Developing and Implementing a Successful Social Norms Campaign Targeting Long-Term Neighbors in the Community

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"This Working Paper describes the development and implementation of a campus-community social norms media campaign targeting long-term neighbors of students at the University at Albany... It was predicted that providing UAlbany students and local community residents with a combined social norms/ informational campaign 'on the streets where they live' would result in neighbors' decreased misperceptions of students' drinking and increase reports of enhanced quality of life... Outcome data yielded significant reductions in long-term neighbors' misperceptions of student behaviors as well as reports of enhanced quality of life in the community. In addition, there were dramatic reductions in the numbers of problem incidents reported to campus police by neighborhood residents during the time the study was underway."

T his Working Paper describes the development and implementation of a campus-community social norms media campaign targeting long-term neighbors of students at the University at Albany (UAlbany), part of the State University of New York (SUNY). The project earned SUNY-wide recognition in 2004 for its effectiveness in advancing campus-community relations.

The campaign addressed the misperceptions held by local long-term neighbors of UAlbany students regarding student drinking and associated high-risk behaviors. A two-pronged, science-based social norms and informational intervention campaign was implemented through the UAlbany's nationally recognized campus-community coalition from July 2003 to March 2004. It was predicted that providing UAlbany students and local community residents with a combined social norms/informational campaign "on the streets where they live" would result in neighbors' decreased misperceptions of students' drinking and increased reports of enhanced quality of life. The specific goals of the project included:

Goal 1: To reduce the percentage of long-term neighbors who believe that UAlbany students drink at least once a week by 10 percent.

Goal 2: To increase the percentage of long-term neighbors who are aware of the UAlbany's proactive measures to address underage student drinking in the community by 10 percent.

Outcome data yielded significant reductions in long-term neighbors' misperceptions of student behaviors as well as reports of enhanced quality of life in the community. In addition, there were dramatic reductions in the numbers of problem incidents reported to campus police by neighborhood residents during the time the study was underway. Qualitative data indicated an increased number of reports by long-term neighbors of improvements in the neighborhood climate and a more positive attitude toward UAlbany students living in the community.

Project Overview and Method

Project Participants. Participants included 200 long-term neighbors in the Pine Hills and Beverwyck neighborhoods of Albany, New York. Half of the survey respondents were male and the other half were female. The mean length of time that respondents resided in the neighborhoods was 20 years. Ninety-six percent of respondents

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Editor's Note: Social Norms and Environmental Management

Environmental management and social norms are probably the two most prevalent drug prevention strategies within higher education. Both are theory-based and both have considerable research in support of their effectiveness —social norms primarily within higher education but more recently in high schools and middle schools, and environmental management in community settings. Answering the question of how these two approaches relate to each other may depend on whom you ask. Some consider social norms to be part of a comprehensive environmental management strategy (for instance, the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention), others consider them to be distinct but complementary approaches, and still others consider them to be antithetical to each other. However one thinks of their relationship, social norms and environmental management are clearly two important health promotion strategies that can be combined in a synergistic, effective manner when part of a process of thoughtful planning and execution.

This Working Paper reports on an effort at the University at Albany that provides an excellent example of the effective and thoughtful combination of these two approaches. In this case, a social norms intervention to address community perceptions of student behavior was undertaken as a way of improving "town-gown" relationships and reducing problem student behavior off-campus that impacted community life. The Campus-Community Coalition that implemented this campaign was composed of campus and community members and utilized environmental management strategies consistent with the recommendations of the Higher Education Center. In this case the work

of the Coalition was enhanced and strengthened by integrating social norms efforts into a larger environmental management initiative. In part their success was due to careful efforts to utilize strategies that were consistent with both approaches and to avoid fear tactics, "health terrorism" and a crisis mentality calling attention to the negatives. When such negative techniques are abandoned the compatibility of the two approaches becomes clearer.

Other efforts to combine the two approaches have met with similar success. For example, the University of Arizona's environmental management/ social norms case study is a classic in the field. More recently, the "City Centre Safe" intervention from Manchester, England presented at the National Conference on the Social Norms Model in 2003 and 2004 provides a second example of successfully combining both approaches. In the Manchester effort violent crime has been reduced in the City Centre for four consecutive years as a result of a social norms effort. This initiative set out to correct misperceptions of the prevalence of problem behavior at large public events, and a "no-fault" harm-reduction policy emphasizing practices that are consistent with safety and socializing with alcohol. In yet another attempt to combine different models, Dunnagan, Hayes, Linkenbach and Shatwell (2003) proposed a theoretical model for reducing underage drinking that combines environmental management, decision balance, and social norms to demonstrate the efficacy of using multiple models and evaluation techniques synergistically to formulate public policy.

