

# VARIABILITY IN DRINKING PATTERNS AMONG COLLEGE-AGED YOUTH

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# Acknowledgements

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- Significant contributions made by Jack Darkes, Paul Greenbaum, and Karen Brandon

# Agenda

- Review findings that provide a platform for the development/implementation of event-based drinking interventions
- Describe patterns of drinking across the academic year for college-aged youth (e.g., Del Boca, Darkes, Greenbaum & Goldman, 2004; Greenbaum, Del Boca, Darkes, Wang & Goldman, 2005)
- Begin to delineate the natural ecology of drinking during high risk occasions

# Investigations of Patterns of Consumption

- **Three longitudinal studies involving different populations of college-aged youth**
- **Daily retrospective assessment procedures**
- **Consistent findings regarding patterns of alcohol use across investigations**

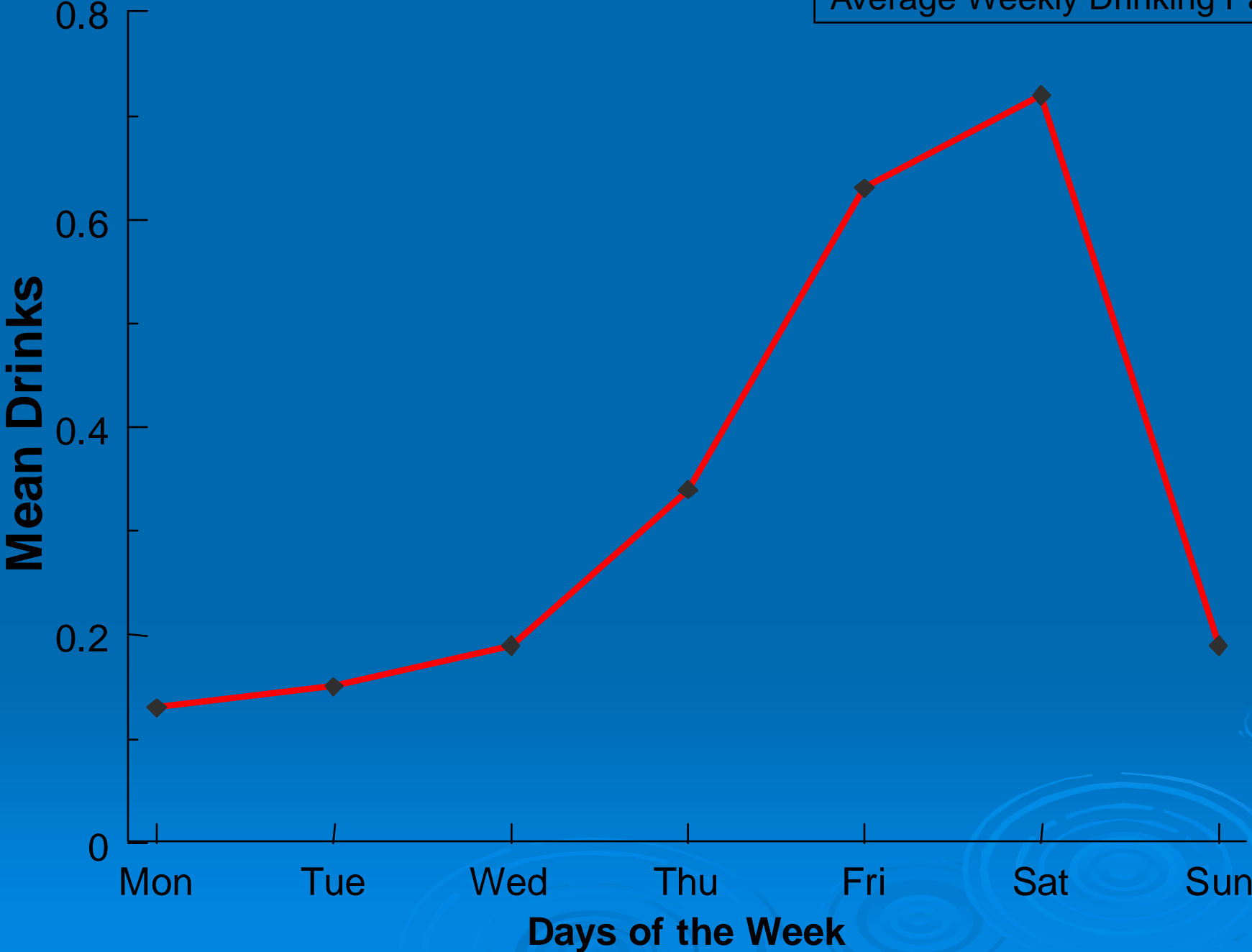
# START Participants

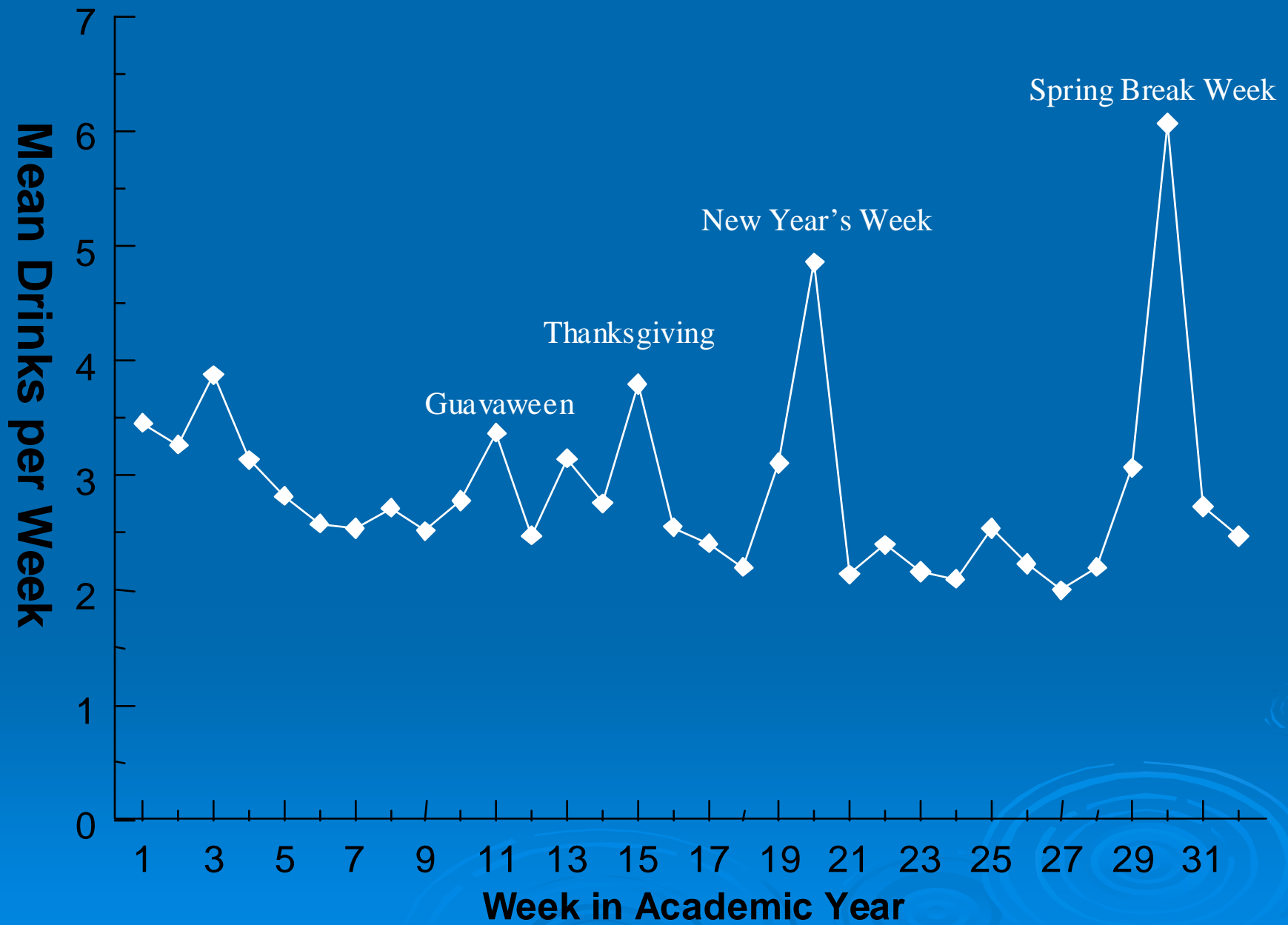
- **N = 301 college freshman, recruited in 3 successive years during required orientation sessions**
- **49% Male, 51% FH+**
- **71% Caucasian, 9% African American, 12% Hispanic**
- **Demographically similar to the population of entering freshman**
- **N = 237 drinkers**

# START Methodology

- **8 monthly assessment sessions: 3 in person (Aug./Sept., Dec., Apr.); 5 telephonic (Oct., Nov., Jan., Feb., Mar.)**
- **Time Line Follow Back interviews used to construct continuous records of daily alcohol use for each participant**
- **Established our standard frequent monitoring protocol for use in subsequent studies**

