

Research and Evaluation of Social Norms Campaigns

This section is intended to address several specific research and evaluation issues that are particular to social norms marketing campaigns.

For general evaluation resources, please see www.higheredcenter.org/eval

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What is the role of data collection in these campaigns?

An important aspect of the social norms marketing (SNM) approach is that each school uses data collected from its own students to construct the campaign messages. It is well established that students consistently overestimate the extent to which their peers are drinking. Therefore, they will at first resist believing the actual drinking rates disseminated in SNM campaigns because the lower drinking rates contradict their perceptions of what is true. If campaign planners use data from another school or from the state at large, students may use this fact as a basis for disbelieving the message, asserting that the drinking rates disseminated through the campaign messages are too low for *their* campus. Therefore, presenting them with data actually collected on their campus increases the believability of the messages.

What data must be collected?

As noted earlier, social norms marketing campaigns are designed to correct misperceptions about how much students are actually drinking. Thus, the first step in conducting a SNM campaign is to measure the extent of these misperceptions by conducting a survey to ask students how much they are actually drinking and how much they think other students are drinking. The data about actual levels of drinking on campus will be used to construct the messages for the social norms

marketing campaign. At minimum, surveys should also ask about alcohol-related negative consequences and student demographics.

Documenting misperceptions, actual drinking levels, and alcohol-related consequences at the beginning of the campaign also will help campaign planners to know whether the campaign is having any effect. That is, if the campaign is working, post-campaign surveys will show more accurate beliefs about peer behavior and reductions in alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and related consequences.

What surveys can I use?

Most colleges and universities start with a particular instrument, such as the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, and then add questions to make the data more meaningful to their campus. Other colleges and universities choose to develop their own instruments.

The Higher Education Center has several publications designed to help you conduct campus surveys. You may also want to seek the assistance of a professor on campus or hire a professional evaluator.

For more information on possible survey instruments, see [Selecting the Right Tool](#)

For more information on conducting surveys, see [Methods for Assessing Student Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)

For more information on the Core Survey, see [Core Institute](#)

For assistance in locating an evaluator, see the Higher Education Center's [Evaluator Database](#)

Constructing social norms messages

Whichever survey instrument is used, it is important to include several questions that can be analyzed to develop the social norms message. We asked some colleges and universities that are actually conducting social norms campaigns to describe their process of developing social norms messages.

University of Oregon

The New View 2000 project at the University of Oregon targets first-year students through a multi-pronged effort to correct misperceptions of actual alcohol use rates and to create campus norms that reinforce and enhance a safe and healthy social and learning environment at the university. Project staff used data collected via an annual survey

conducted by The UO Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) for the UO Student Health Center to create their "80% of UO Students have 4 or fewer" social norms message campaign. The annual survey is intended to assess student satisfaction with the Health Center and to track health-related trends in student attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Data were obtained through three questions on the survey:

1. On average, how many days per week do you drink alcohol?
(This question includes a category for students who do not drink at all)
2. On the days that you drink, how many drinks do you average per day?
3. On how many days per week do you have 5 or more drinks per session?

According to the UO Student Health Survey (1997), of the 67.8 % of students who reported drinking, 80% had 4 or fewer drinks.

The university has also used the Core survey to direct its social norms messages. For example, for an ad that tied academics/GPA with alcohol they used the following question: "Please indicate how often you have experienced the following due to your drinking or drug use during the last year...Part b. performed poorly on a test or important project." 82.6% of first-year UO students didn't let alcohol or other drugs get in the way of performing well on tests or important projects.

They also used the question, "Please indicate how often you have experienced the following due to your drinking or drug use during the last year...Part c. Been in trouble with police, residence hall, or other college authorities." 79% of first year UO student have never been in trouble with police, residence hall, or other college authorities.

For a Valentine message, they used the question: "Do you believe that alcohol has any of the effects...Part m. Makes me sexier." 87.6% of first-year UO students reported that drinking alcohol does not make them feel sexier.

Rutgers University

To develop its social norms messages, Rutgers University uses a survey instrument titled *Personal Report of Student Perceptions (PRSP): A Drug and Alcohol Survey* (Lederman, Stewart, Kennedy, Powell, Laitman & Goodhart, 1998). The specific question used to develop the norms message is:

"The last time I drank alcohol, I had ____ drink (s)." (Enter 0 if you do not drink).

(One drink equals one 12 oz. beer, or one 5 oz. glass of wine, or one 1.5 oz mixed drink or shot of liquor).

To develop the messages "2/3s of Rutgers students stop at 3 or fewer," and "1 in 5 don't drink at all," project staff determined the percentage of respondents that drank 0 drinks, 1 drink, 2 drinks, 3 drinks, 4 drinks, and so forth. The percentage of students who answered "0" to this question determined the "1 in 5 don't drink at all" message. They added this percentage to the percentage of students who drank 1 drink, 2 drinks and 3 drinks to create the "2/3s stop at 3 or fewer" message.

Pre-testing the ads

Once the project team has developed messages and constructed the ads or other campaign materials, it is critical that they be tested with the target audience to ascertain whether they are understandable, believable, and relevant to your audience.

