

## College Issues, Teen Alcohol Use Discussed in April Student Town Meetings

Students from three area high schools participated in Student Town Meetings during the month of April, and the discussion topics clearly indicated what's on the minds of high school seniors this time of year. Each program was moderated by Alan Chartock and was taped for later broadcast at WAMC's Linda Norris Auditorium.

With the onset of warm weather, prom and graduation season, members of the senior class from **Catskill High School** discussed the **problems related to teen alcohol and drug** use on Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>. The panel for this program included Brad Warner, Program Manager, St. Peter's Addiction Recovery Center (SPARC); Todd Hopwood, an intern at SPARC who himself is in recovery; and Sgt. George Marshall, NYS Police School & Community Outreach Program. The students and adults began the discussion with some reasons why kids get involved with drugs and alcohol. All agreed that peer pressure, the desire to "fit in" with new or long-time friends, and easy access contributed to poor choices made by many middle and high school students. Some parents encourage teen usage by hosting "keg parties" for their sons and daughters, ignoring the irresponsibility and illegality of serving alcohol and/or drugs to under-21 year olds. To their consternation, the students learned that, having passed their 16<sup>th</sup> birthdays, they had reached the age of culpability – the age at which they would be treated as an adult in the event of criminal wrongdoing. Although the panel discussed some of the "warning signs" that may indicate teen substance use and abuse, they didn't indicate a conclusively clear pattern or list of behaviors. Warner cautioned that young people quickly notice discrepancies between adult admonitions and behaviors, and capitalize on the ignorance of a society in denial. This issue will continue to be discussed in future Student Town Meetings. The program aired May 10<sup>th</sup>.

On April 13<sup>th</sup>, students from **Waterford-Halfmoon High School** discussed whether America still needs an **affirmative action** program almost thirty years after the Bakke decision. Community experts on the panel included Jeffrey D. Honeywell, attorney with the law firm Girvin & Ferlazzo, P.C.; Wes Holloway, Vice President for Diversity, Golub Corporation; and Ned Jones, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, Siena College. The students' interest in the issue began as an outgrowth of their involvement in the college admission – and sometimes rejection – process. During the course of the discussion, they learned how colleges seek a student body that is diverse in many areas – geography, race, gender, financial background. Several of the students readily acknowledged that day-to-day, informal contact with people from all backgrounds is necessary to better understand the world, and spoke of their school's homogenous nature as being atypical, perhaps even limiting. Holloway, who was personally affected very directly by affirmative action, reinforced the students' perception with his comment concerning "the value we bring because of our differences." One clear point of agreement among the panel was the need to strengthen educational programs at all levels, beginning with pre-K, so that each member of society be given the necessary skills to succeed in high school and beyond.

The other part of the college admissions equation – **financing a college education** – was the focus for **Duanesburg Central High School's** April 25<sup>th</sup> Student Town Meeting. The question said it all - "Is a college education still an affordable part of the middle-class American dream?" The panel

included Doug Morrissey, school counselor at Canajoharie HS; Steven Dwire, Director of Financial Aid, College of St. Rose; and Beth Post, Director of Financial Aid, Union College. Various solutions were offered to offset direct costs – grants, scholarships and student loans – but it soon was evident that kids and their parents need to become more pro-active years in advance of high school graduation to avoid saddling young people with exorbitant debt. Morrissey stressed that planning for post-secondary study needs to begin immediately for new parents, and that everything affecting a family's expenses comes into play – the key being not living beyond their means. Several students planned to attend community colleges, generally less expensive than four-year schools, prior to transferring to other institutions to complete credits for their bachelor's degrees. And some relied on Advanced Placement courses offered in high school to earn transferable college credit, thereby shaving a semester or two (depending on the number of courses taken) off their college time. The discussion expanded to include the students' expectations and anxieties as they leave the sheltered and monitored existence of high school for life in the real world. Each adult on the panel encouraged them to take full advantage of any and all opportunities for travel and study abroad, internships, mentoring and work/study programs offered in their prospective institutions of higher education. In many instances, these help shape future career paths, develop life-long relationships with people working the field, and frequently result in employment after graduation.

Waterford Halfmoon's and Dueanesburg's programs will air on *The Speakers' Corner* during the month of June.

WAMC Youth Media Project: Student Town Meetings are made possible through support from the Educational Foundation of America, the Howard & Bush Foundation, Carl E. Touhey, and Jack and Connie Hume. Urban and rural public education high school educators interested in participating in the project during the 2006-07 school year, or in WAMC's Teacher Institute June 26 - 29, should contact WAMC Education Director Maryanne Malecki at (518) 465-5233 ext. 135, or visit the Web site, [www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org](http://www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org). Audio versions of all previously recorded programs are available online as well.