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New Study Published in Journal of American College Health Shows Significant Reductions in Serious Alcohol-Related Consequences Among College Students

Lower Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) Among First-Year Students Exposed to Social Norms Educational Intervention

By University of Virginia

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA., AUG. 11 – A new study shows significant decreases in serious alcohol-related problems among students at the University of Virginia (UVA) – including drinking and driving, alcohol-related injury/fighting, taking sexual risks and missed classes – as a result of a six-year campus-wide social norms marketing campaign. The study's findings are in stark contrast to national statistics on college drinking, which show no change or even slight increases in self-reported negative consequences during a similar time period.

Social norms research has shown that students are influenced by perceptions, whether right or wrong, and tend to behave according to what they perceive to be normal. So, if they perceive a negative attitude or behavior to be normal, they are more likely to engage in that behavior or adopt that attitude. Social norms marketing is a comprehensive approach that includes gathering credible data and communicating accurate information about the prevalence of healthy behaviors and attitudes among peers.

To correct misperceptions and change behaviors on a college campus, social norms campaigns give students accurate information about the prevalence of healthy behaviors and attitudes among their peers. At UVA, previous surveys had shown that students grossly overestimated the amount and frequency of campus drinking, and underestimated the frequency of protective behaviors, such as stopping a friend from driving drunk.

WHAT: The social norms media campaign used a series of highly posters, table tents and student presentations correct students' perceptions of heavy campus drinking. Inform also provided on norms regarding protective behaviors. anonymous Web-based survey assessed the impact of the c 10 negative consequences of drinking. Approximately 2, were surveyed annually over the six-year period.

Key findings include:

- The likelihood of experiencing none of the 10 negative consequences increased by 113%.
- Some negative consequences as a result of drinking fighting, having unprotected sex, damaging property, missing classes
- Over 9,000 more students experienced NO consequences to alcohol during the study
- The chances of experiencing multiple negative consequences decreased by 57%.
- First-year students reported a 22% decline in the odds of experiencing multiple negative consequences, and a 2 in the odds of having an estimated blood alcohol content greater than .08 the last time they partied.
- An estimated 1,972 fewer students were injured by alcohol, 553 fewer engaged in unprotected sex in 2006 compared to 2005, respectively, as a result of the campaign (based on undergraduate population of 12,500).

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The study, "Declining Negative Consequences Related to Misuse Among Students Exposed to Social Norms Marketing Intervention on A College Campus", was published in the of the Journal of American College Health.

WHY: Alcohol use among college students causes numerous soci and health-related problems and has been a significant many years. Yet, despite publicity, interventions, and outreach campaigns, prevalence rates of high-risk drink related consequences have changed little since 1993.

WHO: The lead study authors are available to discuss the soc approach, study results and implications for other univ

-- James C. Turner, MD, Executive Director of the Natio Norms Institute, Professor of Internal Medicine, Uni Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

-- Jennifer Bauerle, PhD, Director of the National Soci Institute

-- H. Wesley Perkins, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Ho William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY

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Visit <http://www.virginia.edu/uvatoday/newsRelease.php?id=6026> to access a photo of lead authors and MP3 of Dr. James Turner discussing the study.

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