

ABSTRACT

Bowling Green State University has taken an innovative approach to the problem of high risk drinking among college students, with an emphasis on first-year students (most underage), members of Greek organizations and athletes. The program, based largely on the works of Berkowitz and Perkins, is a peer-based misperception program designed to change attitudes, behaviors and the campus social environment.

The program incorporates small group survey and focus group research to uncover and dispel misperceptions, or imaginary norms, among peer groups, such as a sorority, fraternity, athletic team or members of a residence hall. Results from focus groups and the campus-wide Core Alcohol and Drug Survey show reductions in the overall high-risk, or binge drinking rate, and decreases in misperceptions surrounding alcohol use.

The peer-based misperception program is one effective component of a comprehensive alcohol program at BGSU. The institution's overall approach to AOD includes: policies and on-campus judicial accountability; campus-community coalitions on alcohol and civility; involvement in statewide prevention efforts; faculty and staff programming; peer education program; alternative activities, residence and classroom programming; and an alcohol and other drug counselor.

Award funds will be used to continue the program at BGSU, to implement it at other institutions, to reduce the overall high-risk "binge" drinking rate and to reduce the gap between reported and true patterns and behaviors. Funds will also be used to develop misperception programming in Ohio high schools and to conduct further researcher among peer groups.

1 □ SIGNIFICANCE OF PROGRAM BEING NOMINATED

Bowling Green State University Peer-Based Misperception Program

Almost all universities have developed policies and education programs addressing alcohol issues, but very few can claim success in altering perceptions and behaviors associated with drinking among college students. This is because most campus health and prevention centers offer traditional information to students that convey the physical and psychological effects about alcohol, and the information is generally

disseminated to a mass audience. There has been little evidence indicating positive results from these approaches.

Since the early 1980s, numerous alcohol education programs have sprung up on college campuses, using various techniques and strategies to combat student alcohol abuse (Gonzalez & Broughton, 1986). A few programs have been successful in affecting the knowledge and general attitudes of students (Gonzalez, 1980); however, even fewer programs can boast long-term success in altering perceptions of alcohol use by students (Bukoski, 1986; Hanson, 1982; Kraft, 1988; Oblander, 1984).

Most prevention programs offer traditional information to students conveying physical and psychological effects of alcohol (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1987; Dean, 1982; Kinder, Pape & Walfish 1980). The goal of these programs is to increase awareness of the effects and consequences of alcohol use in order to change attitudes and in turn lead to a decrease in alcohol use. In essence, most prevention programs are aimed at educating students and enforcing university alcohol-related policies, as many college students who consume alcohol are underage drinkers. Research has shown this approach to have very little impact in changing the attitudes, behaviors and social environment of college campuses.

In 1997, Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green (BGSU), in Ohio, took an innovative approach to the problem of high-risk or binge drinking. BGSU developed a peer-based misperceptions program to change the campus social environment. The approach is unique because:

- a. it is the first university funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services in which the university health educator *and* a faculty member are leading the efforts of a comprehensive program that involves students, faculty, staff, administration and the surrounding community;
- b. theory and research have guided the development of the misperception program and overall comprehensive plan;
- c. the use of audience segmentation allows for a more focused and personalized program thus allowing for innovative means to reach these audiences;

df the use of evaluation throughout the misperception program continues to provide feedback on the program's success.

In essence, this extensive and comprehensive program emphasizes social marketing strategies and environmental interventions to dispel misperceptions regarding alcohol use among college students.

Put simply, a misperception can be defined as “a misunderstanding.” In essence, it is the difference between the perceptions and realities of a given behavior. In the case of college students or any group, values and beliefs are formed through such factors as peer influences and group interaction. These values and beliefs then become the norms, or the standards, held by that group. And certainly, the college environment has its defined norms for drinking as well as for behavior in general.

Yet, according to Berkowitz and Perkins, leading researchers in alcohol education, many of these beliefs about alcohol use are incorrect. According to Perkins (1991), the phenomenon of students misperceiving peer norms is ultimately a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, we need to consider that drinking patterns, as well as other peer influences, may actually result from *perceptions* of peer attitudes and behaviors rather than the *actual* peer behavior. In their extensive research, Perkins and Berkowitz offer approaches to reducing misperceptions of peer norms, however, they fail to provide detailed programming ideas to change or alter these misperceptions held by students.

