

Middle Earth:
A Model for an Innovative and Comprehensive Student-Driven
Alcohol Prevention Program
Within a State University Center

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ABSTRACT

The University at Albany, State University of New York seeks assistance to enhance an innovative, comprehensive, targeted and student-driven social norms-based Alcohol Prevention Program for its entire campus community of 17,000 students.

The proposed social norms-based program will augment and will operate from an established campus alcohol education and peer assistance center which has been in existence on the University at Albany campus for thirty years and which has served as a local, state, and national model for alcohol and drug prevention since the 1970's. The proposed prevention program enhancement initiatives were designed after 1) receiving consultation through the regional consortia on alcohol and other drug prevention; 2) carrying out outcome research to determine student attitudes, perceptions and health behaviors; 3) establishing a multi-departmental President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention at the University; and 4) consulting with campus representatives within the SUNY system.

This effort seeks to employ social norms-based theory and environmental strategies to 1) reduce binge drinking and perceptions of peers' drinking rates by exposing all segments of our campus community to social norms messages, 2) promote, reinforce and support healthy lifestyle choices and low risk behaviors, and 3) disseminate information concerning the University at Albany prevention program to other colleges and universities on a local, state, and national scale. Program comparisons of key project initiatives will be conducted to examine the effectiveness of delivering social norms information through various venues, such as multimedia campaigns, in classrooms and satellite resource centers on residence quadrangles, and use of social norms information within peer theater programs.

Specific project objectives will be met through a variety of strategies including ongoing process and outcome research, monthly meetings of project participants, teleconferencing using the satellite system capabilities of our campus, and the enhancement of alcohol and other drug education curricula through the infusion of social norms data.

The proposed program was selected as a finalist for the FY 1999 United States Department of Education Model Programs competition and was site visited by representatives from the Higher Education Center. Though the proposed program did not receive funding in 1999 because our outcome studies were in progress, the present reapplication with supporting data from the current academic year was strongly encouraged.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Problem and Theoretical Context

National studies show that almost one-half of the nation's college students are binge drinkers, and they are 11 times more likely to fall behind in school, 10 times more likely to drive after drinking, and seven times more likely to have unprotected sex. Based on this research, led by the Core Institute and the Harvard School of Public Health (1995, 1998), and similar findings from a statewide survey conducted by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, a definite need to address and correct students' norm misperceptions has become evident. Several studies conducted in New York State on the ways in which norm misperceptions influence student alcohol and other drug use indicate that students have definite perceptions of the alcohol-related behaviors and attitudes of other students, which in turn influence their own pattern of use. Yet these beliefs about the substance use of their peers are frequently incorrect. Perkins and Berkowitz (1986) have theorized that students consistently overestimate the amount of alcohol consumed by their fellow students. The findings of Perkins and Berkowitz suggest that presenting students with information and statistics on the actual rates of drinking on campus through interventions such as media campaigns has been very effective in reducing binge drinking rates.

This proposal outlines an innovative, comprehensive, and targeted alcohol prevention program which includes a set of initiatives based on social norms theory. The program and its many components can serve as a laboratory for the evaluation of new initiatives as well as program comparison with traditional prevention strategies.

Middle Earth: Meeting the Challenge

To respond to the national and personal crisis associated with binge drinking, colleges and universities have searched for ways to assist their students, and more importantly, reduce both primary and secondary effects of alcohol and other substances. In this spirit, the University at Albany has developed, maintained, and supported a broad-based and integrated prevention program, the *Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program*, for the past thirty years. Presently the peer assistance unit of the University Counseling Center, Division of Student Affairs, Middle Earth provides peer counseling and peer education services to the campus community and surrounding capital region area. It is the major alcohol and other drug prevention services arm of the University, operating a telephone hotline which is, in large part, responsive to needs for immediate service during times when other campus offices are closed. In recent years, Middle Earth has focused more heavily on the prevention of alcohol misuse and abuse

through the implementation of social norms based environmental interventions (Perkins and Berkowitz).

While the program components within the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program that will be focused upon in the Model Programs competition will be its environmental/social norms strategies, it is critical for the reader to gain a sense of the broader programmatic context in which these strategies are implemented.

The following section will provide an overview of the Middle Earth program and will lead into a more detailed discussion of specific programmatic aspects and impact of its social norms and environmental components.

Program Overview and Mission

Established in the spirit of students helping students, the Middle Earth program has a primary mission of providing peer counseling and peer education services that assists students in meeting their educational goals and in coping with emotional, social, and other life issues that they face. Since its inception, its primary focus has been on alcohol and other drug prevention as it relates to these issues. An additional mission of the program is to strive toward increased diversity within the organization so that services offered may be more sensitive to the individual needs and experiences of the widest cross-section of students on our diverse campus.

History

In 1970, a University at Albany student, Louis Ringe '71 and two other students envisioned the establishment of a crisis hotline on campus to respond to the needs of students who were affected by concerns and societal events related to alcohol and other drug abuse. In the spring of 1970, with the assistance of the University Counseling Center, a student-operated hotline, CRISIS 5300, was launched. It was one of the first hotlines of its kind in the United States and one of the few which continues to be in operation today.

As years passed, CRISIS 5300 gained momentum. Upon its renaming as "Middle Earth" in 1973, the program became grant-funded by the New York State Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services to expand the program into a comprehensive peer counseling and peer education agency. Middle Earth quickly gained a reputation as a leader in several areas. These included the provision of consultation on the development of similar programs at other colleges and universities across the state and speaking to young people about alcohol and drug prevention. Its staff also became involved in training professionals, such as hospital personnel, teachers, and overseas operators for New York Telephone, on ways to recognize and address crisis situations. In 1983, Middle Earth expanded its scope of services by sponsoring its first Alcohol Awareness Week and Sexuality Week, events which continue today.