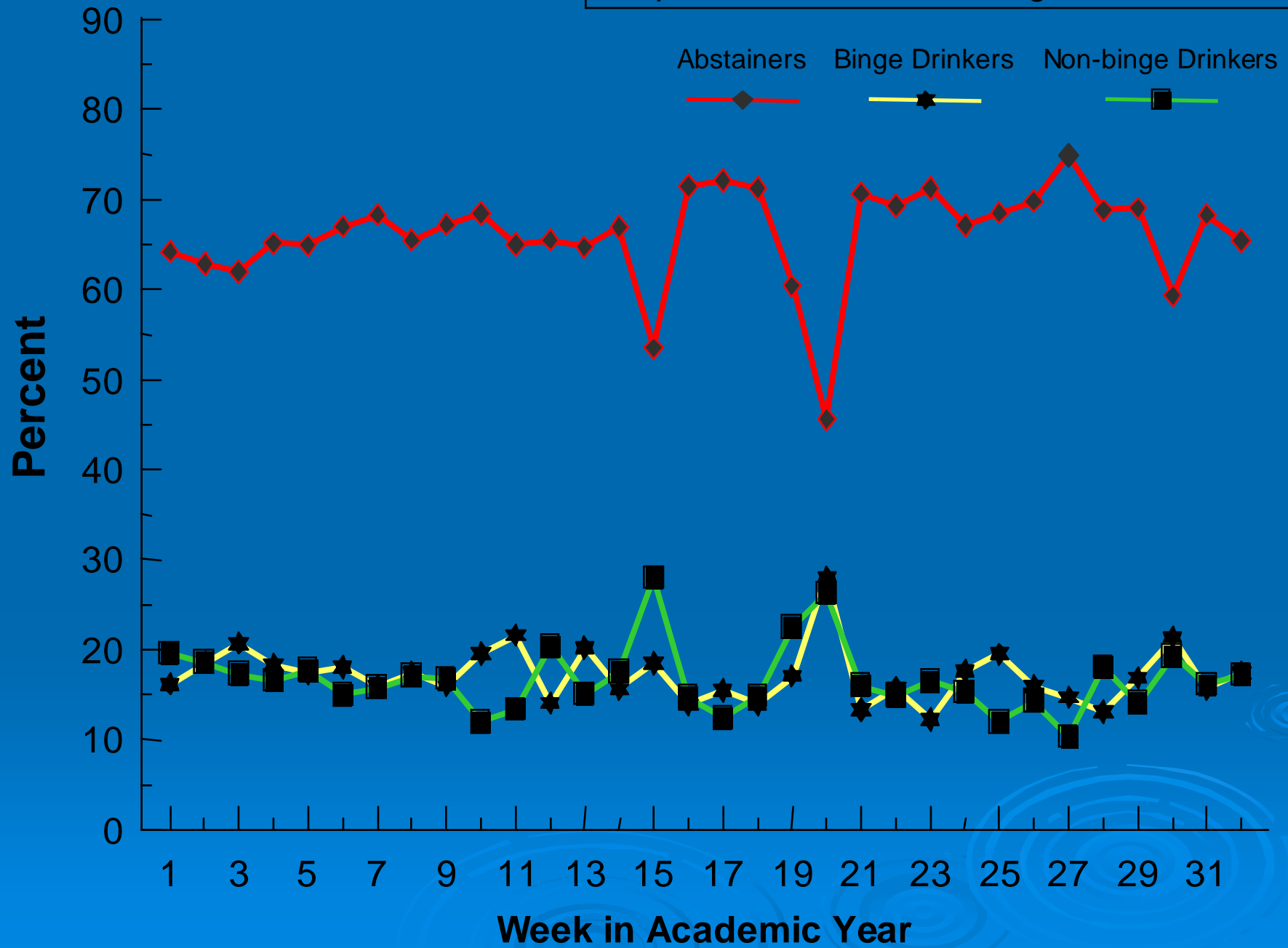
Average Weekly Drinking Pattern



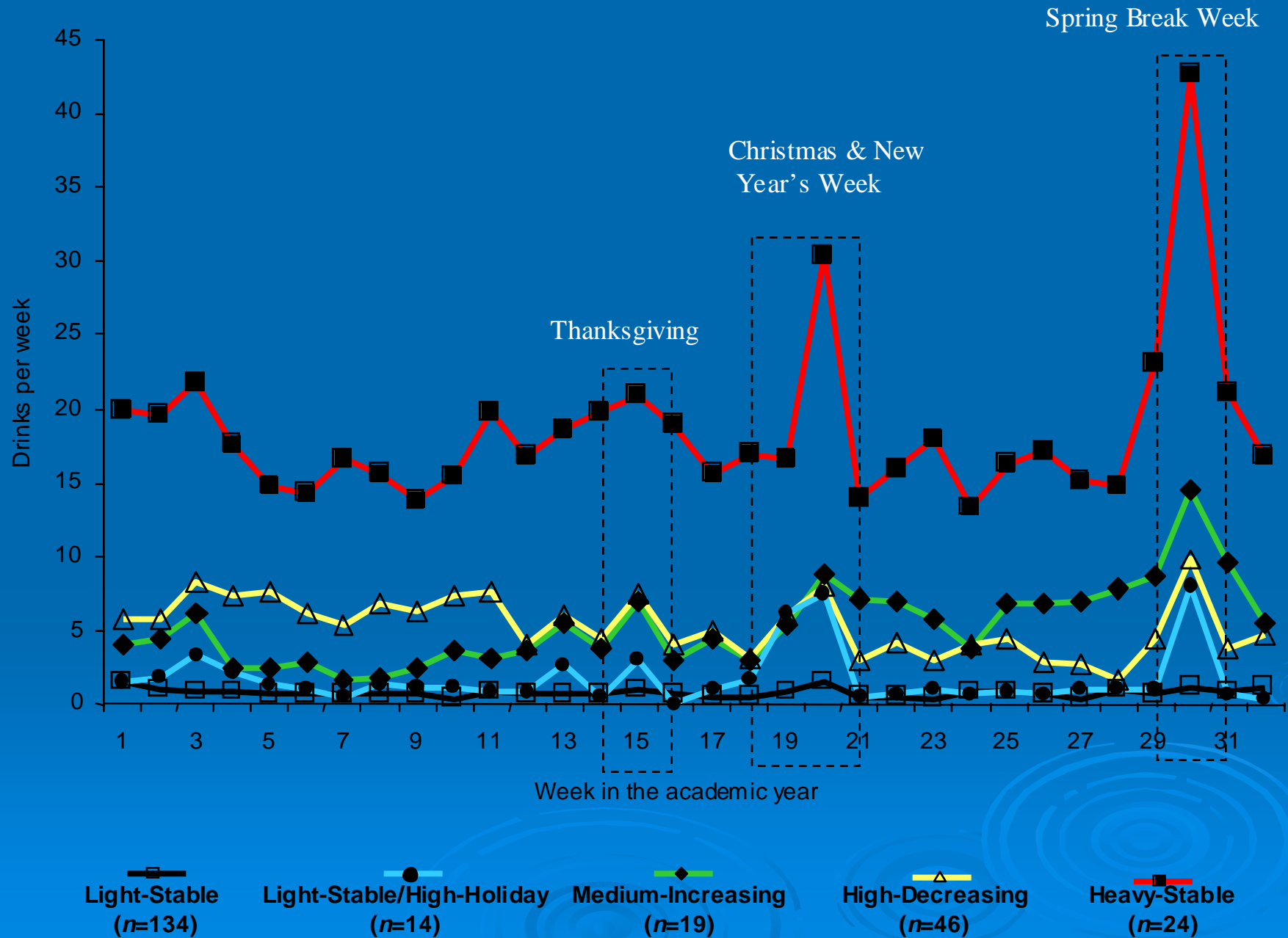