As a result, BGSU developed an alternative to the traditional informational prevention programming – a peer-based misperception program, grounded in theory and research data gathered at this institution.

This peer-based misperception program at BGSU can be replicated at other institutions. The process is relatively simple and inexpensive, although time consuming. The program involves both quantitative and qualitative methods and can be used in a variety of settings – meaning the survey and focus group instrument can be adapted to a variety of audience segments. For example, the misperception survey instrument was used to study the student population at large as well as *specific* target audiences such as members of sororities, fraternities, student organizations and residence halls (Appendix A). The value of audience segmentation allows for a greater understanding of peer groups and what influences are affecting their drinking patterns and behaviors.

After analyzing survey data about patterns, perceptions and behaviors of a particular peer-group, a focus group discussion is held to discuss the peer-group survey results and to dispel the misperceptions held by that group (Appendix B). The focus group discussion also includes an alcohol education component and discussions on university policies, the campus culture and alternative programming ideas for university students.

Therefore, a peer-based misperception program allows both researchers and health educators to achieve the following:

- e. to provide an alternative to traditional mass-audience dissemination of alcohol-related information;
- f. to dispel misperceptions regarding alcohol use and behaviors among high risk groups through the use of interpersonal communication techniques;
- g. to replicate the peer-based misperception campaign at other universities using a survey instrument and focus group agenda that can be adapted to specific target audiences;
- h. to provide an innovative program that addresses social and environmental factors that contribute to high risk drinking.

One of the strengths of the peer-based misperception program is that the program is interdisciplinary, requiring the collaboration of a faculty researcher with expertise in social marketing/communications and the university health educator. This collaboration has allowed for tremendous institutional support and has been recommended as a model to other Ohio institutions.

The results of this program will enable other universities to implement a peer-based misperceptions program as well as gather both quantitative and qualitative data from segmented publics within the university population. This information will be valuable in looking at trends across campuses nationwide and dispelling some of the misperceptions associated with high-risk drinking patterns and behaviors. The results of this program will be disseminated in the following ways that will benefit other higher education institutions:

- videoconference (see budget and budget narrative for details)

- presentations and workshops at other higher educational institutions in the Midwest (see budget and budget narrative for details)
- on-line newsletter produced at BGSU
- participate in already established list serves at institutions throughout U.S.
- Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth (continued collaboration with the Ohio 31 colleges and universities involved)
- contact person (will serve as key contact person for other institutions as well as media relations)
- presentations at national and regional health, higher education and communication conferences
- refereed papers submitted to health, higher education and communication conferences and refereed journals
- report required by the U.S. Department of Education, disseminated on-line
- media (including news releases, feature stories and news conference)
- misperception pamphlet disseminated to Ohio high school counselors

2□ **DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM NOMINATED**

One of the most widespread alternatives to the traditional informational prevention programming on college campuses is peer-based alcohol education programming. The theoretical rationale for such a program is based on social learning theory. The assumptions here include: a) a similarity between the model and observer will enhance the observer's learning; b) students may learn responsible drinking behavior more effectively from peers than from authority figures; and c) use of peer pressure may enforce responsible norms of drinking behavior (Massey and Neidigh, 1990).

Social learning theorists would argue that behavior is learned through two processes. The first process involves direct experiences with the environment, such as the college campus; in this way behaviors are learned through a series of rewards and punishments. Direct experiences would also include the campus "culture." William DeJong, Ph.D., director of the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention asserts that programs need to address the campus environment or "culture" to counteract high-

risk drinking (Prevention Pipeline, 1997). Examples of cultural influences would include posters, ads and various paraphernalia displayed in campus bookstores.

The second process involves learning through observing *others'* behaviors. Such direct influences may at first involve the student's family and/or community of origin. Later, new college students entering an unfamiliar campus environment may learn about the consequences or rewards of their behavior more indirectly. Such a socialization perspective asserts that individuals will think and act based on how their peers think and act, especially with those in close proximity and with whom they have extended interaction (Perkins, 1991). Perkins further explains that this is because "peers set and maintain the normative standards and definitions of acceptable and valuable behavior" (p. 12). In this case, a student who recognizes heavy drinking behavior as unacceptable may actually embrace this behavior because it is in some way reinforced or rewarded by his or her peer group.