Thirty years later, in 1999-2000, Middle Earth carries the same name and logo, but the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings and look of the agency have evolved with our times. Still focusing largely on prevention of alcohol and other drug misuse, the agency continues to operate a student-driven hotline service and outreach education program under the supervision of a professional Director. Middle Earth operates one of the few surviving student-driven hotlines in the country, and it receives calls from college students from across the country. Students can perform services for Middle Earth either on a volunteer basis or for course credit through the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology. The agency is funded both by the University and by the Student Association, making it a student organization that enjoys the rights and benefits of University affiliation.

The nature and scope of Middle Earth services have also evolved with our changing times. While its mission continues to focus on providing services to assist students in achieving their educational and personal goals, this mission is carried out in a more proactive, preventive manner, placing heavy emphasis on current research and theory in the area of social norms. The impact of binge drinking on the lives of our students today could have never been imagined by a Middle Earth volunteer of the 1970's or early 1980's, nor was there as much of a focus on the importance of associated issues such as personal safety, eating disorders, and human diversity. While CRISIS 5300's first hotline service was operated by less than ten students and was housed for a time in a converted closet in the Campus Center, today's Middle Earth volunteers number over 140 University at Albany undergraduate students, and its offices are located in the Health and Counseling Building as the prevention services arm of the University Counseling Center, Division of Student Affairs. The implementation of the social norms model also places our students in prevention roles throughout the University through ad campaigns, peer theater presentations, and classroom activities which provide the campus community with accurate statistics on rates of alcohol and other drug use based on the University's administrations of the CORE survey instruments, most recently conducted in fall 1999.

The proactive social norms activities of our program have led to a change in the look of Middle Earth consumers. During the 1999-2000 year, the hotline service received over 1600 contacts. Males requested slightly more services than did females, perhaps suggesting that males prefer to seek services anonymously. The three primary issues of concern for students who contacted the hotline were alcohol and other drug concerns, peer relationship issues, and sexuality. In addition, the Middle Earth outreach education program reached over 10,000 students with its prevention programs.

Program Components

The Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program is comprised of three primary service units which either carry out or interface with social norms-based activities. Staffing for the program includes a Director who is a licensed psychologist, six graduate assistants who coordinate daily operations and a front-line staff of over 140 peer counselors and peer educators. Because Middle Earth is also recognized by the student government as a student organization, there is an active executive board comprised of student leaders who influence the direction of the program.

Hotline Service. The Middle Earth hotline operates from noon to midnight Monday-Thursday and 24 hours a day on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday during the academic year. The service offers an anonymous information and referral option for students who are hesitant to seek out traditional counseling or who are seeking further information subsequent to social norms-based programs conducted by peer educators. The hotline also provides an info-tape line, which offers callers the opportunity to listen to 5-8 minute audiotapes on topics such as “Making Decisions About Drinking”, “How Do I Know If My Friend Has a Drinking Problem?”, or “Facts About Marijuana”. In 2000-2001, these services will be expanded to the Internet; services will be able to be accessed via email, and information from our info-tape series will be accessible on the World Wide Web.

Outreach Education Program. Since 1983, Middle Earth has conducted traditional peer education workshops for students on alcohol and other drugs, though there has been inclusion in recent years of statistics on University at Albany student drinking rates as part of a social norms intervention. The program has also sponsored theme weeks, such as National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week and Sexuality Week. Middle Earth has been actively involved in the campus media since 1980, when it began a weekly informational column entitled “Middle Earth Roots” in the student newspaper. In 1998, Middle Earth students began hosting a radio talk show addressing current campus issues, such as binge drinking, sexual assault and alcohol, and making choices about alcohol. Middle Earth students, under the editorship of the Director, have written a self-help book entitled Talk to Me, which addresses issues related to college success and prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse; this book is scheduled to be published during the 2000-2001 academic year. Each of these media interventions makes use of survey statistics to present accurate rates of student drinking and other risk behaviors.

The Middle Earth program operates a Resource Room comprised of books and videos on alcohol and other drug prevention and related issues, such as sexual assault and violence. The Resource Room also offers training modules and workshop outlines for presenters. Resource Room materials are

available for loan to any member of the campus community as well as other colleges and universities.

Perhaps the strongest and most visible initiative of the Middle Earth Peer Education program is its improvisational theater group, the *Middle Earth Players*. Begun in 1997-98, the group addresses conflictual situations around alcohol and other drugs and involves audience members in generating their own constructive and positive solutions to resolve these issues. This program has been presented to all new students during orientation for the past two years, is routinely performed in residence halls and to student groups, and has been presented to local colleges and universities and local, state, and national conferences addressing alcohol and other drug abuse prevention. In 2000-2001, peer theater performances will focus on the presentation of social norms information to audiences, serving as another venue to provide students with accurate information regarding drinking rates.

Training and Staff Development Component. Middle Earth offers a comprehensive undergraduate peer educator, peer counselor, and peer mentor training program focusing on educating students on alcohol and drug prevention and related campus issues, such as sexual assault and HIV/AIDS. Students are trained in listening and communication skills, workshop and peer theater techniques and crisis intervention, and human diversity topics including multiculturalism, disability issues, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered concerns. In 1994, the Middle Earth training program began offering four 3-credit academic courses in peer education, peer counseling, and peer supervision within the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology. Selection for the program is very rigorous, with less than one third of applicants selected for training based on skill, leadership, and commitment to alcohol and other drug prevention. Middle Earth is the only campus-based undergraduate internship training opportunity in the human services field, and research indicates that over 90 percent of program participants pursue graduate careers at the masters and doctoral level.

The Middle Earth staff development component also offers training for masters and doctoral students in the fields of clinical and counseling psychology, social welfare, and education. Graduate trainees, including graduate assistants, interns, and advanced practicum students, receive both individual and group supervision and participate in a series of training seminars on community intervention and social norms research and practice. Middle Earth is part of the University Counseling Center's nationally accredited doctoral internship program in psychology.

