Focus on Alcohol Use and Protective Behaviors

The National College Health Assessment was administered in February 2009 to a random sample of undergraduate students at Villanova. In this survey, students were asked how many days they used alcohol within the last 30 days, and the results appear in Figure 1. Similar percentages of men and women were non-drinkers or abstained from drinking in the last 30 days. Likewise similar percentages (21%) drank 10 or more days during the 30-day period. Frequency of drinking differed for men and women for those who drank episodically (less than 10 days).

Within the last 30 days, how many days did you use ALCOHOL?

![Figure 1]

Over the last two weeks, how many times did students have 5 or more drinks at a sitting? More than one-third of women (36%) did not engage in this pattern of risky drinking as compared to less than one-fifth of men (18%). Men engaged in this risky drinking behavior with greater frequency than women; 23% of men had 5 or more drinks in a sitting 4 times or more during the 2-week period compared with 14% of women.

For those students who reported that they partied and drank during this 12-month period, the table below addresses a series of protective behaviors and the extent to which students engaged in them.

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<th>2009</th>
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<th>Most/Time</th>
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<th>Rarely</th>
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More than three-fourths (77%) of students always use a designated driver. Students frequently (always or most of the time) eat before or during drinking (80%) and keep track of how many drinks they have consumed (63%). Other protective behaviors are not being used by the majority of students with any frequency. In general, women reported engaging in protective behaviors more frequently than men.
The Research Is Clear:

• Heavy episodic binge drinking is associated with increased probability of academic failure and early departure (Jennison & Johnson, 2004; Martinez, Sher, & Wood, 2008).

• Being arrested for a DUI increases the odds of attrition (Thompson & Richardson, 2008).

• Faculty involvement through discussion of career plans, academic work, course selection, and interaction at social events had particular positive impact on a student's drinking rate (Porter & Pryor, 2007).

One-Minute Strategies:

• Make the commitment to understand the Villanova alcohol culture. Students frequently exaggerate how much alcohol their peers consume. Be familiar with what is "normal" for students at Villanova.

• Be sensitive to various student lifestyles and choices. For example, refrain from making assumptions about a student who chooses to stay in on a Friday night to study rather than to "party." For the past three years, more abstainers arrive on campus than in the previous year (AlcoholEdu for College, 2006-2008).

• Learn student language. Have you heard of a ticket party? Sink or Swim? Grab-a-Date formals? These are all student activities that often involve or are centered around alcohol. Be careful not to encourage unhealthy or unsanctioned behavior.

Short-Term Commitment Strategies:

• Be conscious of behavior changes in your students. Encourage a student to go to the Office of Health Promotion or University Counseling Center to schedule an appointment. If the student is anxious or concerned, feel free to walk over with the student and/or give the Counseling Center a call while the student is with you.

• Integrate discussions about the Villanova student alcohol culture at all class levels and in all organizations. AlcoholEdu for College is a universal Villanova student experience and one that could be used as a “jumping off” point for conversation. Whether or not a student “enjoyed” the course may be a starting point for a more meaningful conversation about the campus alcohol culture.

Long-Term Commitment Strategies:

• Promote alcohol-free events on and off campus. Challenge students to new experiences.

• Engage first year students during the critical six-week period. Research suggests that the first six weeks of college are critical to first-year student success. Because many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of their college experience, the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with a successful academic life. The “college effect” (Wall, 2007) demonstrates that first-year students significantly increase their alcohol consumption in this short period of time as they become more acclimated to the campus alcohol culture.

• Make alcohol questions part of the exit interview process for students choosing to leave Villanova, and seek to correlate attrition with high-risk drinking patterns or with the campus alcohol culture.

Resources:

www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov (College Drinking: Changing the Culture, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
www.higheredcenter.org/services/assistance/news (Higher Education Center alcohol, other drugs, and violence-related news)
www.higheredcenter.org/services/assistance/research (Higher Education Center alcohol, other drugs, and violence-related research)
www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov (National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism tools and resources for risk reduction strategies with college students)

Bibliography:

