

The Greek Challenge:

Effective Strategies for Reducing Alcohol Risk and Harms Among Fraternity and Sorority Members



EVERFI

Executive Summary

EverFi undertook an extensive effort to uncover what works in addressing high-risk alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members. This examination of the research literature and practitioner knowledgebase resulted in the following report.

Key findings from our research include:

- Fraternity and sorority members use significantly more alcohol than their non-Greek peers and suffer more negative consequences from drinking, including the negative secondhand effects caused by others' alcohol use.
- While there is relatively little evidence on effective alcohol prevention strategies for Greeks, a number of approaches are supported by the literature, including BASICS and its adaptations, small group social norms work, and substance-free housing policies.

Creating a Blueprint for Successful Prevention for Greeks

Through the course of our research efforts, a number of themes emerged that can help guide planning and program development:

Establish harm reduction as the goal: Having the goal of harm reduction, not abstinence, is an important mindset to bring to this work.

Appreciate the diversity of the Greek population: Not all fraternity and sorority members use alcohol in a high-risk manner. Approaches that “meet students where they are” will resonate most with students.

Set the right tone: Greek members don't want to be preached at. Approaches that draw on the tenets of motivational interviewing and adult learning theory provide students the respect they deserve and increase the potential for success.

Implement interventions inspired by the evidence base: The common denominator among successful approaches are practitioners who call upon the evidence base to inform their approach, adapting effective programs and policies to their needs and those of their Greek students.

Leverage “groupthink” to shift cultural norms: Given the culture of alcohol use among Greeks, and what we know about the influence of social norms, it may be particularly advantageous to use interventions that work with students in small groups.

Use complementary environmental and educational initiatives: Students are very responsive to policy initiatives and education efforts that complement one another.

Collaborate across entities to create synergy: Prevention professionals on campus need to work with national Greek organization leaders to create complementary campus- and national-level policies.

Engage adults in chapters to deter high-risk behavior: Campuses should support each chapter having a committed—even paid—adult on site, whether as a live-in advisor or an engaged alumni volunteer.

Adhere to the Principles of Effective Practice:

Following these important principles helps ensure successful alcohol prevention work:

- Be strategic in programming and policy decisions
- Examine available data to inform new efforts
- Call upon the evidence base to select effective programs and policies
- Evaluate the program implementation to document success
- Disseminate the results to educate others

A number of alcohol prevention strategies are supported by the literature, including BASICS and its adaptations, small group social norms work, and substance-free housing policies.

A Note to Readers:

Greek letter organizations have been vibrant centers of student activity on American campuses for over a hundred years. They are a significant part of campus culture, contributing in many positive ways to the college student experience by promoting the formation of strong peer bonds and service within the community. At the same time, however, Greek organizations on many campuses are inexorably linked to the “culture of drinking,” with traditions and norms that perpetuate dangerous alcohol-related behaviors.

Addressing high-risk alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members may be challenging, but this population must be a focus of prevention efforts on campus. Fraternities and sororities are often centers of student social activity for Greek and non-Greek students alike. As such, they set the tone for all students regarding alcohol and other drug use. Therefore, it is critical for administrators to understand the alcohol-related behaviors, motivations, and attitudes of Greek students and develop effective strategies for managing risk among this population.

EverFi researchers culled the research base to gain insights, distill themes, and determine what is known—and not known—about effectively addressing high-risk drinking among Greek students. Our research team also spoke with practitioners and researchers from a variety of campuses, research institutes, and national Greek letter organizations to benefit from their insights and experiences.

This briefing marks the first in a series of Research Reports produced by EverFi that focus on strategies for managing high-risk populations and events. The case studies and recommendations provided in these reports are intended to elevate standards of best practice among our partner institutions and contribute to the growing body of knowledge of effective collegiate alcohol prevention.

Regards,

The EverFi Team

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Introduction

Periodically since the 1980s, researchers have demonstrated what is commonly believed—that drinking among fraternity and sorority members is higher than in the general college student population. Given their elevated risk for excessive alcohol use, members of Greek letter organizations are often targeted in campus alcohol prevention efforts.

That said, the science is still emerging on how to best address alcohol use among these students. To arm prevention professionals and campus administrators with strategies for reducing risk among members of Greek letter organizations, we sought to answer three important questions:

- **What is the nature of alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members?**
- **What are the evidence-based strategies for alcohol prevention efforts for this group?**
- **What are the best practices for creating effective programs that target this population?**

Defining the Problem

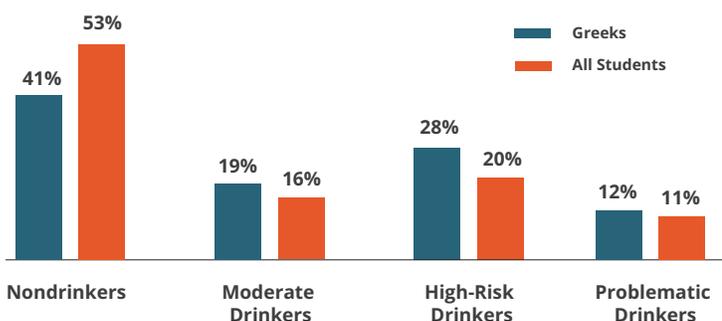
Popular culture has depicted fraternity brothers as beer guzzling, rowdy party hosts. This caricature belies the diversity of alcohol use among members of a single fraternity chapter (e.g., some fraternity and sorority members choose to abstain from alcohol entirely), among chapters of the same national organization, and among fraternity or sorority organizations.

