Best Practices and Current Issues for Successful Social Norms Interventions Among College Students

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Potential Topics for Discussion

I. What We Currently Know – The Social Norms Model and Evidence

II. Good Data and Good Messages: Do’s and Don’t’s

III. Targeting Subpopulations?

IV. Evaluation Issues
What We Currently Know

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

- Grossly exaggerated perceptions of the drinking norms pervade all campuses and subcultures.

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

But what about Perceptions of Peer Norms?
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

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### 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)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy of Perceived Drinking Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under-estimate by 3+ Drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

71% Overestimate Peer Drinking!
What We Currently Know

- 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.

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

Source: H. W. Perkins, “Designing Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programs…,” 1997
Normative Education

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

Baseline
Identify Actual & Misperceived Norms

Intervention
Intensive Exposure to Actual Norm Messages

Less Exaggerated Misperceptions of Norms

Predicted Result
Less Harmful or Risky Behavior
Examples of Strategies to Reduce Misperceptions and Strengthen Positive Norms

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

Getting Good Data

- Sample Size and Frequency
- Representative Sample
- Measures of Injunctive (Attitudinal) Norms
- Measures of Frequency of Use
- Measures of Quantity
- Measures of Negative Consequences
Creating Good Messages

- Majority behavior that is positive
- Include images that identify local population
- Avoid identifying individuals
- Do not display the problem behavior
- Provide the source and make it large enough to make it part of the message
- Avoid overuse of logos and branding
The majority of HWS students (54%) typically consume four or fewer drinks or no drinks with alcohol when partying.

SOURCE: Spring 2011 Survey of all HWS students with 593 respondents, conducted by BIDS 295

When asked about their last 30 days...

98% of HWS students have NOT used smokeless tobacco
87% of HWS students have NOT used cigarettes
74% of HWS students have NOT used marijuana

SOURCE: Fall 2010 National College Health Assessment Survey conducted anonymously online with 399 HWS respondents.
90% of HWS student-athletes believe that students should not drink to an intoxicating level that affects academic work or other responsibilities.


www.hws.edu/JustFacts

What is your protective strategy?

86% of HWS students usually or always eat before or during a party where they may be consuming alcohol or they do not drink at all.

SOURCE: Fall 2010 National College Health Assessment Survey conducted anonymously online with 389 HWS respondents.

www.hws.edu/JustFacts
What is your protective strategy?

79% of HWS students always use a designated driver when they have been drinking at a party or they do not drink at all.

SOURCE
Fall 2010 National College Health Assessment Survey conducted anonymously online with 369 HWS respondents.

www.hws.edu/JustFacts

If Someone says, "College students drink a lot..."
Let them know the facts:
Most HWS students when they party drink one to four drinks or do not drink at all.

Most Students Make 0 to 4 Drinks
Healthy Choices

Source: Data collected in the Spring 2000 BD295 survey of a representative cross-section of 327 students.
HWS students typically drink alcohol once a week or less.

Source: Data collected in the Spring 2000 BD295 survey of a representative cross-section of 327 students.
87% of students never cause property damage as a result of drinking during the academic year.

88% of HWS students NEVER submit late papers or exams as a result of drinking during the academic year.

Data drawn from a Spring 2005 survey of a representative cross-section of HWS students with 272 respondents.
The majority of athletes in season drink only twice per month or less often.

Source: Data drawn from all intercollegiate athletics (CI-III) participating in a Spring 2008 mail survey of a representative cross-section of HWS student-athletes.

Did you know that...

7 out of 10 HWS student-athletes (70%) believe one should never use tobacco.

Source: Fall 2005 Web survey of all HWS student-athletes with 349 respondents (79% of all student-athletes on campus).
82% of HWS student-athletes blew a 0.05 or lower BAC returning home late at night.

Source: Data collected from 194 randomly selected student-athletes returning to residence halls late at night between 11 pm and 3 am every night of the week during Fall '04, Spring '05, and Fall '06. These results were obtained from chemistry department interns who study and test students advised by Professor David M. Cripp, Jeffrey O’Meara (BS), Lauren Giannetto (WS), Mattie Truitt (BS), and Fedor Strenz (BS). Data from their study was collected by research assistants David M. Cripp, Patrick O’Meara, George Timbrell, and Jenna Strenz (all BS).
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

Source: H. W. Perkins (ed), The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse, 2003
Research on Effects of Perceived Norms and Social Norms Intervention Programs

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

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

(2 Year Rates of Change)

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

Social Norms Marketing Programs at the University of Virginia


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


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
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<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% No Consequences</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Multiple Consequences</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
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Not All Results From the Field Are Consistently Positive:

What does a lack of impact reflect?

Model Outcome of Social Norms Approach

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YES YES YES YES

Source: H. Wesley Perkins, 2001
## Possible Outcomes of Social Norms Approach

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Confusing or Counter Messages

Source: H. Wesley Perkins, 2001
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But only for a targeted subgroup

Source: H. Wesley Perkins, 2001