This example also illustrates the importance of differentiating between objective and subjective perceptions. Past studies of alcohol use among college students have focused heavily on the objective conditions – a descriptive analysis of actual drinking patterns and behaviors at the expense of noting important subjective conditions, such as perceived norms. Subjective perceptions are important because people act on their perceptions of the world in addition to acting with the real world (Perkins, 1991). Together, objective and subjective perceptions become crucial in understanding peer norms from a social-psychological perspective. Therefore, the study of both objective and subjective components of social learning theory may be useful in helping researchers, health educators and others at higher education institutions understand the importance of distinguishing between actual and perceived norms within this peer intensive environment. Thus, the peer-based misperception program offered here is based on the argument that the subjective perceptions of students, whether they are accurate or inaccurate, cannot be ignored in favor of an objective approach alone.

In further support of this theoretical foundation, studies have shown that peers provide the strongest influence on college-aged drinking, and the "the development of individual drinking patterns during college takes place in the context of norms for alcohol use

established and maintained within immediate peer groups” (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1987, p. 71). What is being suggested is that alcohol education programming should link the relationship of individual drinking styles to peer norms. Thus, Berkowitz and Perkins conclude that changes in alcohol use patterns among college students need to incorporate social-psychological influences to develop prevention and intervention strategies that involve peer networks.

One of the problems in using peer-based alcohol education programs is that peers are found to perpetuate the myths and misperceptions surrounding alcohol use. For example, a study of resident advisors (RAs) concluded that RAs were just as likely as other students to perceive the campus population as heavier drinkers than they actually were. As a result, “RAs may be guilty of helping perpetuate myths and misperceptions regarding alcohol use insofar as they are effective agents in socializing student opinions and perceptions of the campus environment” (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1986, p. 152).

The evidence presented here leads us to the conclusion that peer-based programming can only be effective if the peers first understand true drinking norms instead of perceived norms. Higher education institutions across the nation need to recognize the impact that the peer environment has in shaping normative behavior and perpetuating perceived norms from adolescence on. Knowing that peer influences may be based on perceived rather than actual behavior sets up new directions for programs. One direction suggested here is to use peer-based programming with small groups of college students in order to dispel misperceptions surrounding alcohol use and to discuss the influence of the campus environment.

Dr. Terry Rentner, an assistant professor in the School of Communications Studies, began a study of misperceptions and peer-based programming in 1994 at BGSU (approximately 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students). The study included both quantitative and qualitative methods. Target groups studied at the university included: Undergraduate Student Government (n=15), Student Orientation Board (n=15), second-year resident advisers (n=15) and freshman from a residence hall (n=132). Each of these groups participated in both survey research and a focus group discussion, and each target group was studied independently of the others.

Members of each organization or group were randomly divided into two groups. Those in each of the first groups completed a survey asking them to describe their drinking patterns and the drinking patterns of

only that group's members. The two variables used for this study were: 1) how often do **you** drink three or more times a week, and 2) how often do **your group members** drink three or more times a week.

After the survey results were compiled, a focus group discussion was conducted with the remaining members from each organization or group. Survey results were shared with focus subgroup members and misperceptions were discussed.

In order to have a reference group for comparison, the results of this study were compared with the campus-wide Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (funded by the U.S. Department of Education) given at BGSU in 1992. This was a phone survey randomly administered to 500 undergraduates. Results from this study indicated that 23% of students campus-wide drink 3 or more times per week. However, the perception of a majority of students was that 73% of the students campus-wide drink 3 or more times per week. (Note: The Core Alcohol and Drug Survey was administered again in 1997 and spring 1999).

The current study yielded similar discrepancies in reports of actual alcohol use versus perceived use. In all four organizations or groups, members who took the survey ranked their peers in that group as consuming alcohol more often than they actually did (Rentner, 1997). For example, 7 % of second-year resident advisors actually drank 3 or more times a week but the perception was that 63% drank 3 or more times a week.

The results from each groups' surveys were later shared in a focus group discussion with those members who did not participate in the survey. In all four groups, members found that the true drinking norms of their peers and campus-wide were lower than those perceived by the group members.

Focus group facilitators then led discussions on these misperceptions and the influence of the campus culture. Facilitators also asked group members what types of messages they would respond to and for campus programming suggestions. In 1997, the "I Don't Drink As Much As You Think" misperception campaign was launched using creative mass media and interpersonal appeals.

