PREVENTION UPDATES
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Student Leadership

by Linda Langford, Sc.D. and William DeJong, Ph.D.

Campus-based efforts to reduce alcohol and other drug abuse and violence (AODV) will be more successful if they involve a wide range of stakeholders—including students—who can contribute to the program's design, implementation, and evaluation.[1] Students provide a unique perspective on AODV prevention, and they can also bring a certain authority to the issue: college presidents and other campus administrators pay attention when students speak about AODV issues in a responsible and informed way.[2]

Effective prevention requires the development of an evidence-based strategic plan that defines the program's goals and objectives and outlines specific strategies and activities to carry out those aims.[3] Likewise, prevention staff will want to think strategically about how students might best support the institution's AODV-related initiatives. Once specific roles for students are defined, project leaders can recruit students for each of those roles.

In addition, it is critical that students—like any other employees—receive training on the mission, goals, and underlying rationale of the projects they will be working on so that they can make informed contributions to the work and also receive the greatest benefit. Such training should include information about evidence-based strategies and best practices in campus prevention.

Further, when working on a particular type of program, students should be guided by the research regarding effective implementation. For example, students unfamiliar with social norms marketing campaigns, which present data to correct exaggerated perceptions of campus drinking norms, often choose images for campaign materials that run counter to the intended positive message because they will be attention-getting for students. The professional staff should teach students basic principles, and then students can work creatively within those parameters.

The need for a strategic approach is supported by reviews of peer education programs, which attribute the mixed efficacy of these programs in part to inadequate conceptualization and planning.[4] One review cited several common reasons for the failure of peer education programs, including, among others, a lack of clear aims and objectives for the project, a failure to appreciate the work involved in managing a peer education program, and inadequate training and support for peer educators.[5]

> As part of their strategic planning, prevention staff will want to articulate exactly what role students will play in a given program, with a clear understanding of how peer involvement is expected to enhance the intervention's effectiveness.

Some AODV programs have succeeded in involving students strategically and effectively by reconceptualizing their relationship with other students as an opportunity to mentor the next generation of prevention leaders. A well-planned program of leadership development puts more demands on the prevention staff, but it also means that students can maximize their contribution while gaining useful experience, learning new skills, and perhaps developing a long-term professional interest in AODV prevention work.

The four institutions featured here exemplify this approach to student leadership: the University of Missouri–Columbia, Arizona State University, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW), and the University of Southern Maine (USM). This orientation affects how AODV prevention staff select and train students, the types of work they do, and how their experience is evaluated.

University of Missouri–Columbia

At the University of Missouri–Columbia, several staff positions in the Wellness Resource Center (WRC) are occupied by graduate assistants. Student volunteers also participate in several peer education and advocacy groups. These students must make a significant commitment to the organization, spending at least five hours per week on WRC activities. For their part, the WRC staff devote significant time and attention to orienting and supervising the students.

Kim Dude, who directs the WRC, requires new student recruits to read key publications about the prevention methods used by the WRC and spends time with them one-on-one to familiarize them with the center's philosophy and approach. Half of the program's weekly two-hour meeting is devoted to training. As funding permits, the WRC pays for students to attend conferences. This more extensive training lays the foundation for the students to contribute as true professionals. As Dude explains, "First we educate them on what the profession says is effective, and then we ask for their input and ideas."

The WRC's wellness programs are grounded in four interrelated approaches: (1) supporting healthy decision-making; (2) correcting misperceptions of student norms; (3) promoting health protection strategies; and (4) implementing environmental management strategies, including new policies. WRC staff and student volunteers are trained in the four approaches so that they can operate from that framework when designing and implementing new programs.

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The WRC also instills a "culture of assessment" by focusing on data collection and analysis. One WRC staff member explained, "There is no one in our office who doesn't ask what data we have and what we can do with it, including the peer educators." As a normal part of doing business, WRC staff and student volunteers review data reports during staff meetings and discuss their implications for their work. If additional data are needed to guide their planning, then they work together to develop a research plan. The WRC employs two graduate assistants who develop instruments, collect data, conduct analysis, and generate reports. The analysts maintain an "open-cube policy," meaning that WRC staff and student volunteers are welcome to approach them about data on any issue.

Consistent with the focus on assessment, the student volunteers complete baseline and follow-up surveys about their personal goals for participating in the program. This is critical information to take into account. The WRC has found, for example, that peer educators appreciate opportunities to provide their peers with important information to help them make better decisions, but they are generally uncomfortable telling their peers what decisions to make. Likewise, some students may enjoy setting up alcohol-free activities on campus, yet they shy away from taking an active role in setting policies that would restrict their classmates' freedom to make choices regarding alcohol use. Considering the students' preferences will help ensure that they can succeed in—and enjoy—their work.

