

Greek Re-Evolution
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Report of Project Activities, Outcomes, and Lessons Learned

Background:

In 2003, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was awarded nearly \$300,000.00 in funds from the United States Department of Education's Grant Competition to Prevent High-Risk Drinking and Violent Behavior Among College Students to initiate a project entitled *Greek Re-Evolution: Enabling Cultural Change in Greek Life at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.

Project Elements/Methodology:

1. Chapters were encouraged to apply for participation in the program and were asked to provide a letter of commitment from their Alumni Board and from their membership.
2. A workshop developed from Peter Quinn's Deep Change was conducted for all participating chapter leaders and alumni.
3. Far and Miller's Small Group Norms Challenging Model was adapted for use among Re-Evolution chapters. Each chapter was measured for project readiness, drinking behaviors, problems, self-efficacy, protective factors, altruism, and normative perceptions. Feedback sessions were conducted in each chapter with follow-up sessions and individual feedback.
4. A new policy was instituted from the Office of Student Affairs that required all Greek Chapters seeking Housing status for first-year students to provide chapter alcohol policies, chapter judicial procedures, and member education plans with an understanding that Greek Chapters must address the problematic alcohol consumption and behavior of individual members through a sound internal process, or the university would step in with chapter-wide sanctions.
5. Project staff initiated discussions with chapter members and leaders in order to help members re-connect with the original creed and values of Greek organizations.
6. A "Leadership Team" consisting of leaders and members were established in each chapter to create and enact an action plan for change. The team met weekly and was mentored by a project staff member.
7. Central to the action plan was the creation of a "real rules" document codifying individual chapter standards and norms for alcohol consumption and related behaviors for members. The document was voted on by the entire membership and distributed across the chapter. Normative reinforcement messages were created and displayed across the chapter's living unit.
8. Each chapter was given resources to address chapter-specific environmental elements, such as improving alumni relations, house repair, recruitment materials, or national/local consultants on membership recruitment, economic planning, or leadership.
9. A recruitment brochure featuring all participating chapters in the Greek Re-Evolution project was created and distributed at New Student Enrollment.

Presentations to parents and incoming students featured the Greek Re-Evolution project and chapters.

10. Chapter-specific posters were created and distributed among participating chapters highlighting chapter-created normative statements and agreements as a way to reinforce newly created norms among chapter members. In many cases, these posters connected national creeds and value statements to chapter guidelines for responsible alcohol use.
11. Participating chapters from Year 1 and Year 2 met collectively as a coalition to address issues related to the project. Issues ranged from coordination of social calendars to addressing high-risk practices occurring across chapters.
12. Each chapter participating in the project received a letter outlining the completed activities and a list of recommendations for continued re-evolution.

Project Enactment:

In Year 1, five fraternities and two sororities participated in the project. All activities and interventions occurred in the second semester.

In Year 2, two fraternities and three sororities participated in the project. Activities and interventions occurred between October and April. Year 1 chapters had limited continued services and participated in coalition activities.

Evaluation:

Survey tools measuring drinking behaviors, problems, self-efficacy, protective factors, altruism, and normative perceptions were administered at the beginning and at the end of each project period (Year 1: 4 Months, Year 2: 6 months). Year 2 chapters were also compared to control chapters. In addition, attitude surveys and focus groups were conducted in Year 2 chapters.

Results:

1. No statistically significant changes were found in the evaluative measures outlined in the original grant proposal. Post-test data from participating chapters found limited and inconsistent change in average or peak BAC levels, problems, self-efficacy, protective factors or altruism for Year 1 cohorts and no significant change in these factors for Year 2 cohorts or when compared to a control group of chapters in Year 2. Statistically significant changes were found in post-tests of normative perceptions for both Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts, especially when compared to control chapters. These findings are consistent with other studies of the Farr and Miller Model.

2. Self-efficacy scores remained high, particularly for sorority women, in pre-tests, which other studies have shown to be correlated to limited change in drinking behavior. In other words, if students believe that they are capable of avoiding significant problems, their likelihood of change is diminished. Self-efficacy scores for the women in Year 2, however, showed significant decline, indicating that the project had successfully raised dissonance among the women about their ability to keep themselves from primary or secondary harms.