The peer-based misperception program using the combination of small group survey and focus group discussions was again implemented during the 1998-99 academic year. This program targeted athletic teams, fraternities, sororities and first year residents – all 12 groups identified by the 1997 Core Alcohol

and Drug Survey at BGSU as high-risk “binge” drinkers. The findings from the BGSU survey were consistent with national findings in identifying high-risk groups.

Comparisons of the 1997 and 1999 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey at BGSU resulted in positive findings of the misperception program:

- 2.5% reduction in the “binge” drinking rate
- 1.5% decrease in the number of students who think the average BGSU student uses alcohol once a week or more.
- 2% decrease in respondents who said they saw drinking as central in the social life of fraternities
- 1% decrease in respondents who said they saw drinking as central in the social life of sororities
- 1.5% increase in number of students who would prefer not to have alcohol at parties
- 1.5% reduction in “bragging” about drinking
- 4% reduction in number of students who heard others bragging about drinking
- 4% reduction in number of students who experienced peer pressure to drink
- 2% reduction in number of students who held a drink so that people would stop bothering them about drinking
- 3% more students said their friends would disapprove if they had 5 or more drinks in one sitting

As the data indicate, gaps between the perceived norms and true norms are being corrected.

The goals of peer-based misperception program are as follows:

- to reduce the overall high-risk “binge” drinking rate
- to reduce the gap between the reported (perceived) drinking patterns and behaviors and the true patterns and behaviors
- to utilize the peer-based misperception program to conduct further research and evaluation, and to generate campus-wide programming alternatives to drinking
- to increase the reach of the misperception program primarily within the high risk groups of first year students, athletes and members of Greek Affairs
- to incorporate misperception programming in Ohio high schools to reduce the “imaginary” norms or expectations of college alcohol consumption
- to teach other institutions the methodology for implementation of the misperception program and to share related campaign programming
- to increase the number of faculty and administrative teams to direct the misperception program
- to use focus group discussions to discuss the campus environment, or “culture”
- to educate a *captive* audience (through discussion and educational components of the focus groups)

The peer-based misperception program is one piece of the comprehensive alcohol program at BGSU. The comprehensive alcohol programming consists of: policy review; on-campus judicial accountability; a president-appointed campus-community coalition on alcohol and civility; involvement in statewide prevention efforts; a faculty and staff component; a peer education program; a peer-based misperception program; alternative activities; residence hall and classroom programming; and an alcohol and other drug counselor.

In the fall of 1998, BGSU revised its alcohol policy. The policy regarding alcoholic beverages reads as follows: “use, possession, or distribution of alcoholic beverages except as expressly permitted by the law and the university regulations is prohibited” which is found in Section 4.d.2. of the BGSU Code of Student Conduct. These revisions created a protocol for events where alcohol is present as well.

In the fall of 1998 Judicial Affairs also implemented sanctioning guidelines for alcohol violations. The guidelines delineate violations into disruptive and non-disruptive categories. Disruptive violations are defined as alcohol violations occurring in conjunction with behavior that is disruptive to the community, endangers health or safety of others, or results in damage or vandalism to University property or property of members of the University community. Recommended sanctioning depends on the location of the violation. Sanctions include community service, an alcohol assessment with a counselor, an alcohol education class and on the second offense suspension from the University for a specified amount of time.

Non-disruptive violations are defined as violations of the alcohol policy by underage consumers on-campus. Again, recommended sanctioning depends on the location of the violation. Locations are defined as University-owned housing or other on-campus areas. Sanctions include residence hall probation, University probation, an alcohol education class, community service, an alcohol assessment by a counselor and on the third offense suspension from the University for a specified amount of time.

In February 1999, BGSU convened the University Committee on Alcohol Issues (UCAI), a recognized university committee reporting to the President of BGSU through the vice president of Student Affairs. (Note: This committee is a result of an ad-hoc committee formed in 1996 and funded by a \$2,500 grant from Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth.) UCAI consists of faculty, staff, students and community members. The committee addresses alcohol-related issues affecting the University community. The

committee's goal is the prevention and reduction of alcohol abuse and its associated problems among BGSU students and other members of the community.

