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The Capital District Regional Consortium on Alcohol & Other Drugs

# **Social Norms and Correcting Misperceptions about Alcohol Use on College Campuses**

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# **Prevention Today Requires Science Based Strategies**

- 1. Good Theoretical Reasoning**
- 2. Good Data (Evidence Based)**

# What We Currently Know

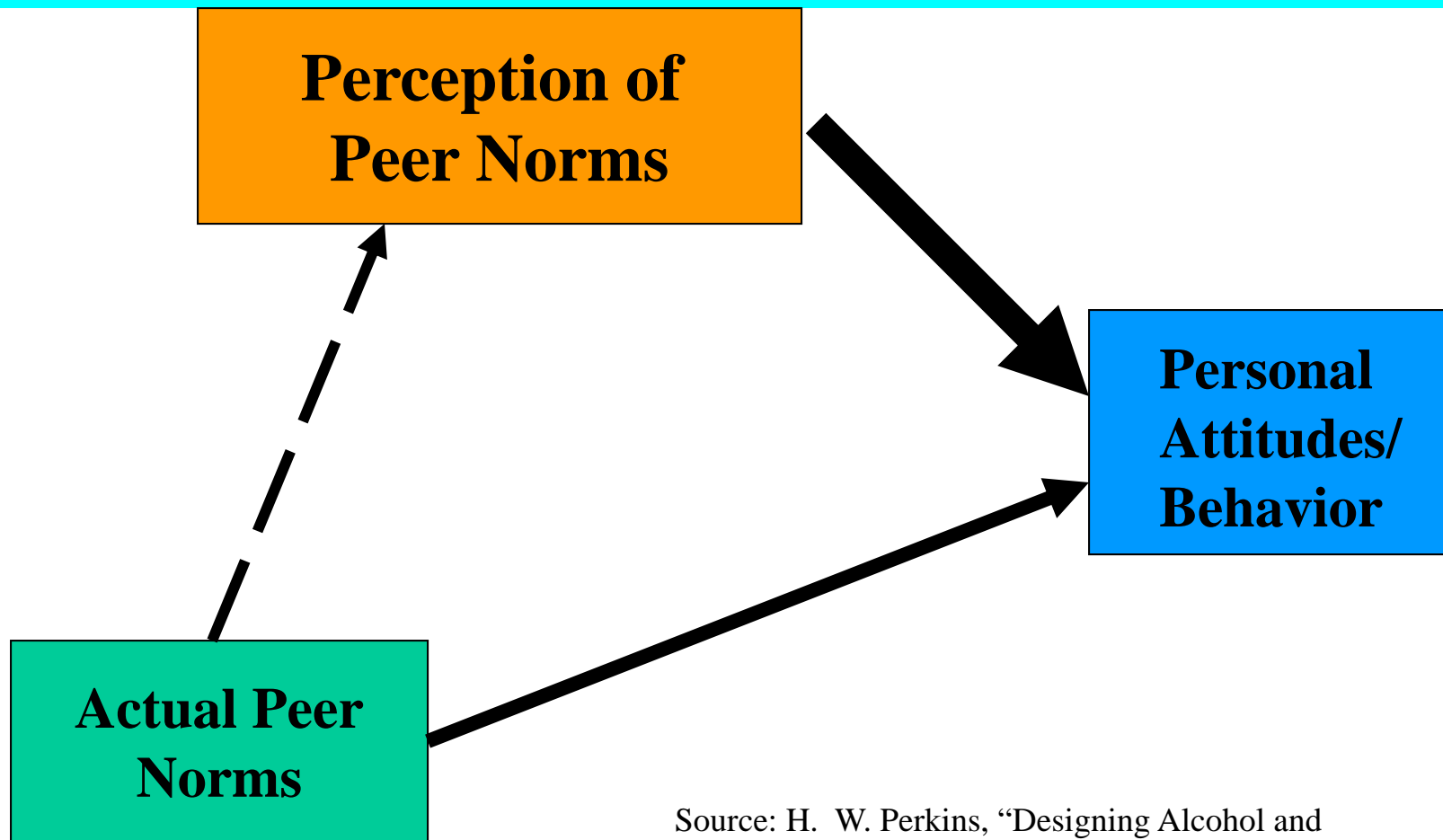
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Traditional approaches to reduce problem drinking (health education, health terrorism, and social control) have limited or no effect.