Some may argue that the social norms component is what accounts for

these programs' effectiveness and others may claim the same credit for environmental management. While the truth is probably more in the middle, the answer is better addressed through careful evaluation efforts. Until such evidence is available it behooves all of us to take advantage of the best of what both approaches have to offer and to combine them effectively as has been demonstrated here by Dolores Cimini and her colleagues at the University of Albany.

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were residents of the neighborhood and four percent were business owners.

The Social Norms Intervention. The social norms campaign designed for this project was disseminated through the UAlbany Committee on University and Community Relations (Gebhardt, Kaphingst, & DeJong, 2000). Established in 1990, this campus-community coalition has three major goals:

■ improve town-gown relations

■ make the environment off campus safer

■ deal with alcohol abuse and misuse off campus

The committee is currently comprised of student leaders and professional staff from the UAlbany as well as other local colleges; officials from the Albany Police and Fire Departments and the Albany Common Council; neighborhood association representatives; community and religious leaders; tavern owners, landowners and representatives from the Empire State Restaurant and Tavern Association; the Albany and Rensselaer County Restaurant & Tavern Association and the New York State Division of Alcohol Beverage Control. Committee membership is open to anyone who wishes to join.

The committee utilizes a basic "Four E" environmental management-based intervention model that addresses the following areas:

■ Education of the campus and community population

■ Enforcement of laws

■ Environmental impact on the problem

■ Evaluation of the approach's effectiveness

These activities are conducted in a manner that is consistent with the social norms approach. In particular, fear-based messages and a "crackdown" mentality are avoided when enforcing laws and providing campus/community education.
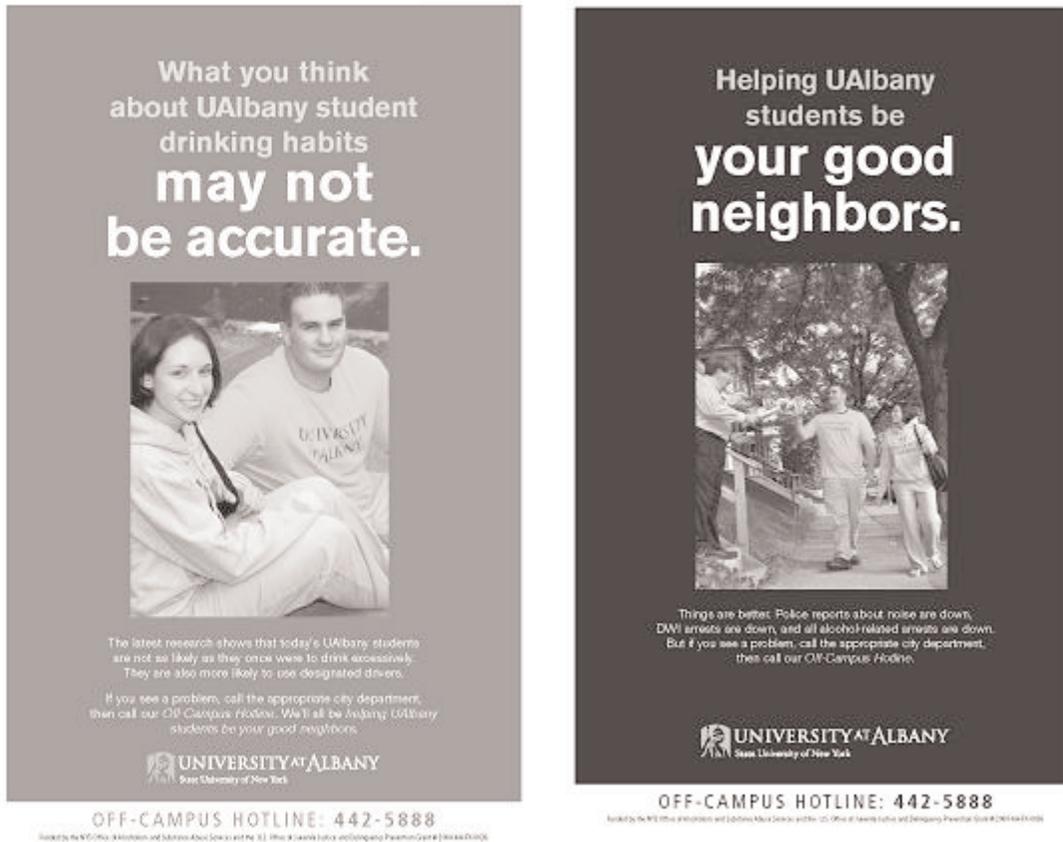
Survey Measures. To assess the attitudes and misperceptions of long-term neighbors regarding drinking and associated high-risk and protective behaviors of UAlbany students, the Local Resident Survey (LRS) was designed. All survey questions for the pre-test and post-test were the same, though there was an additional question on the post-test which assessed whether the respondent received and read the social norms campaign materials created for this project. To assess UAlbany student drinking rates and rates of associated high-risk and protective behaviors, the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) of the American College Health Association (2000) was administered to an in-class random sample of UAlbany undergraduate students.

