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Linda Major, director of NU Directions

Local groups tackle binge drinking

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But members of a 65-member campus-community coalition are confident they can reduce high-risk campus drinking patterns by 25 percent before fall 2003.

Why?

Because they have a plan.

Everything matters

In September 1998, after receiving a five-year, \$700,000 grant to use as ammunition, UNL began to wage a war against excessive student drinking.

The grant, awarded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's A Matter of Degree program, based in Princeton, N.J., provides money for programs to increase awareness, education and law-enforcement efforts to combat underage and high-risk drinking on the UNL campus.

"The grant is allowing us to bring interested parties together to find creative solutions to problems," said NU Directions Director Linda Major. "It has provided a large amount of energy — campus and community."

NU Directions, a campus-community coalition consisting of university officials, business leaders, students, parents and UNL faculty members, is trying to create a campus culture that supports responsible, low-risk drinking, including abstaining from drinking all together.

The group established a first-year planning budget of \$100,000, Major said. The remaining grant money will be divided among the group in \$150,000 increments in the next four years.

"I think it is a dangerous time for 18- to 20-year-olds and drinking," said Robert Jergensen, owner of P.O. Pears, 322 S. Ninth St., and coalition mem-

ber. "We now have the opportunity to influence students and their perceptions about alcohol."

Strategic moves

Preparing to make an impact on the university binge-drinking scene, NU Directions would like to cut in half the instances and prevalence of high-risk drinking.

"We are not about prohibition," Major said. "We are, however, about responsible, low-risk drinking."

With five committee groups — education and information, policy, enforcement, social environment and neighborhood relations — NU Directions spent this year looking at ways to reduce high-risk drinking among university students.

Chris Linder, NU Directions student chairwoman, said students have continued to play a key role in the implementation of the grant.

"The plan is the result of some student propositions," Linder said. "Students have had an integral role with the project."

The coalition has identified and set goals in the following areas:

- Education and information, including correcting misperceptions and promoting awareness of risks associated with binge and illegal drinking, and promoting campus-based substance-abuse treatment services.

- Creating policy to reduce high-risk marketing practices, the use of false identification and the proliferation of liquor licenses. High-risk marketing includes advertised drink specials such as penny pitchers, all-you-can-drink for a flat fee deals and ladies nights, where women get big drink discounts.

- Enforcing institutional policy as appropriate.

UNL group uses education to fight abuse of alcohol

BY IEVA AUGSTUMS
Staff writer

A group of UNL students cares for the well-being of their peers, and hopes their efforts will convince other University of Nebraska-Lincoln students to do the same.

Project CARE — Creating Alcohol Responsibility through Education — is a program that provides information to UNL students about the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

"We educate students in what we like to call a fun way — games, skits, presentations," said Brett Stohs, a sophomore mathematics major and Project CARE educator. "We don't just get in front of people and say, 'Don't drink.' We just want them to think and drink responsibly."

Stohs, along with seven other UNL students, were trained and certified last fall to be Project CARE educators.

As educators, the group delivers accurate information on many alcohol and other drug-related topics, including acute alcohol intoxication, drinking and driving and reducing personal risk for alcohol-related problems.

Bob Schroeder, UNL alcohol and drug program coordinator, said the mission of Project CARE is to affect the alcohol culture on campus through the promotion of responsible use or non-use of alcohol by all university students.

"College students often have misperceptions about

the use and abuse of alcohol," Schroeder said. "This group helps correct those."

Schroeder said CARE educators challenge their listening audiences — greek houses, residence hall floors, academic classrooms and freshman foundation courses — to demonstrate care and concern for themselves and others by practicing responsible alcohol consumption.

Stohs, however, said the group does more than give presentations.

"We are a campuswide group, promoting and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices," he said.

Along with the eight CARE educators, Stohs said, there are about 15 additional students in the group.

Tiffany Kline, a freshman biochemistry major, joined the student-at-large group last fall. Kline is not a Project CARE educator.

Kline, who is planning Alcohol Awareness Week in October, said she stands behind the group's mission 100 percent.

"There are better things to do beside drink or drink irresponsibly," Kline said. "Project CARE helps promote those things."

Schroeder said Project CARE is planning to work with NU Directions — a campus and community group working with a \$700,000 grant to fight high-risk drinking on the UNL campus — to promote alcohol education within the community.

"With the grant there are many possibilities," Schroeder said. "We just want students to not only care about themselves, but about each other."

- Improving UNL's social environment by increasing the availability of attractive student-centered social activities located on campus and in the community.
- Improving neighborhood relations by improving the social climate

of UNL students who live off campus.

Steve McElravy, executive director of the Nebraska Council to Prevent Alcohol and Drug Abuse, said his role as co-chairman of the education committee was to teach students and the community about alcohol's adverse effects.

"Our plan is to help get the word out," he said.

Through continued community and campus support, Major said she had no doubt NU Directions would succeed in reducing high-risk campus drinking patterns by 25 percent.