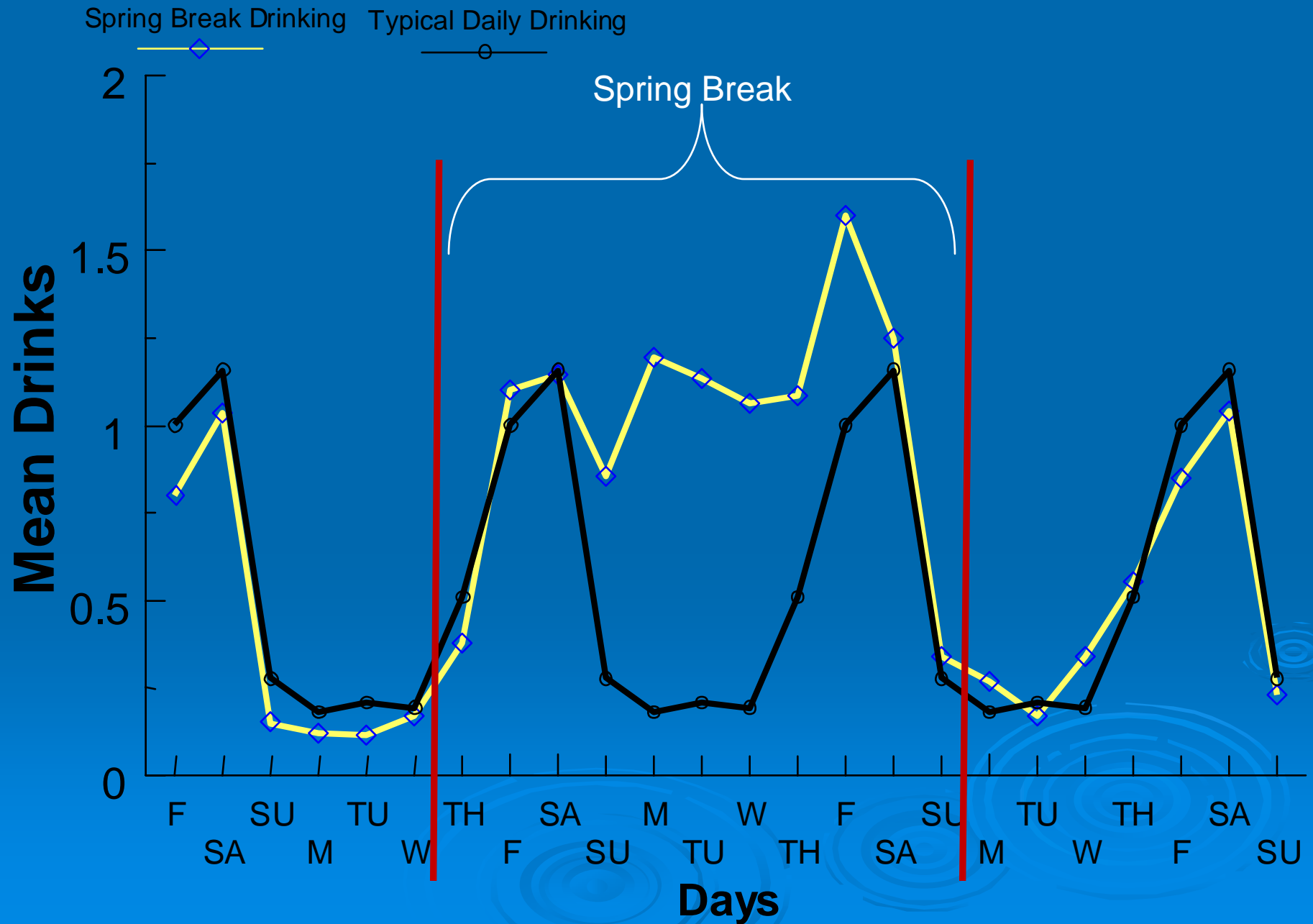
# Proportions of Drinkers, Bingers, and Abstainers