Nonetheless, over the past three decades research has consistently demonstrated significantly elevated alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members versus their non-Greek peers. While Greeks remain a high-risk population, modest gains may have been made over time in reducing alcohol use by Greeks who live in fraternity or sorority housing. Findings from the Harvard College Alcohol Study suggest that between 1993 and 2001, heavy drinking among residents of Greek housing declined by almost 10%, although no such decrease was found for Greeks overall (Wechsler et al. 2002).

Greek students demonstrate increased rates of other high-risk behaviors as well. For instance, Greeks are more likely to drink and drive than non-Greeks (33.2% vs. 21.4%) and are twice as likely as non-members to abuse prescription stimulants such as Adderall, Ritalin and Dexedrine (CASA, 2007).

Greek students demonstrate increased rates of other high-risk behaviors

Figure 1: Drinker Profiles of Greek Members Compared to All Students



Nondrinker: 0 drinks in the past two weeks

Moderate Drinker: 1-3 drinks for women, 1-4 drinks for men on at least one occasion in the past two weeks

High-Risk Drinker: 4-7 drinks for women, 5-9 drinks for men on at least one occasion in the past two weeks

Problematic Drinker: 8+ drinks for women, 10+ drinks for men on at least one occasion in the past two weeks

Source: Comparison of students taking GreekLifeEdu™ (n=57,762) and AlcoholEdu for College® (n=39,940) in fall 2009 (post-matriculation implementation).

To bring more data to bear, we compared reported alcohol use between students taking GreekLifeEdu™ (n=57,762), a course designed specifically for members of national fraternities and sororities, and those taking AlcoholEdu for College® (n=39,940), which is designed for all college freshmen. This comparison yielded statistically significant differences across a variety of measures.¹ Figure 1 presents differences in overall patterns of alcohol use, with the entire population more likely to be abstainers and less likely to be moderate, high-risk, and problematic drinkers than Greek students alone. When split by gender, this pattern of differences is more marked for women than for men (Figure 2), as drinking behaviors of Greek men closely match those of all men.

We also see dramatic differences in the amount of alcohol consumed in a two-week period (Figure 3), with Greek males consuming 50% more drinks over this period than male students overall, and Greek females consuming fully 66% more than female students overall.

Figure 2 : Drinking Profiles of Greek and All Students by Gender

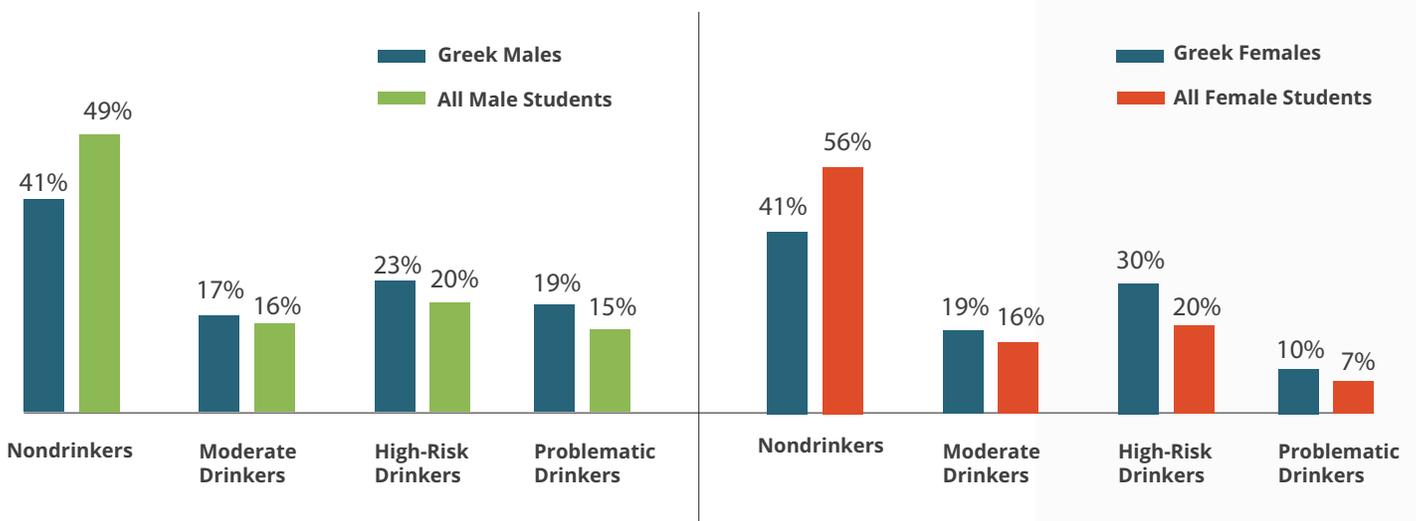
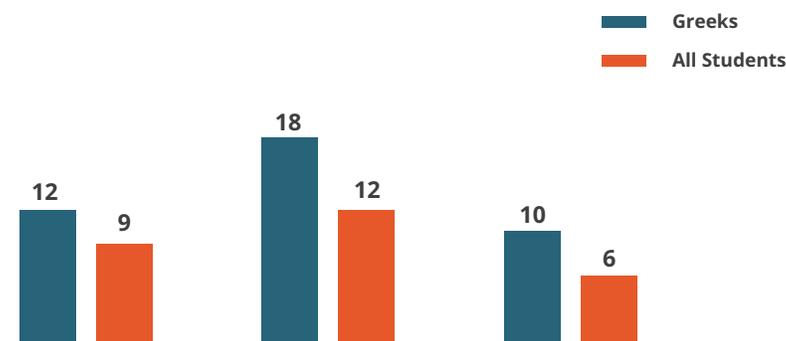