Table 1: Healthy Campus Community Demonstration Project Timeline 2003

Week of June 16, 23	Submit bids to 3-5 outside advertising agencies
Week of June 23, 30	Bids due from advertising agencies
July 6	Surveys mailed to long-term neighbors
July 24	Survey responses from long-term neighbors due via postage-paid return mail
Week of July 28	Compile responses and identify residents' concerns. Draft key messages for posters, etc. Meet with ad agency to review concept, strategy and goals.
Week of August 4	Draft copy due from UAlbany. Agency designs components.
Week of Aug. 4-8	First round of materials due from ad agency. UAlbany to make revisions, etc. UAlbany approval. Materials sent to printer.
Week of Aug. 18-22	Printing delivered.
Aug. 28-30	Distribution of plastic door hanger with off-campus survival guides. Distribution of new social norms materials (posters in area businesses, etc.). Classes begin Sept. 2.
*Sept. 2003—Feb. 2004	Distribution of mailings, cycle posters, etc. October 16 is the mid-term point for the fall semester. Classes end Dec. 10 and the spring semester begins Jan. 21.
2004	
Week of March 1	Distribution of post-surveys to residents. The mid-term period starts March 10.
Late March 2004	Compile post-surveys, measure effectiveness of campaign marketing effort. May 5 is the last day of classes.

Note: The timing of media dosing is critical. Consider periods/due dates in conjunction with "hot" periods of student activity in regard to alcohol and other drug use. Stay away from distribution during "hot" periods and focus on quieter times in the neighborhood (i.e. after mid-terms, etc.).

Figure 1

The LRS pre-test survey was administered in July 2003 and the post-test survey was administered in March 2004.

Media Message Development. After the collection of initial assessment data on student drinking and associated high-risk and protective behaviors and information on attitudes and perceptions of long-term neighbors, a social norms/informational media campaign

"Pre-test findings...showed evidence of significant misperceptions by long-term neighbors concerning the alcohol consumption of students. Respondents also held the belief that the university was not concerned about the students' behavior and was not doing anything about high-risk student behavior in the neighborhoods despite the fact that there were significant efforts in place to address these issues."

addressing community misperceptions was developed and implemented from September 2003 to February 2004.

Pre-test findings from the LRS showed evidence of significant misperceptions by long-term neighbors concerning UAlbany students' alcohol consumption. Respondents also held the belief that the university was not concerned about the students' behavior and

was not doing anything about high-risk student behavior in the neighborhoods despite considerable efforts to address these issues. To address these misperceptions, the university's marketing staff worked with an advertising agency to develop a social norms informational media campaign that targeted these opinions by using data from the NCHA survey administered to UAlbany students. A timeline for the campaign is provided in Table 1 on page three.

The goals of the media campaign were to address and correct long-term neighbors' misperceptions about the drinking and associated behaviors of UAlbany students and to describe the university's work to nurture good citizenship among students. The campaign theme, "Helping UAlbany Students Be Your Good Neighbors," presented facts on how the University actively works with students to help them be responsible neighbors and introduced data about student behavior. In order to develop a credible campaign that captured the

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Table 2. Post-Test: Changes in Perceptions of Community About UAlbany Students and University Efforts

What percentage of UAlbany students do you think drink once a week or less?