Long Tradition of Theory and  
Research on Peer Influence and  
Conformity to Peer Norms

But what about  
Perceptions of Peer Norms?

# Peer Influence on Personal Attitudes and Behaviors



Source: H. W. Perkins, "Designing Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs...", 1997

# What We Currently Know

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Grossly exaggerated perceptions of the drinking norms and norms about other drug use pervade all campuses and subcultures.

# Students' Misperceptions of the Norm for the Number of Drinks Consumed the Last Time Other Students "Partied"/Socialized at Their School

(NCHA Nationwide Data from 72,719 Students Attending 130 Schools, 2000-03)

Source: HW Perkins, M Haines, and R Rice, Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 2005.

<b>Accuracy of Perceived Drinking Norm</b>				
<b>Under-estimate by 3+ Drinks</b>	<b>Under-estimate by 1-2 Drinks</b>	<b>Accurate Estimate</b>	<b>Over-estimate by 1-2 Drinks</b>	<b>Over-estimate by 3+ Drinks</b>
<b>3%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>39%</b>

**71% Overestimate Peer Drinking!**

*What students think are the most common attitudes and behaviors of peers regarding alcohol are often inaccurate.*

- **Most students overestimate:**
  - 1) the permissiveness of peers
  - 2) how often peers drink
  - 3) how much peers drink
  - 4) how frequently peers incur consequences
- **Most students underestimate:**
  - 1) peer use of protective drinking strategies
  - 2) peer support for campus alcohol policies



# **Research Shows Misperceived ATOD Norms Exist**

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- **In All Types of Colleges (Regions, Size, Programs, Actual Norms)**
- **In Primary and Secondary Schools**
- **Across Subpopulations of Youth**
- **In a State-wide Population of Young Adults**
- **For Attitudes, Use, Policy Support, and Protective Behaviors**
- **For All Types of Drugs**

# What We Currently Know

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- Perception of the peer norm is the strongest predictor of personal drinking level compared to all personal, demographic & environmental factors that have been researched.
- Bystanders become more prevalent due to misperceptions of the norm.

# Causes of Misperceptions

- **Psychological - mental attribution processes**
- **Social psychological - memory and conversation patterns**
- **Cultural – entertainment, advertising, news and health advocacy media**

*Source:* HW Perkins, “Social Norms and the Prevention of Alcohol Misuse in Collegiate Contexts,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2002.