3. Year 1 and Year 2 chapters demonstrated a significant increase in their readiness to address alcohol problems within their chapters as indicated by comparisons of pre- and post-readiness surveys. Chapter attitude surveys also indicated a significant increase in positive attitudes toward addressing alcohol problems within the chapter at the end of the project. Strong support for the “real rules” document regarding alcohol consumption was found among members of every participating chapter. Overall, participating chapter memberships ended the project with positive attitudes regarding their chapter’s participation in Greek Re-Evolution.

3. Several significant changes occurred as a result of the project that enhanced the Greek environment as a whole. Among these was the system-wide agreement to eliminate the Thursday night “Frosh,” a high-risk activity where first-year fraternity members invite first-year sorority members to a planned event followed by a post-event party with alcohol supplied by older members.

Given this data, we can draw several conclusions:

1. Right project, wrong measures: In hindsight, we now see that the project used the wrong outcome measures given the length of the project and the degree of readiness for the cohort at the start of the intervention. Despite the impact created on the Greek system by five years of environmental strategies (chapter sanctions for alcohol within houses, increases in individual citations and protective custody admissions among Greek members, etc), the assumption that chapter members were ready to address actual drinking behaviors was inaccurate. Project evaluation should have focused more heavily on measuring the changes to environmental conditions within the Greek system and participating chapters as well as individual and group movement through the stages of change.

2. Despite the lack of evidence that the intervention led to reductions in high-risk drinking behaviors for the participating chapters, sufficient evidence exists that the project was successful in moving participating chapters toward both environmental and individual change. We can reasonably assume that, given the changes in readiness and continued application of the project’s interventions, participating chapters would see significant decreases in consumptive behaviors and increases in protective behaviors among its members.

3. Self-efficacy is an important determinant for readiness to changing alcohol behaviors for members of Greek organizations. This project provided statistical and qualitative evidence of high perceptions of self-efficacy among members of this sub-culture regarding alcohol use, and showed a direct correlation between self-efficacy scores and the lack of behavioral change following intervention. In other words, student members of Greek organizations seem to hold stronger perceptions that they have the ability to drink heavily without facing negative consequences despite data that shows they in fact are not able to avoid these consequences. This perception among members of Greek organizations may explain why they are less likely to respond to individual or environmental interventions. More research is needed to determine if there are cultural or institutional influences to this perception that can be addressed to lesson the false

perception of self-efficacy, or whether other environmental or individual strategies can be created in order to hasten behavioral change for this sub-population given this reality.

Discoveries:

As a result of the project, several critical discoveries were made about addressing high-risk alcohol consumption within the Greek environment. These include:

1. Chapters had not yet begun to recognize or address the actual norms, practices, or rituals surrounding alcohol consumption within their membership prior to the start of the project. Chapter members and leaders were unable to identify high-risk alcohol consumption as a problem, having assumed that since drinking no longer occurred within their chapter houses, there was no need for additional work in this area. When pressed by project staff, chapter leaders only identified issues of containment for members who over-consumed alcohol. Chapter leaders and advisors had also not connected their problems in recruitment, retention, unity, or image to the high-risk drinking practices of their members. As a result, chapters were unwilling to address the issue of alcohol consumption as the basis of the entire Greek Re-Evolution project. Finding chapters to participate in the project was limited by chapter leaders who believed that alcohol issues were not present or significant enough to justify the energy and effort needed to complete the project. Project staff had to quickly re-frame the Greek Re-Evolution project as “chapter improvement” rather than as an alcohol harm-reduction intervention, focusing on low recruitment and retention of fraternity members and chapter image across campus for sororities as the basis for participation.

a. The project staff discovered that the majority of Greek chapters at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln had adopted containment practices for those members who became acutely intoxicated rather than practices to prevent acute intoxication among members. This may explain why self-efficacy scores were high in pre-tests of participating chapters. Chapter culture surrounded the continuation of high-risk norms and practices but prided itself on its ability to keep highly intoxicated members from causing harm to themselves or the chapter. “We take care of ourselves better than anyone else on campus” is a common response heard across chapters.

b. Others had simply grown tired of the “alcohol issue” as it related to the Greek system, regardless of their continued (and often organized) high-risk behavior. Perhaps as a result of intensified public dialogue about high-risk alcohol abuse across the university and within the Greek system created by the media, national organizations, and the NU Directions campus-community coalition, the topic of alcohol had saturated the environment to the point where the “boomerang” effect” had occurred within the Greek system. Project participant readiness surveys indicated that most members had grown weary with more alcohol programming.

