

Latest Trends in College Health

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With the world around us changing at a fantastic pace, it can often be challenging to stay on top of current health and safety issues. In order to help peer educators and advisors keep their work plans aligned with current trends, BACCHUS asked a few advisors their thoughts on the health and safety landscape.

What differences have you noticed in today's students, as compared to five years ago?

Students are struggling more with mental health issues, thus requiring college administration and student leaders to learn more about these topics. Previously, mental health was strictly left to the counseling center. Now, we are seeing the inseparableness of mental and physical health. Alcohol, tobacco, academic performance, sleep, and even sedentary lifestyles can have links to a person's psychological health.

Also, students are the most technologically savvy that we have ever seen. They have had access to so much information for so long, that they no longer take your word in regard to facts and statistics. Advisors need to present sound research that is well annotated. We are competing for students' brief attention spans. Therefore, marketing, programs, and campaigns need to "stick".

What new or previously "lower priority" issues have come to the forefront?

By now, most everyone is aware of prescription drug abuse, particularly with drugs such as Ritalin, Adderall, and Vicodin. The majority of students do not report using these drugs, but the perception of use is very different. Campuses should continue to correct misperceptions about norms and perceived "safety" of prescription drugs.

There has also been a return to some of the most basic aspects of health: eating right, getting exercise, sufficient sleep, and preventing the spread of germs. These are topics that are important to everyone. Not everyone is drinking or having sex, but all students should know the proper way to wash their hands or monitor their hydration levels.

Nutrition and fitness are probably the most important issues to students right now. With increased media coverage of obesity rates, this is definitely the hot topic. Many campuses have placed a greater emphasis on fitness and nutrition programming, helping students move more and establish a healthy weight. Be sure to partner with recreation, club sports, catering services, and other groups on campus to conduct your promotion activities.

Sleep is also one of the fundamental needs for good health, yet it is one of the most neglected. Encourage better sleeping habits on campus, as this can affect academic performance, emotional health, and driving safety.

What social justice issues are important to address?

Environmental sustainability seems to be on everyone's mind nowadays, and students are starting to see the larger picture in terms of health and the global environment. Students have an interest in the way food is grown and the energy resources required to deliver it. Find ways to engage the campus population in critical thinking about personal, community, and global health.

Students know more than ever about gender, sexual orientation and discrimination against disparate populations. Take the time to discuss ways in which various groups experience high-risk behavior, receive treatment for disease, and interact with society as a whole. How can peer educators revise their programs to be more mindful and inclusive?

Are there any other important issues to address?

Cyber safety is crucial, particularly when students are too open about their personal lives and information. Try to work with the IT department, campus safety, and student life to encourage smart use of the Internet and privacy features.

What leadership techniques or tools are helpful for peer educators to learn?

- BACCHUS CPE (Certified Peer Educator) training provides the basic skills that a peer educator needs to be effective.
- TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS) helps people learn the keys to serve alcohol responsibly.
- Motivational Interviewing (MI) has increased in popularity over the past few years, and it is a tremendous way to help peer educators assist with behavior change.
- Social norming, social marketing, and technology in general all play a role in messaging and promoting healthy behaviors.
- Also, do not neglect the “traditional” leadership experiences, including retreats and teambuilding activities. These still have a place, regardless of technological advances.

What resources would you like to share with colleagues?

- BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention of College Students) is a model program, as designated by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- Be sure to utilize the network of BACCHUS volunteers (Area Consultants, State Coordinators, and Student Advisory Committee (SACs)). Our network was designed to provide support to affiliates at every stage of group development.
- Attend national conferences, such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and BACCHUS conferences. These provide invaluable networking and idea sharing time.

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Sidebar

Tips for Advisors

Trust in the students! They know what is going on around them and are our best leaders of health topics. Learn from them, no matter how hip you think you are.

Take care of yourself and don't spread yourself too thin. Stay connected with people.

You need to embrace technology—learn software programs, instant messaging, clicker technology, etc.

Be aware of your campus's unique culture and implicit values.