

# SOCIAL MARKETING HANDBOOK



This handbook was developed by the State University of New York at New Paltz and funded through a Model Program Grant from the U.S. Department of Education

Dear Colleague,

We are pleased to be able to bring this Social Marketing Handbook to you through the support of a Model Program award from the U.S. Department of Education. As researchers and practitioners ourselves, we are always eager to become familiar with state-of-the-art strategies that can enhance our student development efforts. Our work at the State University of New York at New Paltz, as well as work we have done for many public and private universities and high schools has provided us with opportunities to conduct assessments, and to train individuals in an environmental management approach to prevention.

If the 30+ years of combined experience we share has taught us one important thing, it is that our time is best spent not “reinventing the wheel.” It is therefore our hope that this handbook will serve as a helpful guide for anyone looking to incorporate the social norms model into their prevention initiatives, or to enhance an already existing researched-based strategy. We have included the following in this handbook: a review of the literature; why the social norms approach is effective; how to glean useful statistics from your data; and the steps and resources necessary for developing and implementing a media campaign. By offering this ‘basic training’ we hope to demystify a proven approach to prevention, and offer ideas and direction that may be helpful to you as you implement this approach. We wish you great success at putting the model into practice!

Raymond M. Schwarz, Ph.D  
Associate Vice President  
for Student Affairs

Robin S. Cohen, M.A.  
Associate Dean of Students

Michelle Cangelosi, M.Ed., CHES  
Director of Student Development

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For more years than we wish to recall, student use and abuse of alcohol has been identified as one of the most critical social issues facing colleges and universities across the nation. Prevention and education programs targeting this problem have been common place on almost every campus nationwide. Such programs often included values clarification, health education, counseling, peer education, and even scare tactics, all with little or no effect (Bangert-Drowns, 1988; Kraft, 1988; Moskowitz, 1989).

In the seventies and eighties peer-education programs seemed to flourish, based on the belief that students would have more influence with their peers than would the older faculty and staff. However, even if this presumption were true and the students paid more attention, the messages being conveyed regarding the dangers and consequences related to alcohol misuse never seemed to translate into actual behavior change (Magner, 1988). Simply put, we had very well informed students making the same choices as those before them. This might suggest that it was the message and not the messenger that was ineffective.

In the mid-eighties, groundbreaking research on social norms suggested that a new message, aimed at correcting student misperceptions, might be more effective in altering student-drink-

ing behavior. This research, conducted by Wes Perkins and Alan Berkowitz, found a significant positive correlation between how much students drink and how much they **think** everyone else is drinking. They also found that students perceive everyone else as drinking more than they actually are (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). These findings have been replicated at colleges and universities throughout the country (Baer, Stacey & Larimer, 1991; Clapp & McDonnell, 2000; Haines & Spear, 1996; Perkins, Meilman, Leichlite, Cashin, & Presley, 1999; Prentice & Miller, 1993) and demonstrate that a very common misperception, or erroneous norm, is driving high-risk drinking on campuses nationwide.



Perkins and Berkowitz (1991) have identified a number of factors that influence and maintain this misperception. These include:

**Public Behavior** – people tend to remember and talk about the extremes of behavior. So if there is a party with a hundred students and twenty of them are intoxicated, their behavior ( i.e. passing out, throwing up, starting fights) is what is remembered and talked about. So what is conveyed is, “You should have been at the party Friday night – everyone was hammered.”

Simply put, we had very well informed students making the same choices these before the

**Conversations** – students (like the rest of us) often speak in an all or nothing fashion. So what you hear is, “everybody likes to party” or “nobody stays in on Thursday night” or “you should have seen the line outside the bar, all the students were there” (that would be all 8,000 of them!).

**Attribution Theory** – simply put, attribution theory states that we are more likely to attribute other people’s behavior to their likes, attributes, or values than to their situation. Whereas, we almost always consider the situation when assessing our own behavior. For example, I may be nursing a beer because I want to fit in but everyone else is drinking because they like to drink.

