John Jay Vs. Columbia
Drugs and the College Experience

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Introduction
This multi-method research project examines differences that exist, or that are thought to exist, between public and private institutions of higher education. The study compared two such institutions – John Jay College and Columbia University – to examine a variety of similarities and differences, and to draw conclusions about them based upon an analysis of the data.

This poster examines differences in what students report about their “best friend at school’s drug of choice” and considers what those responses say about both schools.

Methods & Materials
1. Literature and data search: search of academic and popular articles that compare and contrast public and private higher education.
2. Ethnographic Observations at both schools: fieldnotes of observations at Columbia and John Jay focused on differential experience of students
3. Confidential survey of students [n=568]: analysis of survey data focused on ethnic, racial and geographic diversity
4. In-depth interviews: with students at both institutions provided context to better understand differences and similarities

Quantitative Findings
Demographics of the sample

Columbia University
John Jay College
Race/Ethnic identity of students in the sample
[p=254 Columbia; 341 John Jay]

Columbia University
John Jay College
Gender
[p=211 Columbia; 301 John Jay]

John Jay College
27.6% 22.7% 30.9% 18.8%
Columbia University
26.7% 17.0% 32.7% 23.3%

Best friend drug of choice

School Best Friend Drug of Choice
Adderall 4.2% 0.0% 0.5%
Caffeine 3.7% 3.2% 1.7%
Coffee 0.4% 1.6% 1.5%
Molly 0.9% 1.6% 1.3%
Weed 23.1% 30.7% 27.6%
None 28.7% 25.3% 26.7%
[NA] 31.7% 40.7% 37.1%
Grand Total 100.0% 100.0% 100.0%

Average number of hours of study per week reported:
Columbia = 23
John Jay = 9

Qualitative Findings
Columbia students, who boast more study hours than John Jay students, also show higher rates of drugs that help concentrate and stay awake.

Adderall, a “study drug” that is used to treat ADHD, is mentioned by Columbia students on the survey and in interviews, but not at all by John Jay students.

John Jay students talked about “Coffee” use, but Columbia students talked about “Caffeine,” which includes coffee, but also Red Bull and other caffeine-enhanced foods and drugs.

Columbia students study said that they study more than John Jay students, but they also mentioned alcohol far more often. A dorm school with fraternity houses, Columbia students have more opportunities to drink than John Jay students, while weed is also popular. Some privileged Columbia students whose tuition is paid for by family seem to spend their time partying rather than attending school.

When asked about parties at Columbia, one student noted that “there’s an endless amount. Most of them happen in the brownstone frat houses, or in the suite-styled dormitories. Usually they’ll take place on Saturday. During spring break, and winter recess, there’s been some cases of them going on for weeks at a time. But those are rare celebrations.”

John Jay students report more cocaine and Molly (ecstasy) use than Columbia students. Drug availability is the likely explanation for the difference.

Discussion
Drug use differences between the schools may be primarily related to Columbia being a dormitory school and John Jay being a commuter school; because students do not have to drive or take a bus or subway, alcohol use is much higher at Columbia.

Freed from transportation issues, Columbia students also have a lot of time to study, and many, it seems, take drugs – particularly stimulants – to help them do that because there is pressure for many of them to excel in school.

Prescriptions and friendship networks for some of the performance-enhancing drugs are the likely source for Columbia students. John Jay students are more likely to acquire drugs in their neighborhoods from illegal sources.

Conclusions
Drug use is an enduring feature of college life.

The most frequent answer for the “best friend’s drug of choice” was “none” at Columbia and “weed” at John Jay College. The use of stimulants, presumably to study, was especially pronounced at Columbia.

Elite universities provide an environment where students socialize and develop social capital through social drinking. John Jay students, are put at a disadvantage by the lack of access to adult beverages.

Policy Implications: Reduce the drinking age to 18 for individuals who are enrolled full time in a university, or open a John Jay campus pub that encourages students to drink together.