Kansas State Project Wellness: Final Report

Project Wellness has been a social norms media campaign to reduce heavy drinking and alcohol-related harm among Kansas State University students. The project began in January 1999 and ends its fifth and final year in December 2003. The Kansas Health Foundation completely funded the project.

Through various media, predominantly newspaper advertisements, the campaign has worked to correct students’ inaccurate perceptions about campus alcohol use. To do this the campaign has advertised the positive normative alcohol-use behaviors of KSU students. By promoting and uplifting these typical responsible behaviors—such as drinking moderately or not at all, using designated drivers, and only drinking in environments they know to be safe—the project has strived to increase these positive actions among K-State students.

This edition of the Higher Education newsletter summarizes what was done during the project and what was learned during the five years of the intervention, including both quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

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WHAT WE DID

The social norms media campaign, refer to at Kansas State as Project Wellness, was a collaborative project that included four other Kansas Board of Regents universities and Social Norms consultants from universities outside the state. The strategy of the collaborative group was to replicate the successful social norms media campaigns of Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the University of Arizona (UA). While the group shared resources for data processing and ideas on ways to publicize student drinking norms, each university created their own messages and came up with their own ways of delivering them to their respective campuses.

Basic activities of the social norms media campaign at Kansas State University included surveying K-State students each Spring semester to assess their alcohol-use norms, developing messages and designs for print media that would advertise the norms, testing the messages and designs with the student body, and then delivering the normative messages to the campus through various media channels. The surveying was conducted in approximately 30 classrooms each spring. The classroom samples were selected so that the total yearly sample (averaging 1,300 over the five years) was representative of the student body with respect to gender, class, and college. Advertisements in the Kansas State Collegian were the primary medium used to deliver the social norms messages. Approximately 25-30 page-dominant ads were run during the Fall semesters and 12-15 during the Spring semesters. Other media used included: posters distributed to all residence hall students (in 2000 and 2001); a four-by-ten-foot banner periodically displayed in the K-State Union; flyers distributed at campus events; classroom presentations; and give-away items such as pens and small purple footballs inscribed with normative messages.

In order to enhance these basic strategies, project staff engaged students in a variety of creative ways to solicit their input and feedback. This contact with students helped the project obtain more in-depth information from students regarding their reactions to Project Wellness media, their drinking and socializing behaviors, as well as the issues they believe are important to them as college students. Project staff got this student input through focus groups, mall intercepts, experiential learning and seminar classes, and online discussion groups. These activities involved the general student population and specifically targeted freshmen enrolled in the University Experience course, students from the Leadership Studies program, residence hall students, sorority and fraternity members, and students identified as influential people on campus. The in-depth information (see Tables 1 – 3) helped shape the design and wording of the media. Furthermore, in later years of the grant, this information influenced a shift away from messages designed to replicate the NIU and UA programs to messages more specific to the experiences of K-Staters.

Several research projects emerged based on both the qualitative and quantitative data collected by Project Wellness and from the aggregate data of the collaborative group’s yearly campus alcohol surveys. Articles prepared for publication include: "Marketing good student behavior: What the 'Tipping Point' can teach us," "College student
consumption (replicating what NIU and UA had produced), to emphasizing the protective strategies students typically use (based on quantitative survey data), to emphasizing the link between positive, normative alcohol-use behaviors and what students view as important to them as college students. See Figures 1 - 3 for examples of these phases of media development.

Figure 1 - Basic alcohol consumption message

Figure 2 - Protective strategy highlighted

Figure 3 – Link between an important issue and positive drinking norms

Quantitative Data

The 2002 survey results from all the Regents universities involved in the grant project suggested that the media campaigns were not substantially changing students’ perceptions about drinking or drinking behaviors. Based on that finding, the grant project directors decided to withhold media during the 2002/2003 academic year. A major reason given for this methodological change was to test the hypothesis that perhaps the projects had over saturated their respective campuses with normative messages. What would the 2003 survey data look like after a year of no advertisements, posters, banners and flyers?

Please note that up until the withdrawal of ads, Kansas State Project Wellness data had shown some promising trends. Although drinking rates had remained constant across years 2000 to 2002, significant positive changes had been observed in other important variables during the same period. For example, perceptions of some drinking norms were becoming more accurate. Perceptions of peers’ use of some protective behaviors were getting more accurate. Use of some protective behaviors was becoming more common. And two variables of self-report harm had decreased.

After a year of no print media, many of these desired trends had reversed. In terms of the efficacy of Kansas State Project Wellness, these patterns appear favorable. The reversal of positive trends after the no-media year suggest that when normative messages
protective strategies and drinking consequences,” and “College student drinking rate and consequences predict norm misperception.” In addition, a doctoral dissertation, a Master’s thesis, and two undergraduate scholars’ projects utilized Project Wellness data and methods.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Qualitative Data

Tables 1 - 3 list a summary of some of the in-depth qualitative information project staff gained from engaging students in the activities just described.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Table 3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences Students Want to Avoid When Partying</strong></td>
<td><strong>Protective Strategies Utilized by Students When Partying</strong></td>
<td><strong>What's Important to Students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Doing something embarrassing</td>
<td>• Designated drivers</td>
<td>• Academic success</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hangovers</td>
<td>• &quot;Buddy system&quot;</td>
<td>• Graduating, getting desired job</td>
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<td>• Late for or miss class/work</td>
<td>• Time management (e.g., partying only on nights without a test or work to follow the next day)</td>
<td>• Physical health</td>
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<td>• Weight gain and decreased physical fitness</td>
<td>• Limit money for alcohol</td>
<td>• Healthy relationships and friendships</td>
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<td>• Assault, accident, DUI (They said these are terrible but rarely experienced, so less of an imminent concern.)</td>
<td>• Idiosyncratic ways of &quot;knowing&quot; when to stop drinking (e.g., lips get numb, lights get brighter)</td>
<td>• Fun, stress relief, and letting go in spare time</td>
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| Media Development |

Project personnel were not expert in print media design and marketing at the beginning of the grant. They learned how to produce effective social marketing media and how to do market testing. Staff received expert training on conducting focus groups and excellent reference materials on how to design print media for social marketing campaigns.

About two years into the project, Project Wellness shifted its media messages. This change in direction took place gradually and was based on both the qualitative findings, as well as on what the staff was learning about effective social marketing. To summarize the change, the advertisements went from the basic information about normative alcohol
were being delivered, they were helping to correct misperceptions about campus alcohol use and to decrease harmful consequences among K-State students. (See Figures 4 - 6.)
FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Drinking has long been a part of college life. The majority of students enter college with some experience drinking alcohol and with a permissive attitude toward its use. Sentiments about college life favor alcohol consumption, and often the environments around universities encourage drinking. Therefore, reducing drinking rates on college campuses often proves to be a difficult task.

Kansas State Project Wellness has demonstrated some success at reducing alcohol-related harm, correcting students’ misperceptions about campus alcohol use, and promoting responsible drinking behaviors. Furthermore, the project staff has enjoyed using the positive, proactive approach characteristic of the Social Norms method. Project Wellness campus stakeholders—a group of K-State students, faculty and staff who acted as an advisory group for the project—have recommend that such an approach continue at K-State. Project personnel believe that it will continue in some form. Certainly this project has taught the campus that promoting the responsible and positive alcohol-use behaviors typically practiced by K-State students ought to be an integral part of campus efforts to prevent harm and enhance health at Kansas State University.

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Alcohol & Other Drug Education Service
Director: Bill Arck
214 Lafene
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Alcoholics Anonymous
Open Noon Meeting (Mon.-Sat.)
Westview Community Church
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