**Advertising** – most advertising suggests that if you want to be popular, attractive, and sexually active, then you should be drinking.

**Previous Prevention Efforts** – we have been so intent on communicating the seriousness of this problem, that we’ve been part of it. When we would go on and on about the percentage of

students who engaged in high risk drinking (never acknowledging that they were ALWAYS the minority) we were reinforcing the misperception. When we used slides from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention that showed that if you took all the beer cans consumed by college students in one year and stacked them one on top of the other—they would go from the earth to the moon and 70,000 miles beyond—we were convincing the audience that **ALL** college students drink **ALL** the time!

Michael Haines at Northern Illinois University was the first person to apply these research results to prevention programming. He believed that if the correlation shown by Perkins and Berkowitz held true, then communicating a message that corrected the misperception (in essence, educating students about the true norm) would result in a decrease in student drinking. His baseline data in 1988 showed that 70% of the students perceived binge drinking as the norm whereas only 43% of students actually engaged in such behavior. He followed his baseline with a year of traditional prevention

programming which had no effect on the perception of or actual binge-drinking rates. He then initiated a creative social-marketing campaign advertising the true norm. His recent data in 1998 has shown a 53% reduction in misperceptions and a 42% reduction in binge drinking (Haines, personal communication, October 24, 2000). Numerous other campuses have initiated positive-norming campaigns with similar results (Perkins, 1997; Berkowitz, 1997), and some examples are as follows: a 29% reduction in heavy drinking at the University of Arizona; a 21% reduction in frequent heavy drinking at Hobart and William Smith Colleges; a 24% decrease in binge drinking at Washington State University; a 21% decrease in the proportion of students who binge drink at the State University of New York at New Paltz; and a 12% decrease in heavy drinking at the University of Northern Colorado (Berkowitz, 2000).

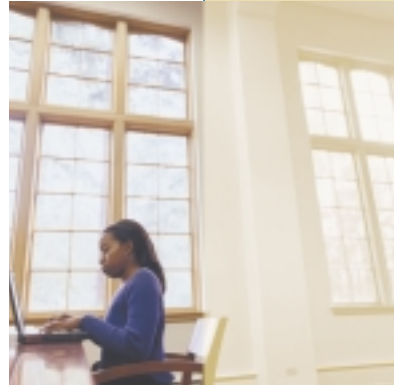
**THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS APPROACH ARE NUMEROUS:**

- 1. IT WORKS!** This is true not only on college campuses but also in junior high and high schools as well. This is demonstrated in a review article on prevention programs for sixth through twelfth grades by William Hansen at Wake Forest University, published in Alcohol Health and Research World.
- 2. IT IS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE.** It doesn’t tell students what to do, but educates them about what their peers are actually doing. As Dr. Jeff Linkenbach from Montana State College has said, “Students are more influenced by what they perceive as normal than by what they perceive as healthy.”
- 3. IT FOCUSES ON THE POSITIVE** and the healthy decisions of the majority.
- 4. IT FITS ALL CAMPUSES.** This approach relies less on residence hall and campus-wide programming and is therefore easily transferable to a variety of campuses, including community colleges and commuter schools; and,
- 5. IT ALLOWS US TO DO “MORE WITH LESS.”** Through focusing on what has been empirically demonstrated to be effective, we are empowered to let go of many of our more costly and ineffective efforts.



The social norms approach is not, by any means, a stand-alone panacea. All would agree that it be a primary part of a more comprehensive program involving other environmental management strategies such as assessment, education, policy development and revision, early intervention and treatment, alcohol-free social and recreational activities, enforcement, and campus/community coalition building.

Resistance to letting go of what we've always done, regardless of its effectiveness, is natural. At present, only one out of nine colleges and universities nationwide utilizes a social norms approach (Wechsler, Kelly, Weitzman, Giovanni & Seibring, 2000). Such resistance must not continue. As researchers, we have a responsibility to be cognizant of valid and replicated research; as educators, we must incorporate the results of such research into our programmatic initiatives; and as administrators, we are obligated to provide the direction and support to insure that this occurs. We must not fail in these responsibilities, especially in an area that has such an impact on the quality of life of our students while at school and forever after.



