

Addressing College Off Campus Student High Risk Behavioral Choices through Peer Leaders



Athens, Ohio

Barbara Harrison, M.A., Assistant Director for Community Engagement, Student Affairs Division
Terry Koons, MEd., Associate Director for Health Promotions, Student Affairs Division

Abstract

- Campus Involvement Center staff at Ohio University, Athens have taken a proactive approach to addressing high risk off campus behavior by conducting off campus door to door visits conducted by two influential peer leader teams.
- Social norming of the Health Campus Majority is necessary in preventing the “College Effect” for first-year students
- The goal of campus programs and services are to reduce the number of students moving into risky drinking behaviors after assimilating to campus
- Through training of our Power Gamma Leaders and Community Ambassador team we address high risk behaviors by having a presence in the off campus neighborhoods.
- The Power Gamma and Community Ambassador leaders conducted collaborative door to doors twice during fall semester 2017 on opening weekend and prior to Halloween weekend in Athens.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be challenged to consider high risk choices
2. Students will be engaged in a discussion about how to ensure safety for all guests whom they host when planning off campus parties.
3. Students will be encouraged to make low risk decisions when engaging in use of alcohol and other drugs in their off campus life.



Power Gamma and Community Ambassador leaders fall 2017
In off campus student neighborhoods

Promoting the 86% Healthy Majority

- * In 2003 a survey of Ohio University, Athens campus students reported that 79% of those students surveyed engaged in high risk drinking behavior.
- In 2017 the same survey revealed that just 14% of students surveyed engaged in high risk drinking behavior.
- The key points of our outreach program is now focused on promoting the 86% healthy majority.



Question and Conversation

The Power Gamma peer health educators engaged off campus students in a series of questions during both neighborhood visits in fall of 2017.

Questions were posed to students meant to challenge their thinking and knowledge of how to utilize protective health factors. (i.e. condoms)

The Power Gamma leaders also promoted healthy behavior by distributing posters, cozies and chapstick.

Students who engaged in dialogue with the leaders were also offered free pizza.

Promoting Safe Off Campus Party Behavior

- * Community Ambassadors engaged students in conversation about their plans for hosting and attending off campus parties and offered a variety of safety tips.



The case for Peer Leader Outreach

In addition to the influence of peers on personal development, higher education theory and research also show that they play a large role in student success and can affect students' transition to college, satisfaction, learning and academic performance, and persistence and retention. However, it is important to note that there is also evidence of negative peer influence, most notably with respect to relationships that focus on partying and socializing. Given the powerful and ubiquitous qualities of peer influence, higher education professionals have begun to harness this resource in student education, support, and service delivery by using undergraduate peers in leadership roles.

The Benefits of Peer Leader Programs: An Overview from the Literature
Shook, Jaime L.; Keup, Jennifer R.
New Directions for Higher Education, n157 p5-16 Spr 2012



Contact Information:

Barb Harrison, Assistant Director – harrisob@ohio.edu - 740-593-4098
Terry Koons, Associate Director – koons@ohio.edu – 740-593-4745