

REPORT OF THE ALCOHOL PLANNING GROUP

June 30, 2004

- *Charge to the Committee*

To develop an outline of the components of a plan that addresses high-risk use of alcohol (policy, education, service, prevention, etc.) with priorities of critical opportunities for engagement identified for each component. This plan should provide a pragmatic roadmap to achieve this vision, and identify gaps. Also needs to develop a set of concrete "first steps" that will be able to be introduced by (or before) this fall to begin to shape the culture that surrounds alcohol on this campus and in this community, based on the components that are deemed to be critical.

- *Preamble*

As our group focused on fulfilling our charge, in addition to identifying several concrete "first steps" to be introduced either before or soon after the start of the next academic year, we also concluded that there were several overarching themes or principles that ought to pervade all University efforts to address high-risk use of alcohol.

As a Preamble to this report, we present these overarching themes:

- The clear focus of University activities ought to be on the prevention of high-risk use.
- In addition to this main prevention focus, the University should clearly communicate its expectations concerning alcohol use and abuse, and clearly communicate the consequences for individuals of not fulfilling those expectations.
- There should be complete and total consistency not only in all messages promulgated by the University, but also in all actions.
- We must recognize that the issue of high-risk use of alcohol does not arise at UNH in isolation. The University exists within larger social, cultural and economic systems that contribute to high-risk use of alcohol among adolescents and adults alike. As we strive to influence those parts of larger systems that are under our control, we must also recognize that much is outside our control.

- ***Process and Products***

We began our efforts by discussing what's already being done at UNH to address high-risk alcohol use. Before we could fulfill our charge to identify gaps, we had to be sure that we knew what is already in place.

Hence, our first product is an *Inventory of UNH Activities Addressing High-Risk Alcohol Use*. This inventory includes a wide array of prevention and enforcement activities that are supported by a variety of University offices and officials. As we consulted various documents that outline best practices for alcohol abuse prevention programs, we conclude that UNH already supports most of the essential components of model programs. As we discuss below, there are still important gaps in our efforts and there is still much more we can do, but – especially in the last year – we have done quite a lot.

The first gap we recognized is the lack of a clear, widely-accepted *Statement of Principle* regarding high-risk and illegal use of alcohol and other drugs. If all that we already do is to have maximum impact, the University's core principles ought to be clearly stated, and presented repeatedly to all involved – students, staff, faculty and community members. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind about our values and our expectations. With the Statement we present below, we feel we have filled this first gap and we urge that this statement be widely disseminated, in both print and electronic forms. The Statement is:

The University of New Hampshire is a vibrant living and learning community. Being a member of the University community is a privilege. Therefore, UNH is dedicated to upholding the laws on the illegal use of alcohol and other drugs that enable all students, both on-and off-campus, to flourish in a civil and respectful community. The University will respond swiftly and consistently to any and all alcohol and drug violations that impact the respectful climate in which we reside. The expectations for UNH students as responsible members of the greater community are clearly stated, as are the consequence for violation of alcohol and drug laws.

Communications Vehicles for Statement

- Parent's Association Calendar for freshmen
- "Parenthesis"
- Recreation Calendar
- Alumni Association newsletter and UNH Connections E-newsletter
- *Campus Journal*
- *The New Hampshire*
- UNH Web Page(s)
- Inside Scoop Web Page

- The Portal
- Student's Code of Conduct/Rights and Rules
- Admissions Material
- Letter from Scott Chesney placed on beds of students as they move into the residents' halls
- New faculty/staff orientation materials
- Residence hall newsletters to students - many are put together for the opening of school
- Athletes Orientation
- Coaches of varsity athletic teams
- Department of Housing newsletter sent to students during the summer
- Distribution through existing email distribution lists
- Posted in the dining halls, residence halls and in the MUB
- Durham Web site

Second, we need to enhance our efforts to address the visibility of high-risk alcohol use on and near campus. We recognize that the University has varying levels of control over its environment (i.e., relatively more control in residence halls and campus apartments; some in recognized Greek houses; much less in either unrecognized houses or off-campus apartments), but we also recognize that we must use whatever means are at our disposal to discourage the visible presence of high-risk alcohol use at UNH. Large, highly visible gatherings that involve high-risk alcohol use are not consistent with the University's values. Such gatherings are disruptive to the community, send the wrong message to the general student body, and perpetuate the acceptability of high-risk drinking. The University, in collaboration with the community, should make all efforts to reduce the number and size of such gatherings.