Program Effectiveness

The Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program has shown evidence of a positive impact on the campus community since its inception. Impact has been evidenced as follows:

1. Students who join the Middle Earth program report significantly lower rates of alcohol and other drug use as compared to the campus community, making them effective peer leaders;
2. Participation by University at Albany students in Middle Earth social norms-based initiatives, including peer-driven ad campaigns and associated education and hotline services, show significant yearly increases in numbers and high rates of satisfaction as well as movement toward reduced drinking rates;
3. Outcome research begun in the summer of 1998 on a total of 2300 new University at Albany students suggests that participation in its Middle Earth Players programs is associated with their intentions to reduce drinking and drug use behaviors as well as reported reductions in drinking rates when measured at 3-month follow-up.

In addition to the above indices of effectiveness, the Middle Earth program has been active in obtaining outcome data as part of a statewide Norms and Misperceptions Project under the auspices of the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). The goal of this project is to reduce the misperceptions of first year students regarding their alcohol use rates. The Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms was administered in September 1999 to 1300 first-year students at the University at Albany. In late fall of 1999, a social norms campaign was planned using posters, radio and newspaper ads, and presentation of norms information within peer education workshops. In developing the media message, which focused on the statistic that 74 percent of University at Albany students consume one drink or less per sitting, focus groups were held with key subgroups of students, including first-year students, fraternities and sororities, and athletes. The resulting media campaign, entitled "*The A-Files*" after the popular TV show, was launched in the spring 2000 semester. A follow-up administration of the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms conducted at the end of April 2000 suggests changes in student perceptions of their peers' drinking rates toward a ten percent reduction.

Replicability of Program Components

While the Middle Earth program has been in existence for thirty years and contains a number of program elements which interface with each other, any single component of the program may be easily replicated by other colleges and universities. These elements include our peer theater program component, social norms public awareness campaigns, newspaper and radio initiatives, and Resource Rooms. The Middle Earth program Director consults routinely with colleges and universities across the United States on the replication of Middle Earth program elements and the importance of university

commitment in the development of programs such as Middle Earth; these contacts have demonstrated that program components can be replicated in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Indeed, the replication of one Middle Earth program component may sew the seed for replication of other components in future years; the Middle Earth program itself should be regarded as a work in progress that has grown and evolved over thirty years in response to current theory and best practices.

The Next Step: Evaluation and Program Comparison of Social Norms-Based Strategies

It is clear that the Middle Earth program has, through its thirty-year history, utilized information reflecting best practices in the alcohol and other drug prevention field to inform and guide its development. There is also a strong commitment to the creation of new program components and the evaluation of their effectiveness in comparison to existing strategies. As a next step in its development, we propose to enhance existing social norms-based strategies as follows:

1. Create Satellite Resource Rooms on all Residence Quadrangles and in the Campus Center to expose students more directly to social norms messages. These rooms can also provide supporting information and opportunities to interact with peer educators trained in the social norms model, computer programs, and videos and books on the topic of alcohol and other drugs.
2. Integrate social norms messages in peer theater presentations and evaluate the additive effects of trained peer educators in delivering these messages.
3. Continue to integrate social norms messages within University first-year courses and evaluate whether this form of exposure to social norms data contributes and additive effect to campus media campaigns.

Program comparisons will be conducted comparing all new and enhanced social norms-based interventions with traditional social norms strategies, such as posters and other media campaigns. The structure of the Middle Earth program offers a solid “laboratory” for such program comparison as it employs many intervention strategies for potential study.

Summary

This section has outlined the theoretical underpinnings, mission, history, structure, and impact of the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program. Its longevity, campus impact, and University and student government commitment to the program show that it is a promising candidate for enhancements. The next section presents a plan and timeline for program enhancements.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Program Enhancements: Rationale, Goals, and Design

An institutional priority of the University at Albany is to enhance and maintain an innovative, targeted, continuing, and comprehensive program to address and prevent alcohol and other drug abuse for students, faculty and staff members. The major focus of program enhancement efforts of the University at Albany through the Middle Earth program will include proactive preventive activities and initiatives based on the empowerment of non-users or low-risk users, as well as projects which will broaden public awareness of healthy lifestyles and safety. It is expected that these initiatives and programs will significantly change the environmental norms of the University at Albany and will lead to further reductions in binge drinking. Ongoing education to support social norms messages and increase the active investment and involvement of all students, faculty and staff members is crucial to this effort.

Whenever possible, the proactive environmental and educational efforts of the Middle Earth program will be integrated into existing University programs to increase the consistency of prevention messages to students and other members of the campus community. This strategy will also provide the opportunity to infuse key concepts of our program and disseminate accurate information about alcohol. In this way as well, awareness campaigns may be brought into well-established courses, departments, and programs. New programs will be created to supplement existing programs.

Program outcomes will be evaluated by assessing changes in both attitudes and behaviors, with a particular focus on reductions in binge drinking rates. Assessment methods will include paper-and-pencil measures such as the Core Survey of Alcohol and Other Drugs, the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms, and the American College Health Assessment of the American College Health Association. All survey data will be collected in a pre-post format, with a baseline administration in fall 2000 and follow-up administration in spring 2001. Additional indices that reflect changes in drinking rates, such as judicial referral statistics and incident reports in the residence halls, will be tracked throughout the grant period. Qualitative process data, such as the number of alcohol-related contacts to the Middle Earth hotline service and satisfaction and behavioral intent measures, will also be available for review, as this data is routinely collected by Middle Earth.

Objectives

- 1. To reduce the percentage of University at Albany students who believe that their peers drink at least once a week by 10 percent by exposing all segments of the University at Albany campus community to social norms interventions.**
- 1. To reduce the percentage of first-year students who believe that their peers drink at least**

once a week by 10 percent

2. To disseminate information concerning the effective components of the Middle Earth prevention program to colleges and universities on a local, state, and national level.

