

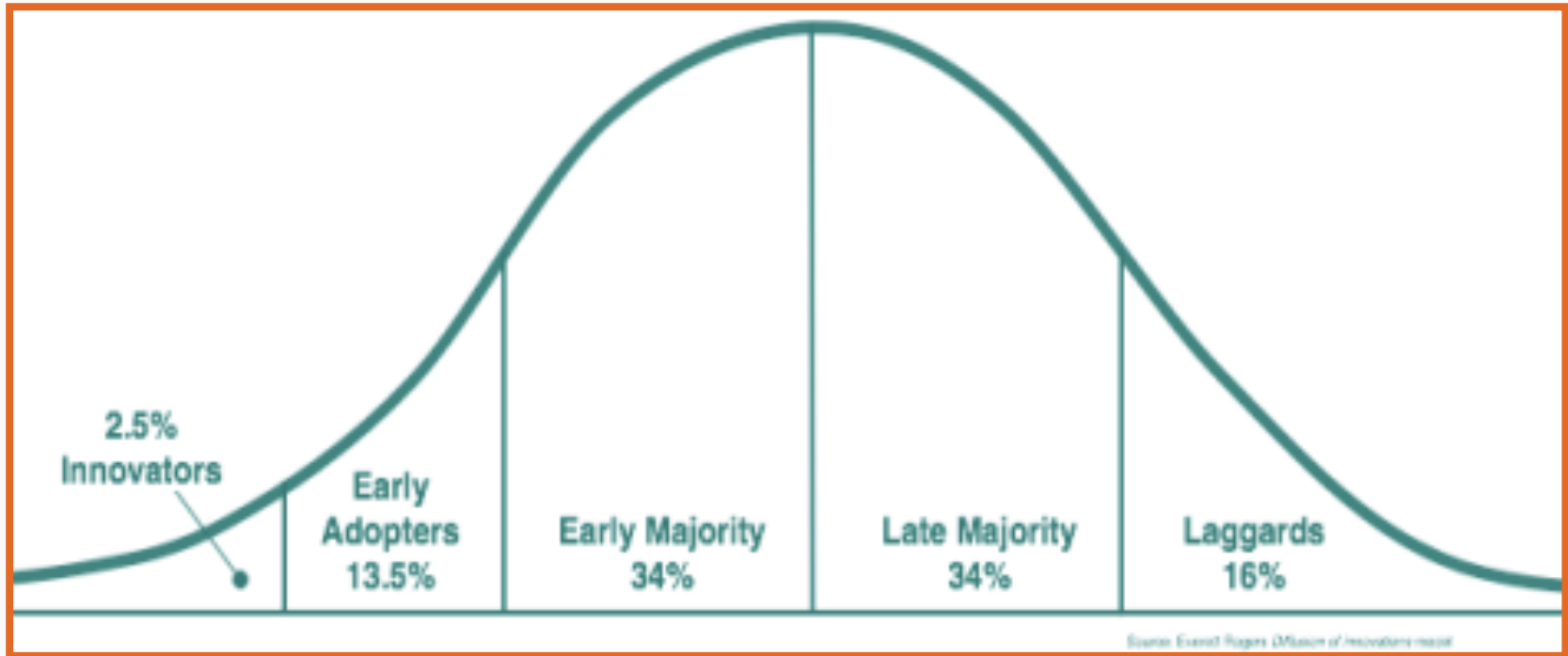
# Using Social Norms to Promote Healthy Behavior Among College Students

Alan Berkowitz, PhD  
& William DeJong, PhD



# Introduction to the Social Norms Model

# Basic Approaches for Comprehensive Prevention



- Educational Approaches
  - Early adopters
  - Early majority
- Normative Approaches
  - Early majority
  - Late majority
- Policy Approaches
  - Late majority
  - Laggards

# Educational Approaches

- Describe the health problem
  - Seriousness
  - Susceptibility
- Explain the behavioral alternatives
- Provide other key facts
  - Warning signs
  - Contributing genetic factors
  - Location of services
  - Policies, including enforcement efforts
- Convey this information *without using fear as a motivator*
  - Fear appeals are difficult to execute and almost always fail
  - Fear appeals can backfire, making the behavior even more resistant to change
  - *Note:* Don't take this to mean that people shouldn't be informed about potential consequences of their behavior

# Normative Approaches

- Influence people's beliefs about the behavior that is typical or is expected of them in a particular social context
  - Provide accurate factual information about what other people are saying and doing (*descriptive norms*)
  - Communicate what other people expect members of the group, family, or community to do (*injunctive norms*)
- Behavior change won't occur unless the target audience is motivated to act on this normative information
  - Explain why the factual information should be trusted
  - Encourage identification with the comparison group
  - Avoid messaging that triggers psychological reactance

# Policy Approaches

- Articulate policies that make clear the difference between acceptable and unacceptable conduct
- Consistently enforce the policies
- Publicize the fact that enforcement is actually happening
- Avoid fear-based messages in favor of other approaches

How was your weekend?  
Mine sucked...



**With increased DUI patrols, instead of needing spending money, you might need bail money.**

Drinking and Driving Laws are

Strictly Enforced in 

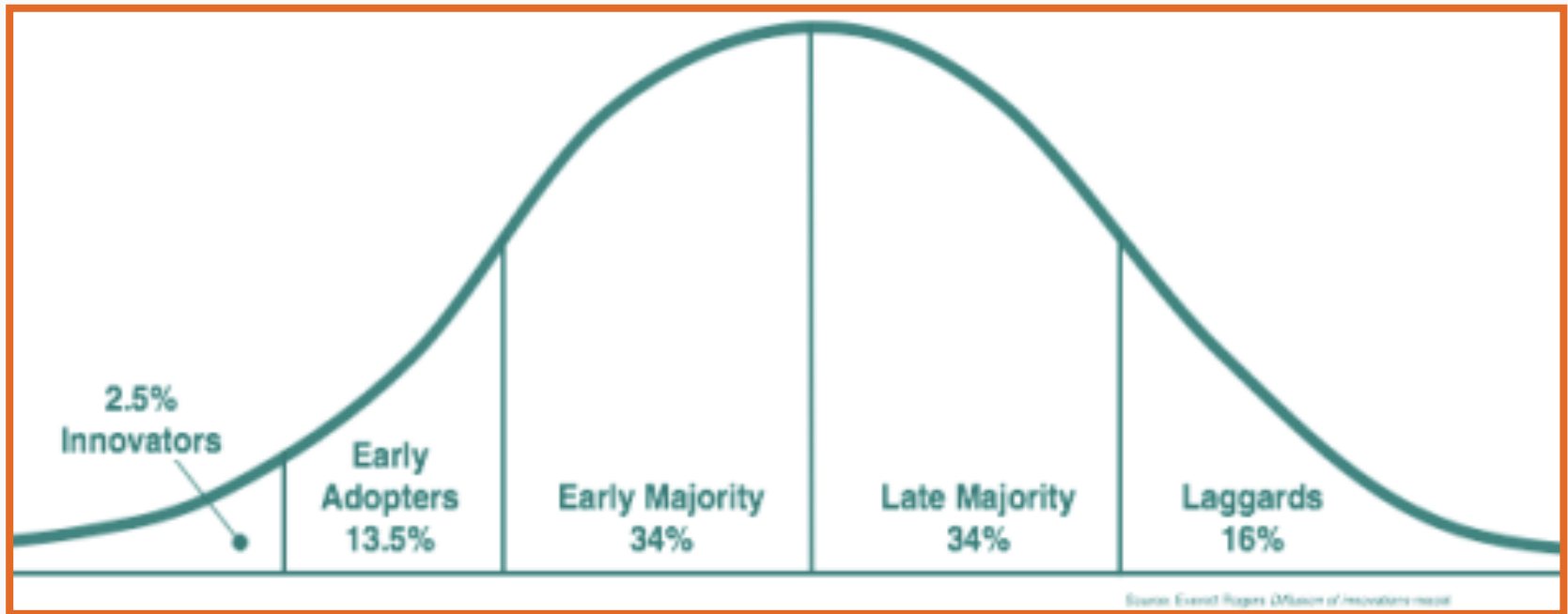
**Plan Ahead for Safe Transportation!**



URI students ask. We respond.  
**RhodeMap to Safety**  
Narragansett-URI Coalition



# Basic Approaches for Comprehensive Prevention



- Educational Approaches
  - Early adopters
  - Early majority
- Normative Approaches
  - Early majority
  - Late majority
- Policy Approaches
  - Late majority
  - Laggards

# What Are Norms?

## Social norms....

- refer to the perceived social acceptability of an action or belief
- are unspoken rules about what is “normal” for a group or setting
- exist for individuals, groups, and communities

### Alcohol Norms

- Attitudes towards underage drinking
- Tolerance of high-risk behavior
- Level of support for policies and enforcement
- Alcohol provided by parents to minors
- Frequency and quantity of drinking

### Sexual Assault Norms

- Extreme gender role identification
- Belief in “rape myths”
- Victim-blaming attitudes
- Tolerance of sexist or rape jokes
- Language that minimizes or promotes violence against women



# Assumptions of the Social Norms Approach (SNA)

- Healthy behavior is generally underestimated, while unhealthy behavior is generally overestimated
  - Misperceptions occur because problem behavior is more visible and gets more attention than less visible healthy behavior
- Misperceptions influence and predict behavior
  - Inhibit the silent healthy majority from acting in healthy ways (*pluralistic ignorance*)
  - Encourage problem individuals to “act out” (*false consensus*)
- Correcting misperceptions can lead to behavior change
  - Perceptions are easier to change than other causes of health behavior
  - Correct implementation and addressing common challenges are a must
- The social norms approach is a “mindset” and philosophy, not just an intervention approach

# Stages of Evidence for the Social Norms Approach

1. Misperceptions are documented
2. Misperceptions are shown to be correlated with behavior
3. Misperceptions at Time 1 predict behavior at Time 2
4. Correcting misperceptions is associated with behavior change
5. Social norms approach creates a “ripple effect,” influencing other types of health behaviors

*Stages 1-5 have been extensively documented for alcohol issues.*

*For sexual assault stages 1-3 have been documented with limited evidence for stage 4.*

# Questions to be Answered Before Applying the Social Norms Approach

- What misperceptions exist?
- Are these misperceptions held by the majority?
- What effect do they have on behavior?
- What behavior changes could changing these misperceptions bring about?
  - What unhealthy behaviors could be decreased?
  - What healthy behaviors could be increased?
- Does the target audience function as a group?