Figure 3: Number of Drinks Consumed Over a Two-Week Period



¹ As GreekLifeEdu is administered post-matriculation, these comparisons only include data from institutions that implemented AlcoholEdu on a post-matriculation basis. Note that GreekLifeEdu is not typically mandated for students, thus lowering response rates. We know from studies of AlcoholEdu that those who refuse to take the course are the riskiest drinkers. Thus, the differences in alcohol use shown here—all of them statistically significant—most likely underestimate the extent to which Greek students' drinking exceeds that of their peers.

Additional Context for Alcohol Prevention for Greeks

The research base provides important insights and context to inform efforts to address alcohol problems in this population, namely:

THE CONSEQUENCES OF USE

- As a result of their increased alcohol use, fraternity and sorority members experience more negative consequences—experiences that include arguing with friends, missing class, being hungover, falling behind on schoolwork, and being injured as a result of drinking.
- Residents of fraternity houses experience more alcohol-related problems than both nonresident fraternity brothers and other men on campus.
- Greek members experience more secondary effects of alcohol use like sleep and study disruption and having to take care of friends who are drunk.

THE GREEK CULTURE

- Students who join Greek organizations generally have higher AOD use in high school, indicating these organizations attract a higher risk drinker.
- Among students who were not high-risk drinkers in high school, more fraternity housing residents become high-risk drinkers in college compared with non-resident Greeks and non-fraternity men.
- Alcohol consumption increases with greater participation in Greek life, with fraternity leaders drinking the most. This has important implications given that leaders of Greek letter organizations set the tone of high-risk use for their fellow members.

These findings all speak to the pervasive “culture of drinking” among fraternities and sororities. Given research that indicates Greeks place a higher value on the role that alcohol plays in their organizations, how do we create programs to reduce their alcohol use?

To begin to address the unique challenges and opportunities posed by fraternity and sorority settings, we called upon the research to inform our recommendations for practitioners.

Overcoming the Challenge of Limited Greek-specific Research

While there is relatively little research on effective practices for addressing drinking among Greeks, it is important to remember that first and foremost, fraternity and sorority members are college students. In their 2007 update of evidence-based individual approaches to alcohol prevention with college students, Larimer and Cronce write, “Several studies found no differences in response of Greek and non-Greek members to skills-based, normative re-education, or BMI/feedback interventions, suggesting members of these organizations are similarly responsive to these interventions despite being at higher-risk and drinking more than other college students.”

With this perspective in mind, it is our obligation as practitioners and disseminators of best practice to adopt evidence-based approaches to our work with Greek students, to adapt them as necessary for working with this population, and to evaluate our efforts—not only for the benefit of our own learning, but for that of others.

A Scan of the Evidence Base

Despite the limited evaluation of alcohol prevention among Greeks, there is a small body of research on education and brief intervention programs intended for use with higher-risk groups that examines their impact on Greek-affiliated students.

Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS)

BASICS has been one of the leading programs administered at colleges and universities to students demonstrating problems with alcohol use, most commonly those found in violation of campus alcohol policies. The program, typically administered by a professional counselor trained in the technique, consists of two one-on-one, fifty-minute sessions. During the sessions, students are provided personalized feedback on their drinking, along with information about the risks associated with consumption, all in a non-confrontational manner. Calling upon motivational interviewing (MI) techniques, the counselor utilizes a number of approaches, such as motivational enhancement and harm reduction, to encourage the student to change his or her drinking-related behaviors (Murphy et al., 2001).

Although BASICS is most commonly administered to alcohol policy violators and students who have received medical attention due to their alcohol consumption, some institutions mandate BASICS for certain high-risk groups, such as fraternity and sorority members or athletes.

Providing BASICS or programs modeled after BASICS to Greek-affiliated students has lowered alcohol consumption, with an equal impact on Greek- and non-Greek-affiliated students in reducing their high-risk use (Murphy et al., 2001 as cited by Larimer & Cronce, 2007).

Adaptations of BASICS

One popular method for applying BASICS to Greek-affiliated students has been to adapt the program to group settings. Conducting BASICS with Greeks with a fraternity or sorority chapter may be a promising alternative to one-on-one sessions and an efficient way to reach a large number of individuals at once.

Some campuses provide both individual and group BASICS sessions to Greek students. Providing both personalized and group-specific normative information may contribute to reductions in consumption among Greek members. For example, one study examined the impact of combined one-on-one and group feedback sessions on the drinking-related behaviors of fraternity members. Fraternity members received a 1-hour individually tailored feedback session in addition to a 1-hour house-wide feedback session. Compared to fraternity members in a control condition, those who participated in the sessions reported significantly greater reductions in average drinks per week and peak blood alcohol level concentrations (BAC) (Larimer et al., 2001).