To meet objective 1, the following initiatives will be implemented:

The Middle Earth program will enhance an ongoing and comprehensive social norms-based public awareness campaign which will include targeted messages developed from the Core Institute research data collected in September 1999. These public awareness campaigns will be aimed at addressing student, staff and faculty misperceptions of alcohol and other drug use on campus. Focus groups were held in late fall of 1999 with different subgroups of students (i.e., athletes, Greek organization members, people of color, women, students with disabilities, commuter students, international students, pre-health students, and other groups) to assist in developing both specific and culturally sensitive program and campaign message content. The awareness campaign will include: 1. a poster campaign on University buses, within residence halls, in academic buildings, and in the Campus Center; 2. campus television, radio, and student newspaper advertisements; 3. a weekly student newspaper health column sponsored by the Middle Earth program.

Peer Educators will develop topic-specific peer theater experiential learning workshops based on positive social norms messages to be presented to resident and commuter students as well as a variety of interest groups. This will include new student orientation groups as well as the approximately 200 University clubs and organizations.

Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program Satellite Resource Rooms will be created on all Residence Quadrangles, the Campus Center, and the Department of Athletics to more efficiently deliver social norms-based messages to students in areas in which they most naturally congregate. Each satellite Resource Room will be expanded to include trigger films to be used by peer educators. Peer educators who are trained in the social norms model will staff the resource rooms and be available to provide information to individual students and provide technical assistance in scheduling and setting up educational programs.

Specific social norms-based messages and educational programming for all student athletes will be developed and implemented. Because research suggests that student athletes are at high risk for alcohol and other drug use, and because the University at Albany has moved into Division I athletics, we need to respond to the increased pressure to excel and the temptation for athletes to respond to this pressure by alcohol use. Within our program, athletes who are invested in alcohol and other drug prevention will serve as peer educators, role models, and leaders in delivering positive social norms messages for other students.

Specific social norms-based messages and peer education programs for all fraternities and sororities will be established. Representatives from University at Albany fraternities and sororities will be trained in the social norms model and will, in turn, work with their own groups, taking advantage of the concept of Greek group solidarity to produce behavior change. While the importance of Greek brotherhood and sisterhood is put into practice, students will learn about their misperceptions of alcohol and other drug use and that they can have a role in making their own internal choices.

To meet objective 2, the following initiatives will be implemented:

An alcohol and other drug prevention curriculum based on social norms theory will be enhanced and infused into the University at Albany First-Year Experience course, Psychology of Personal Effectiveness course, Freshman seminars, and other related academic courses. These courses, primarily designed for freshmen and transfer students, will be presented to over 2300 students during this academic year.

To meet objective 3, the following initiatives will be implemented:

The Project Directors and project staff will plan and mount a strategy for the dissemination of program information on a local, state, regional, and national level. Media campaigns, publications and brochures will be created, and all materials will be reviewed for scientific soundness, clarity of presentation, and sensitivity to diversity issues. Where applicable, materials will be translated into other languages, and technical assistance will be provided to help other colleges and universities begin similar prevention programs. Furthermore, continuing a tradition in which the Middle Earth program has provided training and consultation to community agencies, high schools, hospitals, and telephone companies (overseas operators), information will be disseminated within these areas as well.

Project Activities Time Line**FALL 2000**

1. The Project Director will implement a social norms media campaign based on data from focus groups with students from Greek organizations, the Department of Athletics, the Department of Residential Life, clubs for people of color, campus women's groups, pre-health students, and graduate students. (September 2000)
2. Peer counselor and peer educator social norms training will continue with last year's students assuming a role as peer mentors in the training process. As new research data and information becomes available, it will be communicated to the peer counselors and peer educators through academic classes and monthly inservice meetings. A graduate student from the School of Education will assist the Project Director in training efforts. (September 2000)
3. The Project Co-Director will continue research concerning student norms, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors using the Core Institute alcohol and other drugs and social norms survey instruments and other questionnaires which assess student awareness of alcohol and other drug prevention programs and initiatives at the University at Albany. All instruments will be administered in September and October 2000 as a pre-test to obtain data for comparison before and after the grant period. (September-October 2000)
4. The Project Director, working with the President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention and students from the Middle Earth program, will develop a Social Norms Public Awareness Campaign. The Social Norms Public Awareness Campaign will include posters for the University at Albany buses, residence halls, the Campus Center and academic buildings. Newspaper advertisements will appear weekly in the student newspaper, in addition to the publication of a weekly health column by our peer education program entitled MIDDLE EARTH ROOTS. Because over 80% of what we learn comes from visual media, we will focus on the written message. Consistent messages will be placed throughout the student's environment.

(October –November 2000)

5. Graduate Assistants in the Middle Earth program will work to improve the effectiveness of the social norms-based peer counseling and peer education programs and help the Project Director establish contacts within each residence hall to set up satellite resource and information centers. These outreach efforts will make educational material more accessible to students. Student use of satellite resource rooms will be documented to evaluate satisfaction with this service. (October – November 2000)
6. The Project Co-Director and President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention will assess the need for ongoing faculty and staff training in the social norms model which can take place throughout the academic year, both to reinforce key concepts and to reach faculty members who are available for training only during the fall and spring semesters. (September-December 2000)

SPRING 2001

1. The Project Co-Director will oversee the implementation of the Social Norms Public Awareness Campaign with the assistance of the President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, Middle Earth Peer Educators and members of the President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention. (January 2001)
2. In the area of curriculum infusion, curricula focusing on social norms data and confrontation of student misperceptions regarding alcohol and other drugs will be developed for inclusion in the Psychology of Personal Effectiveness, Freshman and Transfer Seminars, and similar courses. The Project Director will be responsible for implementing this program. (February-April 2001)
3. The Project Co-Director and the University Counseling Center staff will plan summer training for professional and paraprofessional staff in social norms theory and environmental intervention, including Resident Assistants and Orientation Assistants. (February-April 2001)
4. The Project Co-Director will oversee post-test data collection on targeted groups receiving pre-test questionnaires during the fall of 2000. (April-May 2001)
5. The revised mandatory social norms-based Intensive Alcohol Education course will be implemented and evaluated. (January-May 2001)