> From pretest to posttest, there was a 31 percent increase (from 7 percent to 38 percent) in the number of long-term neighbors who held the accurate perception that 74 percent of UAlbany students drink alcohol once a week or less.

Is the University at Albany doing enough to address the issue of underage and abusive drinking by its students in the neighborhood?

> From pretest to posttest, there was a 27 percent increase (from 32 percent to 59 percent) in the number of long-term neighbors who believe that the UAlbany is doing enough to address the issue of underage and abusive drinking by its students in the neighborhood.

> *"Our post-test survey feedback indicated that long-term neighbors appreciated being informed of our social norms data as well as our prevention efforts."*

attention of the long-term neighbors the campaign used photographs of real students, interacting with real neighborhood residents on actual Albany neighborhood streets. Rather than a "slick" generic approach, a more "folksy" grassroots look was used.

The campaign consisted of the following two elements:

1. A letter from the Committee on University and Community Relations was mailed in September to all long-term neighbors reminding them of the pre-test survey they had completed and how the University was at work helping to provide for a safer, healthier community. The letter informed them of the Off-Campus Hotline number urging residents to call it if they had complaints about student behavior. A refrigerator magnet was included posting the hotline number.

2. A series of three postcards was created and mailed at strategic times during the fall and spring semester. The first postcard (see Figure 1 on page four) introduced the theme: "Helping UAlbany Students Be Your Good Neighbors."

These elements were supplemented by posters with the same messages and images used in the postcards. The posters were hung in neighborhood businesses including local taverns. The campaign concluded with a post-test administration of the LRS in March 2004, one month after the final set of campaign posters and postcards was disseminated.

Key Findings

For Goal 1, there was evidence of a significant shift from pre-test to post-test in long-term neighbors' misperceptions toward accurate norms. In particular, we noted a 31 percent shift (from 7 percent to 38 percent) in perceptions by long-term neighbors toward the accurate norms. For Goal 2, there was a 27 percent shift (from 32 percent to 59 percent) from pre-test to post-test in reports of neighbor satisfaction and qualitative differences in long-term neighbors' knowledge of University efforts to address problem drinking in the community (see Table 2 on page four for data).

Qualitative data indicated an increased number of reports by long-term neighbors of improvements in the neighborhood climate and a more positive attitude toward UAlbany students living in the community. Comments included long-term neighbors reporting a greater interest in renting apartments to UAlbany students as well as reports of greater collaboration between long-term neighbors and UAlbany students. Another indicator of program success was the high level of collaboration between both University and community stakeholders in the project throughout its planning and implementation period.

Post-test survey findings indicated that long-term neighbors wanted to see continued communication from the UAlbany in regard to student behavior norms as well as updates on what the

> *"...the most critical factor that influenced the successful implementation of this project was the degree of collaboration between a number of campus and community stakeholders, including the campus-community coalition and university media and marketing office."*

Table 3: Examples of Qualitative Feedback From Long-Term Neighbors at Post-Test

- "Continue to emphasize education and the good things the students do rather than party."
- "I appreciate the efforts you are making to benefit the community. Thank you!"
- "The University is doing as much as it can…thank you for what you do!"
- "Thanks for caring enough to ask neighbors their opinions."

University is doing to address underage drinking in the community.

Discussion

In any intervention that involves university-community relationships, it is critical to respond in a visible, intentional, and aggressive manner, particularly when disseminating social norms data and messages. In our project, we remained front and center during the intervention period, and we capitalized on the natural opportunities to re-issue to the broader community our alcohol and drug prevention mission and the actions steps we have taken to achieve our prevention goals. Our post-test survey feedback indicated that long-term neighbors appreciated being informed of our social norms data as well as our prevention efforts. Long-term neighbors also made useful suggestions on alternative ways that social norms information could be communicated to them on an ongoing basis, such as through a campus-community website and email communication, as illustrated by the comments in Table 3.