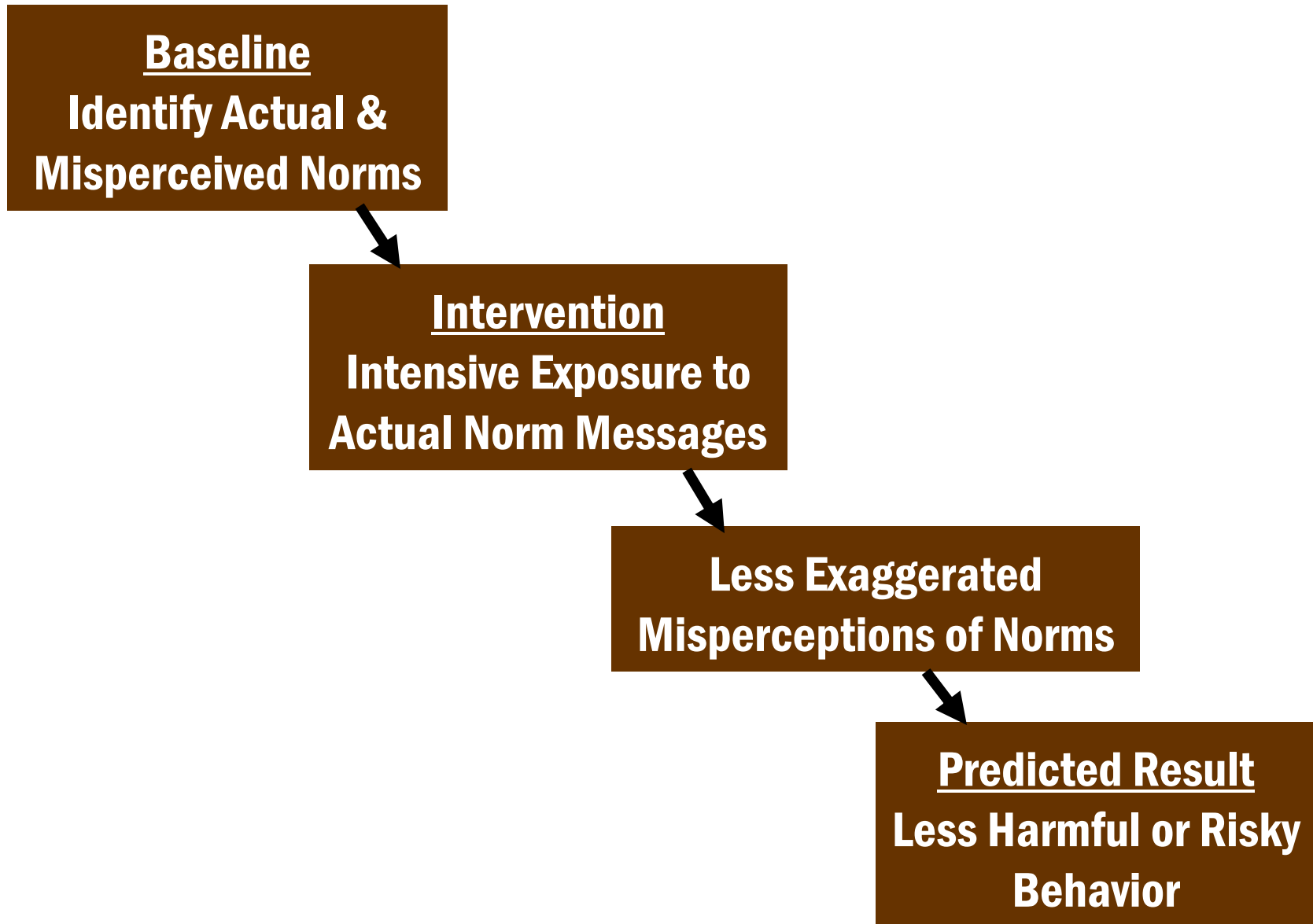
# Consequences of Misperceptions

- **Definition of the situation produces a “Reign of Error”**
- **Problem Drinking Increases**
- **Layers of Misperceptions Compound**
- **Opposition is Discouraged from Speaking**
- **Intervention by Others Declines**
- **“Carriers” of Misperception Contribute to the Problem**

# **Normative Education (The Social Norms Approach)**

*Letting more people know that most of their peers drink in moderation helps even more peers make responsible decisions about drinking.*

# The Social Norms Model



# **Examples of Strategies to Reduce Misperceptions and Strengthen Positive Norms**

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- **Print and video media campaigns**
- **Peer education programs and workshops for targeted risk groups**
- **New student orientation presentations**
- **Counseling interventions**
- **Curriculum infusion**
- **Electronic multimedia**
- **Online Personalized Normative Feedback**