2. There is no natural “trickle down” effect from leadership to membership regarding the knowledge or attitudes gained through project activities. Three examples demonstrate this discovery:

a. Although the project required an entire chapter to vote on participating as part of the application process, project staff consistently encountered a large number

chapter members who were unaware of project activities, uncomfortable or unwilling to participate in activities, and unsupportive of changes being addressed by the Leadership Team.

b. Focus group interviews showed a significant difference in the awareness, understanding, and positive attitude toward the project between members who actively participated in the project through Leadership Team and other events and those chapter members who did not.

c. The most common issue raised in chapter assessment was the lack of trust from members toward the decisions and actions of their leaders. This issue was found for both project-related decisions as well as other chapter issues.

2. Given the resistance to address alcohol issues directly across all participating chapters, the use of the Far and Miller Small Group Norms Challenging Model at the start of the project proved to be an ineffective approach that slowed the readiness process rather than quickened it. Getting chapter members to take the survey proved to be an extremely labor-intensive effort. Despite the use of non-confrontational presentation skills in feedback sessions, trained facilitators faced significant resistance and negative reaction when presenting data collected from the membership. Though some of this is expected, much of the resistance was directed toward the presumption on the part of project staff that alcohol consumption was a problem within the chapter. Project staff quickly adopted other survey tools and group processing techniques to assess generic chapter issues. Alcohol issues emerged as a part of a broader chapter assessment where members raised the issue as a cause for other chapter problems (disunity, poor house maintenance, inability to pay fees, chapter image, etc.). It was only at this point that chapter members were willing to discuss alcohol consumption problems.

3. Comparison of chapter norms to the norms of the campus as a whole also proved to be ineffective in changing behavior, although it did yield a change in the perception of norms. Greek members had already separated themselves from the general campus population and were uninterested in how their drinking compared with the rest of the campus. In some cases, they felt proud that they were “set apart” from other students in this area. More effective was the use of individual data following the small group feedback session that enabled project staff (at a second session) to compare scores within the membership, identifying both extreme drinking behavior and members with low scores as part of the same culture. Seeing dramatic differences in problems related to alcohol consumption within the chapter yielded significant dissonance and quickened the readiness to change process.

4. The original hope of the project was that by reconnecting members to their national policies and programs, chapters would find all the resources they needed to successfully address high-risk alcohol consumption. This proved to be an inaccurate assumption. The use of Greek policies, programs and resources created and instituted by the national corporations and fraternal organizations proved to be ineffective and unproductive to assist in moving the chapter toward readiness to change or in implementing lower-risk practices and behaviors for three key reasons:

- a. The majority of chapter members and several leaders were unfamiliar with or had neglected their national alcohol policies. Several chapters were not fully implementing the nationally-created new member education program, which details these policies, while other national new member education programs did not emphasize the role of policies in real-life contexts.
- b. Many of the alcohol-related activities regularly engaged by chapter members were in direct violation of national policies. In some cases, leaders knowingly reframed their activities to fit the letter (but not the intent) of the policy, where in other cases, the policies were simply ignored. The most common reason given in chapter discussions was, “Students are going to do it anyway.”
- c. In addition, chapter visits by national consultants were guided by a national agenda, limiting any effective intersection between the national office and the project’s goals and activities. In many cases, the national consultant was unaware of the project, despite the approval of participation by the national corporation.