As mentioned earlier, in general, studies have shown that there tends to be a drastic discrepancy between most students' use (and values) and their perception of the use and attitudes of others. Prior to attending college, young people have already received messages that they live in a culture where attendance in college is synonymous with drinking. In the social context of the campus, college students continue to receive a great deal of informal information, and make assumptions about what is "normal" for their peers. Since beliefs can be impacted by both truth and myth, it is essential that myths be challenged with true facts.

The Social Norms approach utilizes information that has been collected on actual self-reported use (quantity and frequency measures) as well as student perceptions of the behaviors and beliefs of their peers. The use of reliable data is necessary if prevention practitioners hope to create a respected (and consequently effective) social marketing campaign. Campaigns are most effective when a team from your school works together to begin to review your assessment goals (see Assessment Checklist) as well as create a potential Social Marketing Plan (see Social Marketing Checklist.)

All you need is some data (your own, local or national) and some creative students in order to generate a campaign. The use of data need not be an intimidating process. **NO** specialized training or expertise is necessary to **USE** data, and once exposed to the simplicity of a media campaign, you will experience that using data is actually easy. Your first step will be to collect and analyze data **OR** retrieve available data that has been collected by others.

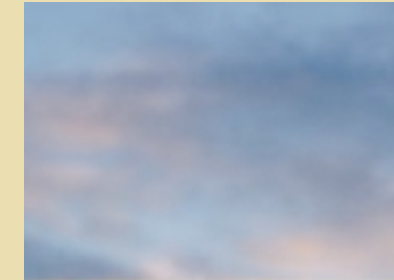
It is common that one reads results of health surveys, we are drawn to the 'bad news'; e.g. statistics showing the areas where problematic behavior exists. For the purpose of a Social Marketing campaign, you are looking to glean the **MOST POSITIVE** normative data from your results, and there is always something positive to be found that reflects your population.

Pinpointing existing sources of accurate data is essential. Not only will this process provide you with a quick source of information, but it will also inform you of areas you might want to explore through a survey that had not been previously addressed. If you are interested in conducting a study because the existing data is not current or relevant, it is then important to

identify professionals who are experienced in instrument development, ethics regarding human subjects research, the approval process for research proposals, and data collection and analysis. Most colleges and schools have a research department where you can be assisted in pursuing data collection.

For example, in 1991, at the State University of New York at New Paltz, we began to gather preliminary data on alcohol and other drug use on campus by participating in a national study. Utilizing the **CORE** Alcohol and Drug Survey

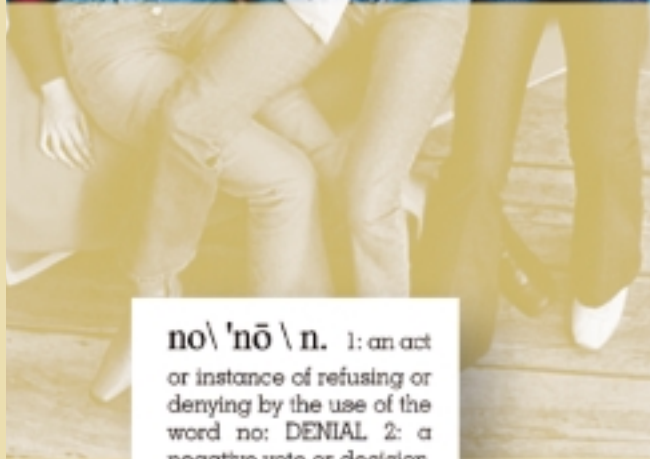
created by and available through the Core Institute at Southern Illinois University (see resource page), we collected baseline data that has provided us with a benchmark for our consequent prevention efforts. Since that time we have used the "Long Form" as well as the "Campus Survey on Alcohol and Drug Norms." There are a variety of instruments available, and it is important to determine your method of administration, the time you will have to conduct the study and the information you need to know. National instruments are beneficial to use at least once, as the results provide you with comparative information on your region and against the nation as a whole.