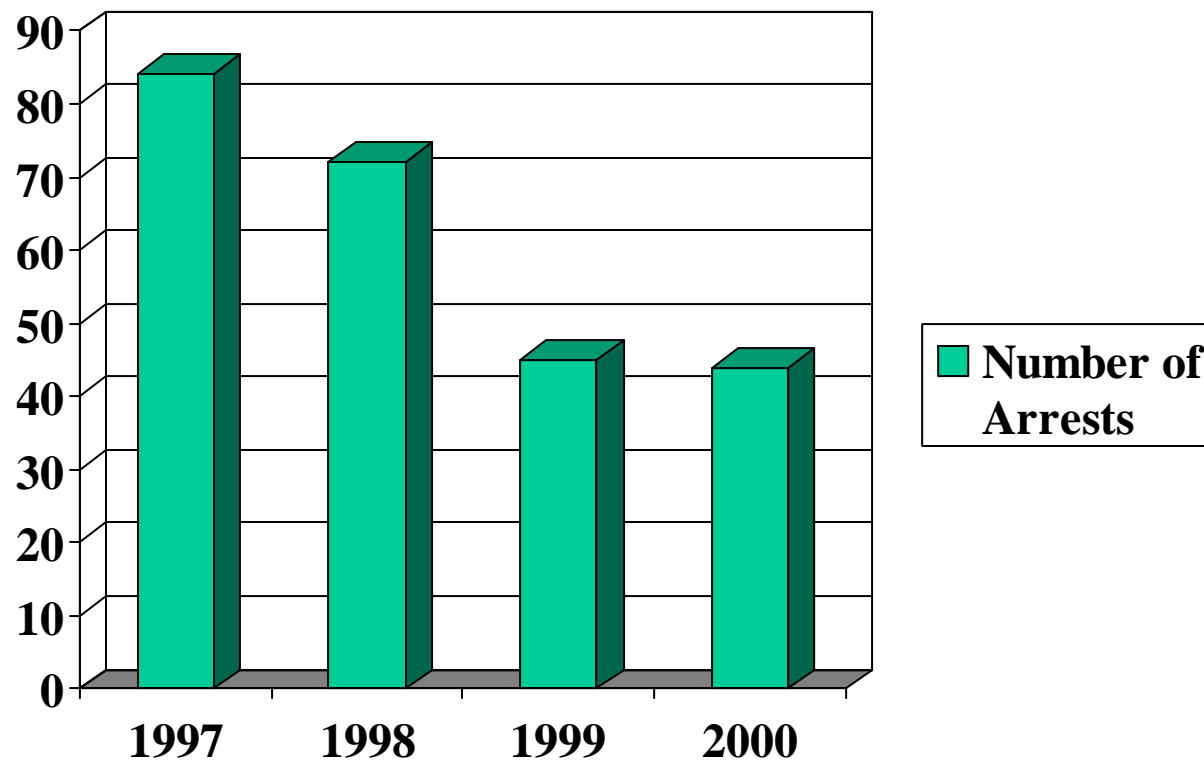
# **Evaluation of Program Effects of First 18 Months at HWS**

(Rates of Change)

- **Frequent Heavy Drinking:** - **21%**
- **Consequences of Drinking**
  - **property damage** - **36%**
  - **missing class** - **31%**
  - **inefficient in work** - **25%**
  - **unprotected sex** - **40%**
  - **memory loss** - **25%**



# Multi-Year Intervention Impact at HWS on Liquor Law Arrests



Source: H.W. Perkins and D. Craig. A Multifaceted Social Norms Approach to Reduce High-Risk Drinking: Lessons from Hobart and William Smit Colleges. Newton, MA: The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention and the U.S. Department of Education, 2002.