The four sub-committees of the UCAI are Response, Community Relations, Evaluation, and Education. Currently, the sub-committees are determining their priorities for the 1999-2000 academic year. The committee will work collaboratively with other campus committees, assess collected data (Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, and focus group data) and establish a response to the recent amendments to the Higher Education Act allowing parental notification after alcohol violations. (A proposal of such action is expected to go before the BGSU Board of Trustees during the 1999-2000 academic year.) They also plan to address alcohol advertising at athletic events and housing options for individuals who want to live in a wellness residence hall. The UCAI executive committee consists of two community members: a Bowling Green resident and a restaurant owner. They have taken an active role in the committee. Other sub-committee community members include a representative from the Wood County Hospital emergency room, a Bowling Green police officer, an alcohol and other drug counselor and a representative from the Municipal Courts. There is a real community presence on UCAI. The community has realized that this is not just a BGSU problem but a Bowling Green community problem.

In May 1999, BGSU established the President's Committee on Campus Civility (PCCC). This committee is charged with addressing issues that manifest themselves as either obstacles to achieving civility or negative outcomes that occur as a result of incivility on campus. These issues include but are not limited to: alcohol abuse, racism, sexism, heterosexism, harassment, sexual assault, vandalism, safety and security, criminal acts and other acts of violence. Currently, the committee is meeting and developing its direction. The committee consists of faculty, staff, students, and community members. Four of these committee members also serve on UCAI.

Ohio Parents for a Drug Free Youth has spearheaded a statewide prevention effort regarding high risk drinking on college campuses. BGSU has been part of that campaign from its inception in February 1997, together with 18 other Ohio colleges and universities. Their efforts continue to grow and currently include 36 Ohio colleges and universities. These institutions have created both an informal and formal network for

information dissemination over the past three years. The model that Ohio Parents for a Drug Free Youth has adapted and encourages all 36 schools to use is an environmental approach.

At BGSU we have implemented components of the environmental approach. Included in these components are a campus-community task force, partnerships with bar and restaurant owners, a change in the university's alcohol policy and violation sanctioning, an exploration of housing options and an exploration of athletic advertising by the alcohol distributors.

Faculty and staff also play an important role in addressing college campus alcohol issues. We have encouraged faculty to take a more active role in discussing alcohol and student behavior in the classroom. In 1997, we had a red ribbon campaign for full-time faculty. Faculty members were sent a red ribbon with the slogan "Binge Drinking Doesn't Make the Grade" and literature on how faculty can discuss alcohol with their students. More than 30 percent of faculty members said they wore the ribbon at least one day during alcohol awareness week and talked about alcohol in their classes. In 1998, we sent all part-time and full-time faculty members an "Undeniable Student Rights" poster with a request that they display and talk about the poster. More than 65 percent of faculty members said they displayed and discussed the poster. The "Undeniable Student Rights" campaign targeted students who chose not to engage in high risk drinking behavior. The campaign proclaimed their rights and encouraged students to assert those rights. Also, faculty and staff members were invited to participate in our alternative activities as guest dance instructors or referees. In spring 1999, we had a random sample of faculty and staff members complete the "Faculty and Staff Environmental Alcohol and Other Drug Survey" which was developed by the Core Institute. While the data is not yet processed, we plan to allow this information to drive our programming efforts for this special population of faculty and staff members.

BGSU has a peer education program on campus. There are eight students who have completed the peer education program and are on the alcohol peer education team. These students present requested programs in residence halls and classrooms. Their programs generally consist of interactive alcohol education, whether it is role-playing or a game show format. The alcohol team also plans and implements alternative activities.

BACCHUS is another peer program/student organization on the BGSU campus. It has about 20 members who promote the responsible use of alcohol. They primarily focus on alternative programs for the members. In addition to these more frequent, smaller events, BACCHUS also plans a few programs for the entire BGSU community.

Successful alternative activities that the Wellness Connection, Student Health Service have planned include the Big Playground, BG Swings and Late Nite at the Rec. We have limited the alternative activities that we plan to one per semester, since University Activities Organization has weekly events planned.

The Big Playground event occurred in February 1998 and 1999. The Student Recreation Center is transformed into a playground featuring grade school activities and games. In 1998 more than 400 students attended and in 1999 more than 600 students attended. One unique facet of the Big Playground is that students can enter a prize raffle by turning in alcohol-related environmental messages. These environmental messages included shot glasses, t-shirts, banners, and inflatable toys to name a few. We have collected more than 650 messages in the past two years.

Another alternative activity that we coordinated was *BG Swings*. This event was held during Alcohol Awareness Week to provide an alternative activity. Over 300 students, faculty and staff attended this program to learn how to swing dance and participate in a dance contest. Alcohol information also was available.