SUMMER 2001

1. The President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention will meet to conduct an evaluation of programs and initiatives from 2000-2001. (June 2001)
2. Work will continue with the Orientation Office to update written materials for new students and to train student orientation leaders on social norms theory and data as well as key alcohol, and other drug prevention issues. (June 2001)
3. The Project Director will organize and schedule social norms staff training programs. Training

will be carried out by University at Albany faculty, professional staff, and professionals from outside agencies who have an expertise in the prevention area. . (June 2001)

FALL 2001

1. All established programs will continue during this time.
2. Mechanisms to insure continued support of project initiatives, such as the transfer of funds to the Division of Student Affairs budget and budgets of other departmental financial sponsors, will be developed and implemented.
3. Surveys of student norms, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior will be completed on a yearly basis to evaluate long term environmental change and to keep efforts focused and responsive to campus needs.
4. Information concerning the effective components of the comprehensive alcohol, and other drug prevention program will be disseminated at a local, state, and national level to colleges and universities through research articles, conference presentations, publications, and other methods. Outside agencies, such as high schools, hospitals, and other institutions, will also be targeted. The project staff will seek the assistance of associations concerned with the prevention of alcohol and other drug abuse, as well as psychological associations and college personnel and health associations to disseminate findings and provide technical assistance to new programs.
5. Final evaluation and final reports will be completed.

Dissemination Plan

The dissemination of successful initiatives to other colleges and universities and professional organizations is an important activity that serves to contribute to the progress of the alcohol and drug prevention field. Staff members within the Middle Earth program routinely disseminate information about effective program components since the program's inception thirty years ago. Several objectives comprise the specific dissemination plan for the Model Programs Grant, including:

- Providing information about specific activities, program descriptions and other resource materials to other colleges and universities in the form of a sourcebook. Sourcebooks will be distributed locally, through the University's President's Advisory Council on Alcohol & Other Drug Prevention, regionally, through the New York Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and within the Alcohol and Other Drug Consortium, and nationally through professional conferences and related activities.
- Ongoing dissemination through regional and national conference presentations will continue (e.g. U.S. Department of Education's National Meeting, BACCHUS and GAMMA Conference, and other

venues).

- Initiatives and empirical evaluations, will be published in relevant publications and periodicals (e.g. *Promising Practices, Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*).
- The use of technology, such as the creation of an informational web page and teleconferencing using the University's satellite facilities.

Key Personnel.

M. Dolores Cimini, Ph.D. will serve as Project Director. Dr. Cimini holds a B.A. degree in Psychology from Barnard College, Columbia University and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University at Albany, State University of New York. She has worked since 1982 on a number of grant-funded programs and has obtained and was Project Director for a research study carried out under the auspices of the William T. Grant Foundation. Dr. Cimini has over fifteen years of experience with young adults, having worked at a residential treatment center for adolescent girls and specializing in research and service to young adults. At present, she is the Director of the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program, an agency with a staff of over 140 peer educators and crisis hotline workers at the University at Albany. Dr. Cimini has designed and implemented training programs and credit-bearing courses in peer education and peer helping for students entering the health and mental health fields through the School of Education and Counseling Psychology, at the University at Albany and consults in the development of peer education programs at other colleges and universities on a nationwide level. She has served as coordinator of campus programs and theme weeks in the area of alcohol and other drug abuse prevention. She has coordinated campus-wide alcohol and other drug education efforts for the past nine years. Dr. Cimini chairs the President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention and sits on the President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention.

Daniel A. Trujillo, Ph.D. will serve as the Project Co-Director. Dr. Trujillo is the University's Coordinator for Alcohol and Drug Prevention and is a staff psychologist at the University Counseling Center. He received his doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Missouri – Columbia, where he worked in a nationally recognized alcohol and other drug prevention program, which has been the recipient of numerous United States Department of Education grants. Dr. Trujillo comes to his work roles with excellent campus-based clinical experience, as well as specialized research and educational expertise in alcohol and other drug prevention for at-risk college students. He has skillfully assumed leadership for all University at Albany alcohol and other drug prevention education Initiatives.

The President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, with its component President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, consists of representatives from over 30 units and departments. This group will advise grant-related activities, and many of its members will be involved in implementing specific project activities.

A Research Assistant will be hired to coordinate data collection and analysis tasks associated with the project. The incumbent shall be a graduate student in the social sciences field who is familiar with statistical techniques and their application to environmentally-based projects.

Two Graduate Assistants will coordinate the efforts of undergraduate peer educators and the Satellite Resource Rooms of the Middle Earth program. One Graduate Assistant will oversee the students working as peer educators, and the other will oversee educational and curriculum development and educational materials used within the Middle Earth Resource Center and satellite resource rooms. The staff of 140 undergraduate peer educators and peer counselors will also be dedicated to this project to carry out both current and new initiatives.

University Commitment.

The University at Albany, State University of New York is fully committed to the enhancement of the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program.

All prevention programs and initiatives will be conducted in consultation with the President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, which consists of representation from high-level administrative staff and faculty members from over thirty departments, as well as representation from student leaders, parents, and members of the community.

The proposed prevention program was developed through the efforts of University representatives from the Division of Student Affairs, the Department of Athletics, the University Police Department, the University Counseling Center, the University Health Center, the Department of Student Life, and the Department of Residential Life.

From the project's beginning, the University will fund all professional and clerical staff and will provide 1,501 square feet of central office and meeting space, 6 telephones and 5 computers.

The University at Albany is committed to continuing the Research Assistant position that will be created through funding from this grant program.

The institution's commitment is further evidenced by the provision of funds and services from a variety of departments and campus funding sources.