Helpful Hints and Lessons Learned

Perhaps the most critical factor that influenced the successful implementation of this project was the degree of collaboration between a number of campus and community stakeholders, including the campus-community coalition and university media and marketing office. Each stakeholder contributed unique expertise and dedication to the project leading to significant project outcomes and a number of practical suggestions. Much of the groundwork for this collaboration was already in place due to the previous successes of our campus-community task force.

Building the Framework for a Successful Community-Based Social Norms Campaign

In the course of this project, we learned a number of lessons that were critical to our success. These are summarized in Table 4 and include the following:

■ **Collaboration is essential**. Work with your institution's media relations department and alcohol and other drug prevention office as well as your town-gown relations committee and local community groups (i.e. neighborhood associations).

■ **Take your message "to the streets."** Personally take your posters and other campaign materials to local businesses that long-term neighbors frequent in the neighborhoods where your students reside. Also have the same person do this each time so a rapport with the business owner can be established.

■ **Select a target group of active long-term neighbors**. For example, utilize members of the local neighborhood association or other community group in the neighborhoods where your students socialize and reside.

Table 4: 10 Keys To A Successful Community-Based Campaign

1. Collaboration is essential.
2. Take your message "to the streets."
3. Select a target group of active long-term neighbors.
4. Select your survey dates carefully.
5. Select your campaign dates carefully.
6. Use a device that will stay and endure with your target group.
7. Use pictures of actual student neighborhoods, students from your institution and long-term neighbors in your community for your campaign.
8. Use pre-existing relationships to maximize your campaign's effectiveness.
9. Keep the same consistent layout for all your posters and for all your postcards.
10. Be sure to thank people.

You may be able to obtain mailing labels from the president of your local neighborhood association.

■ **Select your survey dates carefully.** Mail out your surveys during dates when you would expect a maximum return rate (i.e. avoid holidays when there may be a lot of mail being sent out and times when the weather is nicest).

■ **Select your campaign dates carefully**. Distribute your posters and postcards when most long-term neighbors are around (i.e. it could be an intersession when your students are gone, but most of the long-term neighbors are around).

■ **Use a distribution method that will stay and endure with your target group.** Although posters and postcards are eventually thrown out, a magnet with your message on it might stay on that refrigerator for a while especially if it has important

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information that neighbors want to keep (i.e. ours had our "Off-Campus Hotline" number).

■ **Use pictures of actual student neighborhoods, students from your institution and long-term neighbors in your community for your campaign**. Do not use "stock pictures" from other places. Make sure that the students you choose as subjects for your campaign are not known on campus as heavy drinkers.

■ **Use pre-existing relationships to maximize your campaign's effectiveness.** For example, if you have good relationships with local tavern owners, ask them to also put up your posters.

■ **Keep the same consistent layout for all your posters and postcards**. This will help people make the connection that this is all part of the same campaign.

■ **Be sure to thank people**. For example, send a formal thank you letter to the local business owners who agreed to hang up your posters in their stores and thank them for their cooperation with your campaign.

Key Concepts in Developing A Media Campaign

From a marketing standpoint, the social norms approach applies traditional marketing principles that use survey research to determine what opinions and needs exist within a target audience. This information becomes the basis for the way in which the marketing campaign is positioned to more effectively inform the audience about the strengths of the product or program and how it satisfies a need. In essence, the campaign helps shape public opinion. In developing a social marketing campaign, it is important to keep several key concepts in mind.

■ **All Social Norms Campaigns Are Contextual.** As with any marketing campaign, the results may be influenced by the context or circumstances that exist at the time. For example, if an incident of high-risk behavior has taken place on or off-campus that attracts a lot of media attention, public opinion and misperceptions may be at a peak. As a result, any efforts to publicize the good work of a university in promoting healthy, safe behavior may suffer an immediate setback if a drinking-related accident or incident occurs.

In this project, our first set of social norms posters and postcards were disseminated after a very controversial, much publicized incident in which students allegedly threw beer bottles through the window of a resident's home. In just two weeks, the local media went from reporting a glowing story about how the UAlbany was taking a larger role in keeping the peace between students and their neighbors to running an editorial cartoon suggesting that the University looks the other way when these incidents occur and doesn't care.

■ **Countering Bad Press Through Proactive Media Relations.** When negative publicity occurs, it is important to stay front and center on the story and to produce, yet

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Table 5: Tips for Addressing Media Issues and Questions

■ Coordinate a campus-wide response from key stakeholders.