Research has also demonstrated that peers may be just as effective as professionals at leading brief interventions with students, which may offer a more cost-effective approach. Providing written personalized feedback alone has also shown significant promise as a cost-effective adaptation to BASICS for both Greeks and non-Greeks (Larimer et al., 2001). Although such programs may not achieve the same reductions in consumption or alcohol-related problems as the fuller administration of BASICS, these adaptations have demonstrated sizable reductions in drinking.

Providing BASICS or programs modeled after BASICS to Greek-affiliated students has lowered alcohol consumption

Small Group Social Norms

Another strategy that has shown promise with Greek populations is providing normative feedback on alcohol use in small group settings. Grounded in social norms theory, these sessions aim to correct group misperceptions of student alcohol use. Sessions are typically conducted with high-risk groups of students (e.g., fraternity or sorority chapters, athletic teams, or first-year students) in order to correct normative misperceptions that are commonly held among members of these groups.

Data on personal consumption and student perceptions of peer drinking-related behaviors is usually gathered before the group session (via online or paper surveys) or during it (using clicker or similar technology). In the session, data is presented to students to demonstrate discrepancies between perceived and actual group norms. Participants are encouraged to examine their personal perceptions and behaviors compared with the actual norms. This presentation is accompanied by group discussion of responses to the data, an examination of why the misperception exists, and what members of the group can do differently. Other educational information, such as the effects of alcohol and harm reduction approaches may also be discussed.

Small group social norm sessions have been demonstrated to yield reductions in normative misperceptions, personal alcohol consumption, and experienced negative consequences among Greek students. The impact of these sessions has also been found to be stronger for students with higher discrepancies in perceived norms (LaBrie et al., 2008). As is the case with BASICS, small group social norms sessions coupled with personalized feedback sessions have yielded significant reductions in consumption (Larimer et al., 2001).

Case Study: Targeting the Social Centers on Campus at Francis University²

At Francis University, a pseudonymed institution, prevention practitioners chose to address high-risk alcohol and other drug use in the fraternities and sororities, as these settings were the center of the social scene on campus for both Greeks and non-Greeks alike.

Francis staff created a unique program combining several of the elements of BASICS and small group norms programming. First, Greek students completed an online survey regarding their rates of alcohol and other drug consumption. During the online sessions, information on the definition of a standard drink and BAC was also provided. Students then received personal feedback via e-mail, comparing their use with other members of their chapter, all Greeks, and all students on campus.

Two weeks following their online survey, Francis Greeks participated in a group session at their chapter houses in which they discussed the perceived level of risk for a variety of behaviors related to alcohol and other drug use. These discussions created personal awareness that risk perceptions vary, allowing individuals to create their own boundaries for acceptable versus non-acceptable use of alcohol and other drugs. Information was presented in the group discussion according to the principles of brief motivational interviewing. Harm reduction—not abstinence—was the stated goal of the program.

Participants in the group session also reviewed a comparison of their chapter-specific AOD behaviors with all chapters and all students on campus. As with small group social norms work, a discussion followed to examine the discrepancies between the chapter's and others' behavior and the misperceptions of norms. Educational content was also presented, along with harm reduction strategies for students to consider. Finally, students completed a follow-up online survey two months later to determine the impact of this program.

²A pseudonymed institution

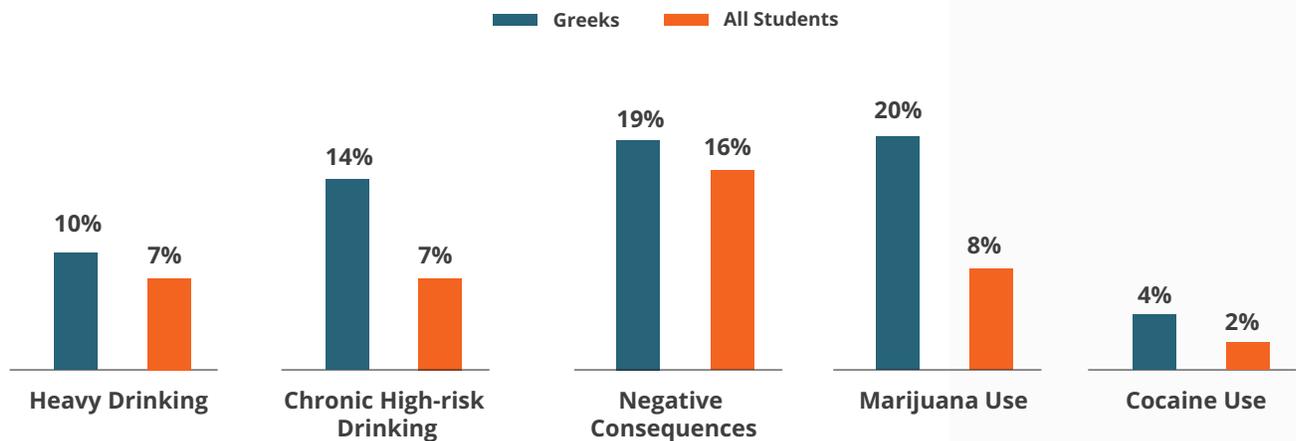
Another strategy that has shown promise with Greek populations is providing normative feedback on alcohol use in small group settings.

