party has made individual efforts to solve the problem of underage drinking without the input of student’s, who are the problem.

We have now outlined the participating parties’ views of the situation and now we want to show you how each party uses their own set of language. The Rhetorical
Scholar Kenneth Burke states that language is influential and therefore rhetorical. Each group has its own language that represents their viewpoints.

VI. Use of language by each party
   a. Each party uses language in a different way to define the problem. Part of this language is the use of “God” and “Devil” terms. As defined by the Rhetorical Scholar Gerard A. Hauser, a god term represents goodness or anything that possesses godlike qualities. A devil term is anything that represents evil or harmful qualities.
   b. From our research we found that the police and the university use very similar language in their use of god and devil terms.
      i. Their god terms include “law”, “justice”, “rules and regulations”, “academics”, “respect and responsibility”.
      ii. Their devil terms include “alcohol”, “drugs”, “disrespect”, “danger”, and “criminal”.
   c. Coming from the health services perspective as we previously stated they define the problem as a health issue therefore their god and devil terms are related to the overall wellbeing of the students’ health.
      i. Their god terms include “getting involved”, “substance free”, and “healthy choices”, ”wellness”
      ii. Their devil terms include “peer pressure” and “anti-socialism”.
   d. The parent’s god and devil terms look at the problem in regards of their children’s best interests whether it be their safety, their future and practicality.
      i. The parent’s god terms include “monitor”, “education”, “future”, and “health”.
      ii. Their devil terms include “unnecessary arrests”, “strict policies”, “assaults”, “criminal record”.
   e. Although the students haven’t been given the chance to be heard they have their own set of god and devil terms, which play the biggest role in the entire problem.
      i. Their god terms are “parties”, “weekends”, “socialization”, “friends” and “adulthood”.
ii. Their devil terms include “police”, “probation”, “arrest”, “violation” and “hypocrisy”.

The God and Devil terms that each party poses contradicts each other. This is important because it shows the attitudes each party brings to the situation, in that one party’s god term is the other’s devil term. For example, the Health Services employs the devil term of “peer pressure,” while the students employ the god term of “socialization” and “friends.” Each defines their motive in terms of what they say on the subject, and by analyzing their discourse we can conclude what motives are behind their vocabulary. Because the language, therefore their motives, are so different, there can’t be an agreement on what the problem is, let alone the solution, until each begins to understand and accept each other’s language.

Through our analysis, we have found that the students appear to be the main blame and cause of this problem. We have also found that the proposed solutions to the problem of underage drinking does not get to the root of why underage students drink. The police and administration are trying to force a change of attitude through threats and consequences, while they should be asking themselves the reasons why students drink.

So why do students drink? From our analysis, students say that drinking is inevitable, in that maybe its not so much a problem as it is a phase. Many students have said that once they turn 21, they find that drinking is not as exciting as it was when they were underage. Once they are of age, they can go out and drink whenever they want. However, underage students still have to be secretive about drinking. This is where the problems, as we have previously outlined, stem from.

The law treats college students of the age of 18 as adults in every other aspect and they suffer the consequences of being adults in the eyes of the law. but when it comes to the consumption of alcohol, they are suddenly reverted back to adolescence.

It is hypocritical for society to expect college students to act as adults in every aspect of the law except for one. If this reason, the fact that students aren’t treated as adults, is the cause of the problem of underage drinking, then the only way to reduce the problem is to change that attitude. Given the results of our analysis, this is what we have found to be the real root of the problem that should be included in the discussion.
Once the underage student’s concerns of the lack of recognition as adults are addressed, only then can progression towards acceptance and ultimately a solution, start to happen. If this is the only way a solution can be brought about, then maybe the police and administration need to start to acknowledge that maybe their attitude is right.

To start to do this, each party needs to adapt their language to the root of the problem. They need to enact a language of civic responsibility, in that do what is best for the community. What is best for the community is to stop the problems that stem from underage drinking. As we previously stated, many students feel that once they turn 21, these problems begin to fade. So what we have concluded in our analysis is that the origin of these community problems derives from the law itself.

It is not just students who feel this way. The Amethyst Initiative is composed of higher education university presidents and chancellors who have all signed a public statement stating that they, “call upon elected officials to weigh all the consequences of current alcohol policies and to invite new ideas on how best to prepare young adults to make responsible decisions about alcohol use,” according to their website. Some of these universities include University of Massachusetts, Southern New Hampshire University, Dartmouth College, Tufts University, Duke University and Johns Hopkins University.

Is the law the only problem? We are not here to say that, we are here to say that everyone wants to fix this problem. We are saying that as of now, the problem is neither agreed upon nor amenable to solution. But once the language enacted in the discussion of underage drinking at UNH is changed, there can potentially be a solution.