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## AT UALBANY, THE PLAY'S THE THING TO CURB STUDENT DRINKING

**Albany Peers convey factual information about the true level  
of drunkenness on campus**

**ALAN WECHSLER Staff writer**

University at Albany officials say they have found a successful way to encourage students to drink less. And it's not through strict rules, scare tactics or lectures.

It's a play.

For the past five years, members of the UAlbany Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program have performed a short play for freshmen that discusses how fellow students drink less than peers think they do.

The idea is part of a popular program known as Social Norms Intervention, which suggests that students will drink less and will engage in safer behavior when they are exposed to the truth about student drinking habits.

Dolores Cimini, director of Middle Earth, said the journal Report on Social Norms will run her own study next month that discusses the impact of Middle Earth's play. Her study found that students who watched the play showed a much higher level of understanding about student drinking, when compared to a similar group of students who listened to a lecture about safe drinking habits.

"The peers are more credible sources," Cimini said. "They listen to it more seriously."

As UAlbany is prepared to invest even more in Social Norms training, officials said they believed such programs could help reduce problems between students and neighbors, such as the

bottle-throwing incident that occurred on Hudson Avenue last month.

The issue was discussed Wednesday as part of the campus' observance of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week. On hand was H. Wesley Perkins, a sociology professor at Hobart and William Smith colleges, whose research back in the 1980s led to the creation of social norms.

Perkins' surveys in the mid-80s found that while only 19 percent of students actually drank to the point that it interfered with studies, 63 percent of students thought that such behavior was common.

Perkins met with UAlbany staff on Wednesday and spent part of an afternoon talking to Middle Earth students and fraternity members about his work. He said two years of social norms programming helped reduce problem drinking more than 20 percent at the University at Arizona, Hobart and William Smith, and the University of Missouri. Many other schools have introduced this training, which uses such elements as peer education, workshops, posters and targeting specific groups like athletes or Greek members.

"What we're talking about is telling students the truth," he said.

At UAlbany, it's not too hard to find students who don't drink much. Dave Coon, a freshman from Saratoga Springs, said he never drank and wouldn't know where to get alcohol if he wanted to.

But other students questioned Perkins' information.

Erin Moore, a senior who attended his lecture, said she thought drinking was a lot more prevalent. Indeed, as she sat with a half-dozen of her friends after the lecture, all of them said they drank from two to four times a week, although none said they drank to excess.

"There's nothing else to do," said Allyson Castellano, a senior from Westchester, who said she goes out two to three times a week.

"The majority of the time, the purpose is to get drunk," she said. "If I don't feel like drinking, I don't go out."

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