Figure 4: Francis University Targets Greeks on Campus



Evaluation findings were very promising, demonstrating significant reductions in AOD use and negative consequences among Greek students at Francis. Moreover, program administrators witnessed impressive reductions of AOD use within the entire Francis student body (Figure 5). The broader impact of this program supports other research findings that the BAC of fraternity party participants is highly correlated with the BAC of fraternity hosts (Clarke, 2009). These outcomes support the notion that addressing high-risk use among populations that serve as models for others can effect campus-wide reductions in behaviors.

Figure 5: Reductions in Use at Francis University



What These Programs Share

Adaptations of BASICS for Greeks and the Francis University case share several elements that contribute to their effectiveness with the Greek population. Specifically, these programs:

- Apply and adapt evidence-based practices
- Provide personalized normative feedback on alcohol use
- Clarify risks and benefits of alcohol use
- Integrate group discussions with individual attention
- Use a non-confrontational, non-judgmental, and empathic approach
- Aim for harm reduction, not abstinence

In their 2007 update of evidence-based individual approaches to college alcohol prevention, Larimer and Cronce lend further support to such approaches, stating that interventions of this type—and adaptations for group administration—have been shown to be effective in the research literature.

Benefits of Clickers and Small Group Social Norms Sessions

One popular and effective means of revealing normative misperceptions to students during small group social norms sessions is clicker technology. For example, in one study of small group social norms, data was gathered using clickers as participants were surveyed on their personal behaviors and perceptions of group norms. These data were then immediately displayed to students in graphical form to demonstrate discrepancies between perceived and actual behaviors. Relative to control participants, students who participated in this intervention had significant reductions in personal consumption and normative misperceptions (LaBrie et al., 2008).

The effectiveness of clickers in small group social norms work has been found to help alleviate the common disbelief experienced by students exposed to broader campus-wide social norms messages. Students exposed to social norms information in this way can later serve as naysayers to peers who attempt to question the accuracy of campaign messages (Hancock, 2009).

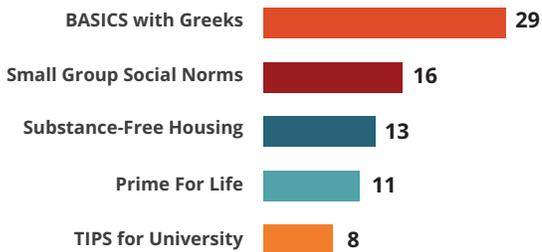
Research on Other Educational Programs Targeting Greeks

There are some evidence-based educational programs used with Greek members that have not been formally researched with this population. For example, the **Alcohol Skills Training Program (ASTP)**, a course consisting of eight 90-minute sessions, has been demonstrated to reduce consumption among high-risk college students for as long as two years (Baer et al., 1992). Greek letter organizations—including Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Pi Kappa Phi—utilize adaptations of ASTP with their members in the form of a single, 2-3 hour session led by a trained facilitator. Although such ASTP adaptations have been widely administered through these organizations, their impact has not yet been measured.

Two additional programs, **Prime For Life** and Training for Intervention **Procedures (TIPS)** for University, have been evaluated with Greek populations to a limited degree, and may hold promise for changing Greek members' alcohol-related behaviors. The research is somewhat mixed for these strategies, and it is not yet clear whether these programs have long-lasting impact on student behaviors.

Figure 6 demonstrates the relative effectiveness of the programs mentioned in this section weighted by the quality of the available research with the Greek population. Impact scores were determined using the same methodology applied to the Alcohol Prevention Compass (previously referred to as the “Cost-Impact Matrix” or bubble chart) developed in previous EverFi research, drawing upon outcome measures cited in the literature on use of these strategies with Greek students.

Figure 6: Impact Scores of Strategies with Greeks



Moving Beyond Education and Intervention Programs

Substance-Free Housing for Greeks

In addition to the education and brief intervention programs evaluated with Greek populations, the effectiveness of substance-free housing policies has also been examined in Greek communities. It is clear from the research that substance-free housing helps protect students—both Greeks and non-Greeks—from the many secondhand effects of drinking experienced in housing facilities, such as sleep and study disruption and the damage and destruction of campus and personal property (Wechsler et al., 2001).

Although it is not clear whether providing substance-free housing reduces personal consumption (such housing may simply shift drinking to other locations), there are many institutional benefits of substance-free living. Specifically, substance-free housing can reduce institutional costs associated with high-risk drinking. For example, the research suggests that insurance rates may be lower for substance-free residence halls and there may be commensurate reductions in vandalism and property damage.

Upon examining Greek houses specifically, research indicates that substance-free housing can increase member satisfaction and academic achievement. For example, since the Phi Delta Theta national office demanded that all fraternity chapters become substance-free, the fraternity has experienced significant reductions in insurance claims and cost savings on insurance premiums. After several chapters of the fraternity became substance-free in 1999, overall insurance premiums for those chapters were reduced by 33% (Phi Delta Theta, 2000, as cited by Lanter & Koepsell, 2000.) Additionally, during a period of typical decline or stagnant membership among national organizations, Phi Delta Theta has witnessed continuous growth in membership—a growth of 15% in 2008 alone—and an increase in member academic performance (Whipple, n.d., & Coalition Interview). These findings further demonstrate the impact that policies have on changing behavior, even among members of groups considered to be at higher risk for alcohol use.