Late Nite at the Rec is another very successful alternative event. It occurs on the Monday before classes begin in the fall and is only for entering freshmen and transfer students. Many activities are planned in the Student Recreation Center from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. In 1999, more than 1200 students participated in the event.

Many requests come to the Wellness Connection, Student Health Service for programs in residence halls and classrooms. The peer educators and professional health educators do the presentations. One avenue that has been successful in the past is the University Success course (UNIV 100) for entering freshmen. Through this avenue we are then able to get the "word" out on all of our other alcohol program components.

The Wellness Connection, Student Health Service contracts with Behavioral Connections, the local mental health agency, to have an alcohol and other drug counselor on site at the University. The counselor

is an employee of Behavioral Connections but sees only University students. She does early intervention and assessment of students. Also, she facilitates some group work. This adds another dimension to our comprehensive program, by including on-site alcohol and other drug counseling services at the University.

3 □ METHODS USED TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECT, AND THE EVIDENCE OBTAINED

There is little question that high-risk, or binge drinking, is a problem across college campuses nationwide. According to the 1997 update of the College Alcohol Study conducted by Wechsler and his colleagues, 2 out of 5 students were binge drinkers (Wechsler, 1997). The study also revealed high rates of binge drinking among certain groups of influential students, particularly members of fraternities and sororities. In a related study, Leichliter, Meilman, Presley and Cashin (1997) found exaggerated high-risk drinking among student athletes. Both studies identify important audience segmentations. Unfortunately, many prevention programs fail to target these segments, opting for messages designed to encompass *all* audiences.

In his work for the University Health Services at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Keeling argues that “the bridge toward independence that colleges inevitably must construct creates a need for the essential consideration of certain life skills, from negotiating with a sexual partner...to drinking safely” (Keeling, p. 51). The problem is that most health and prevention centers offer traditional information to students that conveys the physical and psychological effects of alcohol, while failing to address these “life” skills that are needed to deal with alcohol issues.

The BGSU peer-based misperception program is designed to provide some of the skills needed for students to deal with alcohol issues. This is accomplished through small group survey and focus group discussions to dispel misperceptions among high-risk groups such as first-year residents or members of a fraternity, sorority or athletic team. The program also is designed to help students discuss the influences the campus environment has on their own attitudes and behaviors. The program is useful in helping University administrators, faculty and student organizations offer alternative events based on suggestions

from focus group participants. These suggestions have led to successful programming such as *The Big Playground*, an event that reduced environmental messages and attracted over 600 students.

One of the strengths of the peer-based misperception program is that it can be easily replicated, although the process is time consuming. The program involves both quantitative and qualitative methods and can be used among all audience segments within the university setting. For example, the small-group survey can be used to identify misperceptions among first year students, sorority and fraternity members, athletic teams and student organizations. The follow-up focus group agenda provides categories, or topics for discussion, and yet it is flexible enough to identify particular attitudes, beliefs and behaviors within each group. Samples of both tools are provided in the appendices.

Prior to this program, little to no research existed that incorporates *both* peer-based survey and focus group approaches toward changing alcohol use misperceptions. As the findings at BGSU indicate, sizeable discrepancies are evident between the percentage of group members who say their peers drink three or more times a week and the actual percentage who do. Follow-up focus groups were able to dispel such misperceptions and offer insight as to why they occur among college students. In addition, the focus groups are a captive audience, allowing for more interpersonal communication on such topics as University alcohol policies, impact of environmental messages, skills to cope with alcohol issues and suggestions of alcohol-alternative programming ideas.

Formative and summative evaluation are the keys to the success of the peer-based misperception program. The Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, conducted in 1992, 1997 and most recently in spring 1999, has been used as both a formative and summative evaluation tool in defining campus trends, attitudes and beliefs, and perceptions of alcohol use at BGSU. As formative evaluation, Core survey results have guided the segmentation process of identifying high-risk groups at BGSU. After high-risk groups have been identified, formative evaluation is conducted to gain information on attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of each high-risk group. This instrument is a one-page survey asking about members' *own* drinking patterns, those of their *group members* and those of the *campus* as a whole. Formative evaluation also guided the development of the focus group agenda.

