

Guidance on developing Media Campaigns and Messaging for Underage and Legal drinkers on a college campus

As many coalitions begin the development of their media campaigns with college campuses it has become apparent that more clarity is needed around the issue of how to develop messages for two target populations, underage drinkers and legal drinkers on one campus. And if only the legal age drinkers are being targeted with a media campaign, how to ensure or limit exposure of a possible harm reduction message to underage drinkers.

After consulting with our media/communication contractor, Anne Dorwaldt, we are suggesting that one approach is for coalitions who are working with college campuses to focus their campaigns on the environment rather than the individual. In other words, instead of focusing on the behavior of the individual drinkers (legal or underage), a college strategy could focus on the environment such as policy change or the supply/access to alcohol. If the coalition focuses on an environmental change, such as policy change or development or access to alcohol issues, the message will be appropriate for all students regardless of age.

If however a coalition has made the decision to focus on the individual, then the best way to control who is exposed to the message would be through how and where the message is delivered. For example, if the message is targeted to legal drinkers, it could be delivered in bars where one could reasonably assume only legal drinkers would be exposed to it.

If a coalition decided to go ahead with a campus-wide message for legal drinkers then it is critical the message be tested with underage students to see what intended or unintended message is delivered. In other words, you want to make sure that your message doesn't have the unintended effect of making students who are under 21 think that drinking is okay as long as it is done in moderation and responsibly. Anne also suggests avoiding anything that portrays students who are drunk as these are often laughed off and not taken seriously. She indicated that messages that are positive and model the desired behavior are most effective.

Another way to target a message to legal drinkers that would be appropriate for all students would be to focus on the second hand effects of high risk drinking which could include sexual assault, injury, accidents, and affects on others in the dorm such as noise impacting others ability to study and get sleep as well as the public health implications of alcohol use (vomit, etc. ...) that other students would have to deal with. So, showing how heavy alcohol use affects people around you rather than just the impact it has on the individual drinker.

Please contact Anne for further discussion or advice if needed at Anne.Dorwaldt@uvm.edu or 802-656-4114

Also, please review the NIAAA website on college drinking at <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov>

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