Pre-testing can be conducted using many methods, including focus groups, self-administered questionnaires, central location intercept interviews, theater testing, and gatekeeper review. Resources for using these methodologies are listed below.

A caveat about pretesting campaign messages in general and SNM messages in particular: audience feedback should be one factor in developing the messages, but not the only one. For example, as noted above, initially students may resist believing the actual levels of drinking on their campus. Thus, during pre-testing, students may state that the drinking levels in the messages are not believable. This is to be expected, and campaign planners should not change the messages based on that feedback. On the other hand, if pre-testing yields the feedback that the locations in the ads do not look like the campus or the students pictured do not look like typical students, these problems should be corrected.

For information on developing and testing messages, several good resources are available.

A Practical Guide to Alcohol Abuse Prevention: A Campus Case Study in Implementing Social Norms and Environmental Management Approaches by Johannessen, Collins, Mills-Novoa, and Glider describes how the project staff at the University of Arizona developed and tested messages for their SNM campaign.

To order visit our publications page at www.higheredcenter.org/pubs/.

An excellent step-by-step guide to developing messages is provided in *Making Health Communications Work*, written by Elaine Bratic Arkin and distributed by the National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Communications. This publication includes information about each of the pre-testing methods named above. To access this publication, go to http://rex.nci.nih.gov/INTRFACE_GIFS/INFO_PATS_INTR_DOC.htm. Select "Communication and Education Resources," then "Program Planning Publications," and then "Making Health Communications Work."

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) also publishes materials about campaign developing and testing. These can be found at www.health.org:80. Examples include:

- "A Key Step in Developing Prevention Methods is to Obtain Expert and Gatekeeper Reviews" (1994), www.health.org:80/pubs/makepub/tab9.htm
- "You Can Avoid Common Errors as You Develop Prevention Materials" (1994), www.health.org:80/pubs/makepub/tab8.htm
- "Pretesting is Essential; You Can Choose From Various Methods" (1994), www.health.org:80/pubs/makepub/tab6.htm
- "You Can Manage Focus Groups Effectively for Maximum Impact" (1994), www.health.org:80/pubs/makepub/tab2.htm
- Social Marketing primer: www.health.org:80/pubs/PRIMER/smarket.htm

Evaluating Project Outcomes

To find out whether the campaign is having an effect, it is important to conduct a follow-up survey. The timing of the second survey will depend on when you initiated the campaign. The post-campaign survey should contain all of the same questions that were found on the pre-campaign survey as well as some additional questions on exposure to the campaign.

Measuring Exposure to Campaign Messages

The post-campaign survey should measure whether students were exposed to the campaign messages, so you know what proportion of students actually saw the messages. Colleges and universities have taken various approaches to measuring exposure to messages.

Below are possible questions to measure exposure to norms messages. The particular questions used will depend on the channels your school uses to disseminate the messages. The following are some sample questions, based primarily on the questionnaires used by University of

Arizona and Washington State University, as well as other questions taken from evaluations of media campaigns in general.

1. *Exposure to norms ads:*

Have you ever seen this ad before? [include picture of ad]

or

Have you seen the message "most [x%] [school] students have [4] or fewer drinks when they party"? (Y/N). You might also ask about specific locations if appropriate, e.g. in school newspaper, on flyer around campus.

2. *Exposure to norms messages through channels other than ads:*

A. Did you receive a copy of a poster about alcohol use on campus? (Y/N)

B. If yes, did you hang it in your dorm room? (Y/N)

C. If yes, did a student advocate give you \$5 for hanging it in your dorm room? (Y/N)

or

Did you receive a greeting card (or frisbee or mousepad) with the message [include message]? (Y/N)

If your campaign has other mechanisms to reach students, you could ask about those if you think a large enough number of students might have been exposed to the message that way.

3. *General exposure to media channels where you have the norms messages.*

Typically, how often do you:

A. Read the *Evergreen* (campus newspaper)

B. Listen to KZUU (student radio station)

C. Listen to KUGR (campus radio station)

D. Read health-related flyers

E. Use the Student Health Center

F. Use health/wellness programs

(response options: never, once a semester, once a month, once every 2 weeks, 1-2 times a week, 3-4 times a week, every day)

4. *Exposure to other aspects of your AOD program:*

Have you attended a [name of AOD or norms] workshop this year? (Y/N)

And/or

Did you attend [name of orientation program covering AOD issues]? (Y/N)

5. *Comprehension of norms ads:*

Using a multiple-choice format, test whether students understand the norms messages, for example:

Does the message "64% of U of A students have 4 or fewer drinks when they party" mean:

- A. 64% of U of A students party
- B. All U of A students drink 4 or fewer drinks at parties
- C. On a typical party occasion, about 2/3 of U of A students drink 4 drinks or less
- D. 36% of U of A students drink 4 or fewer drinks when they party

Collecting Contextual Data

Finally, in order to determine whether the campaign had an impact, it is important to document other factors in the campus and community that could influence high-risk drinking. This information includes prevention programs, policies, level of enforcement, alcohol promotion, events, high-profile incidents, and other activities. Without information about these other factors, it could be argued that it was other factors, rather than the SNM campaign, that resulted in changes in drinking or related consequences.