# Misperceptions of Alcohol-Related Attitudes and Behaviors

## Documented Overestimations

- Alcohol use
- Risky and dangerous drinking
- DUI and DWI
- Parental permissiveness
  - Perceived by both parents and children

## Documented Underestimations

- Extent to which others are bothered by “second hand effects”
- Willingness to intervene and confront abuse
- Support for stricter policies and enforcement

## Impact of Alcohol Use Misperceptions:

- Encourages greater consumption by responsible drinkers and earlier initiation of drinking by non-drinkers
- Allows abusers to justify their behavior and fosters more abuse
- Inhibits bystanders from intervening and addressing “secondhand effects”

# Sexual Assault Misperceptions

## Men and women overestimate others' —

- sexual activity (frequency, number of partners)
- belief in “rape myths”
- willingness to use force to have sex
- having sex without a partner's consent

## Men underestimate other men's—

- discomfort with male socialization
- discomfort with sexist and violent behavior
- respect for someone who intervenes
- willingness to intervene

***Perpetrators misperceive these norms to a much greater degree than non-violent men and are more willing to act coercively when they misperceive other men's rape myths and tolerance for coercive behavior.***

# Social Norms Assessment & Message Selection

## When doing an assessment, ask:

- How much of “X” actually exists? How much of “X” do others *believe* exists?
  - How many occasions **have you consumed** alcohol in the past 30 days?
  - How many occasions in the past 30 days do you think the **average student** at this school has consumed alcohol?
  - **Would you support** a fellow student who intervened when he or she heard sexist jokes or language they found offensive?
  - **What percentage of students at your school** do you think would support a fellow student who intervened when he or she heard sexist jokes or language they found offensive?

## When selecting a normative message, ask:

- Is “X” a norm?
- Is the message positive, inclusive, and empowering?

## Message choice should be based on:

- the strength of the norm
- the degree of misperception
- relevance to intended program outcomes

# Research on the Impact of Social Norms Approaches on Alcohol Use

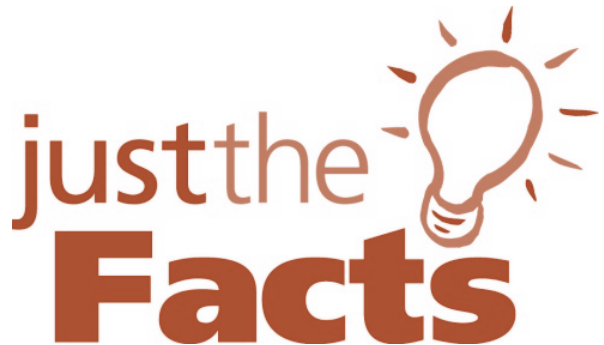
# Social Norms Marketing Research Project

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
U.S. Department of Education

*R01 AA 12471*

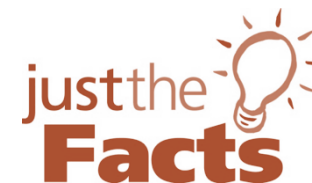
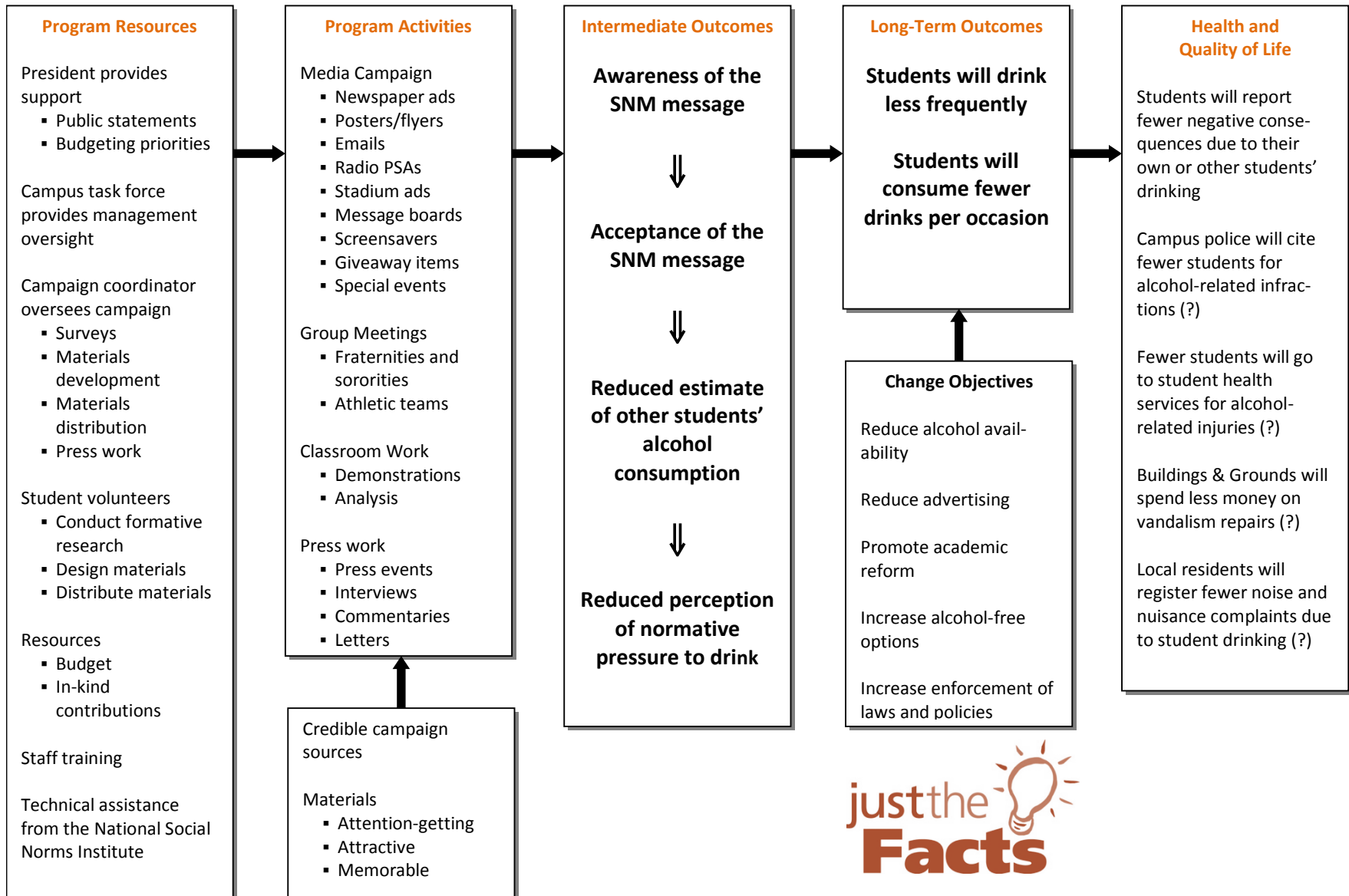
“When people are free to do as they please,  
they usually imitate each other.”