While evaluations of broad-based, comprehensive efforts to address alcohol use specifically in Greek populations on campus are scarce, new data from Purdue University demonstrates how campus-wide change targeting Greeks at the policy, enforcement, judicial, and educational level can affect significant behavioral change. While such demonstrations of comprehensive, targeted, and effective programs are rare, they provide a model to other campus administrators looking to address alcohol problems in this population.

The State of the Field and Emerging Best Practice in Greek Alcohol Prevention

Typically, both at the national organization and campus levels, efforts to address alcohol use among Greeks have concentrated on educational programs designed for higher risk populations. Programs such as CHOICES, Prime for Life, and the Ladder of Risk are commonly implemented in a group format (usually on a chapter basis), and some but not all call upon the evidence base or best practice principles. The focus of many of these educational programs is risk reduction and management, particularly with respect to hosting social events where alcohol is present. Education regarding policies is a common theme.

Notably, national Greek letter organizations have been eager adopters of the online course intended for Greek students, GreekLifeEdu™, with fully 50% of all national Greek organizations implementing the course among their membership. This course serves as a strong basis for additional efforts designed to address alcohol use among Greek students.

Increasingly over the last decade, campuses and some national organizations have sought to move beyond educational programming by revising policies to address problem behaviors. National organizations have created clearly articulated risk management policies with incentives that include providing insurance discounts to chapters in compliance. One of the challenges with this approach is how to enforce such policies given the physical distance between national organizations and their chapters. Many fraternities and sororities have signed onto Fraternal Information and Programming Group (FIPG) policies, but adherence and enforcement is inconsistent. A handful of fraternities and all sororities have mandated that their chapter houses be alcohol-free.

Whether from the campus or national organization perspective, one common theme in current prevention practice is the lack of a coordinated approach, with many efforts appearing piecemeal in nature. At the leading edge of best practice are national organizations such as Pi Kappa Phi and campuses like the University of Illinois and Purdue University, which have undertaken concerted strategic efforts to develop a set of comprehensive, evidence-based programs and policies that are targeted to the specific needs and challenges of the campus and organizational membership.

Campus successes have also come about when AOD prevention professionals connect their efforts with those of Greek Life officials and vice versa, and where they support and reinforce the risk management policies and standards of the national Greek organizations.

“The first instinct for chapters is to recruit socially. Given ways to recruit in a dry manner, they can better convey their values to prospective members. This helps to recruit a better student—one who shares their values. It creates an upward spiral.”

—**Steve Simo**,
Director of Greek Affairs, The
University of Rhode Island

Case Study: Creating a Positive Environment at The University of Rhode Island

Between 1996 and 2008, several measures were instituted at The University of Rhode Island (URI) to address the drinking culture among Greek students.

Steve Simo, Director of Greek Affairs at URI, credits two important components in setting the stage for the positive changes on campus: a mandatory 1999 substance-free housing policy and “live-in advisors” in each chapter house to oversee student behavior. Additional changes included several leadership programs and new mechanisms for membership recruitment.

Simo states that Mondays in the 1990’s were largely devoted to “addressing the carnage” wrought by Greek students—replacing broken windows and fielding police reports of violations. Chapter damages were a serious concern, incurring costs ranging between \$18,000 and \$25,000 annually. One year, a chapter house burned down.

“The students would lose their security deposit but that wasn’t a deterrent,” states Simo. “Once their chapter house was trashed, they’d continue to treat it badly. It was just a downward spiral.”

The university decided to clean up the houses and educate students on the expectations of improved house treatment. They also mandated that all chapter houses be alcohol-free. While the new policy did not stop all drinking at chapter houses, it did deter the out-of-control parties.

Each chapter house was also mandated a live-in advisor, preferably one much older than the student members. Referred to on campus as “the Dougan Doctrine,” this policy was spearheaded by then Assistant Vice President Thomas Dougan. Under previous arrangements, graduate assistants and alumni closer in age to Greek students had been used with less favorable results.

Simo stresses the importance of using a live-in advisor without ties to the local chapter for this approach to work best. Greek alumni groups who own the chapter houses pay the advisors a stipend or salary for their efforts.

The association overseeing billing, collections, and repairs of URI chapter houses cites promising outcomes from these efforts: chapter maintenance costs have dropped to \$4,000 to \$5,000 per year, which Simo states is the “baseline general maintenance” for the 22 chapters on campus.

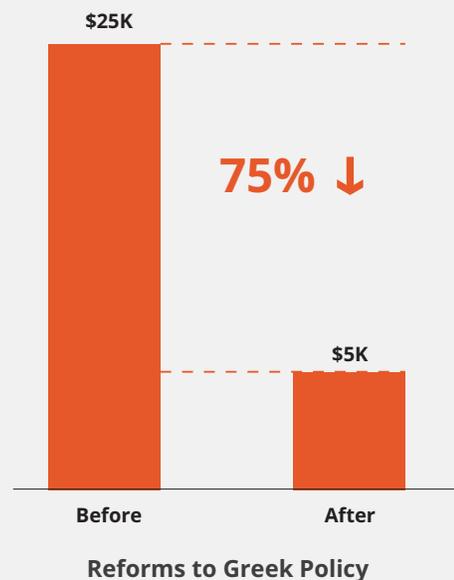
Simo has also called for a clear articulation of the core values to URI’s Greek organizations: fellowship, scholarship, leadership, and community service. The values of each chapter are conveyed to new students at orientation, where Greek leaders present their organizations to incoming freshmen, as opposed to the previous practice of simply throwing a party.

