



The Higher Education Center
for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education

A Campus-community Coalition to Control Alcohol-related Problems Off Campus: An Environmental Management Case Study

Thomas L. Gebhardt, MA; Kimberly Kaphingst, MS; William DeJong, PhD

Abstract. The authors report on the effects of a university and community coalition in preventing problems related to college students' off-campus drinking. The Albany, New York, Committee on University and Community Relations used strategies based on an environmental-management approach that focuses on changing the environment in which individuals make decisions about alcohol consumption and related behaviors. Committee initiatives included improving enforcement of local laws and ordinances, creating a safety-awareness campaign for off-campus students, and developing a comprehensive advertising and beverage-service agreement with local tavern owners. The initiatives were associated with a decline in the number of alcohol-related problems in the community, as indicated by decreases in the number of off-campus noise ordinance reports filed by police and the number of calls to a university-maintained hotline for reporting off-campus problems. An environmental management approach, the authors suggest, has promise as an effective means of preventing alcohol-related problems among college students.

Key Words: alcohol, college, drugs, environmental management, prevention

Recent publicity about students' drinking has led college administrators to intensify their efforts to reduce high-risk drinking on campus. Traditional approaches, including freshman orientation, alcohol-awareness activities, peer education, and curriculum infusion, are necessary but insufficient for dealing with the problem. Also needed are efforts to change the institutional, community, and policy environment in which students make decisions about alcohol consumption and related behaviors. This approach, called *environmental management*, involves an analysis of environmental features that increase the risk of alcohol abuse, followed by a consensus-building initiative to change the environment and reduce those risks.¹

The primary focus of a campus-community coalition should be on curtailing the access of underage youths to alcohol and eliminating irresponsible alcohol sales and

marketing practices by local bars, restaurants, and liquor outlets.² Key objectives for such a coalition can include the following: (a) changes in local zoning ordinances to reduce the density of alcohol sales outlets and irresponsible sales and marketing practices; (b) a community-wide program for responsible beverage service; and (c) enhanced and publicized police enforcement of the age 21 drinking and drunk driving laws. The wisdom of such an approach has been reinforced by new research demonstrating the potential power of community-based coalitions to eliminate mixed-message environments that invite irresponsible alcohol use.³ What remains untested is the effect of coalition-driven policy changes on college students' drinking.

The case study we report here examines the impact of the Committee on University and Community Relations, a coalition of representatives from colleges, universities, and various other groups and organizations from the Albany, New York, community. The committee was established in 1990 in response to increasing community complaints and media publicity about problems resulting from off-campus student drinking, including noise, litter, vandalism, and other public safety disturbances. The committee is responsible for developing alcohol and other drug prevention programs, with the ultimate goal of increasing student safety off campus and improving campus-community relations.

The committee chairman is the director of the Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs of the University at Albany, State University of New York, who is also the first author of this article. Groups represented on the committee include students, landowners, neighborhood associations, individual tavern owners, the Empire State Restaurant and Tavern Association, the Albany and Rensselaer County Restaurant and Tavern Association, the Albany Police Department, the University at Albany Police Department, the Albany Fire Department, the Albany Common

Council, the College of St Rose, Albany Medical College, the Albany College of Pharmacy, the Junior College of Albany/SAGE, and the Division of Student Affairs of the University at Albany.

The committee's central mission is to work with the Albany police and fire departments, student groups, and neighborhood associations to identify and address quality-of-life problems off campus. To facilitate this work, the committee, through the auspices of the University at Albany, has maintained a telephone hotline since 1991 for registering and responding to complaints about students' behavior.