Although it is most effective to use your own school's data in a campaign, if you can take positive information from county, state or national data on student drinking, results may be available that offer appropriate statistics to which students can relate. Past participation in a national instrument like the National College Healthy Survey, or use of the national results can be considered. In most cases, it is feasible and most effective for a school, with appropriate permission from its Institutional Review Board to create its own surveys, asking simple Likert scale questions. In this manner, the pertinent questions you want answered are the focus, rather than an extensive study where much of the response data is not utilized.

**EXPANDING THE SOCIAL NORMS APPROACH TO OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES**

Once you become familiar with this approach, you will see its potential for applicability to a myriad of issues. Some of the many areas in which social norming has proven effective include norms regarding tobacco use, sexual aggression/date rape attitudes, retention, academic rigor, normalizing student expectations of college (study habits, time management), and homesickness/adjustment. Follow-up research we conducted showed that in terms of sexual aggression/date rape, attitudes changed, there was a decrease in violations/incidents, and there were improved perceptions in the efforts being made by the campus.



**no\ 'nō \ n.** 1: an act or instance of refusing or denying by the use of the word no: DENIAL 2: a negative vote or decision

**When it comes to sex, more than 8 out of 10 New Paltz students know the definition of "No".**

These results are taken from a study involving 670 New Paltz students administered by Dr. James A. Berman, Chair of the Center for Health, Behavior, and Society, and a member of the Psychological Counseling Center.

*It is not hard to start a social marketing campaign on your own campus or in your school. To get started, all you need is some data (your own or national), some creative students to generate great ideas and a computer! In just a few easy steps, your school can begin generating positive social norms and creating healthy environments.*

**Step 1.**

**Recruit a core group of student volunteers, interns and interested faculty/ staff members for your team**

Student input and involvement is critical to the success of any social marketing campaign. Begin by canvassing existing student groups in your school who might be interested in substance abuse prevention, such as students involved in SADD chapters or social service organizations. Over the years, we have worked with interns who have majors in psychology, sociology, or human services. Depending on your budget, it might also be helpful to have some students on board who might have an interest or background in graphic design or computer graphics to help in the design of your posters. Once you have interested volunteers, be sure to provide them with an overview of what social norming theory is and why it works. Student buy-in from the beginning is extremely important if you want your campaign to work.



## Step 2.

### Brainstorm creative ideas, themes, slogans, etc.

Don't be afraid to start the creative process!! You don't have to start out with professional photographs on four-color posters. Our first social marketing attempt at New Paltz consisted of a simple clip-art figure with the tag-line "Did you know?" printed on 8'x11' colored paper (see fig 1). Over the years, utilizing student input, we realize that student's respond best to what they think is contemporary or 'cool'. Ask your volunteers what the current trends are in TV, video games, books, movies, fashion etc., which would attract their 'peers' attention on a poster.

In the past at New Paltz, we have utilized television shows such as MTV's, "**Real World**"

or the "**X-Files**" as part of our campaign. The current trend in reality television can make a great starting theme for any school! Make sure you also use the "current" language or lingo for your population as well. For several years, we utilized a campaign slogan "Join the Majority" until we realized that most of our student population liked to think of themselves as individual and unique, anything but in the majority. We currently use slogans like "Just Thought You'd Want to Know" and " You are here because you are smart" to make students not only feel empowered to make good choices, but also not coerced by messages conveyed through shock value.