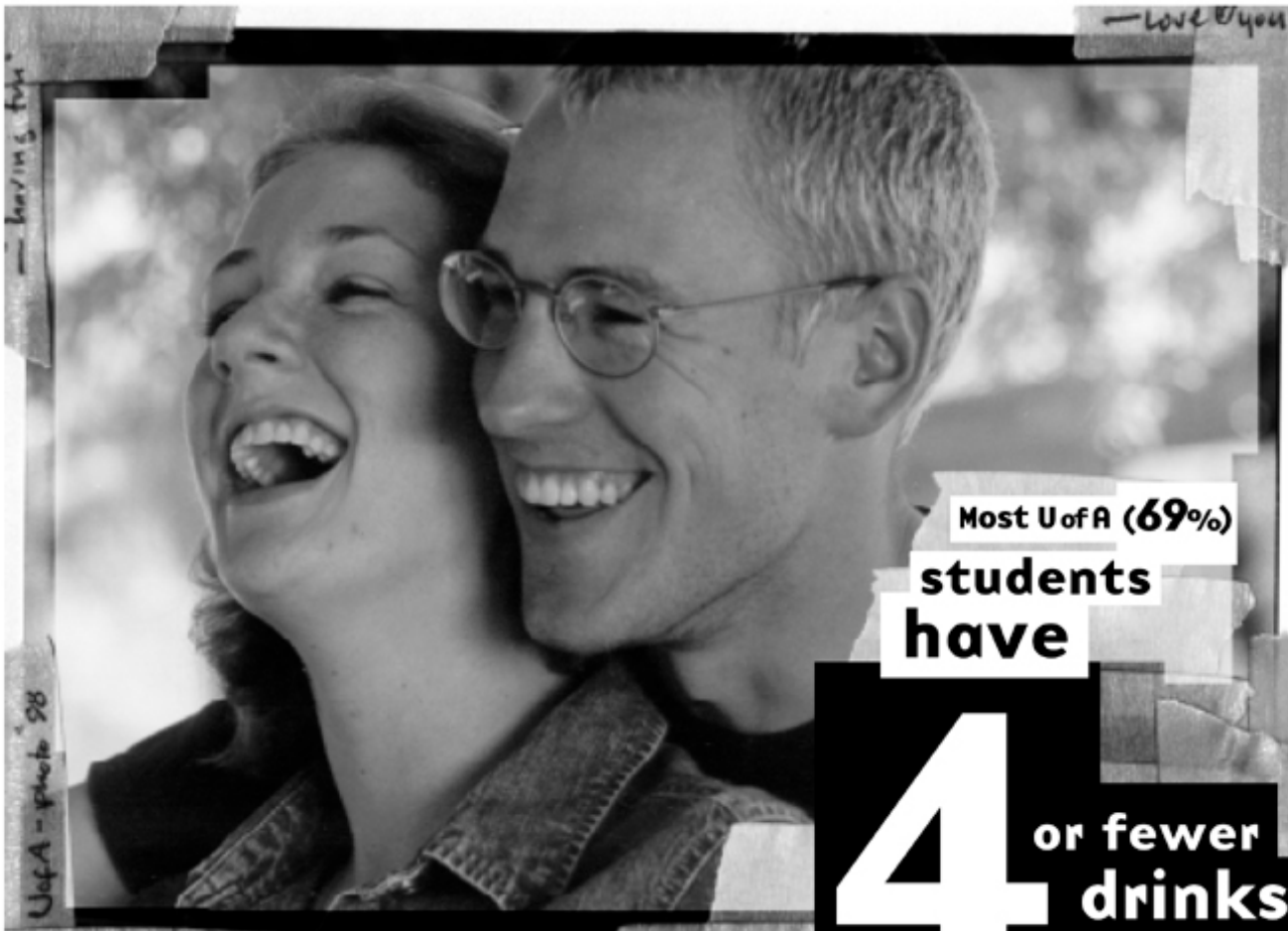
—Eric Hoffer





# Social Norms Marketing Campaign Logic Model





Most UofA (69%)  
students  
have

**4** or fewer  
drinks

1 drink = one 12 oz. beer = 4-5 oz. wine = 1 oz. liquor

when they party



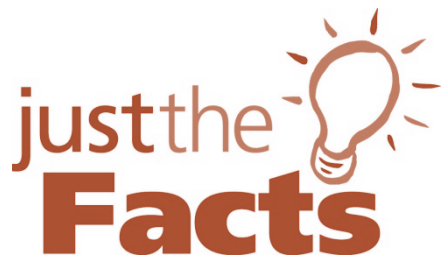
\*Based on survey data collected by Campus Health Service (1998) from 317 U of A students in a randomly selected mailing.

Funded by the US Dept. of Health and Human Services.

# Social Norms Marketing Research Project

## Study 1

Cohort A = 18 Colleges and Universities



# Selection of Participating Institutions

- Sent open invitation
- Applicants completed questionnaire
  - Never had a social norms campaign
  - Willing to be in control group, if assigned
  - Demonstrated commitment to the project
- Secured IRB approval (Study 1 = 18 sites)
- Matched schools (region, size, governance, student demographics) into pairs
- Randomly assigned schools in each pair to either the treatment group or control group

# Randomized Control Trial Study Design

**Year 1**

**Year 2**

**Year 3**

**Year 4**

**Year 5+**

All Schools

Survey of College Alcohol Norms and Behavior 

Contextual data collection 

Treatment Group Schools (9)

*Just the Facts* Implementation 

Control Group Schools (9)

*Just the Facts* Implementation 

# SNM Message Guidelines

## Campaign messages must:

- Be targeted to the entire undergraduate population
- Convey information about a behavior typical of a majority of students
- Correct an identified student misperception
- Be simple statements of fact (i.e., should not have a judgmental or moralistic tone)

Most U of A (69%) students have **4** or fewer drinks when they party

1 drink = one 12 oz. beer = 4-5 oz. wine = 1 oz. liquor

**CAMPUS HEALTH**

\*Based on survey data collected by Campus Health Service (1998) from 317 U of A students in a randomly selected mailing. Funded by the US Dept. of Health and Human Services.

## SNM Message Guidelines (cont'd)

All campaign materials must include:

- Normative message
- Campaign logo
- Identification of the source of information (survey, date)
- Drink equivalency line (i.e., “1 drink = 12 oz. beer = 4 oz. wine = 1 oz. liquor)
- Print advertisements should include an eye-catching photograph

# Campaign Messages\*

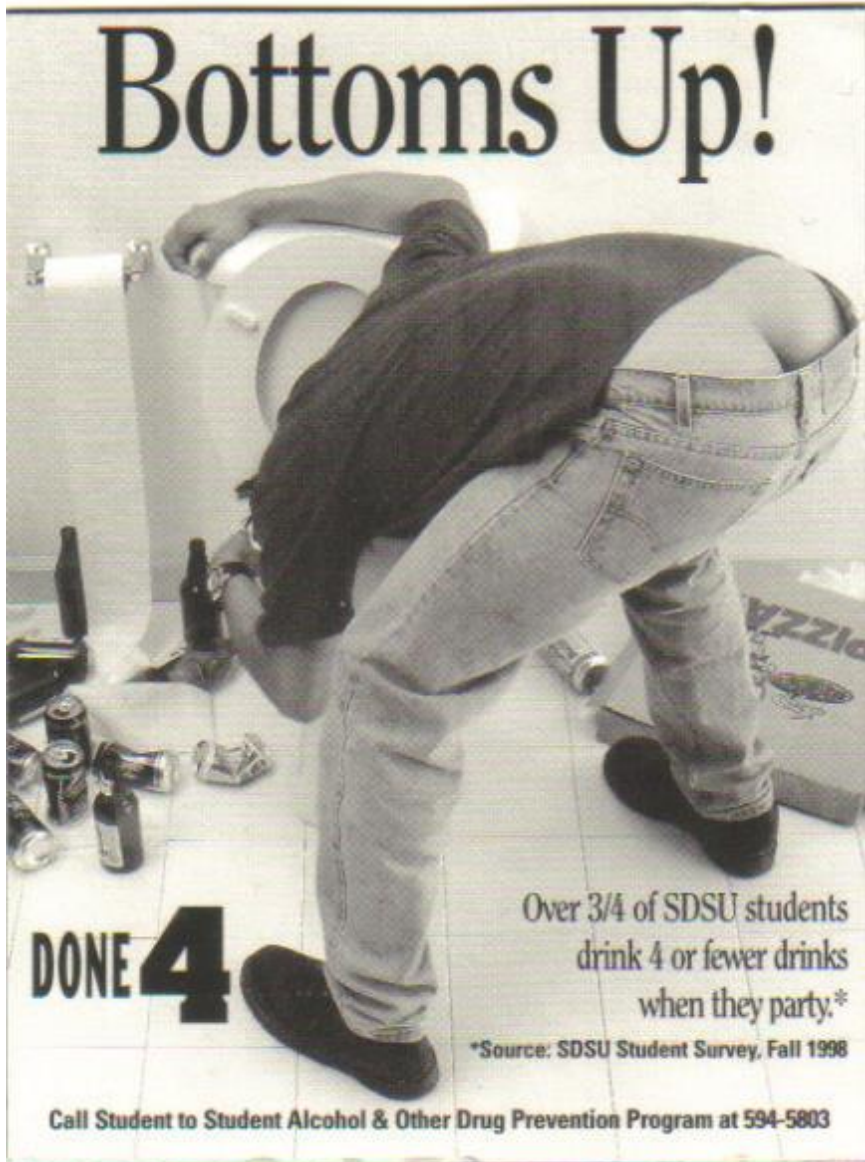
Number of  
Schools

[CAMPUS] students have 0-5 drinks when they party.	1
[CAMPUS] students have 0-5 drinks a week.	0
[CAMPUS] students have 0-4 drinks when they party.	5
[CAMPUS] students have 0-4 drinks a week.	1
[CAMPUS] students have 0-3 drinks when they party.	1
[CAMPUS] students have 0-3 drinks a week.	1

*\*Alternative wordings:*

- [CAMPUS] students have # or fewer drinks when they party.
- [CAMPUS] students have # or fewer drinks a week.






Sometimes the campaign execution can go horribly, horribly wrong...

...which is why we approved all of the campaign materials before they were used.

# Sample Campaign Materials

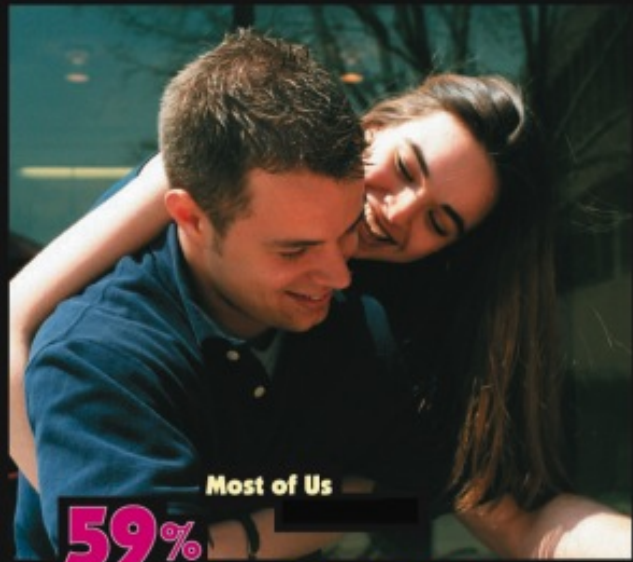
**67%** of **STUDENTS** just the Facts



**HAVE 4 OR FEWER DRINKS WHEN THEY PARTY**

For more information:  
Student Wellness Office 494-WELL

1 DRINK = 12 OZ. BEER = 4OZ. WINE = 1OZ. LIQUOR



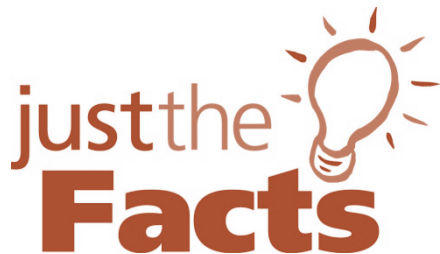
Most of Us  
**59%** of students have  
**0 to 4 drinks** when they party

just the Facts

Source: Society of College Alcohol, Drugs, and Behavior, 2008  
This message brought to you by the Substance Abuse Prevention and Health Enhancement Office, Division of Student Affairs.