EVALUATION METHODS

How Program Evaluation is Conducted at the University at Albany

The University Counseling Center has assumed leadership and major responsibility for outcome research implementation and program planning in the prevention and health promotion area. Within this framework, the Director of the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program and the Coordinator for Alcohol and Drug Prevention maintain the major responsibility for coordination of all alcohol and other drug prevention evaluation efforts on campus. They also apprise the President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention and the President's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention regularly on program evaluation and outcome research activities. In addition to administrations of the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey, the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Drug Norms, and the American College Health Assessment, the Middle Earth Director and Coordinator for Alcohol and Drug Prevention collect the following data:

- A. Tracking of changes in the following behaviors:
 - 1. Student awareness of campus prevention efforts;
 - 2. Student awareness of campus policy and its enforcement;
 - 3. Student involvement in prevention efforts;
 - 4. Types and frequencies of consequences experienced by students;
 - 5. Student perceptions of alcohol and other drug use;
 - 6. Current rates of student alcohol and other drug use.

- B. Monitoring of changes in the following:
 - 1. Number of requests for information, brochures, education programs, and self-help groups;
 - 2. Attendance at self-help groups;
 - 3. Requests for individual consultations;
 - 4. Number of students involved in Resource Room management, Peer Education, the Middle Earth crisis hotline, and other peer-driven programs;
 - 5. Attendance at educational programs, theme weeks and drug-free social events.

- C. Tracking of students attending the mandatory Intensive Alcohol Education Course for subsequent problem emergence or additional involvement with Judicial Affairs staff members.

- D. Surveying of students attending any educational program using workshop evaluation forms addressing program interest and presenter preparation, the ways in which student perceptions of their own knowledge have changed, opinion changes, insights gained, and interest in making behavioral changes.

- .E Following of a group of freshman students through their four years at the University at Albany. This group will be surveyed each year beginning in fall 2000.

G. Holding focus groups each year to acquire qualitative data for comparison to quantitative data.

H. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation from President's Advisory Council and Task Force meetings.

A number of the data sources listed above offer clear evidence that the Middle Earth Program is an integral factor in the changes in attitudes toward alcohol and other drugs as well as reeducations in students' reported use of alcohol or other drugs. As will be evident in some areas, data collection is being planned for the upcoming year with the expectation of promising outcomes. The following discussion will highlight major outcome and process findings and place them into a clearer, more integrated picture. Outcome research that is planned during the Model Programs Grant period will also be discussed, and expected findings will be outlined.

Outcome Evaluation I: Research on Changes in Student Norms Regarding Drinking

The Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program is currently involved in providing campus leadership in a statewide college student norms and misperceptions outcome study. We have been selected as one of ten New York State schools to be awarded a mini-grant from the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services to evaluate the effectiveness of a media campaign on student norms about drinking and drug use. This project was launched because national research on norms and misperceptions (Perkins and Berkowitz) leads us to expect movement in student attitudes toward more realistic norms of lower drinking and drug use rates and to actual reductions in rates of alcohol and other drug use.

Project Overview. In 1996, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) conducted a statewide Core Survey to collect baseline data on the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by college students. Findings from the survey indicated that 41 percent of the students consumed five or more drinks in one sitting within the past two weeks; students at upstate and suburban colleges have consistently higher use rates of alcohol and marijuana than their New York City counterparts; and 61 percent of the students did not know if their campus has an alcohol and other drug abuse prevention program. The survey findings also document that 89 percent of the state's college students think that their fellow students drink alcohol at least once a week, when in fact, less than one-half of the state's students engage in this behavior (40 percent). Additionally, findings indicate that 4 percent of students believe that their peers do not drink alcohol; in reality, the survey documents a fivefold misperception since 19 percent of students report nonuse.

National studies show that almost one-half of the nation's college students are binge drinkers, and they are 11 times more likely to fall behind in school, 10 times more likely to drive after drinking, and

seven times more likely to have unprotected sex. Due to this research, led by the Core Institute and the Harvard School of Public Health, and the subsequent findings from OASAS' statewide survey, a definite need to address and correct students' norm misperceptions has become evident.

Several studies have been conducted in New York State on how norm misperceptions influence student alcohol and other drug use. College students have definite perceptions of the alcohol-related behaviors and attitudes of other students, which in turn influence their own pattern of use. Yet these beliefs about the substance use of their peers are frequently incorrect.

This project provides the necessary means to implement a multifaceted approach that will correct the misperception that New York State's college students have of their peers' alcohol and other drug use. The first phase provides mini-grant funding to 10 of the state's institutions of higher education to address and correct the norm misperceptions of first-year college students on their campuses. Phase Two addresses this issue from a statewide perspective.

Project Goals. This Project is a two-phase statewide initiative to address and correct the substance use norm misperceptions of New York State's college students. The first goal is to reduce the percentage of first-year students who believe that their peers drink at least once a week by 10 percent on each of the funded campuses. This is being achieved by offering a series of intensive Learning Institutes, and implementing a multimedia campaign at each institution, the effectiveness of which will be measured by using the Core Institute Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms and conducting focus groups with first-year students.

The second goal will be to gather current prevention research and best practices and disseminate it to all of the state's colleges and universities, as well as the OASAS' prevention provider network. This will be accomplished by developing a technical assistance packet, creating a supplement to OASAS' Networking for Healthy Campuses programming manual, and sponsoring a statewide conference on alcohol, other drugs, and the college community.

Method and Results. The Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms was administered in September 1999 to a sample of 1300 first-year students at the University at Albany. In late fall of 1999, a social norms campaign was planned using posters, radio and newspaper ads, and presentation of norms information within peer education workshops. In developing the media message, which focused on the statistic that 74 percent of University at Albany students consume one drink or less per sitting, focus groups were held with key subgroups of students, including first-year students, fraternities and sororities, and athletes. The resulting media campaign, entitled "The *A-Files*" after the popular TV show, was launched in the spring

2000 semester. A pilot follow-up administration of the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms conducted at the end of April 2000 suggests changes in student perceptions in their peers' drinking rates toward a ten percent reduction.

