THE GREEK CHALLENGE: SMALL GROUP SOCIAL NORMS AT VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

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SESSION OUTCOMES

- Identify one evidence-based strategy for reducing high-risk substance use with Greek-affiliated students.

- Describe one implementation process for small group social norms with Greek-affiliated students.

- Discuss challenges in the implementation process.

- Examine behavioral outcomes as it relates to substance use with Greek-affiliated students.
PRIOR TO 2011

Before small group social norms approach
HISTORICAL REFERENCE

- Programs provided by request to fraternity and sorority Chapters
- Functioned largely as a health education service
- No strategic planning between Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL) and Health Promotion
- No data sharing between OFSL and Health Promotion
SMALL GROUP SOCIAL NORMS APPROACH

Why it works with Greeks
FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES AS A HIGH-RISK POPULATION

- Use significantly more alcohol and other substances (namely, prescription stimulants) compared with their non-Greek peers
- Experience significantly more negative consequences as a result of their peers’ alcohol use compared with their non-Greek peers
- There are specific strategies that have been shown to have significant impact on Greek-affiliated students:
  - BASICS
  - Substance-free housing policies
  - Small group social norms
BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESSFUL PREVENTION WITH FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES

- Establish harm reduction as the goal.
- Appreciate the diversity of the Greek population.
- Set the right tone.
- Implement strategies that use the evidence base.
- Leverage “groupthink” to shift cultural norms.
- Use complementary environmental strategies.
- Collaborate across entities to create synergy.
- Engage adults in Chapters to address high-risk behaviors.
SMALL GROUP SOCIAL NORMS

- Providing normative feedback in a small group setting (e.g., Chapter)
- Correct group misperceptions about alcohol use (among their Greek peers)
- Demonstrate discrepancies between perceived and actual norms
- Coupled with BASICS, small groups social norms demonstrate the most significant reductions in consumption among Greek-affiliated students

LaBrie et al. (2008); Larimer et al. (2001)
BREAKTHROUGH YEAR: OFSL STAFF

(shared 2009 National College Health Assessment aggregate data regarding Greek-affiliated students around a variety of health behaviors (namely alcohol and other drug use) which prompted:

- Questions regarding our Greek students’ behavior compared with the average Villanova student
- Questions regarding the requirements of our Greek organizations on campus with regard to risk management and new member training
- Opportunities for collaborative strategic planning
- Moving away from “blanket” programming for Greek students)
BREAKTHROUGH YEAR: GREEK-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

- Shared 2009 National College Health Assessment aggregate data regarding Greek-affiliated students around a variety of health behaviors
- Described what the small group social norms process would like:
  - Survey instrument review (confidentiality, ability to opt out, importance of full participation)
  - How data would be shared
  - With whom data would be shared
  - For what purpose data would be organized at the Chapter level
BREAKTHROUGH YEAR: OFFICE OF PLANNING AND INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH (OPIR)

- Supplemental question code to link individual surveys to specific Chapters
- Data analyses and Chapter report generation
- Request for specialized report from ACHA on four-year, private institutions with Greek students ONLY
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #1: SPRING 2011

- Strong sorority participation
- Mediocre fraternity participation
- Online survey administration created a number of issues
  - Glitch in e-mail communication and online survey system
  - Response rates among fraternity men
Local advisors were invited to attend these meetings with new Chapter Presidents

Chapter Presidents and OFSL Coordinator attended meetings with me:
- Reviewed Chapter-level data
- Asked for reactions from President (good, bad, ugly)
- Identified particular areas of concern for the President, Coordinator and myself
- Discussed potential ways in which Health Promotion might support each Chapter’s needs and concerns

Notable observations from these first meetings:
- Shocked at how much higher risk they are in comparison to their non-Greek Villanova peers and to their Greek national peers
- Honest evaluations of their Chapter culture(s)
- Honest evaluations of their Chapter challenges with members who drink too much and/or have had significant incidents (e.g., member with heart problem consuming alcoholic energy drinks and heart attack)
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #1: CHAPTER-LEVEL REPORTS

- Alcohol use in last 30 days
- Number of drinks last time partied
- Number of high-risk drinking episodes (4/5) in last two weeks
- Change in AOD use in last 12 months
- Use of alcohol and energy drinks and alcoholic energy drinks in last 12 months
- Protective strategies
- Self-described weight & whether or not they are trying to do anything about weight
- Self-critical and negative assessment(s) of weight
- Interest in receiving more information on a variety of issues
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #1

- Creation of Chapter score cards which integrated Chapter-level action plan items, as well as other data points that were important to OFSL (e.g., GPA, philanthropic activity, membership dues)

- Application of one universal strategy for all Chapters: BASICS soft referral training & process

- All other strategies were determined based on Chapter-level strengths and areas for improvement

- Continuous progress checkpoints with OFSL Coordinator and outgoing/incoming Presidents
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #2