In addition, the committee has launched several safety-related initiatives, including the following:

1. Providing educational fliers that inform students about the penalties for using altered or false identifications (IDs) to purchase alcohol and for violating the City of Albany's noise ordinance and the state's open-container law.
2. Distributing door tags in off-campus student neighborhoods each fall and spring to provide information about various laws and ordinances that become effective if students host parties in their apartments.
3. Delivering small brochures to off-campus students door-to-door to alert them to public safety issues in the community. Concerns about safety have been a unifying agent for students and other community residents.
4. Sponsoring an "Off-Campus Safety Awareness Day" when the university recruits students to participate in neighborhood "Walk and Watch" crime prevention programs. During the event, students also receive personal, property, and fire safety information.
5. Encouraging rental property owners to adhere to laws that require them to provide safe and secure apartments to students. This is done at an annual meeting each August with landowners and later on an ongoing basis.
6. Providing brochures on community safety and off-campus behavior each fall to students living in university residence halls. These students will frequently visit off-campus neighborhoods.
7. Holding a meeting with fraternity and sorority presidents at the start of each school year at which university officials discuss alcohol laws, safety issues, and off-campus behavior.
8. Having the Albany Police Department maintain an increased presence in off-campus student neighborhoods at the beginning of each school year as a deterrence strategy.

Thomas L. Gebhardt is director of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs, University at Albany, State University of New York, and chairperson of the Committee on University and Community Relations. Kimberly Kaphingst and William DeJong are with the Department of Health and Social Behavior, Harvard School of Public Health. Ms Kaphingst is a doctoral student, and Dr DeJong, a lecturer, is also Director of the US Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, which is based at the Education Development Center, Newton, Massachusetts.

9. Assuring that the University at Albany's director of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs receives reports from the Albany Police Department whenever a university student is either arrested for or is the victim of an off-campus crime. This information sharing makes it possible for university officials to provide follow-up victim assistance and also serves as an informal barometer of off-campus alcohol and safety issues.

In 1995, the committee launched the "Cooperating Tavern" program. A key feature of the program is the Tavern Owner Advertisement Agreement, which was developed with a representative of the Empire State Restaurant and Tavern Association and the owners of 14 local bars and restaurants in traditional off-campus student neighborhoods.

Tavern owners who sign the voluntary agreement promise to meet the following guidelines in designing their advertising: (a) to include a statement asking patrons to be respectful of neighborhood residents and to behave responsibly and in a civil manner when leaving the establishment; (b) to emphasize the legal necessity of being 21 years of age or older, with a valid form of identification, to obtain alcohol; (c) to avoid language or illustrations that promote irresponsible alcohol consumption (eg, "Toxic Thursdays," "Sponsored by Drinkers Unlimited," "Penny-Til-You-Pee Beer Specials"); and (d) to promote nonalcoholic beverages and food specials as much as alcoholic beverage specials. A copy of a Cooperating Tavern sign is provided to the participating taverns for display, and the owners are given a Cooperating Tavern logo to be included in tavern advertisements.

In addition, the tavern owners agree to comply with both community and campus policies concerning posting and distributing advertisements. Committee members monitor on-campus publications and bulletin boards, identify advertisements that violate the agreement, and then work with the tavern owners to revise the ads. Most of the advertisements that violate the agreement are created by students who host parties at the bars, not by the bar management. On-campus compliance with the guidelines is now nearly 100%.

The committee, working with the Albany police and fire departments and the state liquor licensing authority, also meets regularly with tavern and restaurant owners and off-premises beverage distributors to discuss responsible beverage service. These meetings provide tavern owners with instructions about existing alcohol service laws and promote discussions of strategies for minimizing underage drinking.

Stricter law enforcement is another focus of the committee's alcohol-use prevention efforts. Committee members have encouraged the Albany police to arrest students using false IDs. The committee purchased special lights to help tavern owners detect altered IDs and provides updated information on the latest technology for detecting false IDs.

METHOD

As we have noted, the Committee on University and Community Relations, through the auspices of the Univer-

sity at Albany, maintains a telephone hotline for registering and responding to complaints about student drinking and other off-campus problems. The hotline is a dedicated telephone line that is known to both long-term neighborhood residents and students. No changes in publicity about the hotline have occurred from the fall of 1991 to the present.

Calls to the hotline are answered personally by the director of the Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs of the University at Albany and are kept confidential. Between 1991 and 1999, problems reported through the hotline were typically related to alcohol misuse, noise, trash, and litter. In addition, most of the calls concerned off-campus parties involving alcohol or "tavern traffic"—individuals returning from taverns late at night or traveling between taverns and parties.