The clear disconnect between national policies and programs and daily chapter life proved to be problematic for instituting change within the chapter. To adapt, project staff worked with each chapter’s leadership team to develop a separate and unofficial set of chapter guidelines regarding the use of alcohol. The document created a list of “real rules” that members would obey and hold one another accountable that identified real-life contexts and behaviors that would reduce the risk of alcohol-related harms for members and the chapter as a whole. Once created, the entire chapter “voted” on the document. Surveys and focus groups revealed that members were more likely to adopt the chapter guidelines than the national rules and policies. One conclusion to be drawn is the importance of allowing members to provide authorship of the covenants they must follow in order to produce full ownership of the policies.

5. The project’s assumption that a reconnection to the creeds and value statements of the chapter would enable behavioral change also proved to be a greater challenge for several reasons:

- a. Most chapter members were unfamiliar with their Creed or Values and could not readily state them in chapter discussions.
- b. Moreover, most chapter members had broad and differing interpretations of the words used in national creeds or value statements; many had never considered the real-life connotations of terms such as “integrity,” “respect,” “moderation,” or others, despite the fact that many of the chapters had significant national programs in values clarification and “lived values.”
- c. Most members will readily admit that the creed and values have little to do with their motivations for joining a fraternity or sorority. Most cite the guaranteed introduction into a social circle, having a competitive advantage when building a career, or following a family legacy as most influential to their decision.

Through the creation of chapter guidelines, however, creed and value terminology reappeared as meaningful; many chapters utilized their key values in communicating their newfound norms in posters, or in discussing those norms for the purposes of member recruitment. Project staff discovered that the process of personal ownership of chapter values and creed occurred only when practical applications could be made that de-mystified the values and connected them to actual contexts. Once again, the issue of

ownership was significant and deserves additional thought in relation to the adoption of chapter-wide values.

6. The use of Quinn's Deep Change model as an introduction to and framework for change management proved to be inappropriate for the developmental stages of the leaders and members of Greek chapters. The model required introspection and personal paradigm changes, which contradicted the level of academic or moral development of a young group of chapter leaders. Although alumni advisors would have benefited most from the model, alumni involvement was minimal. Project staff was unable to get alumni to actively participate in the personal adoption of the Deep Change model.

7. Alumni advisor involvement proved to be a critical missing piece of the Re-Evolution process. Despite the signing of letters of commitment prior to the acceptance of chapters into the program, alumni advisors and alumni boards remained uninvolved. The majority of fraternity advisors did not attend or participate in any project activities, and the involvement of sorority advisors was scattered and inconsistent, despite staff attempts to communicate directly with advisors. Fraternity advisor involvement is a due to a lack of men actively serving chapters in any capacity. Several fraternity chapters were unable to involve the men whose names were listed on chapter paperwork, or were unable to interest those advisors in participating in any of the chapter activities relating to the Re-Evolution project. Project staff discovered that chapter advisory boards – made up of adults who are raising families, managing careers and balancing complex schedules -- were not structured or equipped to address the day-to-day problems being faced by the members or their student leaders.

8. Effectively addressing the attitudes, practices, norms, environment and behaviors surrounding high-risk alcohol use in the Greek system is a highly time and labor-intensive endeavor. Many of the issues limiting effective intervention of alcohol-related problems for Greek members are connected to larger system-based problems such as a lack of daily mentoring in leadership, ineffective transition between leadership teams, a significant disconnect between the goals, values, and procedures of national organizations and the local chapters, and concretized norms, attitudes and "underground" practices that have never been recognized or addressed by parents, administrators, chapter advisors or national consultants. Although the project moved chapters toward a readiness to change, these larger system-based issues, combined with a lack of funded staff positions to sustain the intervention, threaten to limit the amount of long-term behavioral change for this group of young adults.

Lessons Learned for future prevention:

1. Issue saturation may be an important factor in assessing and strategizing messages in the Greek student environment. Given the degree and nature of local and national discourse about alcohol abuse among Greek students, there is a clear potential for messages surrounding alcohol to be instantly rejected or misperceived among this population. Assessment of a directed effort to address harms created by alcohol abuse among this population must first consider:

- a. The impact of national and local media on the public opinion of Greek life at the institution and the degree of defensiveness among Greek leaders, members and alumni.
- b. The amount and nature of institutional communication concerning student alcohol abuse within the campus community and within the Greek system. Discussions among Greek leaders concerning their perceptions of the goals and strategies of administration are critical; members and leaders at UNL inaccurately sensed that the goal of administrators was to shut down or significantly limit Greek chapters due to alcohol issues, and that that the institution is most interested in reducing its own legal and civic liability.
- c. The degree of polarization across the campus and within the Greek system regarding alcohol issues.