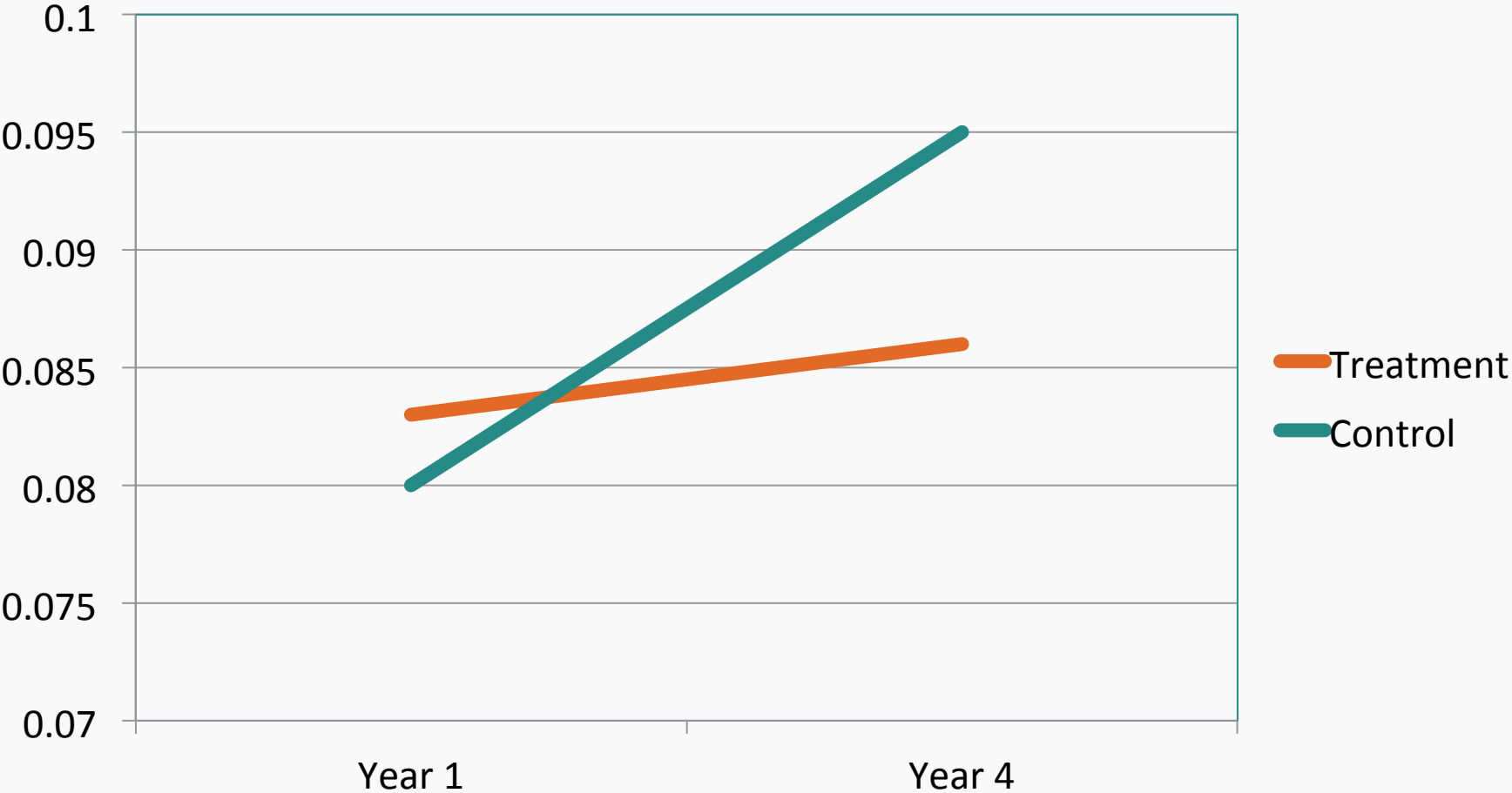
# Media Channels

- Newspaper Ads
- Radio and TV ads
- Flyers/Posters
- Billboards
- Table Tents
- Item Giveaways
- Talks/Presentations
- Student Orientation
- Reinforcement Activities
- Newsletters
- Press Releases
- Other



# Study 1: Results

Estimated Blood Alcohol Concentration for Greatest Number of Drinks on One Occasion in the Past Two Weeks



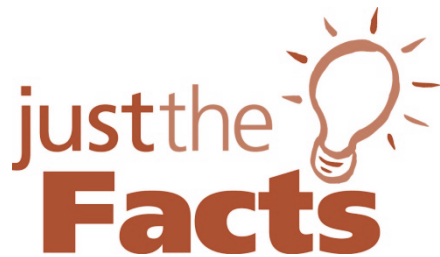
# Study 1: Summary

- Relative risk of alcohol consumption was lower at schools with a social norms marketing campaign
- Pattern:
  - Minor change at treatment group schools
  - Heavier alcohol consumption at control schools
- Core Institute data suggested that there was a national trend for increased heavy drinking during the time of the study
  - Control group schools were part of that trend
  - Treatment group schools were not

# Social Norms Marketing Research Project

## Study 2

Cohort A = 14 Colleges and Universities



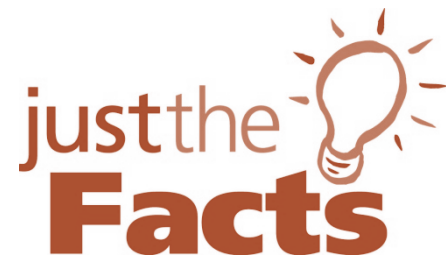
# Overall Summary

## Study 1

Students attending an institution with a social norms marketing campaign have a lower relative risk of heavy alcohol consumption

## Study 2

Replication failure



## Study 2: Results

Estimated Blood Alcohol Concentration for Greatest Number of Drinks on One Occasion in the Past Two Weeks

Treatment Group Year 1	Treatment Group Year 4	Control Group Year 1	Control Group Year 4
0.136	0.142	0.134	0.130



Social norms marketing campaigns are less likely to work in campus communities that have an alcohol-rich environment.

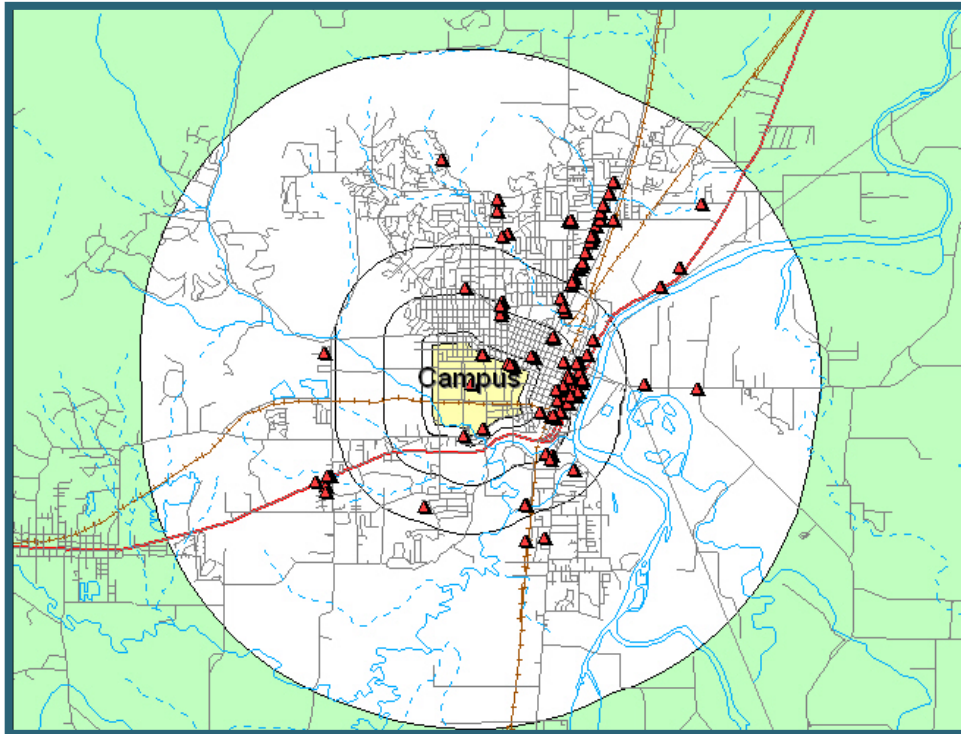
*Indicator:* High alcohol outlet density

— Richard Scribner, LSU



# Alcohol Outlet Density

Number of on-premise alcohol outlets within 3 miles of campus boundary, per 1,000 total students enrolled