Arizona State University

Arizona State University's Wellness and Health Promotion office runs a program called the Home Safe Violence Prevention and Advocacy Center (Home Safe), which is dedicated to increasing knowledge about sexual assault and relationship violence, to providing services that offer support to survivors, and to promoting healthy relationship skills and norms. Home Safe was developed in partnership with a group of students committed to reducing violence on campus. Students continue to play an important role in this work, which includes presentations to classes and student groups, social marketing campaigns, bulletin board informational kits, online education, and advocacy for change.

According to Karen Moses, who directs the program, the complexity of the subject matter—particularly the student audience's frequent defensiveness regarding alcohol use and legal definitions of sexual consent—created obstacles to having student peer educators organize and lead the program presentations. They found that peer educators are more effective in staffing information booths, assisting with prevention activities, monitoring news media reports, obtaining student input, and supporting program staff members who give the presentations. Over time, gifted peer educators are invited to lead an activity as part of the presentation but only occasionally do they take the lead role themselves.

While most of the student volunteers serve in supportive roles, Moses and her colleagues look for students who can take on more responsibility, including developing and implementing special educational events or serving on selected boards or committees (e.g., policy task force). Each year Home Safe hires three student workers who have proven through their volunteer work that they can succeed in a leadership role, work with student organizations, lead peer education programs, and coordinate the student volunteers.

Wellness and Health Promotion also works with leaders of existing student organizations, to provide guidance as they develop their violence prevention-related work. Moses notes that an advantage of student groups is that they can utilize the strength of the student voice to take on controversial issues or promote policy changes that the program staff cannot undertake. The staff's role in this case, Moses explains, is to help the students "develop their voice and use it as an instrument of change."

All students involved with Home Safe attend a 16-hour training retreat before each fall semester, followed by weekly meetings that include additional training. There is a midyear refresher training before the spring semester. Students completing their work with Home Safe fill out a survey to assess their experience—whether being involved has helped them make better decisions or benefited their social relationships; whether and how they had a positive effect on other students; and whether the work has improved their leadership skills, prepared them for future jobs, or led them to rethink their career choice.

Potential Student Contributions to a Campus and Community Coalition

- Provide background information on the problem, contributory factors, and local condtions.
- Interpret student survey data, offering suggestions and giving feedback on policies and programs being considered.
- Conduct student focus groups to pretest prevention materials and information materials.
- Advise on how to present the prevention program to students so that they will understand the need for it and offer their support.

Source: *Experiences in Effective Prevention: The U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grants.*[6]

University of North Carolina Wilmington

UNCW has a robust peer education program, according to Rebecca Caldwell, director of Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention, which includes UNCW CROSSROADS: Substance Abuse Prevention and Education Program and UNCW CARE: Violence Prevention and Relationship Education Program. Each year CARE and CROSSROADS hire and train a small number of paid peer educators, who typically are campus leaders in fraternities and sororities, residence life, and student government. Explains Caldwell, "This assures us that our perspective and expertise are in student leadership spaces and times, whether our professional staff is there or not."

CARE and CROSSROADS are part of a highly collaborative Division of Student Affairs. For the past three years, CARE staff have hosted the Value of Peer Education (VOPE), a one-day

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conference in August for on-campus student leaders. VOPE promotes cross-division training and relationship building among student leaders and supplements the training each individual department provides on prevention theory and topical material.

Participants include substance abuse and violence prevention peer educators, health promotion peer educators, student tutors, programming board members, off-campus apartment resource students, and student government leaders, plus student union and campus activities staff members. "A key advantage of this program," notes Caldwell, "is that it helps the peer educator positions to be seen as leadership positions that have as much value as being in student government or on a major program board."

Programs like VOPE are a natural outgrowth of a divisionwide focus on student learning outcomes. Each department conducts assessments to identify which skills students gain in different leadership positions. With that information in hand, the division can better match students with leadership positions that more closely match their personal goals.

A Foundation for Effective Student Involvement

- Student roles are well defined and support the overall initiative's mission and goals.
- Students are recruited and selected with attention to the students' interest in and skills for the particular role they will play.
- Students receive initial and ongoing training and supervision appropriate to the role, to ensure that their work effectively serves program needs.
- Programs attend to the students' personal and professional development and their goals for participating.

University of Southern Maine

The Office of Early Student Success (ESS) at USM, directed by Paul Dexter, helps students maximize their college experience by staying focused on their educational purpose and being constructively engaged in student life. In this context, ESS frames substance abuse issues as a threat to students' achieving their educational and career goals.

Getting students involved in the ESS's work poses different challenges than those found at the other campuses discussed here. USM's undergraduate student body is older, with an average age in the mid-20s, and most students work. Recognizing this, Dexter developed a student internship and each year has found a small number of dedicated students who are excited about the opportunity to work with the ESS. Importantly, students are required to develop specific learning objectives for the internships. "This arrangement is not a source of free labor," Dexter explains, "but is an important part of the student's learning experience."

