

# Another article published on social norms research

GENEVA — Two local professors have had a new article published on their continuing research into social norms as a high-risk drinking deterrent among college students.

Professors Wesley Perkins and David Craig report in *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* on the dramatic positive effect of a social norms intervention in reducing high-risk drinking among college student-athletes. Although student-athletes are generally at higher risk for alcohol misuse, that risk can be significantly reduced simply by letting them know that the majority of their student-athlete peers do not engage in or approve of high-risk drinking.

In a three-year study, data were carefully collected from the student-athlete population of an undergraduate college. The actual norms were much more positive than what was perceived to be the case and student-athletes simply learning about the re-

ality made a big difference in reducing problem drinking.

Professor of sociology Perkins first introduced his research in 1982, demonstrating that students in general typically overestimate peers' risky drinking attitudes and behaviors.

This latest study shows that student-athletes as a group are not immune from these misperceptions of their peers. They consistently overestimated permissiveness and risky drinking among teammates. When the facts about actual norms regarding attitudes and drinking practices were revealed, based on credible data, this intervention had a marked deterrent effect on the student-athletes who were previously prone to drinking large quantities of alcohol and experiencing negative consequences.

Craig, professor of chemistry and coauthor of this research, emphasized that not all programs are equally effective.

"Intensive exposure to information about the actual positive norms is key to success. Our project provided messages about actual moderate attitudes of the majority, their limited frequency of drinking, and the fact that the large majority of student-athletes do not let their blood alcohol concentrations reach risky levels to cause negative consequences."

The most effective message must be delivered in a variety of print and electronic media and in peer-led workshops, Perkins added.

"A Successful Social Norms Campaign to Reduce Alcohol Misuse Among College Student-Athletes," appears in the November 2006 issue of the *Journal*. The research was supported by a Model Program grant award from the U.S. Department of Education.

More information on Social Norms Research can be found at <http://alcohol.hws.edu/>