Outcome Evaluation II: Assessment and Follow-up of Social Norms-Based Peer Theater Programs

In the summer of 1998, outcome research on the effectiveness of the Middle Earth peer theater program in effecting behavioral intent to reduce drinking and drug use was launched. Subjects were 2300 new University at Albany students attending freshman orientation. All students participated in a performance of the Middle Earth Players which addressed alcohol and drug-related concerns such as dealing with a roommate with an alcohol problem, addressing issues related to DWI and fake ID's, and preventing sexual assault while under the influence of alcohol. Program goals were to communicate to participants accurate statistics on college drinking rates and to teach them effective strategies of addressing these issues with peers. Assessment of changes in behavioral intent prior to and after the program indicated significant movement by participants toward reductions in alcohol and other drug use. The primary factor which led to these reductions, according to participants, was the influence and effectiveness of the peer educators in delivering the social norms prevention messages as well as participants' active involvement in generating positive solutions to peer theater situations during the program.

In September 1999, a follow-up survey was conducted with first-year students who participated in the summer 1999 orientation program Middle Earth Players presentation. The Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms was administered to a sample of 500 students with specific attention to data on alcohol use rates. Results from the follow-up survey demonstrated a 5 percent reduction in students' perceptions of peers' drinking rates as compared to perceptions reported at summer orientation. Students attributed the changes in their drinking rates and patterns to the exposure to statistics about drinking in combination with the presentation of this data by peer educators who were regarded as role models.

Process Evaluation Indices: Research on Program Visibility and Impact

Program Visibility and Direct Service. In 1992, the President's Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention surveyed a random sample of University at Albany freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors on their awareness of campus services available to address alcohol and other drug concerns.

Results indicated that the most well known campus service for these students was the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program. The survey also indicated that the number of students who were aware of Middle Earth services increased according to their class year. Surveys conducted since that time suggest that students are becoming aware of Middle Earth services even earlier in their academic careers, and some students are selecting the University at Albany in order to participate in Middle Earth and its alcohol and other drug prevention work. The direct service statistics summarized below support the conclusion that students are aware of Middle Earth services and view the program as a positive resource for alcohol and other drug concerns and education.

During the 1999-2000 academic year, the Middle Earth hotline received 1689 contacts. These statistics are suggestive of a 20 percent increase in callers as compared to previous years. This pattern of usage is supported by research findings that indicate that some college students feel more comfortable seeking assistance from peer helpers rather than professionals, particularly in regard to alcohol and other drug concerns. There is also a trend that suggests the importance of anonymity for some callers, a feature that the Middle Earth hotline offers.

Direct service usage statistics also indicate that males use hotline services more than do females, suggesting that males may prefer to seek services anonymously. In addition, 75 percent of callers were students registered at the University at Albany, while the remaining 25 percent were individuals from the capital region area as well as locations as far as New York City and Bennington, Vermont. 63 percent of all contacts were made by new consumers, while 37 percent of contacts were initiated by chronic callers (repeaters) who required individualized responses by staff members based on individual action plans. These data support the conclusion that the Middle Earth program serves a wide variety of clients, most of whom are students at the University. There is also an indication that hotline services are a strong source of support for over one-third of clients, most of whom are quite dependent on a variety of services within the local mental health and substance abuse system for stability.

Hotline service usage data were also analyzed by month, day of the week, and time of day. These data suggest that the most active months during the 1998-99 academic year were October, November, and March, times during which stress and correlated alcohol and other drug abuse concerns are at peak levels. While there was no clear usage pattern by day of the week, usage statistics regarding time of day showed clear evidence of a trend toward relatively heavy evening and weekend use, also times during which there are greater campus-wide needs to intervene with alcohol and other drug issues. Overall, data examined by month, time, and day of service operation suggests that Middle Earth continues to be a vital service on campus that is

used when other agencies are closed and which is available to respond to immediate needs in the alcohol and other drug area.

During the past academic year, the Middle Earth hotline responded to callers with a variety of concerns and presenting issues, many of which were serious and required immediate referral or more intensive intervention services than the hotline could provide. The most frequent types of presenting issues fell into the category of alcohol and other drug concerns and included questions about binge drinking, marijuana, designer drugs, and behaviors associated with alcohol and drug use, such as sexual assault. The data also suggested that Middle Earth continued to be used as an information source for callers who needed to know the locations of AA meetings or other self-help groups. Overall, these statistics parallel national trends that suggest that students are coming to college with increasingly complex and serious mental health and substance abuse issues and concerns.

While it is clear from the above data that students use the Middle Earth hotline service heavily for alcohol and drug concerns, it is also necessary to examine the impact of information and referral services on callers. In circumstances when consumer satisfaction ratings can be obtained without compromising service or anonymity for callers, callers have indicated their commitment to follow up on information they are given or pursue treatment referrals. Clinical service data from the University Counseling Center suggests that approximately 66 percent of students who are referred to the Center by Middle Earth present for services at the Center.

Peer Education. During the 1999-2000 academic year, the Middle Earth outreach education program continued to move toward greater growth and visibility. This was due to a number of factors, including more aggressive recruitment and training of peer educators, and more extensive advertising of Middle Earth peer education services to the campus community. Each of these factors resulted in a 33 percent increase in workshop requests on alcohol and other drugs, increased quality and scope of theme programming, and continued usage of Middle Earth library resources, and information from the Middle Earth Roots column by members of the University community who read the Albany Student Press.

During the current academic year, the Middle Earth program conducted 252 workshops, 57 percent of which were in response to campus requests and 43 percent associated with theme programming. This number is nearly one third more than the amount of workshops conducted during the 1997-98 academic year. Programs conducted by request as well as theme programming reached approximately 10,500 students. Peer education programs were most frequently requested by the Department of Residential Life, student organizations under the auspices of the Student Association, and fraternities and sororities. The most

frequently requested workshop topics included alcohol and other drugs and sexual assault. Middle Earth also organized or co-sponsored several theme weeks during the past year. The agency had primary responsibility for National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week and Sexuality Week, reaching over 8000 students. Surveys conducted during these theme weeks suggested that participation in Middle Earth peer education programs and activities was associated with students' intent to reduce drinking, other drug use, and associated high-risk behaviors, such as unprotected sex or having sex while intoxicated.