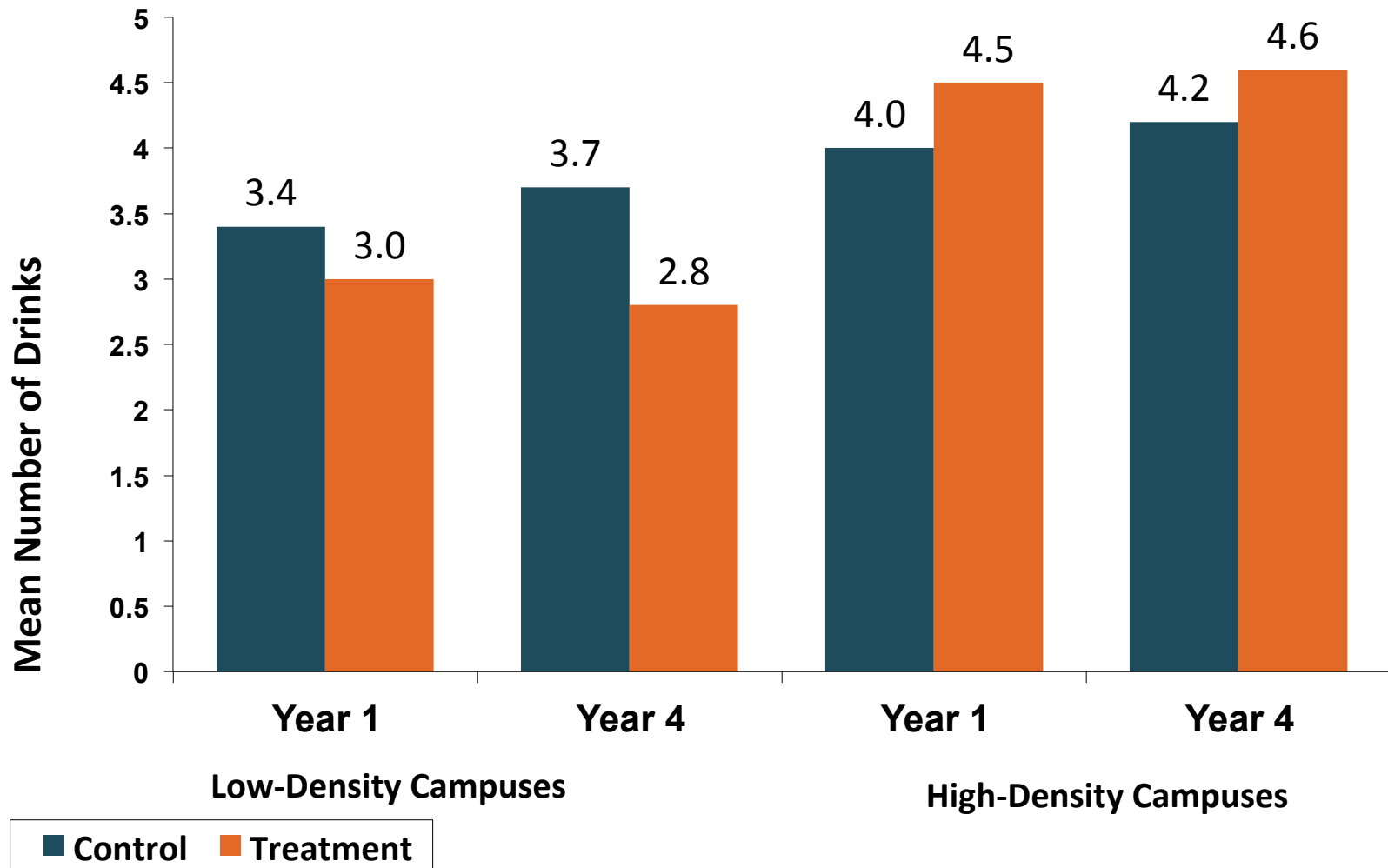
Range = 2.3 to 128.0  
Median = 10.78

High Density  
10.78+ outlets per  
1,000 enrolled

# Summary of Results

- High alcohol outlet density:
  - No intervention effect
- Low alcohol outlet density:
  - Significant intervention effect

# Mean Number of Drinks When Partying by Experimental Group & Alcohol Outlet Density



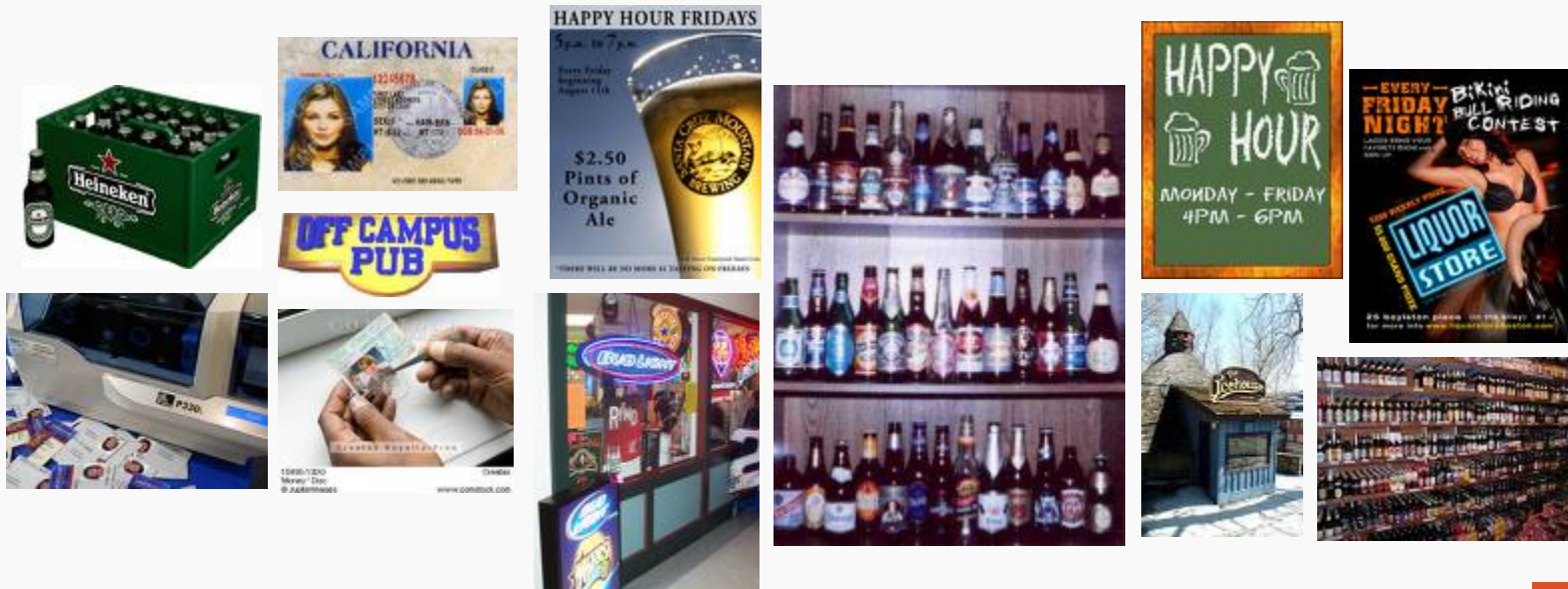
# Alcohol Outlet Density Explains Study 1 v. Study 2 Results

- *Study 1:*
  - 18 sites, 5 at or above the median
    - 3 treatment group sites
    - 2 control group sites
- *Study 2:*
  - 14 experimental sites, 11 at or above the median
    - 6 treatment group sites
    - 5 control group sites

# Possible Explanations

## High density of alcohol outlets:

- Increases alcohol access, which drives up consumption
- Counters the social norms campaign's normative message



# Implications

- Social norms marketing can work to reduce student alcohol use
- But it does not work as well in alcohol-rich environments
  - Need an even more intensive social norms marketing campaign
    - University of Virginia
  - Need to work to change the campus community's alcohol environment



# University of Virginia



- Conclusion:

A large, well-funded, and highly visible social norms campaign can counteract an entrenched drinking culture and reduce alcohol-related problems



**HON • OR**  
/än-ər/  
[ME, fr. OF honor, fr. L honos, honor]

(noun) : a keen sense of ethical conduct  
(verb) : to regard or treat with respect

EX:  
< 91% of UVA students usually stop their friends who have been drinking from harming others. >

HOO  
HONOR ?

Designed by Tami Parkearni, Class of 2008

Data is from the 2007 Health Promotion Survey with a random sample of 2,341 UVA students. [www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/hp/norms/index.html](http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/hp/norms/index.html)



# Campaign Focus

- Target Audience

- 1999: Focus on first-year students
- 2002: Expand messaging to include all undergraduates

- Messages

- Correct misperceptions about the quantity and frequency of alcohol use
- Communicate that most students practice protective behaviors:
  - Asking friends to slow down if they are drinking excessively
  - Tending to a friend who has passed out
  - Not allowing an intoxicated friend to drive
  - Using a designated driver or alternative transportation.

# Campaign Venues

- 1999:
  - Monthly series of posters (“Stall Street Journal”)
- 2002:
  - Parent orientation sessions
  - Weekly campus posters, emails, newspaper ads, and newspaper articles
  - Staff and peer presentations in residence halls, Greek residences, and classrooms.
- 2003:
  - Small group sessions for fraternity and sorority members and athletes
- 2004:
  - Annual music event.
- 2005:
  - Facebook ads



# Research Study

- Survey data collected annually, 2001-2006
  - No control group institutions
- No new policies or programs to address student drinking were launched at the institutional, community, or state level during this time
  - Increases the likelihood that any observed changes were due to the campaign and not to other initiatives
- National surveys of college students between 2001 and 2006 showed no decreases or even slight increases in several self-reported negative consequences

# Findings



- Percentage of students reporting *no negative consequences (out of 10) due to alcohol use*:
  - 2001: 33%
  - 2006: 51%
- Percentage of students reporting *multiple negative consequences due to alcohol use*:
  - 2001: 44%
  - 2006: 26%
- Percentage of students stating they had *driven under the influence of alcohol*:
  - 2001: 27%
  - 2006: 15%

# Lessons Learned 1

- A campaign must have a high level of activity, with frequent message repetition
  - Use a variety of supportive messages and media executions to keep the campaign fresh and avoid message fatigue
- Campaign organizers must anticipate and prepare a response to counter student skepticism about the data's accuracy
  - Explain how the student surveys were conducted and why drinking norms are so often misperceived
  - Begin with other normative messages that are unlikely to raise doubts about the student survey (e.g., percentage of students involved in community service, average time spent sleeping) and then to weave in the alcohol-related messages later on

## Lessons Learned 2

- Reaching the broadest cross-section of students requires using multiple venues
  - Note that commuter students tend to be less engaged with campus life and therefore view student newspapers or other traditional student media less frequently
- Students will not be moved to change their behavior if they do not identify with the student body as a whole
  - Include supportive messages that emphasize campus traditions and themes and student spirit
  - Remind students of what they have in common as members of the same academic community.