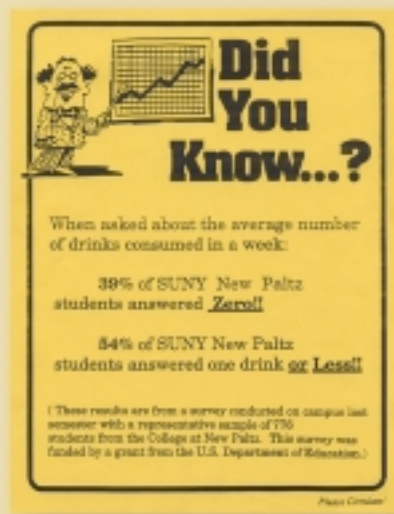
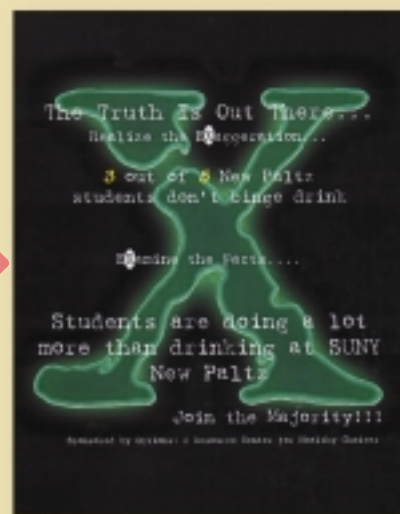


figure 1

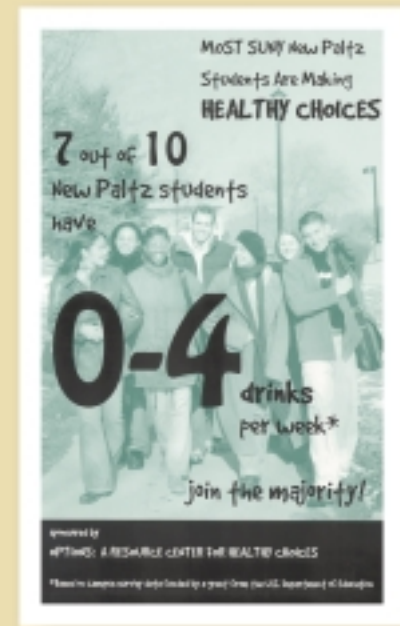


## Step 3.

### Figure out how to utilize your best data

You don't have to be a researcher yourself to have access to accurate information. Look at your school's survey instruments and find the "good data." Even though 30% of students may have a problem with alcohol, the majority or most (70%) do not. Get that message out there! If you feel you cannot identify positive data that is specific to your population, you can always access county, state or nationwide data.

It is also important to pick a few key target messages and constantly expose your population to them. While the design of a poster may change, it is important that the messages remain consistent if students are to internalize them.



## Step 4.

### Plan your poster design

Once you have decided on a theme or slogan and what data you are going to use, it is time to begin design work. Some issues to think about include what kind of graphics or photos you would like to use, poster size, colors, etc. While we started with simple graphics in the early years of our poster design, over time at New Paltz, we were able to begin incorporating photos of our students into our posters. We began by sending student volunteers out to take photos of students on campus just being themselves. After we had received some grant money for more professional posters, we were able to hire a photographer. In any case, it is important to be mindful of diversity issues and be reflective of the gender and ethnic make-up of your school. Don't forget to cite where your data came from and what organization is sponsoring the poster as this adds credibility to it.

Student feedback is important in the process of poster design and once again when the posters are out on campus. Solicit student feedback via focus groups to see if your slogan, design and healthy norm message are actually being internalized and accepted by your students. If students cannot relate to the poster theme, design or the message, you may actually be invalidating your own work.

## Step 5.

### Assess your budget and then plan your technical and printing needs

Again, you don't have to have a huge budget to start a social marketing poster campaign. If you don't have students who have design experience, see if you can recruit professionals or faculty/staff members with a background in art or design to donate their time. Perhaps you even have an on-campus design office that can create something from a preliminary sketch. Utilize clip-art or general use pictures on the web for generic pictures or symbols. If you want to utilize photos of your students, tap into a photography class to see if it can become a class project. Invest in some disposable cameras and run a contest for pictures of students.