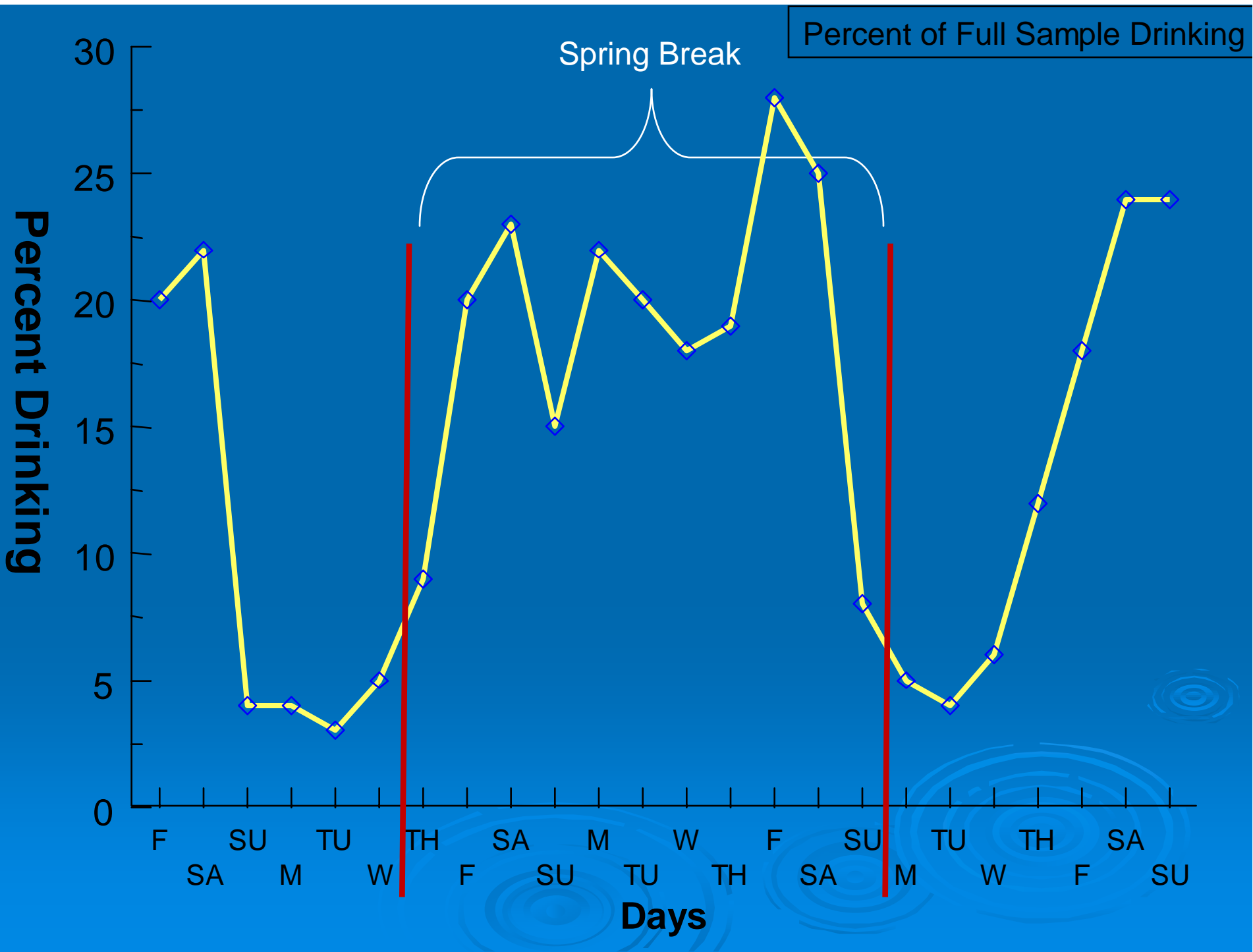


# Observed Drinking by Drinker Class

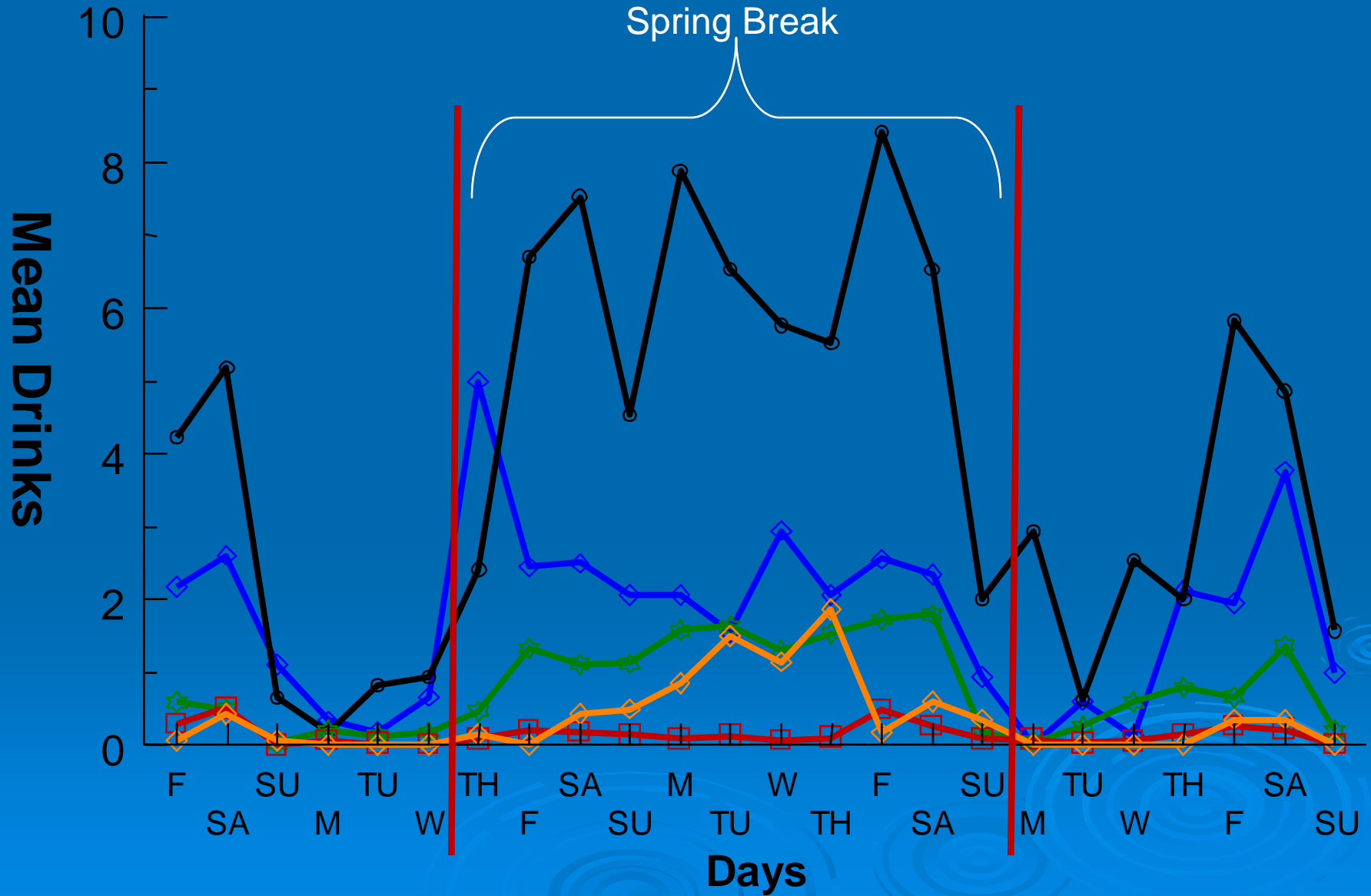
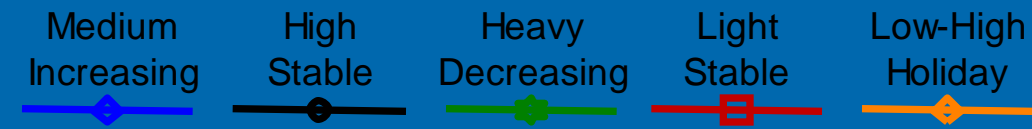