## Lessons Learned 3

- Some subgroups of students may not see the larger student body as a salient comparison group and therefore be unmoved by the campaign
  - Examples:
    - Athletes
    - Fraternity and sorority members
  - Members of these groups tend to hold exaggerated perceptions of drinking norms within their own group
  - Targeted messages with these students highlighting salient group norms might be a more effective way of reducing their alcohol consumption

## Lessons Learned 4

Social norms marketing campaigns can be used to set the stage for stricter policies and enforcement

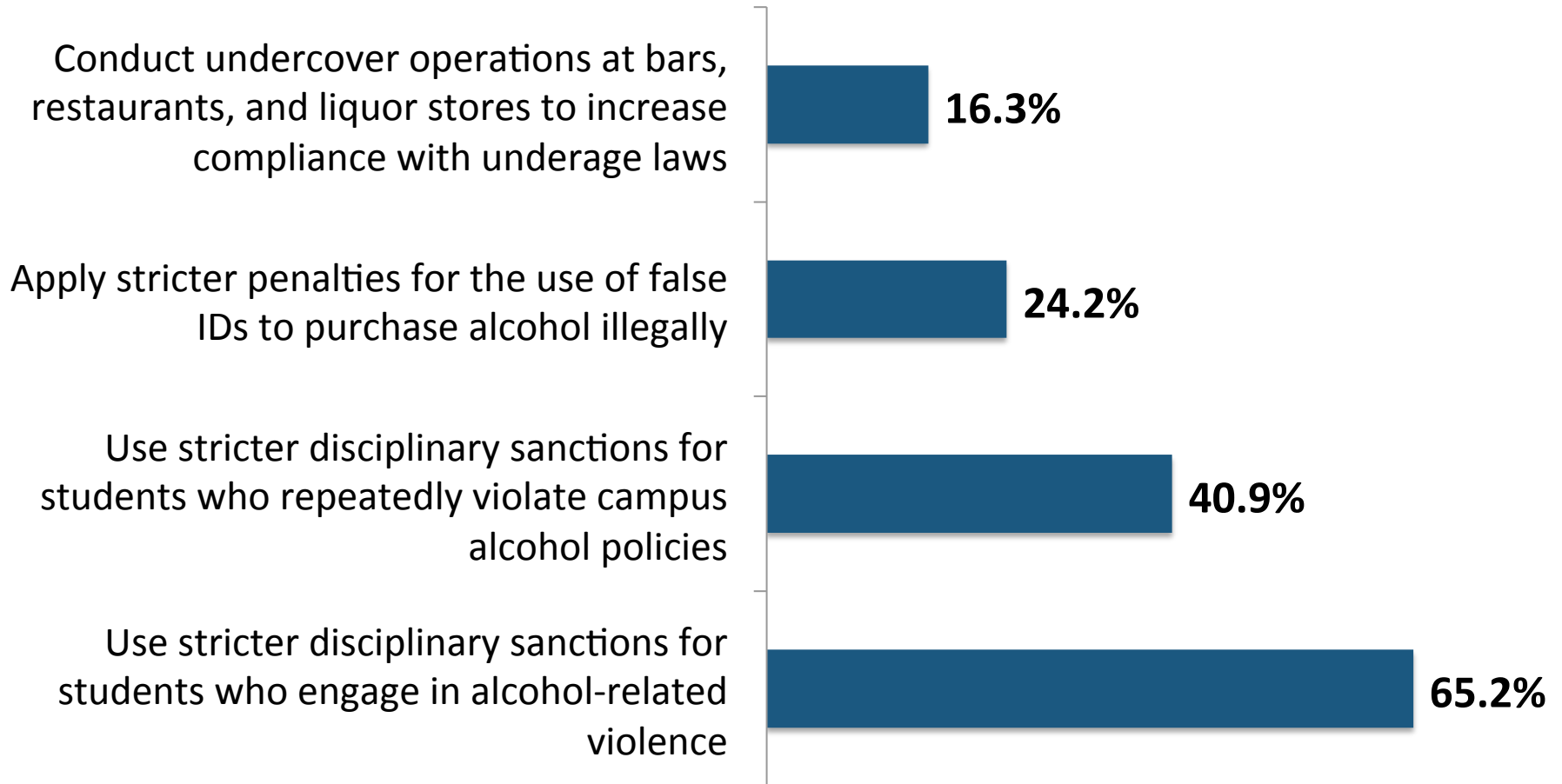
### Method:

1. Publicize high levels of student support for law and policy enforcement
2. Position specific environmental prevention strategies as a *response to students' concerns*



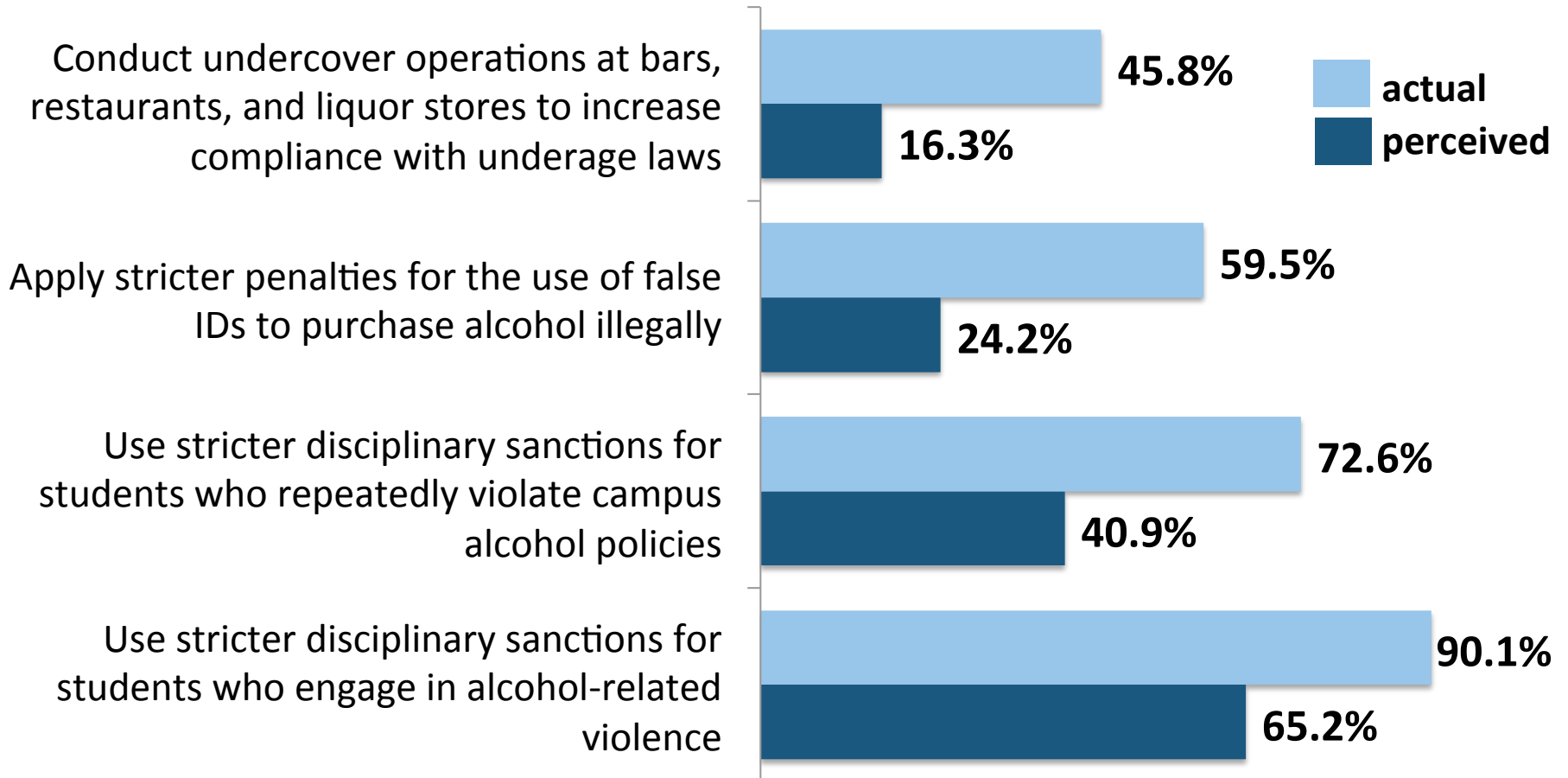
# Perceived Support: Strict Enforcement

## Perceived Other Students' Support for Strict Enforcement



# Perceived Versus *Actual* Support: Strict Enforcement

## Student Support for Strict Enforcement



# RhodeMap to Safety



- *Phase I*
  - Inform students that a majority of URI students support alcohol policy and enforcement efforts to create a safer and healthier campus
- *Phase II*
  - Make students aware of increased alcohol enforcement efforts and other initiatives in Narragansett, South Kingstown, and on campus
  - Educate students about Rhode Island drinking and driving laws and URI alcohol policies