In 2008–09, an intern assisted with a 21st birthday card program; developed a series of social marketing posters on energy drinks, on the effect of alcohol on the brain and on the learning process; promoted USM's "Good Samaritan" policy; and designed marketing materials to promote student completion of a health and wellness survey. After completing training, the intern became a program facilitator for Promoting Alcohol Responsibility Through You (PARTY), a workshop delivered to members of the Greek system, athletic teams, and other student leaders with the goal of reducing underage and high-risk alcohol consumption at parties through risk reduction and responsible hosting strategies.

This internship model has now been adopted statewide. Maine's Higher Education Alcohol Prevention Partnership (HEAPP) provides the state's colleges and universities with $750 per semester to hire an undergraduate or graduate student intern to assist in campus-based prevention work to reduce high-risk alcohol use. HEAPP is a partnership between Maine's institutions of higher education and the Maine Office of Substance Abuse.

Students are drawn to the program because of their interest in the substance abuse prevention field and the opportunity to gain experience that might help them in their field of study, such as psychology, social work, or health education. They are hired for eight hours per week and are paid $10 per hour. Depending on the campus students also receive course credit for their work.

Interns typically participate in a campus-based task force or campus and community coalition, work on social norms campaigns, create promotional materials for intervention programs, develop educational programs for both students and staff, and conduct intercept interviews with other students to get feedback on training and programs.

The interns prepare for their work by attending an all-day training. Topics covered include best practices in college prevention, environmental management, and social norms marketing. Each intern is supervised by the HEAPP contact on campus. The HEAPP staff hold conference calls with interns, and the interns stay connected with one another through a listserv.

Conclusion

As these four programs illustrate, a mentoring approach to student leadership development, focusing on recruiting, training, and supervising a small number of qualified and committed students, can pay enormous dividends, contributing to the immediate success of the college's AODV prevention program while also stimulating students to develop a long-term professional interest in prevention work.

Linda Langford, Sc.D., is associate director for violence prevention initiatives at the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention. William DeJong, Ph.D., is a professor of social and behavioral sciences at the Boston University School of Public Health and a senior adviser to the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention.

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For additional information, contact:
The Higher Education Center for
Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention
EDC, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458-1060
1-800-676-1730 ❖ TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711
HigherEdCtr@edc.org ❖ www.higheredcenter.org

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5. Walker and Avis, "Common Reasons Why Peer Education Fails."
6. DeJong, *Experiences in Effective Prevention.*

Resources

Organizations

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS)
U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/osdfs; 202-245-7896

OSDFS supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent alcohol and other drug abuse, ensure the health and well-being of students, and teach students good character and citizenship. The agency provides financial assistance for drug abuse and violence prevention programs and activities that promote the health and well-being of students in elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

The U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention
http://www.higheredcenter.org;
1-800-676-1730; TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711

The Higher Education Center offers an integrated array of services to help campuses and communities come together to identify problems; assess needs; and plan, implement, and evaluate alcohol and other drug abuse and violence prevention programs. Services include resources, referrals, and consultations; training and professional development activities; publication and dissemination of prevention materials; assessment, evaluation, and analysis activities; a Web site featuring online resources, news, and information; and support for the Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues. The Higher Education Center's publications are free and can be downloaded from its Web site.

The BACCHUS Network
http://www.bacchusgamma.org;
303-871-0901

The BACCHUS Network promotes college student leadership in advocating for healthy and safe decisions regarding alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, sexual practices, and other high-risk behaviors. Students focus on offering workshop presentations and health promotion campaigns, while also advocating for effective policies to address campus and community health and safety issues. BACCHUS-affiliated peer education groups are active on more than 1,000 campuses worldwide.

NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
http://www.naspa.org; 202-265-7500

NASPA sponsors a Knowledge Community on Student Leadership Programs, whose mission is to provide resources to higher education professionals with an interest in student leadership training, education, and development. The Knowledge Community shares best practices, provides critical evaluation of the field, examines standards for leadership programs, supports national and regional efforts to develop student leadership programs, makes contributions to the literature, recognizes exemplary programs, and cultivates a forum for presenting new ideas.

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues
http://www.thenetwork.ws; see Web site for telephone contacts by region

The Network Addressing Collegiate Alcohol and Other Drug Issues (Network) is a national consortium of colleges and universities formed to promote healthy campus environments by addressing issues related to alcohol and other drugs. Developed in 1987 by the U.S. Department of Education, the Network comprises member institutions that voluntarily agree to work toward a set of standards aimed at reducing AOD problems at colleges and universities. It has more than 1,600 members nationwide.

Publications

Experiences in Effective Prevention: The U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grants
by W. DeJong

This publication summarizes elements of effective campus-based alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, based on the experiences of 22 grantee institutions funded from 1999 to 2004 by the U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses grant program (86 pp., 2007). Available at http://www.higheredcenter.org/services/publications/experiences-effective-prevention.

What Peer Educators and Resident Advisors (RAs) Need to Know About College Drinking
by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

This brochure contains highlights from *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges,* a seminal report developed by the NIAAA's National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Task Force on College Drinking (11 pp., 2002). Available at http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/CollegeStudents.

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