

## **Addressing Alcohol Use Among University Students**

Like many colleges, college binge drinking was common on the campus and in the community of our Fayette university. Community members felt it was the University's problem to address college binge drinking. Past prevention efforts included panel presentations, media campaigns, and educational events, but these things had not done much to address the issue. Many accepted the culture of college binge drinking and even underage drinking. Some employees used the approach that "if we don't admit it, there is not a problem." We knew that what was being done did not work, but where do you start to change a culture?

### **Problem Overview**

One of the first things that had to be done to address college binge drinking was to analyze and define the problem. Student drinking tends to be very risky because drinks are typically bunched in heavy episodes, occur around social events, and many factors (environmental, individual, and developmental) interact to determine an individual's drinking patterns.

The consequences of excessive and underage drinking affect virtually all college campuses, college communities, and college students, whether they choose to drink or not. We found that college binge drinking is costly for the university. According to the National Institutes on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA, 2013), as many as 1/3 of college students do not register for a second year as a result of their drinking. Additionally, the National Institutes of Health (2013) report the following second-hand and costly consequences of college binge drinking:

- **Death:** 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes (Hingson et al., 2009).
- **Injury:** 599,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol (Hingson et al., 2009).
- **Assault:** 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking (Hingson et al., 2009).
- **Sexual Abuse:** 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape (Hingson et al., 2009).
- **Unsafe Sex:** 400,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 had unprotected sex and more than 100,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex (Hingson et al., 2002).
- **Academic Problems:** About 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their drinking including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall (Engs et al., 1996; Presley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Wechsler et al., 2002).
- **Health Problems/Suicide Attempts:** More than 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem (Hingson et al., 2002), and between 1.2 and 1.5 percent of students indicate that they tried to commit suicide within the past year due to drinking or drug use (Presley et al., 1998).

- Drunk Driving: 3,360,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 drive under the influence of alcohol (Hingson et al., 2009).
- Vandalism: About 11 percent of college student drinkers report that they have damaged property while under the influence of alcohol (Wechsler et al., 2002).
- Property Damage: More than 25 percent of administrators from schools with relatively low drinking levels and over 50 percent from schools with high drinking levels say their campuses have a "moderate" or "major" problem with alcohol-related property damage (Wechsler et al., 1995).
- Police Involvement: About 5 percent of 4-year college students are involved with the police or campus security as a result of their drinking (Wechsler et al., 2002), and 110,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are arrested for an alcohol-related violation such as public drunkenness or driving under the influence (Hingson et al., 2002).
- Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: 31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6 percent for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence in the past 12 months, according to questionnaire-based self-reports about their drinking (Knight et al., 2002).

### **Program/Activity Description**

As part of the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG), the Coordinator worked with the Office of Student Development at the University to define the problem, identify target areas to address, and brainstormed strategies to reduce college binge drinking. Each step of the SPF process was valuable.

**Assessment** – high risk college student drinking was defined as underage, binge, drinking and driving, or drinking with health conditions and/or medication use (NIAAA, 2013). National and local data was located to understand the consequences including higher rate of death, assault, sexual abuse, unsafe sex, academic problems, suicide, vandalism, and dependence. Iowa Youth Survey (2012) data was used to show that the University “inherited” the problem of drinking and was not responsible for creating it. Policies and level of enforcement were reviewed. An environmental scan determined that the college community as a whole, not the University, supported high risk college student drinking.

**Capacity** – some faculty, students, and staff were ready to make a change. Administration wanted any changes to be in the best interest of the University and thus have a positive effect on the bottom line. The budgets for prevention efforts were slim and outside funding may be needed.

**Planning** – the University Substance Education and Use Prevention (SEUP) group was formed of 2 instructors, a Graduate Assistant, an Assistant Director of Athletics, Director of Counseling, 3 students, and the SPF SIG Coordinator. Initial planning included some programming but progress was slow. The SEUP group worked as a subcommittee of the Fayette County Substance Abuse Coalition (FCSAC) and requests for student surveys and policy changes were not always granted. Around this time, the interim president approved the sale of alcohol at football games to address the dwindling attendance at events.

**Implementation** – Using the 3-in-1 Framework, the students, community, and university were involved in addressing the issue. The project started to gain steam when community members got involved and

capacity was increased. The SEUP group started to review policies and look at those of like-sized colleges. Additional partnerships with law enforcement were established and the new President was convinced more needed to be done. Furthermore, several sexual assaults occurred on campus which provided further credibility to the efforts. Locally, recognition of the cost was important in implementing change including the university's reputation, recruitment and retention of students, academic ranking and classification of "party school", operating costs including security, staff, and property damage, liability and relationship with the community.

In the review of policies, there were some key changes to be made:

- Minors in possession were given an administrative penalty of \$50
- Fines were not tied to student accounts – there were no consequences for non-payment
- Each student was allowed 24 cans of beer and 64 ounces of hard liquor, even in new suite-style living, further promoting college binge drinking.
- Policy banned alcohol at sporting events, but it was being sold in an attempt to increase attendance.
- Minors could be roommates with someone over 21 years of age.
- A dry-floor option did not exist.

#### **Program/Activity Outcomes**

Changes at the University involved policy changes, ongoing evaluation, commitment of resources, and consistent enforcement. Policy changes included:

- Language was included to state underage drinking is not allowed.
- Removed language regarding specific amounts of alcohol on hand and amounts are now at the discretion of the Resident Advisors.
- Fines increased for violations but also now include education, screening, and referral in each level of infraction
- Fines are now tied to student accounts mandating consequences
- Amnesty policy and education surrounding alcohol poisoning and what to do when a person has had too much to drink.
- Budget was established for ongoing prevention efforts
- SEUP group now includes two additional community members and work continues to grow capacity.
- Outgoing communications at University are closely reviewed for the message they sent.
- Zero tolerance policy for student athletes during their respective sport at a minimum.

**Evaluation** – CORE surveys will now be done annually to track student alcohol use. Student data including retention, reason for treatment, and number of violations will be monitored.

**Sustainability** – a budget has been committed to the ongoing efforts of the SEUP group which now functions on their own with plans to use the SPF process to make changes as needed. Students, faculty, and staff receive regular information about substance free events and ways to learn more.

**Cultural Competency** – When the University, its students, and the community are engaged in mutually reinforcing interventions, the broader environment is changed which helps reduce abuse and problems for the long-term.

### **Additional Information**

The SPF SIG project was a partnership between the Iowa Department of Public Health and Helping Services for Northeast Iowa with funding provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration.

#### Project Contacts

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More information on the SPF SIG project can be found at [www.helpingservices.org/FCSAC](http://www.helpingservices.org/FCSAC)

### **Resources**

<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov>

<http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/>

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges. NIH Publication 02-0510: 2002.