# Positive Student Reactions

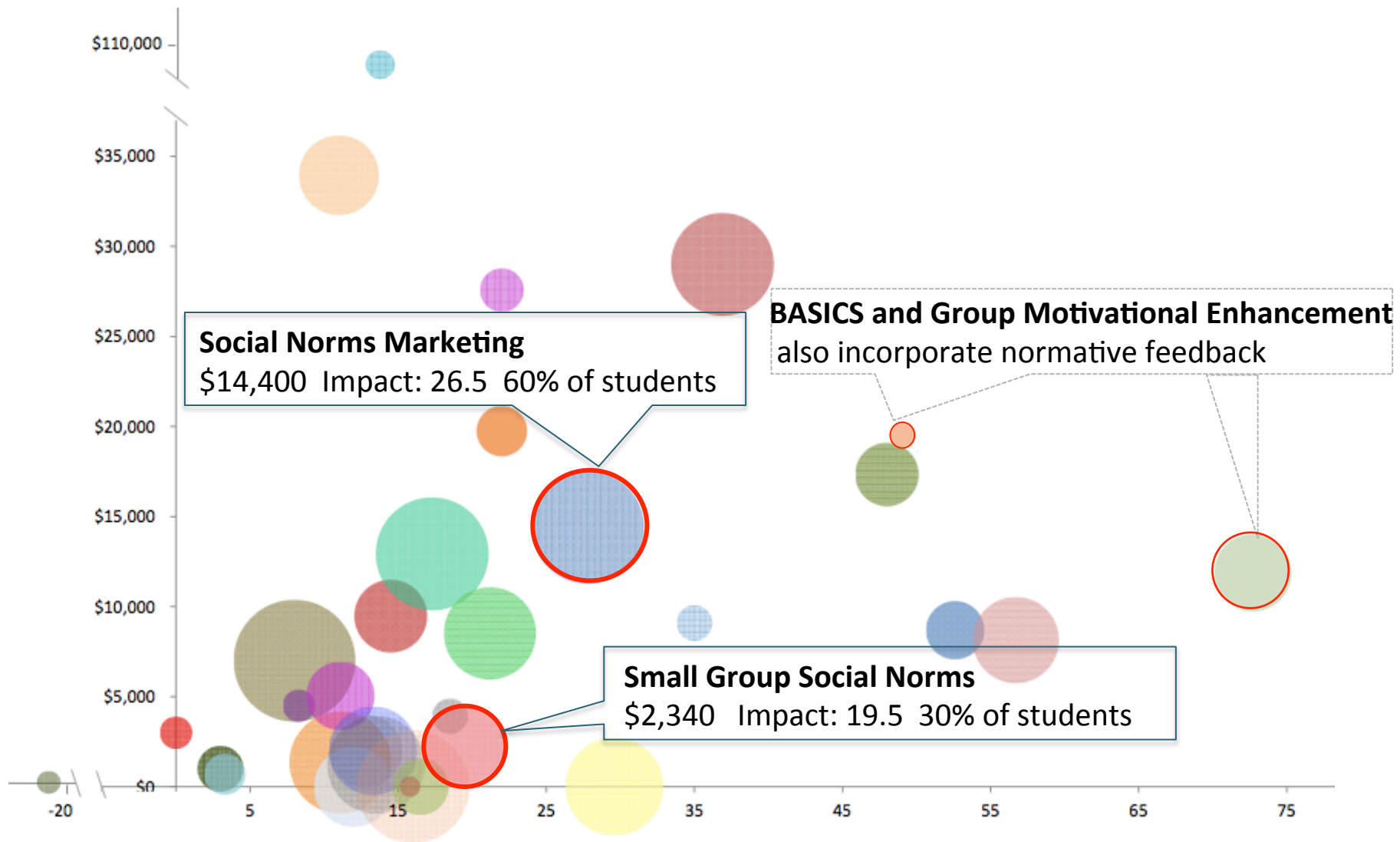
Positioning policy initiatives as a response to student concerns facilitates implementation

- Intercept interviews: positive ratings of campaign
- Few complaints sent to campaign email address
- Student newspaper editorial: “RhodeMap to Safety Campaign Is a Step in the Right Direction”

“The RhodeMap to Safety campaign is a response to student demand for tougher policies and enforcement to deal with alcohol-related problems among URI students.”

- Neil Cavanaugh, URI Student Senate President

# Efficacy of Social Norms Approaches



# Research on the Social Norms Approach Applied to Sexual Assault

# SNA as a “promising practice” for SA prevention

- Misperceptions have been documented and predict behavior (i.e., the model “fits”)
- Small group norms interventions have been successful in changing behavior in some cases
- Social norms media campaigns have resulted in positive attitude change but have not yet been successful in changing behavior

*The issue of sexual assault is different from alcohol and it may be important to combine SNA with other strategies such as bystander intervention rather than to view it as a “stand alone” strategy*

# Social Norms and Bystander Intervention to Prevent Sexual Assault

- Bystander intervention is currently considered a “best practice” for sexual assault prevention
- Underestimations of other’s degree of concern, willingness to intervene and respect for those who intervene serve to inhibit bystanders from intervening.
- Research and theory therefore suggest that both social norms and bystander intervention should be combined in order to enhance the efficacy of both in preventing sexual assault



# Changing the Normative Culture: A Model Small-Group Norms Rape Prevention Program

- Developed by Alan Berkowitz and tested by Christine Gidycz, Ohio University, in a CDC-funded study
- Incorporates definition of consent, normative feedback (group and campus), and practice in bystander intervention strategies (responding to scenarios)
- Offered in parallel with a women's risk-reduction program
- Workshop recipients were men and women in residence halls with matched control groups

# Findings

Compared to control group, those in the intervention group:

- Perceived that their peers would be more likely to intervene (including sexually aggressive men)
- Sexually aggressive men perceived less reinforcement from peers for sexually aggressive behavior
- Participants associated less with sexually aggressive peers
- Were less likely to engage in sexually aggressive behavior (1.5% experimental versus 6.7% control)\*
- Reduced use of pornography

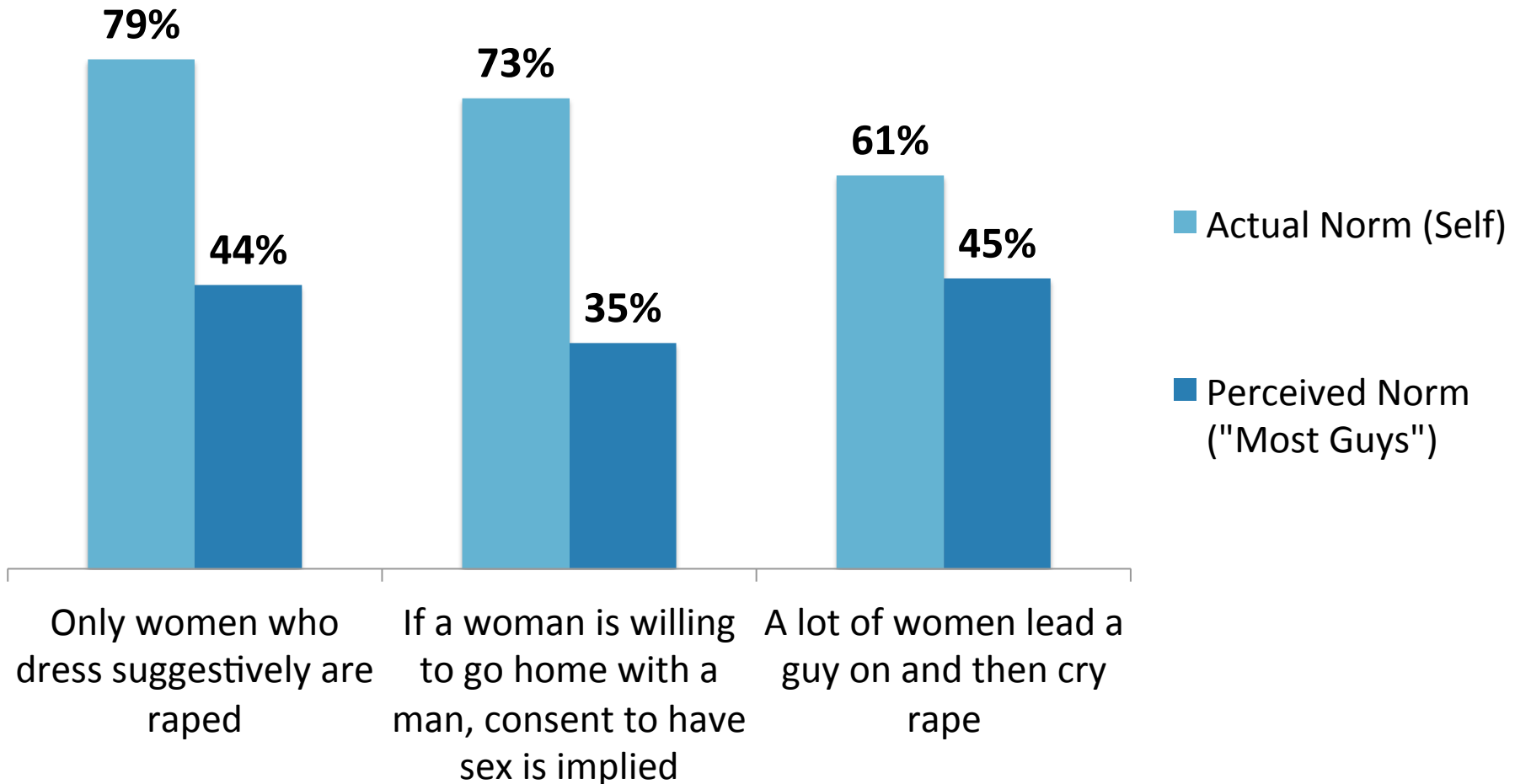
*\*Reduction in assaults at 4 months not sustained at 7 months*

# FSU Sexual Violence Prevention Project and Social Norms Media Campaign

- Campus-Wide Social Norms Marketing (SNM) Campaign
  - Correct Student Misperceptions of Attitudes and Behaviors That Influence Sexual Violence
  - Survey assessing attitudes, behavior and perceptions regarding sexual activity, consent, rape myths, victim blaming, disapproval of sexist remarks, and bystander intervention.
- Peer-Facilitated “Men’s/Women’s Workshop”
  - Trained Peer-Educators to Facilitate 90-Minute Workshops
  - Targeted to ‘All Male’ or ‘All Female’ Groups on Campus (Predominately Within the Greek Community)
- Campus Based Community Action Team (CAT)
  - Component of Healthy Campus 2020 Committee Chaired by FSU Vice President for Student Affairs
  - 10-Member Sexual Health/Sexual Violence Prevention Sub-Committee

# Example: College Men's Attitudes about Rape

## Florida State University Sexual Violence Prevention Survey



# Social Norms Marketing Campaign Themes

- Bystander theme:

***“Most FSU men would intervene to prevent sexual harassment or sexual assault”***

- Rape myth-not blaming victims theme:

***“Most FSU men agree that blaming sexual assault victims is wrong”***

- Sexually active theme:

***“Most FSU men are not as sexually active as you might think”***

**9 OUT OF 10 FSU MEN  
would do something to help  
IF THEY SAW A WOMAN  
BEING MISTREATED**

FSUmeasureup.com

FSU Spring 2011 Random Male-Only Survey (N=738)

This item was supported by funding from the Rape Prevention Education project provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the Florida Department of Health (FDOH). The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the US Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC, or FDOH.