As found at UNL, indirect approaches to addressing alcohol consumption and harms within the Greek system, where alcohol issues are discovered as root causes to other problems, may be far more effective than visible “alcohol” programs. The key lesson learned is that, for certain high-risk groups such as fraternities and sororities, prevention efforts must frame their work around more salient issues such as chapter (or team) improvement and image. Greek leaders and members are most concerned with their chapter’s reputation on campus; attempts to address high-risk alcohol behaviors across the chapter must be seen as beneficial to accomplishing this larger goal.

2. Assessment tools and processing must assist students in connecting the salient issues of chapter image and reputation to high-risk drinking practices rather than directly assessing high-risk drinking attitudes, norms, or behaviors at the start of the process. There is a place for motivational feedback devices that focus solely on alcohol attitudes and behaviors such as the Small Group Norms Challenging Model, but it is only when alcohol issues are indicated by broader chapter assessment tools and alcohol is agreed to be an issue worth exploring across the membership. A simple exercise that proved to be effective as a starting point was the “crumpled paper” exercise, where members wrote comments about the chapter on pieces of paper and then crumpled them and threw them onto the floor for another member to pick up and read. Several of the comments revolved around alcohol, or were later connected to alcohol in further processing. This proved to be a more powerful feedback device than more sophisticated programs, as the feedback was automatically accepted as true.

3. Consistent with Tipping Theory, chapter member influence should be carefully considered when creating leadership teams and workgroups within chapters. Ownership of programs to improve chapter life and address high-risk drinking is best accomplished when the assessment and action-planning is conducted by the students themselves rather than by paid staff or national program personnel, but even the use of elected student leadership can be problematic; involvement should come from a mixture of leaders and average members so that trust is developed and members are empowered to create plans that are meaningful to the group as a whole. In much the same way, change that was created in the chapter through grass-roots coalition-building proved to be much more effective than change commanded from national offices, administrations, or even elected student leaders. Secondly, active influence to change the behaviors of the 20% of

members most responsible for the highest-risk practices is best accomplished by pressure applied by the rest of the membership; in many chapters, elected leaders are themselves part of the highest-risk group, so others must be empowered to use influence on these individuals.

4. Active law enforcement from both campus and city police -- along with consistent judicial consequences from local courts and from Judicial Affairs officers -- are critical for providing the motivation to address alcohol-related problems among Greek chapters, who are sincerely interested in keeping their chapters from closing due to violations in laws or campus policies. However, enforcement and adjudication incidents must be actively processed by alumni and faculty advisors and other (non-enforcement) support staff to assist leaders and members in making effective choices in response to critical incidents. It is not surprising that, given their stage of development, chapter members and leaders would conclude that the best strategy to avoid future legal or judicial consequences is to improve the concealment of the behaviors rather than addressing the behaviors themselves. Thorough processing of incidents by a variety of adults involved in Greek Life, however, must assist students in adopting more effective harm reduction strategies. It is essential, however, that a clear separation is made between those whose role involves enforcement and adjudication and those whose role involves chapter support, so that consequences can be applied consistently and impartially and that support personnel are given complete trust by student members.

5. Preparing Greek chapters to move from Pre-contemplation to Contemplation in changing their drinking habits requires a significant investment of time and resources. Programs attempting to address these populations should expect a process that takes at least three to four years and requires additional full-time staff positions beyond the Director of Greek Affairs. This is particularly important given the fact that student leadership throughout the Greek system changes annually, requiring staff to re-orient new leaders to the goals of the effort and maintain consistency during this transition period. It is particularly important that the effort to address high-risk drinking in fraternities and sororities is shared across all campus and community partners as well as national offices for consistent support.