



Social Norming Assessment Plan

The goal of social norming is to decrease high-risk alcohol use and curb negative consequences related to alcohol use. The social norming assessment plan is centered upon assessing this goal and determining that social norming is the reason for these decreases.

It is very difficult to attribute change in some behavior to one intervention unless this intervention occurs in a vacuum. In other words, a decrease (thinking positively here) in frequent binge drinking does not necessarily mean that the social norms campaign is the reason for this decrease. There could be other reasons; more vigilant enforcement by the police and residential life staff, increase in educational outreach health services staff, change in behaviors of incoming students, etc. Ideally, we could create this vacuum or at least have a control group that does not receive the social norming message. This would give us greater confidence in our assessment results, but it is highly impractical given our environment and resources. In order to make a reasonable conclusion that social norming is the facilitator of such a decrease four steps can be combined.

The overall approach can be called “triangulation.” This means to gather different types of data from different sources all of which taken together can strengthen a hypothesis; in this case that social norming is effective. Instead of only looking solely at a decrease in self-report binge drinking, one can look at other types of alcohol consumption (e.g., number of drinks per week, number of nights partying per week, number of students abstaining), the first step, and other types of alcohol-related behavior, the second step, such as negative consequences or number of judicial cases involving alcohol. If all of the behaviors support the others, this strengthens the claim that social norming is effective. One could argue that this SHOULD happen, as drinking behaviors SHOULD be related. This is true. But it is just one piece, not the only piece, in the puzzle. Reviewing data on alcohol use and negative consequences related to alcohol use are the first two steps in this triangulation process.

The assessment so far is predicated on the assumption that students are receiving the normative messages, the third step. It is important to validate this assumption and determine by more than mere anecdotal evidence that students are indeed receiving the messages. The social norms approach is based on the theory that people act to what their perceptions are of normality. These perceptions are often very skewed in relation to reality. Thus, if people are educated as to reality their perceptions will become more aligned with reality and, in this case, their alcohol use will decrease. The social norms approach would also be validated if perceptions become closer to reality as the social norms campaign continues. Taken together these are the third step. One needs to assess the extent to which messages are sent, received, and integrated in a way that changes perceptions.

The fourth step includes analyzing the alternate hypotheses. If there is a decrease in alcohol use, negative consequences, and perceptions are more closely mirroring reality, how does one know that this is a result of the social norming campaign and not something else? One method would be to determine if incoming students have different drinking patterns than in the past; are they drinking less coming into college. Another method would be talking with the police department and residential life staff to see if they changed their enforcement behaviors. One could also talk with health education staff to see if there was an increase in other types of interventions. Ideally we would be able to experimentally or statistically control these alternative hypotheses. Since we can't do that we can intuitively determine if they have controlled themselves by not changing.

While these four steps do not produce unquestionable evidence that social norming is THE reason for a decrease in alcohol use and negative consequences, they do strengthen that claim.

To summarize there are four methods that can be used to validate the effectiveness of social norming: 1) assessment of alcohol use 2) assessment of alcohol-related negative consequences 3) assessment of reception and integration of messages, and 4) assessment of alternative hypotheses.

Assessment of Alcohol Use – Step 1

Self-report alcohol use data from annual alcohol surveys

*Compare self-reported alcohol use indicators from the New Hampshire Higher Education Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey and National College Health Assessment (posttests) for past years against the Positive Norming Survey, spring 2000 (pre-test).

- % binge drinking
- % frequent binge drinking
- % of students choosing not to drink (in the last 6 months)
- mean number of drinks consumed in a week
- mean number of drinks consumed when partying
- mean number of nights partying per week

Self-report data from annual residence hall survey

*Compare self-reported alcohol use from the Student Profile Survey Fall 2000 (since campaign did not begin until January 2001) to future years

- % binge drinking
- % frequent binge drinking
- mean number of drinks per week
- mean number of drinks
- mean number of nights partying per week

Assessment of Negative Consequences- Step 2

Self-report negative consequence data from annual alcohol surveys

*Compare self-reported negative consequences indicators from the New Hampshire Higher Education Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey and National College Health Assessment (posttests) for past years against the Positive Norming Survey, spring 2000 (pre-test).

- % that had hangover
- % that performed poorly on a test/project
- % that had been in trouble with police, etc.
- % that had been involved in a fight or argument
- % that had got nauseated or vomited
- % that had driven a car while under the influence
- % that had missed a class
- % that had a memory loss
- % that had done something that they later regretted
- % that physically injured themselves

Comparison of alcohol judicial cases

*Compare percentage of judicial cases involving alcohol from 1999-2000 to future years.

Comparison of police-related alcohol cases

*Compare percentage of alcohol-related arrests/warrants from Clery Act reporting from 1999-2000 to future years.

(NOTE: This data may be confounded because of how it is gathered and is reported.
Check with Paul Kopreski regarding cautions on this data)

*Compare percentage of students placed into protective custody as a result of their alcohol-related behavior from 1999-2000 from present to future years.

Assessment of Reception and Integration of Messages – Step 3

- *Analysis of questions on Entering Student Survey as to whether students saw or heard a particular message at orientation or opening weekend
- *Analysis of extra questions on New Hampshire Higher Education, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey
- *Hold focus groups to determine 1) if messages are seen/heard and 2) where are they seen/heard
 - first determine feasibility of this method given time/staff resources
- *Utilize internet/email survey to determine 1) if messages are seen/heard and 2) where are they seen heard (could send invitation via mail)
 - first determine feasibility of this method given time/staff resources
- *Comparison of perceptions of use to actual usage from the New Hampshire Higher Education Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey (this is the only survey where the questions are consistent with each other and with the messages to the public)
 - % difference between mean number of drinks consumed per week and perception of how many are consumed per week
 - % difference between mean number of nights spent partying per week and perception of nights partying
 - % difference of abstainers in last 6 months to perception of abstainers in last 6 months
 - % difference between attitudes about use influencing daily responsibilities and perceptions about others' attitudes

Assessing Alternative Hypotheses – Step 4

- *talk with Paul Dean to determine if they or Durham PD have made any changes to their enforcement methods
- *talk with Ruth and Mary to determine if Res. Life has made changes to their enforcement methods
- *talk with Kathleen Grace-Bishop and Brian Miller to determine if OHEP, Health Services has made any changes to their educational outreach methods aside from social norming
- *Compare CIRP data regarding alcohol use to determine if use of incoming classes is decreasing (compared to 1999 data)