# Media Campaign Outcomes

- Misperceptions reduced in all four campaign theme areas
- Increase from 85% to 90% in men who say they get consent before sex
- Increase from 62% to 71% in men who stop “first time date says no”
- Small increase (from 88% to 91%) of men who would intervene if they saw emotional abuse
- Better outcomes for workshop (from 77% to 85% for BI)

# Challenges to Applying the Social Norms Approach



# Challenge 1: Readiness

- Do you have buy-in from key stakeholders?
- Have key stakeholders and leaders (including students) been trained in the model and do they know how to address questions and skepticism?
- Do you have the infrastructure necessary to measure and document changes and to implement a media campaign?
- Is there a team assigned to oversee and implement the process?

*Implementing a campaign without the necessary structures in place can lead to campaign failure*

## Challenge 2: Saliience

- Are the norms “salient” to the audience (i.e. does the recipient feel that the messages are relevant to them?)
- Does the target audience (group or community) function as a group?
- Is the target audience so heterogeneous that group norms are not relevant?
- What groups will be left out of your intervention because they do not feel a part of the larger community?

*Messages must be salient to be effective – therefore message saliience must be assessed and evaluated*

## Challenge 3: Believability

- Messages about accurate norms contradict the misperception and create cognitive dissonance which will result in the message being rejected in order to resolve the dissonance.
- All questions and concerns about believability must be addressed with patience and by taking skepticism seriously.
- Focus groups and intercept interviews are a good way to assess believability issues.
- Strategies must be developed to address concerns about survey methodology and target audiences must be educated about reliability and validity issues.
- Ongoing efforts should be made to address believability issues by modifying campaign practices.

*The SNA assumes that messages will not be believed. Therefore believability issues must be addressing as an ongoing process.*

## Challenge 4: Evaluation

- Do you have an effective means of evaluation in place?
- Are your measurements sensitive enough to detect changes?
- Is it possible to have any kind of control group or comparison group?
- Because some negative behaviors may increase in college no-change is not necessarily a negative outcome
- Is misperception correction correlated with behavior change?
- Is it possible to measure “ripple effects”?

*Evaluation must be built into the process from the beginning*

## Challenge 5: Unrealistic Expectations

- What are realistic expectations for a social norms campaign?
- When a campaign is successful, is there a limiting point (i.e. how far can the misperception be pushed down)
- Implementation challenges (readiness, believability, salience) must be addressed and fidelity to the model is necessary for a campaign to be successful

*The success of many social norms campaigns in pushing down the misperception and improving health from year to year may generate unrealistic expectations of what it is possible to accomplish*

# Challenge 6: Keeping Things Fresh

## Multiple Ways to Diversify a Social Norms Campaign

- ***Internally to your issue:*** focus on another aspect of your target problem. For example, with alcohol focus on event specific norms, relevant protective behaviors, specific sub-populations, etc.
- ***Horizontally to other issues:*** expand to incorporate other issues such as violence prevention, leadership development, ecological/green issues. etc.
- ***Developmentally within an issue:*** look at your issue developmentally and identify the next step in a developmental continuum. For example, after addressing individual alcohol use one can begin to address bystander issues. Using a Stages of Change model, one can identify layers of the issue that are misperceived even while perceptions have been corrected for the original target issue.
- ***Vertically to get “underneath” an issue:*** incorporate issues that underlie the problem, i.e. begin to address spirituality, self-esteem, values and intentions, self-confidence etc. from a social norms framework. (i.e. create a “ripple” effect from below)

# Applications to Other College Health Behaviors

# Other Issues Where Misperceptions Exist

Research has documented misperceptions with overestimations of:

- Gambling
- Bullying and sexting
- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Heterosexuals perception of other heterosexuals homophobia
- Women's perception of men's and women's desire for feminine thinness

....and underestimations of:

- Support and practice of “green” behaviors
- Spirituality and religiosity
- Seat belt use
- Elements of positive academic climate



# Widespread Diffusion of the Social Norms Approach

## Journal publications for social norms studies in 2011

*Addiction*

*Alcohol and Alcoholism*

*Teaching of Psychology*

*Journal of Anxiety Disorders*

*Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*

*Communication Research*

*Journal of Urban Health*

*Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*

*Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*

*Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*

*Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*

*Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*

*New Media and Society*

*Violence against Women*

*Alcohol and Alcoholism*

*Journal of American College Health*

*Psychology and Marketing*

*Addictive Behaviors*

*Journal of Urban Health*

*Journal of Consumer Behavior*

## Countries conducting social norms research (published in 2011)

United States

Holland

Korea

Scotland

Denmark

England

Switzerland

# Conclusion

# Concluding Points

- The social norms approach (misperception correction) is effective as a stand-alone strategy *for alcohol* with individuals, groups, and communities, but may need to be combined with other approaches for sexual assault
- The social norms approach can be integrated as a component of other strategies to enhance them (e.g., bystander intervention and policy development and enforcement)
- Misperceptions when uncorrected create a climate that works against our prevention efforts
- Multiple program elements should be synergistic and mutually reinforcing
- The social norms approach is a way of thinking about prevention as well as a specific strategy

# Appendix I: Addressing Challenges to the Social Norms Approach

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by Alan D. Berkowitz

Practitioners interested in implementing a social norms intervention must address a number of challenges. These include:

**Readiness (developing infrastructure).** Implementing a social norms campaign requires a significant amount of “readiness” or preparation to ensure that an infrastructure is available that can deliver a quality intervention. This includes: 1) training key stakeholders and staff, 2) creating support and discussion in the larger community, 3) revising policies that may foster misperceptions, 4) collecting and analyzing data, and 5) training and supporting project staff to implement the model properly. Each of these areas should be addressed *before* undertaking a social norms intervention, and they must be continually addressed during the intervention.

**Salience (selecting appropriate and relevant messages).** In relatively homogeneous communities all members may feel a part of the community and react positively to a community-based norms message (i.e. “most of us...”). However, in a very heterogeneous community individuals may not identify with messages like these unless they are carefully constructed to have broad appeal. Some may identify more with particular identities such as participation in a sport or affinity group and may be more responsive to targeted social norms campaigns. Thus, which messages are “salient” to which groups is an important consideration and should be assessed prior to implementation. Salience has a number of dimensions including which norm is addressed, for what group, how it is measured, and whether the norm is an attitudinal or a behavioral norm.

**Believability (message credibility).** Social norms messages introduce cognitive dissonance by suggesting that the truth is different from what is thought. Therefore messages are often not believed. Campaigns must address this “push-back” to determine why messages are not believed and to provide appropriate explanations to address concerns raised. Addressing believability is part of the process can relate to: trustworthiness of the message source; questions about survey methodology, unappealing message presentation; or suspicions about data. It is important to assess believability through focus groups and intercept interviews and to provide explanations to the concerns raised.

**Evaluation (conducting meaningful assessment).** Social norms campaigns may appear to fail when in fact positive changes have been overlooked. Evaluation issues include: designing surveys that capture anticipated changes, evaluating message impact in addition to message exposure, and assessing both global and differential campaign impact on population sub-groups. Lack of specificity in measures of change may cause effects to be overlooked

**Unrealistic Expectations.** Success in correcting misperceptions and reducing high-risk behavior may lead to the expectation that numbers will continue to improve from year to year when in fact there may be a limit point. Similarly, success on one campus does not ensure that the conditions for success exist on another. Therefore it is important that staff and supervisors have realistic expectations of what it is possible to accomplish.

## Appendix I: Addressing Challenges to the Social Norms Approach

**Keeping Your Campaign Interesting (i.e. avoiding “habituation”).** Doing the same thing from year to year to year will lead to “habituation” – i.e. the audience tuning out the message. After achieving success in addressing one aspect of a problem it may make sense to refocus on another. Thus, campaigns must be continually “refreshed” in order to ensure that the target audiences are paying attention and that problematic aspects of the culture are successively addressed.

In summary, social norms interventions can be successful when they are implemented carefully, with adequate preparation and fidelity to the model, and evaluated thoroughly. These guidelines can provide a template for assessing the quality of a campaign before it is implemented, and for diagnosing perceived or actual failure when it occurs.

### Resources

The *Social Norms Report*, published in 40 issues between 2002 and 2005, is a practitioner-oriented publication that contains many articles on challenges. Back issues are available from the National Social Norms Institute ([www.socialnorm.org](http://www.socialnorm.org)).

Relevant articles include:

- *Can you believe it: Assessing the credibility of a social norms campaign* (Robert Granfield, Working Paper #2-March 2002)
- *Frequently asked questions about the social norms approach* (Koreen Johannessen, Summer 2002, 1-4)
- *Responding to the critics: Answers to common questions and concerns about the social norms approach* (Alan Berkowitz, Working Paper #7-October 2002)
- *Is your campus ready for a social norms marketing campaign?* (Koreen Johannessen and Kim Dude, March 2003, 2-4)
- *Do your data do you justice: Evaluating social norms interventions* (Jason Kilmer and Jessica Cronce, May 2003, 2-7)
- *Guidelines for ensuring confidentiality of SGNM data.* (Jeanne Far, November 2003, 3-3)
- *Getting social norms results by improving implementation and assessment* (Wes Perkins, June 2004,3-9)
- *Habituation and social norms* (Michael Haines, April 2005,4-7).
- *The mall intercept – A social norms marketing research tool* (Rich Rice and Linda Hancock, April 2005,4-7)
- *Recent research on norm saliency* (Alan Berkowitz, May 2005, 4-8)