Spring Break Period  
Daily Drinking

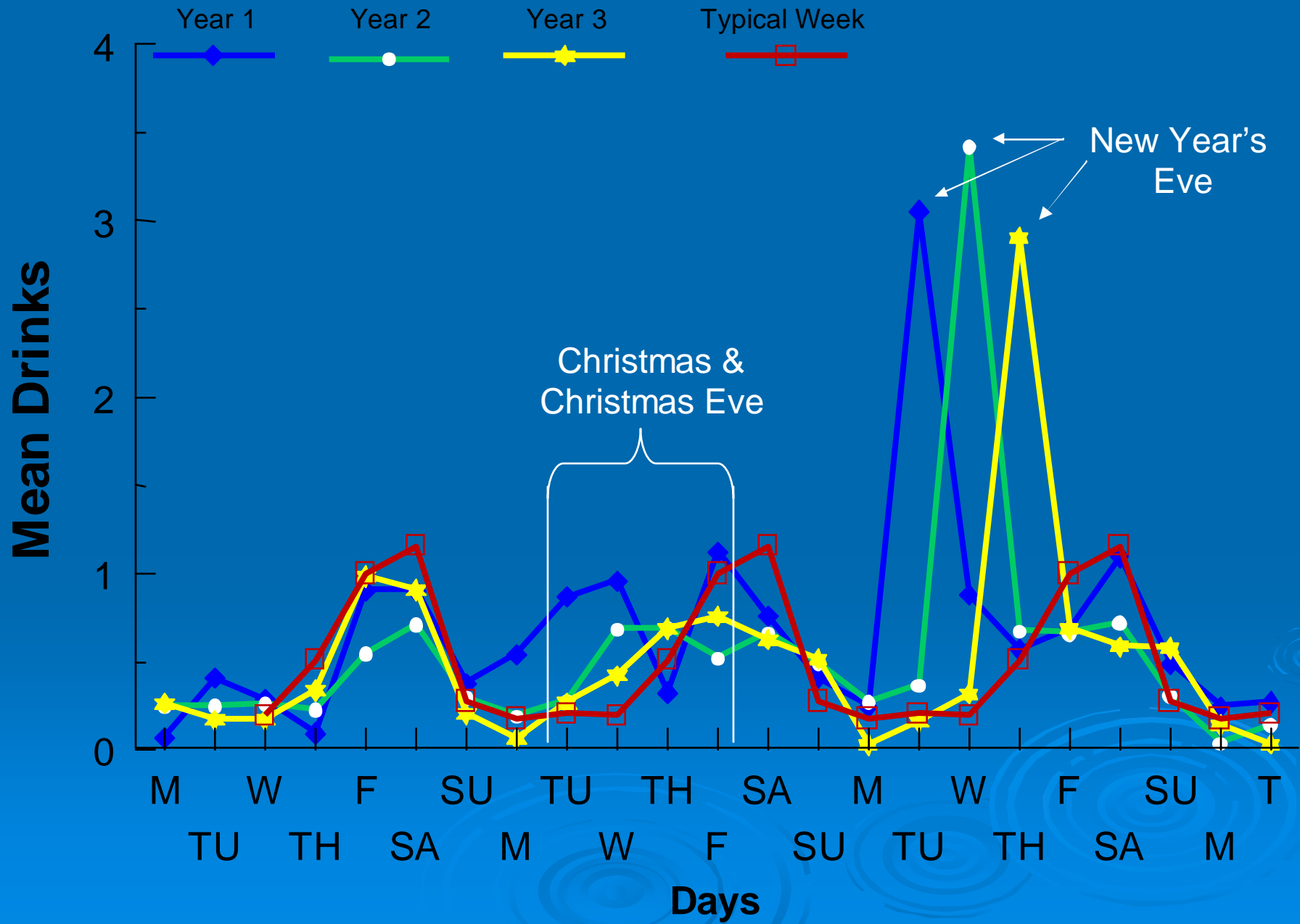




# Spring Break Period Daily Drinking By Class



Christmas and New Year's Eve Drinking



# College Students vs. Aged-Matched Peers

- Ongoing longitudinal study involving 600 participants enrolled at age 19
- Roughly equal proportions of students and non-students
- Students recruited from a variety of institutions (e.g., community colleges, universities)