This year, the Albany Student Press published 26 Middle Earth Roots articles, approximately one per week. The Director worked closely with the news editors to submit articles that were responsive to campus concerns as well as informative and timely (e.g. articles on rohypnol and GHB, etc.). There was a high correlation between the publication of Roots articles and topic-related calls on the hotline, particularly when articles on alcohol and other drugs were published.

During the past year, 142 individuals borrowed materials from the Middle Earth Resource Library. Throughout the past two years, work was begun on updating library materials based on campus demand to provide current and accurate information on alcohol and other drug prevention and related issues, such as campus violence and rape and sexual assault prevention education.

Recruitment of Undergraduate Student Staff. Surveys of students who are peer educators and peer counselors within the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program indicate clearly that students are attracted to the organization for its zero-tolerance stance toward alcohol and other drug abuse. Student members view the organization as supporting healthy lifestyles, and they, in turn, feel empowered to communicate this message through their work with other students. Involvement by students who are supportive of alcohol and other drug prevention is increasing dramatically; in the summer of 1999 alone, over 25 percent of the class of 2300 new University at Albany students who participated in Middle Earth Players programs during orientation expressed an interest in joining Middle Earth and building relationships with other students who value healthy lifestyles that do not involve alcohol or other drugs.

Retention of Middle Earth Undergraduate Student Staff and Their Impact on Other Students. In addition to its solid, academically-based training program, surveys of Middle Earth undergraduate students indicate that they value the program because it provides an opportunity to work with other students who do not view alcohol and other drug use as their primary lifestyle. By virtue of the fact that Middle Earth is a student organization with an Executive Board consisting of student leaders, these leaders ensure that there are social events and opportunities for student recognition that do not contain alcohol or other substance use. While this is clearly a positive outcome that is limited to the Middle Earth program and its membership, it is

noteworthy that current members are active in recruiting increasing numbers of student who espouse healthy lifestyles to Middle Earth. This, in turn, enhances the program's no-use messages to other members of the campus community. These students, in addition, also serve as student leaders in other campus and community groups, increasing the impact of their positive messages to a broader population of their peers.

The Next Step in Outcome Evaluation Methods: Program Comparison

Evaluating the Impact of Peer Educators in Delivering Social Norms Messages. It is clear that providing students with accurate information about the drinking rates of their peers is associated with reductions in binge drinking on college campuses (Perkins and Berkowitz). However, few studies have specified the most effective ways of offering such social norm information to students, nor have they examined the potentially additive impact of trained peer educators in leading to positive changes in student attitudes, behavior, and reported drinking rates. To address this need, the Middle Earth program intends to conduct comparisons of new social norms-based peer theater initiative with more traditional strategies, such as poster campaigns highlighting statistics on student drinking rates. Baseline data will be collected in the fall of 2000 on three target groups: first year students, athletes, and fraternities and sororities. Members of each of these target groups will be exposed in a randomized manner to either a social norms peer theater and poster campaign condition or a social norms poster campaign alone condition. Follow-up data will be collected from these groups regarding attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and drinking rates. It is hypothesized that the students who are exposed to the more active social norms-based peer theater programs facilitated by trained undergraduate students combined with the social norms poster campaign will show significant reductions of at least 10 percent in perceptions of peers' drinking rates at follow-up as compared to a poster campaign alone.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Satellite Resource Rooms to Deliver Social Norms Information. Data indicates that the Middle Earth Resource Room is heavily utilized by students for information on alcohol and other drugs. As a further step in our evaluation process, Middle Earth intends to evaluate the effectiveness of "taking the social norms data to where the students live". To meet this objective, satellite resource rooms highlighting social norms messages on drinking will be launched in a stepwise manner on each residence quadrangle, at the University at Albany. Prior to the launching of the resource room at each location, randomized baseline data will be collected on student consumers' attitudes and drinking rates using the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms. After one month of extensive advertising and operation of each resource room, follow-up data will be collected using the Core norms survey as well as with specific instruments assessing the visibility and student use of the resource rooms.

It is hypothesized that student who utilize the satellite resource rooms will demonstrate a 10 percent decrease in reported drinking rates as compared to baseline. It is also predicted that with the stepwise launching of satellite resource rooms on campus, the specific impact of this intervention will show more systematic, specific quadrangle-based changes during the study period.

Evaluating the Impact of Social Norm Information in the Classroom. An alcohol and other drug prevention curriculum based on social norms theory will be enhanced and infused into the University at Albany First-Year Experience course, Psychology of Personal Effectiveness course, Freshman seminars, and other related academic courses targeted to first-year students, who have been identified in research studies as being at high risk for binge drinking. These courses will be presented to over 2300 students during this academic year. To carry out this evaluation, half of the classrooms will receive a lecture based on social norms information and accurate statistics regarding drinking rates at the University at Albany, and the other half will be exposed to a lecture on general health without social norms information. Pre and post tests will be conducted with all students registered for these classes prior to the intervention using the Core Campus Survey of Alcohol and Other Drug Norms, and post-testing will be administered at one month follow-up. It is predicted that students who received social norms-based information in the classroom will demonstrate a ten percent reduction in their perceptions of their peers' drinking rates as compared to pre-test measures.

Summary

Both process and, more importantly, outcome data indicate that the Middle Earth program has an impact in moving its consumers toward reduced drinking and drug use. There is clear evidence that the social norms-based program elements attract students seeking healthy alternatives to alcohol use as well as establishing a peer group focused on low-risk or non-users. In turn, these peer educators and peer councilors actively communicate non-use and low-risk messages to the broader student culture. While our collection of outcome data is relatively recent, there is clear evidence that both our social norms campaign for first-year students and peer theater program have demonstrated effectiveness in shifting behavioral intentions, attitudes and behavior toward reduced drinking.

We look forward to collecting continued outcome data and contributing to the NYS OASAS college student norms and misperceptions outcome research project. We are also committed and eager to conduct program comparison and outcome research on all new initiatives and enhancements funded by this Model Program Grant using both existing and new research methodology.