“The first instinct for chapters is to recruit socially. Given ways to recruit in a dry manner, they can better convey their values to prospective members,” states Simo. “This helps to recruit a better student—one who shares their values. It creates an upward spiral.”

With the orientation presentations, alongside a party moratorium for Greeks in the first three weeks of fall semester, URI witnessed a dramatic drop in ER transports for alcohol overdose—from the teens to zero.

“I don’t want these students to not have a social life, but I don’t want that to be their primary focus,” says Simo. “It has to be about giving back and leadership. We’ve flipped the balance and are sending students the right message.”

Average Chapter Maintenance Costs Per Year



Case Study: Purdue University's Comprehensive Alcohol Prevention Effort

Purdue University has the third largest Greek population in the US, with 80 registered fraternity and sorority chapters on campus. In 2007, Kyle Pendleton, Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at Purdue, knew he needed to respond to a growing problem: Greek students at Purdue were torn between the social hosting policies of their national organizations and the logistical and legal constraints in West Lafayette, Indiana.

The Community Challenge in Context

All national fraternities require that their members' social functions must either occur at a third-party location, be hosted in-house with a licensed alcohol server, or be held in-house under "BYOB" rules (party-goers can come supplying their own alcohol). National sorority offices have mandated that houses be alcohol-free for several years, and only some allow BYOB events, effectively limiting social options involving alcohol hosted by sorority members.

State policies and local circumstances conspired to limit the options further for Purdue Greeks. While licensed alcohol servers were hard to come by, there are only five locations for third-party functions for fraternities or sororities in West Lafayette—three local hotels and two bars. Given the large size of the Greek population at Purdue, many unregistered parties were occurring at fraternity houses, with fraternities bearing much of the risk associated with these gatherings.

Launching a Pilot Program

Under a pilot effort sponsored by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention and the North-American Interfraternity Conference, Purdue undertook a strategic examination of their local conditions and needs, from which they instituted several changes, most notably in campus policies relating to safe party hosting.

Social Practice Initiative

PHASE 1 addressed the issue of Purdue's new student week and the role of alcohol in orientation

PHASE 2 examined social practices among members of Greek letter organizations

PHASE 3 undertook Greek alcohol education and prevention efforts with a focus on BYOB reform, spreading responsibility across fraternities and sororities for hosting social functions

Figure 7: Purdue University's Social Practice Initiative



Before the range of policy reforms was instituted, Greek members received extensive education regarding the rationale for the policies and the need for their buy-in and cooperation. The new policies included prohibiting events with alcohol at fraternity chapters until new student week had concluded, and a recommendation that members not move into chapter houses until shortly before classes began.

In accordance with the policy measures, enforcement was also increased and stiffer sanctions were created for chapters in violation of the policies.

Purdue's efforts were, in essence, an embrace of FIPG policies to ensure that campus chapters were adhering to principles that many national organizations had endorsed. However, for some chapter houses—notably the sororities—some of these new policies meant, in effect, loosening their national organization policies. For instance, under the new Social Practice Policy, sororities at Purdue were allowed to host BYOB events. Some national organization leaders have opposed these measures, which fly in the face of their stated policies. Pendleton has attempted to overcome this challenge by expressing to leaders the policy rationale and the broader goal of safety and responsibility.

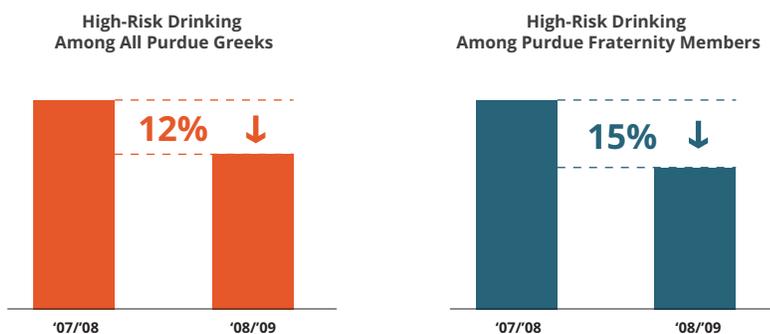
Educational efforts targeting Greeks at Purdue are varied, providing members with ample opportunities to hear information and better understand the policies, the risks of alcohol use, and a variety of messages to support healthy decision-making. Additionally, accountability measures and procedures were adopted to increase responsibility for policy adherence and enforcement.

An interesting component of this effort was the Caliber Program, a student organization designed for peer observation, peer education, and peer accountability. Each weekend night, teams of three Caliber students are assigned to visit several social gatherings. They observe behavior but do not intervene. If policy violations are observed, Caliber students present them to the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) to respond.