- Drinking assessments conducted at 3-month intervals throughout the calendar year

# Preliminary Findings

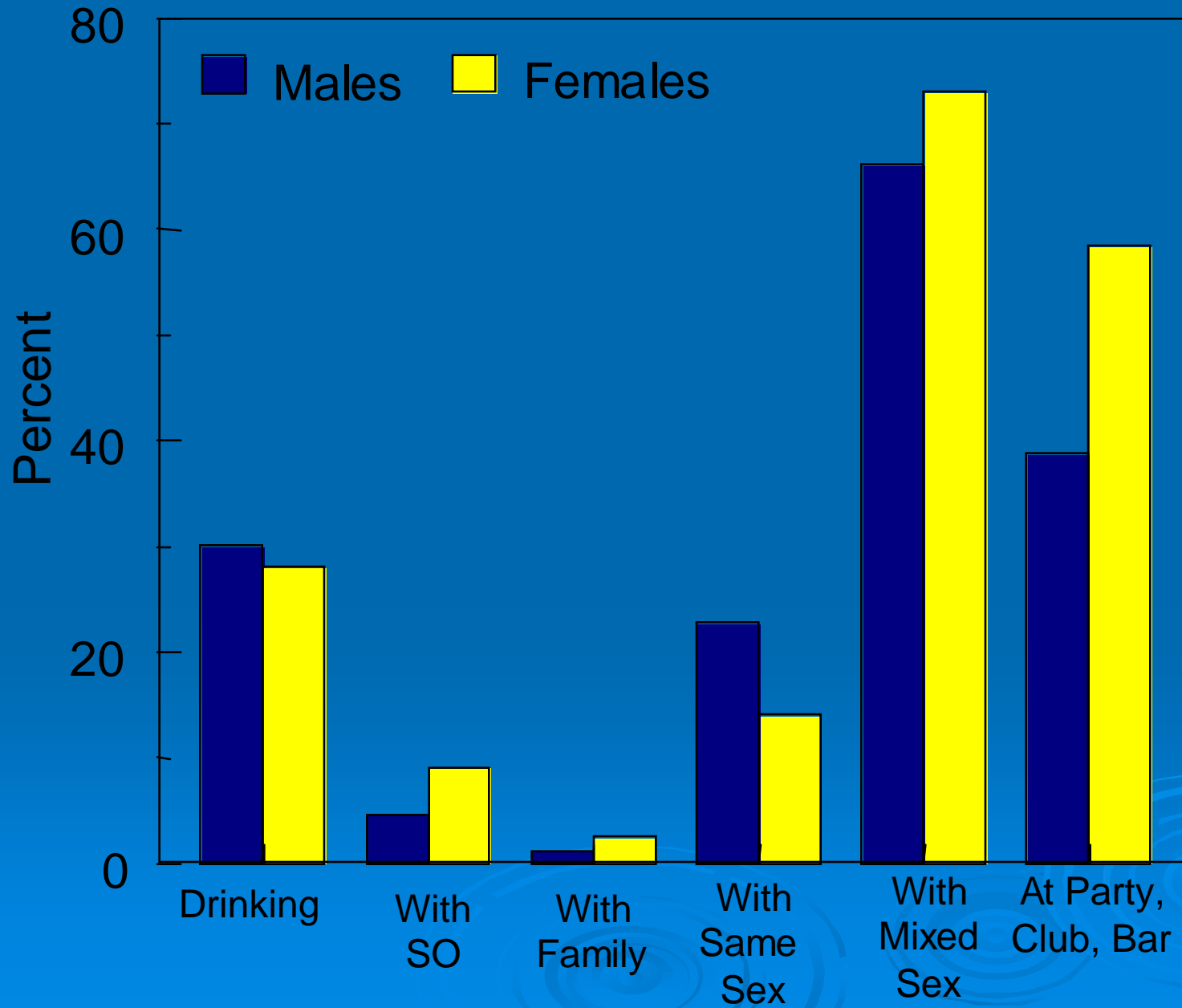
- **Student and non-student categories tend to be fluid**
- **Although non-students consume less than students, they exhibit similar temporal patterns:**
  - **Drinking escalates on Thursdays**
  - **Consumption increases during Spring Break and on holidays**
  - **Alcohol use appears to be contingency driven**