Police reports on violations of the City of Albany's noise ordinance were also collected, using the protocol established by the University at Albany's Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs and the Albany Police Department. The ordinance limits noise beyond a residence 24 hours a day, but police enforcement is especially keen from 8 PM to 6 AM. The protocol calls for the police to notify the Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs whenever a student is responsible for an ordinance violation.

The Albany Police Department allows the University at Albany's director of the Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs to examine police records to develop tabulations of alcohol-related arrests involving university students. Key offenses include using false IDs (primarily by altering the indicated date of birth on a driver's license), criminal impersonation (using another person's driver's license to purchase alcohol illegally), possession in public of an open alcoholic beverage container, indecent exposure, and driving while intoxicated.

RESULTS

Off-campus Hotline Calls

Calls to the complaint hotline concerning off-campus student drinking and related problems decreased markedly from the 1991/92 academic year, when the hotline was first installed, to the 1998/99 academic year (see Table 1). During the 1991/92 school year, 63 complaints were registered. The number of complaints dropped substantially in the 1992/93 and 1993/94 school years. Progress continued through the 1998/99 school year, when there were only 10 registered complaints, an 84% drop since 1991/92. The declines were especially sharp in the fall semesters, from a high of 45 calls in fall 1991 to a low of 5 calls in fall 1998. Results from the spring semesters were less dramatic, but consistent, with 18 complaints in spring 1992, but only 5 complaints in spring 1998 and 1999.

Off-campus Noise Ordinance Reports

Decreases also occurred in the number of off-campus noise ordinance violation reports involving University at Albany students filed by the Albany Police Department (see Table 2). The police department reported 40 violations dur-

TABLE 1
Calls to the University at Albany's Complaint Hotline Concerning Off-campus Student Drinking and Related Problems, 1991-1999

Academic year	Number of complaints		
	Fall	Spring	Total
1991/92	45	18	63
1992/93	22	15	37
1993/94	27	13	40
1994/95	17	6	23
1995/96	16	8	24
1996/97	11	9	20
1997/98	8	5	13
1998/99	5	5	10

TABLE 2
Noise Ordinance Reports Involving University at Albany Students Filed by the Albany Police Department, 1992-1999

Academic year	Number of complaints
1992/93	40
1993/94	51
1994/95	29
1995/96	15
1996/97	43
1997/98	7
1998/99	7

ing the 1992/93 school year, followed by 51 during the 1993/94 school year. Violation reports dropped off substantially for 2 years, followed by a major increase during the 1996/97 school year. Reasons for this increase are unclear. Both the 1997/98 and 1998/99 school years were relatively quiet, with only 7 complaints filed in both years. These data are somewhat erratic from year to year, but, in general, the trend has been toward ever-declining problems with noise ordinance violations.

Alcohol-related Arrests

We tabulated arrest data from the Albany Police Department for the academic years 1992/93 through 1998/99. Overall, the total number of alcohol-related arrests of university students showed a sharp increase beginning in the 1996/97 school year (see Table 3). The number of arrests for possession of forged or altered IDs also increased during this time, as did the number of arrests for criminal impersonation with intent to purchase alcohol. The number of arrests for other offenses peaked during the 1997/98 school year, but then dropped sharply during 1998/99. Reasons for this complex pattern of arrest data are unclear.

COMMENT

TABLE 3
Alcohol-related Arrests of University at Albany
Students by the Albany Police Department,
1992–1999

Academic year	Number of arrests		Total†
	False ID	Impersonation	
1992/93	11	0	14
1993/94	5	0	14
1994/95	8	0	8
1995/96	16	1	11
1996/97	48	7	75
1997/98	41	7	84
1998/99	24	3	35

† Arrest total includes the following alcohol-related offenses: using false ID, criminal impersonation with intent to purchase alcohol illegally, possession in public of an open alcoholic beverage container, indecent exposure, and driving while intoxicated.

This case study suggests that an environmental management approach has promise as an effective means of preventing alcohol-related problems at the college level. On the basis of the field data we have reported here, it appears that Albany's Committee on University and Community Relations may have had a substantial effect in reducing off-campus neighborhood problems resulting from student misconduct. Over the past several years, coinciding with the work of the committee, the number of off-campus noise ordinance reports filed by police and the number of calls to the university-maintained hotline for reporting off-campus problems decreased.

These data are not definitive, of course. Clearly, there may be reasons other than improvements in student conduct that the number of hotline calls declined (eg, turnover in neighborhood residents, discouragement over the problem, or growing student reluctance to complain about fellow students). Similarly, data on police noise ordinance reports are notoriously difficult to interpret because of variations in police tactics or decision making over time.⁴ However, confirmation of the results can be found in local news accounts, which have included interviews with long-term neighborhood residents. These residents have consistently noted improvements in neighborhood conditions since the committee was formed.⁵ In addition, neighborhood association leaders have reported to the committee that the situation regarding house parties and tavern traffic has improved dramatically.

The complaint hotline helps the University at Albany's Office of Personal Safety and Off-Campus Affairs monitor students' off-campus behaviors and identify repeat offenders. With the permission of the complainants, officials of the University at Albany are able to take immediate and appropriate action in response to reported problems. Over time, analyses of the frequency and type of complaints have allowed the committee to identify the need for additional programs and initiatives to deal with recurring neighbor-

hood problems. For example, police and university officials discovered that student hosts of off-campus drinking parties that were typically attracting between 100 and 300 participants were charging admission fees without a liquor license. The committee then launched a focused effort to eliminate this practice.

Initially, the committee encountered several obstacles. Some Albany-area colleges were reluctant to join the committee, thereby admitting publicly that they had alcohol-related problems. Some community residents saw the committee as a public relations ploy by the University at Albany and did not foresee real change. Tavern owners were reluctant to join the effort, believing that the committee was planning to institute mandatory advertising restrictions. They also knew that some community residents were intent on getting rid of the neighborhood taverns. Through hard work, however, members of the committee eventually reached compromises that benefited all of the participants.

Committee members attribute their success to a number of factors, including (a) active support of the city's political leadership and the president of the University at Albany; (b) an open membership policy, leading to the involvement of several key stake holders; (c) media publicity to increase the visibility of the committee's work and build community support; (d) ongoing dialogue and communication; (e) a spirit of cooperation; (f) flexibility and a willingness to compromise; and (g) a long-term commitment to the program.⁶ Members meet monthly to discuss their goals and activities, but they have also established a strong network of communication outside of these regular meetings.

Albany's town-gown coalition confirms the general wisdom that community mobilization, involving a mix of educational, civic, religious, and governmental agencies, is a key to successful prevention of substance abuse among college students. Essential to making community-based programs work is the formation of coalitions and interagency links that lead to a coordinated approach, with adequate planning and a clear division of responsibilities among coalition members.¹ Where such programs do not exist, higher education officials can take the lead in forming similar citizen-led coalitions and moving them toward an environmental approach to prevention.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Preparation of this article was supported by US Department of Education contract SS95013001 to Education Development Center, Newton, MA. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Department of Education.

REFERENCES

1. DeJong W, Vince-Whitman C, Colthurst T, et al. *Environmental Management*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention; 1998.
2. Erenberg DF, Hacker GA. *Last Call for High-Risk Bar Promotions That Target College Students: A Community Action Guide*. Washington, DC: Center for Science in the Public Interest; 1997.
3. Holder HD, Saltz RF, Grube JW, Voas RB, Gruenewald PJ, Treno AJ. A community prevention trial to reduce alcohol-involved accidental injury and death: Overview. *Addiction*. 1997;92(supp 2):155-172.
4. Silberman CE. *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice*. New York: Vintage; 1980.
5. McGuire M. Two neighborhoods tout hard-won harmony. *Albany Times Union* (May 23, 1997): A1, A5.
6. Gebhardt TL. Town-gown cooperation. *Prevention File*. 1998; Spring:2-5.