

Students discuss on, off-campus bar options

By Briana Bindus, Staff Writer

Although there are a variety of bars open to Pitt students close to campus, Avery Moore thinks they “all feel very undergraduate.”

“There’s a lot more to explore in the Pittsburgh area when you’re 21,” Moore, a senior finance major, said. “When you become 21, there kind of does become more to do, and it really opens up your world a bit, which is nice.”

Amanda Carson, a 2023 Pitt graduate, said she felt a “very different vibe” when she began going to off-campus bars rather than ones close by.

“You get a lot more of all ages of people — it’s a little bit more chill and relaxed,” Carson said.

According to Carson, this wider age range at bars contributes to a more comfortable vibe at the bar. Instead of being around young college students who are “super chaotic and sloppy,” she said she appreciates that there are more mature people with a variety of reasons for going out.

“You will definitely see more people there for multiple different reasons at off-campus bars, as opposed to when you’re on campus bars, it’s definitely with the intention to get drunk,” Carson said. “Off-campus bars are very much, you’re going to this place for this reason. You’re gonna go to 5801 because you want to dance, you’re gonna go to Cavo because it’s your birthday and you want a club vibe. You’re deciding the demographic you want to partake in.”

Off-campus bars offer a number of experiences that students can choose from based on the day and occasion. Moore finds it more enjoyable to get a “cute cocktail” over dinner around the Pittsburgh area.

“More so than [my roommates and I] would go to a bar, we’ll go to a nice dinner, which I honestly like,” Moore said. “Meat and Potatoes, Coop de Ville — they are all really nice restaurants ... you can get food there, you can get drinks, there’s games, it’s just fun like that.”

One aspect of off-campus bars that is harder to find around Oakland are event nights, which Moore loves. Urban Tap, a restaurant with a location on the South Side, has Thursday trivia nights with half-off margaritas — an incentive that brings her and her friends in.

“They have really good trivia, margaritas half-off, and I really like doing that,” Moore said, “I like Urban Tap. I love trivia night. I like to have something to do.”

After exploring Pittsburgh, Carson said it’s much easier to decide which settings are “more your speed.” For Carson, her “heart will always be with 5801,” a gay bar in Shadyside.

“I like that bar specifically because you can go and talk with people, but you can also go and dance,” Carson said, “I really like that kind of dynamic to it, but I also enjoy the safety of it. I feel 10 times safer if I’m at a gay bar than if I’m at a straight bar.”

Another bar that offers some niche experiences, according to Carson, is Spirit, located in Lawrenceville. While there is a cover fee to get in, the bar offers guests spaghetti if they stay past midnight.

“It’s because it’s also a restaurant, so at midnight, instead of throwing out all of their leftover food, they just give it out to people,” Carson said, “Sometimes they’ll have pizza. My friends go and wait in line early to make sure that they get their spaghetti and stuff.”



Alex Jurkuta | Staff Photographer

5801 Video Lounge & Café on Ellsworth Ave in the Shadyside neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

Despite students having the freedom to choose anywhere they want to go off campus, for 2021 Pitt graduate Stephanie Bisignano, having the convenience of on-campus bars “was amazing.”

“It was just right there and you could just drunk walk home, and you were fine,” Bisignano said. “It was pretty much the place where you knew that everyone was going to congregate at — and Hem’s was always that. Come back from a club meeting, come back from class, or even just walking by — it’s in the middle of everything.”

Another benefit of having bars “so close to home,” for Bisignano, is the late-night food options available in Oakland. To cater to students, there are many restaurants open until 2 a.m., including Frenchie’s, Ocha Thai Noodle, El Jefe’s and Pizza Romano.

“In Pittsburgh, there’s not a lot of places to get food after a certain time, and Oakland has that,” Bisignano said. “That’s a huge point for why we would stay on-campus instead of going to off-campus bars.”

Bisignano highlights the “variety” of experiences that people have to choose from, whether they decide to stay on-campus or go off-campus.

“Sometimes we just want to get away from being around other college students too, so [going off-campus] was the escape,” Bisignano said. “The most random place would sometimes be the best spot to get away.”