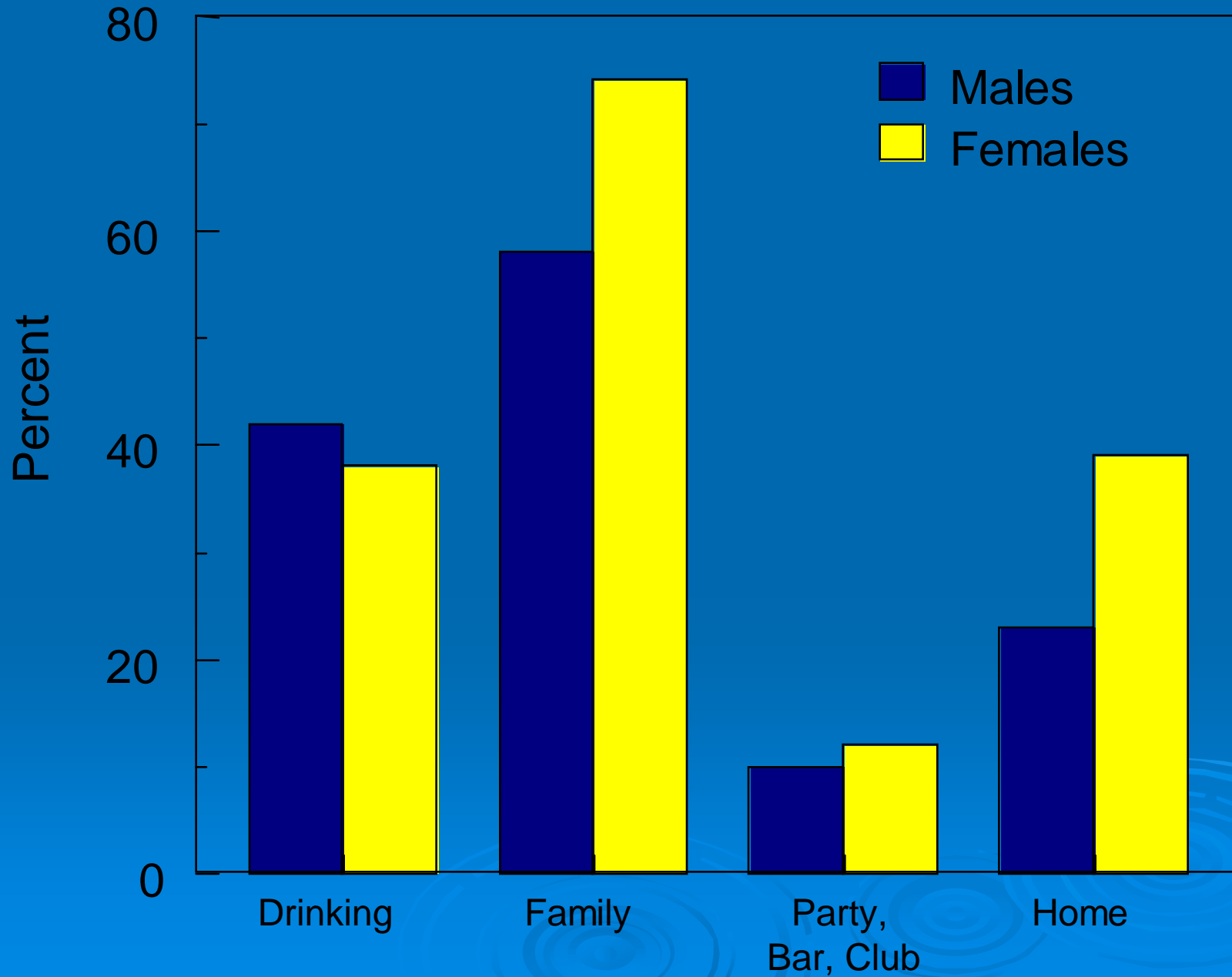
# With Whom and Where Drinking Occurs

- A third study involved retrospective monthly assessments of daily consumption and also provided preliminary evidence regarding circumstances surrounding specific drinking events
- Two samples recruited in successive years, one male (N=215), one female (N=221), with roughly even proportions of underage and over-21 drinkers

# Post Spring Break Drinking and Situations



# Christmas Drinking Situations



# Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

- Although it is difficult to generalize to campuses in other locales, most drinkers in our studies drank only occasionally
- When students did consume alcohol, they tended to drink heavily
- A notable minority of students were regular heavy drinkers

- **The heaviest consumption occurred on specific holidays and during Spring Break, periods when students were typically away from campus**
- **Holiday (especially Spring Break) drinking may be particularly risky for novice drinkers who are unaccustomed to consuming alcohol**
- **Most drinking occurred in mixed-sex groups, a circumstance which may put women at risk for unwanted and/or unprotected sexual encounters**

- **College student drinking appears to be contextual, instrumental, and contingency-driven**
- **The drinking patterns of college-aged youth pose methodological challenges**
  - **Participant sampling**
  - **Method of assessment**
  - **Capturing the event**
  - **Timing of assessment**

- **Prevention and intervention efforts should consider the variability in consumption patterns among college drinkers, the specific occasions on which students drink, and the circumstances under which alcohol use occurs**