Within just one year of implementation, results from Purdue are very promising, with drinking down among all Greeks on campus, and down among fraternity members most markedly. Pendleton admits that it has not all been smooth sailing, and that many efforts were made prior to policy adoption to lay the groundwork for these efforts. Challenges still exist in shifting the culture of high-risk alcohol use among Greeks at Purdue, but clearly much progress has already been made, offering Pendleton and others impetus for their continued comprehensive efforts to address this pervasive problem.

“Blanket policies applied to the whole nation do not work because of important regional differences. We have attempted to officially recognize the social options for our Greek students, making sorority and fraternity social functions safer and more responsible.”

—**Kyle Pendleton**,
Assistant Dean of Students
and Director of Fraternity
and Sorority Life, Purdue
University



Source: Campus-wide administration of the Core Survey

Creating a Blueprint for Successful Prevention for Greek Students

Based on the published research findings and other cases of successful prevention efforts, a number of themes emerge that can guide planning and program development.

Establish harm reduction as the goal: What is evident from most—if not all—of these studies and examples is that harm reduction, not abstinence, is a better goal to inspire this work. For instance, programs such as substance-free housing may not eradicate alcohol use entirely, but can certainly curtail excessive and highly visible alcohol abuse.

Appreciate the diversity of your Greek population: As noted previously, not all fraternity and sorority members use alcohol in a high-risk manner. Administrators should focus on approaches that “meet students where they are” instead of assuming their use is high-risk. Additionally, efforts to address abstainers directly will support their healthy decisions and then modeling of this behavior to others.

Set the right tone: In speaking with effective practitioners about what worked in their programming, many state that their Greek members truly appreciated feeling as though they were not being preached at. Fraternity and sorority members are likely accustomed to people assuming they drink to excess and are exposed to prevention messages multiple times. Drawing on the tenets of motivational interviewing and adult learning theory provides students the respect they deserve and allows them to buy into exploring their assumptions about drinking.

Implement interventions inspired by the evidence base: Our conversations with campus directors of Greek Life and education programmers for national organizations demonstrate wide variation in how campuses and Greek letter organizations address this issue. The common denominator among successful approaches are practitioners who call upon the evidence base to inform their approach, adapting it to their needs and those of their Greek students. Even approaches with as solid an evidence base as BASICS can—and arguably should—be adapted to address Greek students in different modalities.

Leverage “groupthink” to shift cultural norms: Given the culture of alcohol use among Greeks and what we know about the importance of social norms in shaping behavior, it may be particularly advantageous to address this behavior in group settings. As chapters collectively debunk myths and process discrepancies between perception and reality, members can shift their attitudes without feeling they may be turning away from their brothers and sisters.

Use complementary environmental and educational initiatives: One concept that has become abundantly clear in our broader research is that students are very responsive to policy initiatives and education efforts that complement one another. As with Purdue, policies that are well-communicated can have a meaningful impact, especially those that demonstrate the need for student responsibility, accountability, safety, and risk reduction.

Collaboration across entities creates synergy: It is vitally important that campus prevention professionals and Greek Life staff enlist the support of national Greek organization leaders to create complementary campus- and national-level Greek policies. Through such partnerships, nationals can also be encouraged to support their local chapters to connect with campus-based resources such as counseling and peer education.

Engage adults in chapters to deter high-risk behavior: Campuses should support each chapter having a committed—even paid—adult on site, whether as a live-in advisor or an engaged alumni volunteer. Alumni volunteers’ participation should be held to a higher standard than simply appearing on the advisor form—physical presence and engagement is a must.

Blueprint Checklist

- ESTABLISH HARM REDUCTION AS A GOAL
- APPRECIATE THE DIVERSITY OF YOUR GREEK POPULATION
- SET THE RIGHT TONE.
- IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS INSPIRED BY THE EVIDENCE BASE.
- LEVERAGE “GROUPTHINK” TO SHIFT CULTURAL NORMS
- USE COMPLEMENTARY ENVIRONMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES.
- COLLABORATION ACROSS ENTITIES CREATES SYNERGY.
- ENGAGE ADULTS IN CHAPTERS TO DETER HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR.
- ADHERE TO THE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Adhere to the *Principles of Effective Practice*: Finally, when considering how to create the most effective alcohol prevention strategies to target Greek students, do not lose sight of the important principles that should be applied to all of our alcohol prevention work, namely:

- **Be strategic in programming and policy decisions:** What behaviors are you trying to change?
- **Examine your data to drive efforts:** Are your efforts targeted to specific audience needs?
- **Call upon the evidence base:** Do your programs and policies have a good chance to succeed?
- **Evaluate your programs for success:** Did you achieve your goals?
- **Disseminate your results to educate others:** How can others learn from your experience?

Conclusion

Fraternities and sororities are sometimes demonized for the high-risk alcohol use with which they are often associated. Indeed, campus prevention practitioners may regard these social clubs as impervious to alcohol prevention messages. Yet, an emerging literature on promising examples of effective prevention with these students can strengthen our resolve to shape their behavior through effective programming. As prevention professionals engaged in comprehensive strategies to address alcohol use on our campuses, we need to reach out to members of Greek letter organizations as potential partners in our prevention efforts. The precepts and values of these organizations lend themselves to a coordinated effort to raise the behavioral standards among Greeks, developing traditions anew and cultures of safety and responsibility.

Learn More About EverFi and Fraternity & Sorority
Harm Reduction at Info@Everfi.com or 202-625-0011

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