"When you have to work with people in what is a long-term thing, it is not easy," Major said. "We have made it this far. We will succeed."

The nation's war

Ten universities, including UNL, received funding from the foundation to combat binge drinking.

"This is not something the universities can do themselves," said Sandra Hoover, deputy director for A Matter of Degree national program. "An essential feature of the program is the formation of college-community partnerships."

Hoover said campus-community coalitions nationwide are focusing on simultaneously changing campus and community environments as well as norms that perpetuate students' high-risk drinking.

Tracy Bachman, project assistant for the Building Responsibility Campus and Community Coalition at the University of Delaware in Newark, said the school received its \$770,000 grant two years ago and has started several programs with the money.

So far, Delaware has revised its student judicial code so the university notifies a student's parents if he or she has been charged with a drug or alcohol offense, Bachman said. The university also has begun a five-star system of ranking greek houses' compliance with grant initiatives. Top houses get awards.

"It has fostered some healthy competition among students," she said. "Unfortunately, there is still more to do."

Robert Maust, project director for the A Matter of Degree Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder, agreed.

"We've been working on this for two years," Maust said. "By no means are we finished yet."

Maust said CU had been successful in finding late-night, alcohol-free activities on campus for students, as well as in sponsoring speakers and in providing educational programming. His university received \$860,000 from the foundation.

Maust and Bachman said their universities' officials had looked at distribution of liquor licenses around their campuses and continued looking into increasing enforcement of alcohol policy procedures in their community.

"It's hard when you have Coors partially funding your university," Maust said.

Hoover said all campuses participating in the program have received positive and negative feedback about their programs.

"The program should be looked at as positive, not taking things away," she said. "We want students to know that this is not something against them. It is for them."

Last call

McElravy said he felt pleased to work with NU Directions.

"I was excited when the campus got the grant. I was excited to accept the job," McElravy said. "Our focus, and mine, is to keep young people alive and safe — to keep them going."

Linder said student and community support had increased during the past year, but more support was needed.

Julie Phye said she found similar support for curbing high-risk drinking as project coordinator for Stepping Up, a program similar to NU Directions that's in place at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

"We have calling for change at universities and colleges nationwide," Phye said. "The more students and community members who answer and are willing to help, the better we will be."

Program offers students safe ride

BY SARAH FOX
Staff writer

Some UNL employees get paid to work on decreasing student alcohol abuse, but three students are doing their part to decrease it for no charge.

A student-led safe ride home program is one of the university's newest efforts to reduce drinking and driving.

The program, which is being coordinated by Brett Stohs, Molly Schmitz and Laura Bradley, would let students get a free ride home on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

UNL students would call a student-staffed university phone number from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. A taxi from Capital Cab, 320 W. P St., would take students from a 4- to 5-mile radius around campus to their homes. Non-UNL students would pay \$1 for the ride.

The taxi rides could not be used to travel between parties or bars, said Stohs, a sophomore mathematics major.

"It's supposed to bring students from anywhere, home," Stohs said. "It's not designed to prolong the evening."

Stohs, Schmitz, and Bradley first met in 1998 at LeaderShape, a spring break leadership conference.

"We came up with an idea to prevent more deaths like Laura Cockson's," Stohs said.

Cockson was a UNL junior who was killed March 14, 1998, by drunken driver Jeffrey Ireland. She was a Gamma Phi Beta Sorority member, as are Schmitz, a junior elementary deaf education major, and Bradley, a senior international business major.

After LeaderShape, the three joined Project CARE, a UNL student group that gives presentations about alcohol abuse. They researched other universities' programs, with the help of National Group Rides and Designated Drivers, a nonprofit organization.

"We came up with the thought the best way to do it on this campus was use the taxi service Lincoln has," Stohs said.

Stohs said UNL needed the program because it is a dry campus.

Alcohol can only be served on campus at special

"We know no matter how much we try to educate students about the dangers of high-risk drinking, there will be some who will participate in (it)."

JAMES GRIESEN
vice chancellor for student affairs

events, and with the vice chancellor for student affairs' permission, said Mary Ann Holland, staff assistant in Greek Affairs.

Because of the recent crackdown of on-campus parties, many UNL students go off campus to drink and use cars to drive home.

"Most of the concerns are off-campus parties," Stohs said. "People don't drive from fraternity to fraternity."

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, said he thought UNL needed a safe ride program.

"Obviously, I would prefer we didn't have a need for it," Griesen said. "We know no matter how much we try to educate students about the dangers of high-risk drinking, there will be some who will participate in (it)."

Schmitz said the service, which will be named later, should start by at least the end of next semester.

The group is now researching how to pay for the program and working to get support from local businesses.

The safe rides home could be funded with student fees, but some students who were surveyed by the group said they don't want their money used for the service.

"Telling students we're going to raise fees always creates an uproar," Stohs said.

But the service will benefit all UNL students, she said. "It's not just for people who are drunk and plastered," Stohs said. "It's for the people who don't want to ride home with them."