■ Maintain a high campus visibility at the scene.

■ Re-issue action steps or campus plans.

■ Remain front and center on the issue.

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again, the action steps that your university takes to address risk behavior. Table 5 contains tips for addressing media issues and questions.

■ **Educate Your Stakeholders, Particularly Your Media People.** Creating an effective social norms media campaign does not necessarily happen on the first try. In working with an outside advertising agency, we first had to educate the agency about the social norms approach. We presented them with articles on the approach as well as examples of posters from successful social norms campaigns that were implemented by colleges and universities across the country. We presented our advertising team with the caveat that what works for one college or university may not work for another, and that the effectiveness of any campaign we create must be tested using focus groups consisting of residents in our local community. While we thought we had explained it adequately, their first concept for a campaign missed the mark and suggested that they did not understand the approach at all. The first theme that was produced indeed was the antithesis of social norms. It took several attempts at education, discussion, and sharing of existing social norms campaign materials from other schools before we arrived at an acceptable creative approach for the campaign. We recommend that, if at all possible, invite your creative team of marketers to attend a social norms conference. The more the creative team understands the approach, the easier the creative process will be.

■ **Let Your Photos Tell the Story Behind Your Message.** When taking

photographs, try to have an art director oversee the shots. A careful eye can make the difference between mediocre photos and photos that vividly tell a story. While you want to use real students, real neighbors and a real neighborhood, pay close attention to important things like lighting and framing your subjects so they don't appear too distant in the shot. Typically, you will want your subjects to be closer together in the photo than what feels comfortable. It will not be detected in the photo and you'll be able to frame them better and crop them appropriately for a poster or postcard.

Pay attention to what your students are wearing. Have them wear a college

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logo sweatshirt or T-shirt. This helps the viewer identify them immediately as students at your university. While you may use your logo at the bottom of the poster or postcard, this is another way of visually telling a story. Pay as much attention to the surroundings as you do to the subjects. Make sure you are photographing your subjects in the best possible environment. Examine the background for the best possible results before taking a photo.

Don't be afraid to manipulate images using software like PhotoShop to improve a photo. For example, we needed to have the students walking past a neighbor's house appear to be in closer

proximity to the neighbor waving hello to them from his front steps. Through the magic of PhotoShop (see for example, the postcard in Figure 1, page 4), we were able to make this happen.

Behavioral Data. At comparable points in time prior to and during the project period, indicators such as alcohol and other drug related arrest rates and complaint calls to the off-campus hotline from long-term neighbors about the behavior of our students were tracked. During the time period of the project AOD-related arrests decreased by 40%, from 17 arrests before the project to 10 arrests during the project itself. While baseline numbers for arrests were relatively low as a result of ongoing and consistent enforcement by the local police department, there were no DWI, disorderly conduct, exposure/public urination, and criminal impersonation arrests during the project period and beyond (until June 2004). It should be noted that the degree of law enforcement remained constant during the period prior to and during the project.

Data collected on AOD-related off-campus hotline calls indicated that there were two calls during the spring 2003 and one call during the project period and beyond (until June 2004). This data is noteworthy due to the fact that long-term neighbors were sent refrigerator magnets highlighting the off-campus hotline number at the beginning of the

project period and were encouraged to call the hotline to report any AOD-related behavioral problems or incidents by our students. Despite the high visibility given to this telephone number at the beginning of the project period, only one complaint call was received.

Summary

This project presented a number of significant and noteworthy issues in its development and implementation. There was extensive collaboration with key stakeholders who were part of an already existing campus-community coalition that had successfully worked together on a variety of other projects (Gebhardt, Kaphingst & DeJong, 2000). The accomplishment of project goals and objectives was strengthened by synergistic efforts using a social norms campaign on the one hand, and a comprehensive environmental management model on the other. Both efforts were designed to be compatible and mutually reinforcing. The social norms intervention and ongoing environmental management work were carried out by our Committee on University and Community Relations. This committee provided us with a broader frame to implement creative and novel strategies that reached our local community as well as our campus.

Developing and implementing a campus-community social norms campaign can be fun and rewarding, but it can also be frustrating and off the mark

in the initial stages of development. The more effort that is made to work with key stakeholders including the creative team and to educate them about the social norms approach, the easier and more successful the campaign and its outcomes will be.

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