Third, the University should enhance its efforts to help faculty and staff identify students who may be experiencing alcohol or drug related problems and to encourage students to seek help. As a University with both a vibrant academic life and a wide array of organized cultural and recreational activities, UNH provides many opportunities for close and supportive contact among students, faculty and staff. Operating on a human scale is, in fact, part of our vision for ourselves as a University that combines the living and learning environment of a New England liberal arts college with the breadth and spirit of discovery of a land-grant university.

Because of this scale, we recognize that a relatively small cadre of staff and faculty are best positioned to be in the front-line where they might recognize students who might be at risk of developing a problem with alcohol and/or other drugs. To considerable extent, many of these individuals are already involved in addressing high-risk alcohol use. However, we believe these efforts can be expanded and made more consistent. We recommend that a concerted effort be made in the coming year to work with front-line faculty and staff to enhance their abilities to address high-risk alcohol use among students.

We propose a series of training programs that would encourage front-line faculty and staff to reinforce the University's expectations, and to urge students to make use of existing resources. These resources include: Health Services and the Counseling Center, the Advising Center, their academic advisors, and their Associate Deans. This training can be brief, but focused, and would include groups such as:

- Residence Life staff
- Campus Recreation and Athletics
- Other units that employ students (Library and Dining Services)
- Student Government
- Greeks
- Eng 401 and Inquiry Course faculty
- Associate Deans
- Advising Center
- Health Services Staff
- Counseling Center

There are already many training programs in place for each of these groups (e.g., the Counseling Center staff already meet each year with English 401 instructors to talk about challenging students). We propose that each of these groups receive a brief, focused training that presents the University's values and policies regarding high-risk alcohol consumption; that assists faculty and staff to better identify students at risk; and that discusses how best to encourage these students to seek appropriate services. We believe that enhanced training of front-line faculty and staff can be an essential element of a strategy to identify students at risk and to refer them on to services that can prevent the more serious consequences of high-risk behavior.

We are under no illusions that this proposal for the enhanced identification of high-risk behavior and referral for additional services is a panacea. Case identification is not easy and rampant denial will certainly inhibit students' willingness either to recognize that there is a problem or to seek help. But we are convinced that the scale of UNH provides us with multiple opportunities to interact with students and that we should take maximum advantage of these opportunities to reach as many students as possible.

Fourth, although our focus is on prevention, and the training programs recommended above address case identification and first referrals, we recognize that for some students extensive treatment will be needed. Furthermore, if we are successful in better identifying students at risk and in encouraging them to seek additional services, we could well put a strain on our existing services. The issue of access to treatment, either within the University or in the community, clearly needs much more discussion before any specific recommendations can be made. We did not have the time to even begin this discussion.

Finally, whatever steps we take it is essential that we collect enough data – both process and outcome data – to insure that we are able to monitor the impact of our efforts.

- ***Next Steps***

Our group was given a clear charge – to identify gaps in UNH’s efforts to address high-risk alcohol use and to recommend actions to address those gaps. We believe we have begun this process. However, we were also given a very narrow time frame to complete our activity. Given the considerable discussion that has taken place on campus in the last year, especially in the Student Summit and the Study Circles, this short time frame was appropriate. It is clearly time to move from discussion to action. Having made a number of recommendations for specific actions, we also feel it is essential that UNH establish clear administrative responsibility for implementing and evaluating the suggestions we’ve made. Doing so must be someone’s job, and it must be clear to the entire community who is both responsible and accountable. Our efforts are –at best – a beginning and we need to know who will lead those additional efforts that are needed.

We also conclude that there needs to be an ongoing mechanism, such as a committee, to insure continued discussion of gaps in what we’re doing and proposals for additional activities. There is much more to be done, and as we succeed with the steps suggested above, new areas of concern will undoubtedly emerge. If there is to be a group constituted to continue these discussions, we feel it is very important that this group represent all the campus and community constituencies. One of the limitations of our effort was the absence of representatives from some key constituencies. Perhaps because we met during summer break, we had less student participation than would be ideal (although those students who did participate made valuable contributions both to the Statement of Principle and the identification of gaps). And we had no representative on the committee from Athletics. We recognized this shortcoming early on in our deliberations, but since we only met for a bit more than a month, we were not able to add people to the group.

- ***Conclusion***

In the short amount of time available to us, we believe we were able to engage in frank and thorough discussions about the various dimensions of high-risk alcohol use at UNH, and in our society. We believe our discussions led to a series of recommendations that have the potential to make a difference. To the extent that these discussions were productive, it was because the Committee took its charge very seriously. We met weekly and attendance was remarkably consistent, in large part because of our shared view of the vital importance of this issue to UNH. We also believe we have only scratched the surface of what needs to be done.

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