As far as reproducing marketing ads, determine what size poster you can afford. Do a few large posters and many smaller ones. We sometimes utilize 1/4 page sheets to put in all student mailboxes. Try to get a local copy shop to donate copies if you don't have an in-house option.



## Step 6.

### Determine what other marketing ideas might work for your population

It is important to saturate your school environment with as many of your posters as is possible. Also consider running ads in your school paper or on your TV station and placing public service announcements on your local radio shows. A website is also a great place to put social marketing messages.

While posters and ads are the predominant methods of social marketing, the sky is the limit as far as promotional items (and your budget) are concerned! At New Paltz we have consistently tried to come up with creative items to give out to students that have our target messages on them. In the past we had a "Fortune Cookie" campaign, with our messages especially printed and put into fortune cookies that were distributed at all of our dining outlets, with a concurrent table tent advertising that campaign as well. We also designed a mousepad with social marketing messages on it and are currently distributing lanyards and coasters with norms information on them.

In summary, creating a social marketing campaign just requires a little "thinking outside the box," but it is a simple and effective form of prevention for any campus. Good luck getting started!



The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention—[www.edc.org/hec](http://www.edc.org/hec)

Specifically—[www.edc.org/hec/socialnorms/references](http://www.edc.org/hec/socialnorms/references)

The New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS)—[www.oasas.state.ny.us](http://www.oasas.state.ny.us)

Bacchus and Gamma Peer Education Network—[www.bacchusgamma.org](http://www.bacchusgamma.org)

SUNY New Paltz—

[www.newpaltz.edu/studentdevelopment/health](http://www.newpaltz.edu/studentdevelopment/health)

Montana Social Norms Project—[www.mostofus.org](http://www.mostofus.org)

Hobart and William Smith Colleges—

[www.hws.edu/~alcohol](http://www.hws.edu/~alcohol)

Northern Illinois University—[www.socialnorm.org](http://www.socialnorm.org)

Arizona State University—

[www.socialNorms.campushealth.net](http://www.socialNorms.campushealth.net)

Core Institute—[www.siu.edu/~coreinst/](http://www.siu.edu/~coreinst/)

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For more information contact...

The Center for Student Development  
State University of NY at New Paltz

SUB 301 75 S. Manheim Blvd.

New Paltz, NY 12561

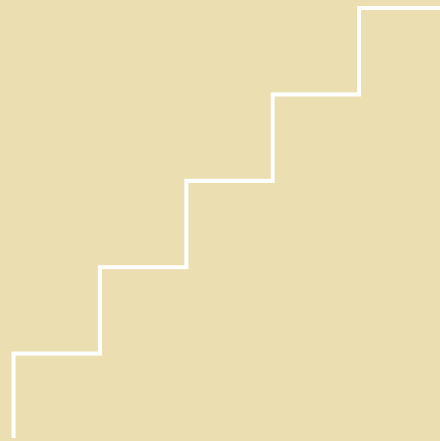
[studev@newpaltz.edu](mailto:studev@newpaltz.edu)

845.257.3088

## Social Marketing Checklist

- Complete an assessment of student behavior, attitudes and perceptions (e.g. Core Instruments, Health Surveys)
- Identify an office that will oversee social marketing initiatives
- Keep up on current trends in social marketing/social norming
- Earmark a budget for social norming strategies
- Pursue grant funding to support new strategies in social marketing
- Create partnerships with other departments and student organizations on campus (Residence Life, Counseling Center, Student Association, etc.)
- Create partnerships with faculty members in order to relate the project to classroom content and students' skill areas
- Utilize student interns and volunteers for input into the development of posters and creative promotions
- Access the services of the professional (or student) graphic design office on your campus
- Utilize the media on your campus in order to disseminate your messages (Campus newspaper, Radio, TV, campus home page)
- Apply the social marketing approach to issues other than alcohol (smoking, acquaintance rape, violence, study habits, retention, school pride, etc.)
- Share social marketing ideas with other SUNY colleges or private universities in your region





The Division of Student Affairs  
The Center for Student Development