Summative evaluation is used to look at the patterns across high-risk groups as well as patterns campus wide. For example, the following tables show the results of the 1999 and 1994 misperception program that illustrate differences *within* specific high-risk groups, *among* these groups and *among all* BGSU students.

Table 1

Perceptions and Actual Drinking Patterns Among Groups

Organization Percentage of group members who “binge”
drink (5 or more drinks in one sitting)

Organization	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Perception of Group</u>	<u>Perception of Campus*</u>
First Year Residents-women n=15	33	73	93
First Year Residents- men n=20	65	70	63
Residence Hall Council n=17	35	64	53
First Year Student UNIV class n=17	47	59	50
Sorority n=48	21	33	43

Table 1 (continued)

Perceptions and Actual Drinking Patterns Among Groups

Organization Percentage of group members who “binge”
drink (5 or more drinks in one sitting)

Organization	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Perception of Group</u>	<u>Perception of Campus*</u>
Fraternity n=33	55	67	70
Athletic team-male n=12	75	75	100
Athletic team-female n=6	50	67	100

*Binge drinking rate among all BGSU is 57.6%, according to the 1999 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey. n= 704.

Table 2

Perceptions and Actual Drinking Patterns Among Groups

Organization Percentage of group members who
drink three or more times per week

Organization	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Perception</u>
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Higher Ed Core Survey (1992)
Campus-wide Undergraduates
n=500

23

73

1994 Small Group Survey

First Year College Students from
Residence Hall

26

54

N=132*

Undergraduate Student Government

n=15

14

40

Student Orientation Board

n=15

50

70

Second-Year Resident Advisors

n=15

7

63

(*residence members were later divided into smaller focus groups of about 15 students each)

The peer-based misperception program, as described earlier, is one piece of a comprehensive program at BGSU. Misperception messages were also disseminated at the mass-mediated level, using ads, t-shirts, table tents, posters, newspaper stories and public service announcements. Summative evaluation was used to assess the impact of the mass-mediated efforts on the student population at large. As described in Section 2, findings from the 1997 and 1999 Core Alcohol and Drug Survey revealed positive results in reducing misperceptions and the overall binge drinking rate at BGSU.

A unique contribution to the evaluation process is that the data obtained from the small group survey and focus group discussions are collected and evaluated by both a faculty researcher and the University health educator. The faculty researcher leads focus group discussions, and the health educator presents the policy and educational components. The expertise of both also allows for more insightful interpretations of the impressionistic data obtained in focus group discussions.

Results from the misperception program have been used for continuous programming improvements. For example, one outcome from the 1994 misperception program was the inception of the campus-wide “I Don’t Drink As Much as You Think” campaign that used survey and focus group data collected at BGSU to dispel misperceptions. Discussions from small group survey/focus group discussions conducted in spring 1998 prompted the 1998-99 “Undeniable Student Rights” campaign—an emphasis on the secondary effects of high-risk drinking.

Funding for the peer-based misperceptions program would allow for the development of more responsive programming as well as conducting further research on high-risk groups. Funding would also allow other universities to learn and implement the misperception program on their campus. Funding would enable BGSU to create an outreach program for Ohio high schools to dispel misperceptions associated with college alcohol consumption. This program may lower the expectations that incoming freshman may have of the campus culture regarding alcohol consumption, and it may lead to a reduction in the binge-drinking rate among this high-risk group.

As described earlier, many college-based prevention programs offer more traditional programming that focus on the physical and psychological effects of alcohol and on university policies. Furthermore, most of this information is disseminated to the mass audience through the media, workshops, class discussions, and/or presentations. Such programs have generally had limited success as they have failed to reach target audiences across which peer pressure and environmental influences may vary. In its place, truly successful prevention programming should focus on clearly specified issues tailored to the needs of specific groups.

Only a handful of researchers have attempted to develop a comprehensive program to address misperceptions of alcohol use on campus. Findings at BGSU suggest that an effective way of correcting these misperceptions is if programs are designed for particular groups with which college students most identify. That is, a program to address alcohol use misperceptions must be aimed at *specific target audiences* and not delivered as a general information campaign aimed at the student *population* as a whole. Funds for continuation of this program will allow for more highly focused programming. Furthermore, the use of group survey methodology and focus group “debriefings” can allow researchers to address the subjective as well as more objective conditions of social learning theory. This combined methodology could aid campus wellness and prevention centers in developing more effective programs for reduced alcohol consumption and other important health-related prevention issues.

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