# **Heavy Drinking Reductions at Five Diverse Institutions Initiating a Social Norms Approach**

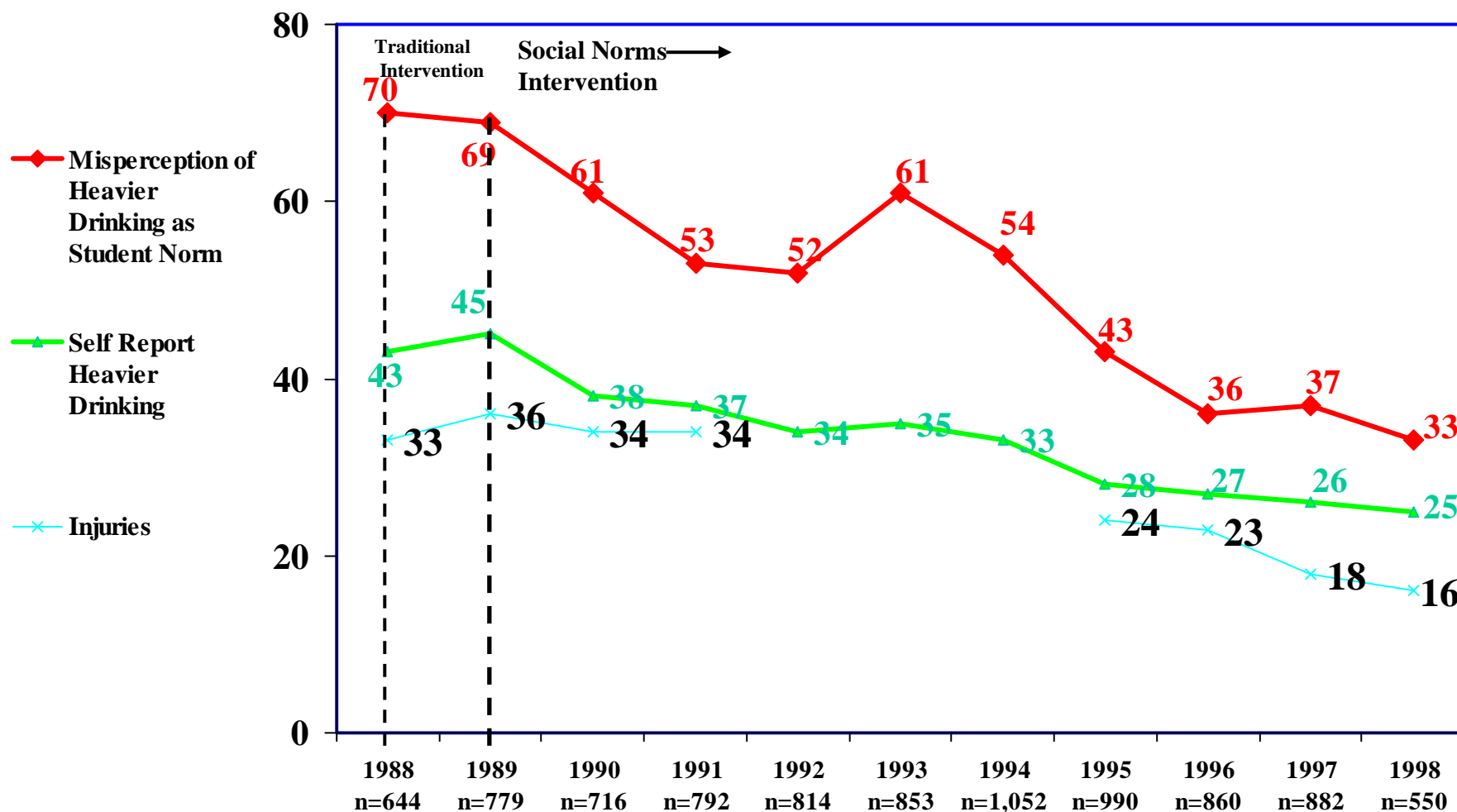
**(2 Year Rates of Change)**

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- **Hobart & Wm. Smith Colleges, NY -21%**
- **University of Arizona -21%**
- **Western Washington University -20%**
- **Rowan University, NJ -20%**
- **Northern Illinois University -18%**