2013-14
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #2: FALL 2013

- Pre-survey implementation meeting with local advisors
- Pre-survey implementation meeting with outgoing Chapter Presidents
- Changes to survey implementation process:
  - Paper-and-pencil administration at each Chapter meeting in February 2014
  - Addition of supplemental questions to determine bystander intervention perceptions and behaviors
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #2: SPRING 2014

- New sorority participating for the first time and did not have the benefit of the 2011 data set
- Strong sorority AND fraternity response rates
  - One exception with one sorority who received coaching from local advisor
Local advisors were invited to attend these meetings with new Chapter Presidents

Chapter Presidents and OFSL Coordinator attended meetings with me:
- Reviewed Chapter-level data
- Asked for reactions from President (good, bad, ugly)
- Identified particular areas of concern for the President, Coordinator and myself
- Discussed potential ways in which Health Promotion might support each Chapter’s needs and concerns

Notable observations from these second meetings:
- Shocked at how much higher risk they are in comparison to their non-Greek Villanova peers regarding pre-gaming and prescription stimulant abuse
- Surprised at how many days per month their members are drinking and its connection to reported levels of stress and declines in overall Chapter-level GPA (increases in this area between 2011 & 2014)
- Surprised at how much members are drinking (decreases in this area between 2011 & 2014)
- Surprised at how much better Greek-affiliated students are at using protective strategies when drinking (increases in this area between 2011 & 2014)
- Surprised by the discrepancies between member expectations of their Chapter leaders versus Chapter expectations of them as members (regarding bystander intervention)
SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION #2: CHAPTER-LEVEL REPORTS

- Alcohol use in last 30 days
- Number of drinks last time partied
- Number of high-risk drinking episodes (4/5) in last two weeks
- Protective strategies
- Non-medical prescription drug use rates*
- Consequences of alcohol use
- Self-described weight & whether or not they are trying to do anything about weight
- Self-critical and negative assessment(s) of weight
- Sleep in the last 7 days*
- Experiences of violence (including sexual violence) in the last 12 months*
- Level of stress in the last 12 months*
- Impact of alcohol use on academic performance in the last 12 months*
- Acceptability of alcohol-related consequences (e.g., missing class, blacking out)*
- Comfortability intervening in a variety of alcohol-related situations*
- Interest in receiving more information on a variety of issues
INTERIM SURVEY YEAR(S)

Spring 2015 - Fall 2017
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #2: ACTION PLANS

- Continuation of Chapter score cards which integrated Chapter-level action plan items, as well as other data points that were important to OFSL (e.g., GPA, philanthropic activity, membership dues)

- Application of three universal strategies for all Chapters:
  - BASICS soft referral training & process (continued since 2011)
  - Bystander intervention training for all leaders & new members
  - Review of prescription stimulant abuse (and its connection to a variety of issues)

- Continuous progress checkpoints with OFSL Coordinator and outgoing/incoming Presidents
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #2: PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

❖ Reinforce key messages about prescription stimulants.

❖ Share Chapter data about prescription stimulants to establish context with your membership.

❖ Remind members that appropriate prescribed use of stimulants is not the issue. Using someone else’s prescribed medication or abusing your own medication is cause for concern.

❖ Sharing and selling your prescription medication (and any other prescription medication) is a federal offense. It could also result in expulsion from Villanova.

❖ Prescription stimulants have high abuse potential. They are in the same family as other stimulant drugs, such as cocaine and methamphetamine.

❖ Abuse of prescription stimulants is closely linked to declining academic performance, the opposite of which many students expect.

❖ The brain does not care about someone’s intention for using or abusing a substance – it merely reacts. So, even if a student is abusing a prescription stimulant because they want to stay up later to study or focus in preparation for an exam (seemingly noble intentions), the brain still reacts the same way it would if someone were using it recreationally.
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #2: PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

- Share relevant information with your Chapter.
  - Commonly Used Medicines that Interact with Alcohol
  - Commonly Abused Prescription Drugs
  - Prescription Drugs and the Federal Law
  - Questions to Ask a Health Care Provider
  - Refusal Strategies for Students with Prescription Medications
  - Smart Disposal Strategies
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #2: PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

- **Use campus resources.**
  - Request a program from POWER.
  - Request a program by a Health Promotion staff member.
  - Encourage your leadership (and even your membership) to attend organized campus-wide events focused on raising awareness about prescription drug abuse.
  - Concerned about a member of your Chapter and their abuse of prescription stimulants? Consider referring them to campus resources.
ACTION PLAN PERIOD #2: PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

- **Consider your Chapter culture.**
  - How does your Chapter’s alcohol use impact the number of days spent drinking and number of days spent studying each month?
  - How does your Chapter address the issue of stress? Do you find your members feeling pressed for time and unable to keep up with their academics?
  - How has your Chapter been performing academically in recent years? Have you noticed a decline in GPA and/or are you performing at a level lower than most other Chapters?
  - Have you considered structuring opportunities as a Chapter to support your members, particularly around high-stress times? (integrating activities that support academic goals)
  - Have you noticed an increase in informal social activities organized among members that may be interfering with members’ studying time?
  - On average, how many planned social events occur on a week night?