**Source: H. W. Perkins (ed.), The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse, 2003.**

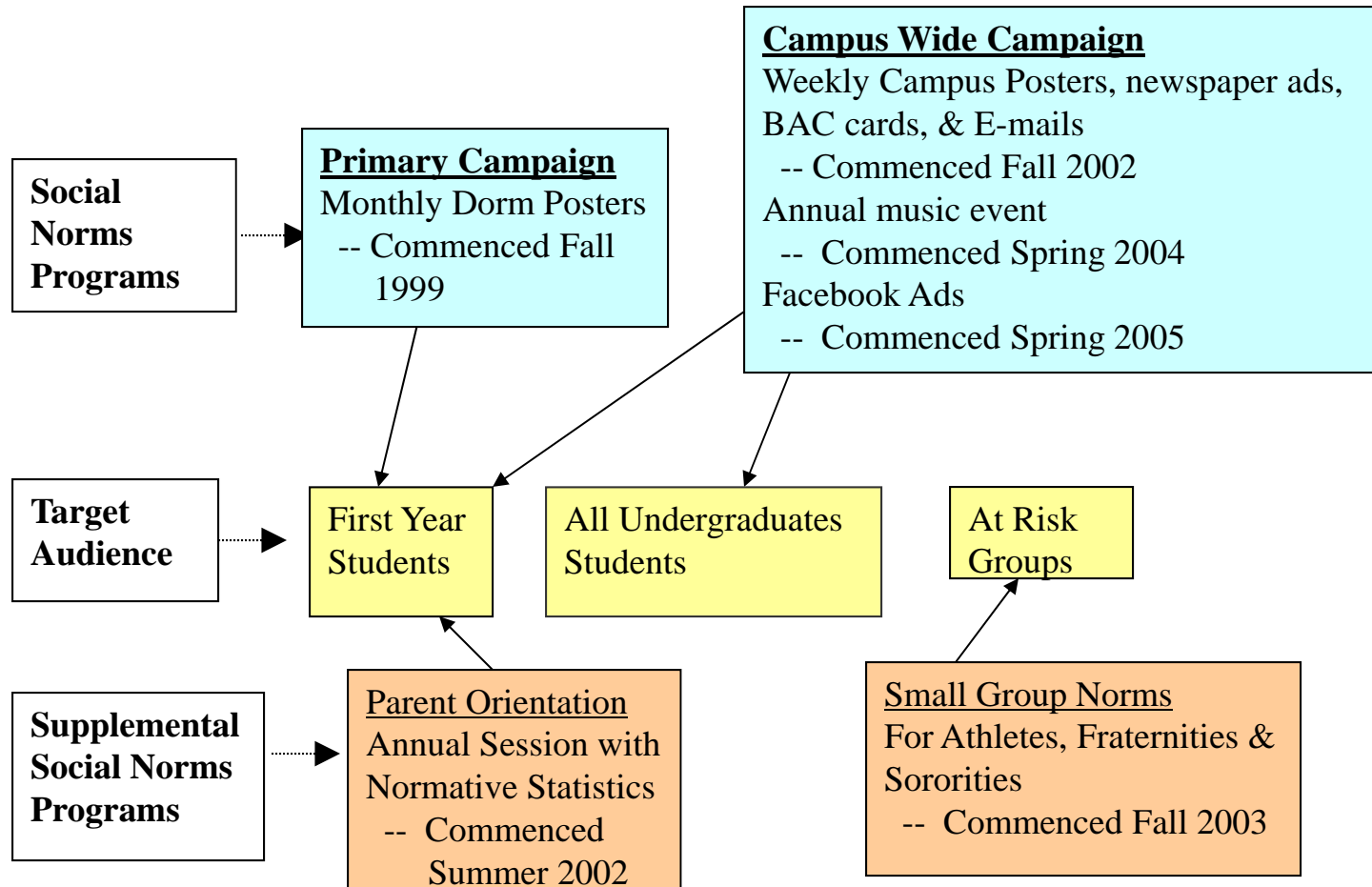
# Heavier drinking, norm misperceptions, and injuries among NIU students, 1988-1998



Note: During survey years 1992 - 1994, comparable injury questions were not included.

Source: M. Haines and G. Barker, "The Northern Illinois University Experiment: A Longitudinal Case Study of the Social Norms Approach." In Perkins (ed.), *The Social Norms Approach to School and College Age Substance Abuse*, 2003.

# Social Norms Marketing Programs at the University of Virginia



Source: James Turner, H. Wesley Perkins, and Jennifer Bauerle, "Declining Negative Consequences Related to Alcohol Misuse Among Students Exposed to a Social Norms Marketing Intervention on a College Campus," *Journal of American College Health* 2008.

# Six Years of Declining Negative Consequences Related to Alcohol Misuse Among Students Exposed to a Social Norms Intervention at U of Virginia

Source: J Turner, H W Perkins, J Bauerle, Journal of American College Health, 2008

	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
% No Consequences	33	38	44	46	48	51
% Multiple Consequences	44	40	36	34	31	26

# **Extensive Research Exists on Negative Effects of Misperceived Norms and Positive Effects of Social Norms Intervention Programs**

- Multi-site cross-sectional studies
- Longitudinal panel studies
- Brief intervention experiments with random assignment
- Longitudinal pre/post case studies of school populations
- Experiments with experimental and control classroom interventions
- Experiments with experimental and control counties
- Longitudinal experiments randomly assigning institutions to experimental and control conditions

# **Whose Norm is Most Important?**

**Should we target messages to specific subgroups or to the group at large?**

- **Immediate vs. larger group effects**
- **Personal vs. contextual misperception effects**
- **Gender specific vs. gender neutral messages**

# Potential Differences in Target Group Misperceptions and Influences

<u>Target group proximity</u>	<u>Extent of misperception</u>	<u>Relative influence</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Immediate or close personal group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intermediate group</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderate</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large group affiliation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small</li></ul>

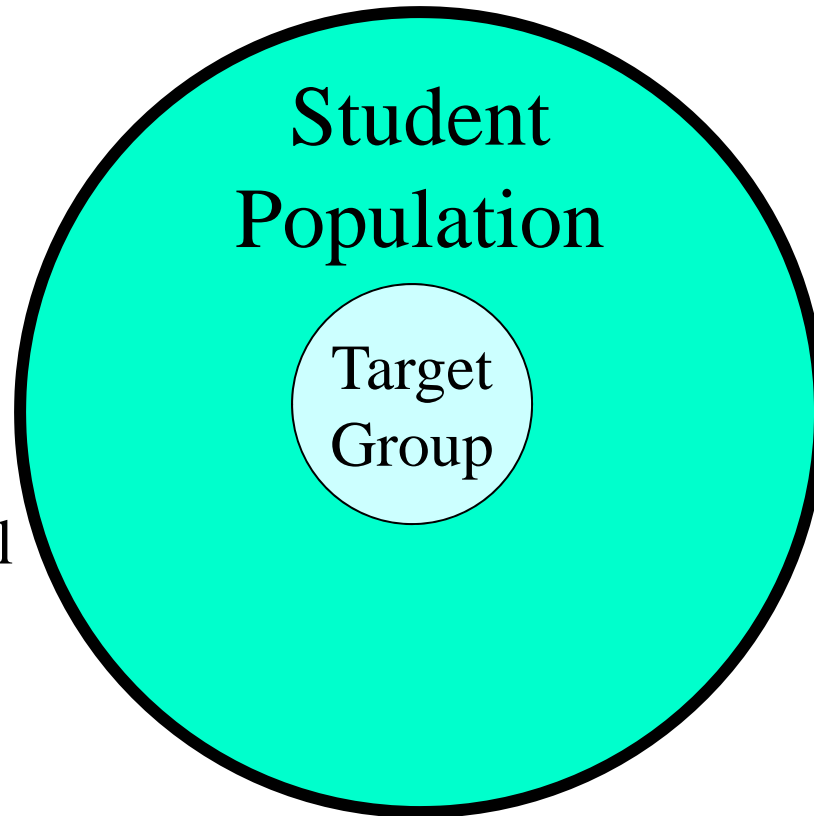


Personal  
(Psychological)  
Effects on  
Target Group  
Individuals

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What do **I** think  
is normative for:

- my group
- students in general



Contextual  
(Sociological)  
Effects on  
Other Students

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What do **OTHERS**  
believe is normative  
for:

- students in general
- the target group

# **When is the Social Norms Approach Most Effective?**

- **Clear positive norm messages**
- **Credible data**
- **Absence of competing scare messages**
- **Dosage is high (ongoing and intense social marketing of actual norms)**
- **Synergistic strategies**
- **Broad student population receives message in addition to any high-risk target groups**