Building a Comprehensive, Sustainable Campus Peer Education Program: Lessons from a Program That Has Thrived for 50 Years,

M. Dolores Cimini, Ph.D.
Melissa M. Ertl, M.S.
September Johnson
Sarah E. Nolan, Ph.D.
Estela M. Rivero, Ph.D.
Natalie Sumski, MPH, CHES
University at Albany, SUNY

NASPA Strategies Conference
Hyatt Regency New Orleans – New Orleans, LA
Thursday, January 16, 2020
Learning Objectives

At the end of this workshop, attendees will be able to:

- Describe the development, structure, and operation over the past 50 years of a peer education program that operates a hotline service, peer wellness coaching intervention, and peer-to-peer education initiative.

- Discuss how a peer education program can establish vital linkages with stakeholders in order to secure financial and space resources, establish the availability of academic credit-bearing peer assistance training courses, and engage with student government, program alumni, and other campus groups and departments to sustain support for continued operations.

- Identify ways to measure program effectiveness and address administrative, training, supervisory, recruitment, retention, and liability issues in a manner that is responsive to the changing and increasingly complex needs of college students.
The Case for Peer Interventions

Why Involve Students in Our Efforts?
Student Involvement in Prevention Efforts

- Undergraduate students are the single most potent source of influence on undergraduate student affective and cognitive growth and development during college (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1993; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999)

- The frequency and quality of students’ interactions with peers extends to a positive association with college student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993)
Why Engage Students in Peer-Delivered Interventions?

Peer Educators:

- Are trusted by classmates
- Have hands-on knowledge
- Are an important link
- Can assist in reducing stigma
- Can provide input to increase prevention program success
Why Engage Students in Peer-Delivered Interventions?

Peer Educators:

- Extend outreach of the professional staff
- Provide student leadership opportunities
- Economical
Why Peer Interventions Work

- Peer influence is a key factor in determining the behavior of college students.

- College students regard their peers as a credible and trusted source of information (National College Health Assessment, 2000).

- Studies have shown that peers can be as effective as professionals in delivering alcohol interventions to college students (Fromme & Corbin, 2004).
Middle Earth: Students Helping Students

- Hotline
- Peer Wellness Coaching
- Peer Wellness Ambassadors
- Staff Training and Staff Development
- Student Organization Leadership
- Alumni Affinity Group
Comprehensive Prevention Spectrum

Optimize Health & Wellbeing

Reclaim Health

Prevent Problems

Treat Problems

Behavioral Health Promotion
- Social Norms Campaigns
- Peer-Facilitated Prevention Programs
- Active Bystander Programs
- Environmental Management

Early Intervention
- Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)
- Gatekeeper Training Programs

Specialized Interventions
- Treatment and Referral Services
- Victim Services
- Protocols and Responses to Urgent or Emergent Situations
- Linkages to Community Agencies and Hospitals
Components of UAlbany Comprehensive Prevention Program

- Presidential Leadership
- Campus AOD Task Force
- Student Involvement/Leadership
- Social Norms Marketing
- Campus-Community Coalitions
- Inclusive Academic Excellence
- Healthy Living Communities
- Alcohol-Free Activities
- Early Intervention
- Restricting Alcohol Marketing/Promotion
- Policy Evaluation/Enforcement
- Parental Involvement
- Treatment & Referral
- Research and Program Evaluation - NCHIP
Our Experiences

Understanding the Peer Intervention Landscape
Effective Peer Intervention Practice

Key Considerations
Consideration #1: Focus of Services

- What do you think of when someone says ‘Peer Education Program’?
- What do you want your peer education program to focus on?
- What services will your program include?
- What are some of the most important elements that a peer educator/mentor should have?
Consideration #2: Staffing & Resources

- Who will serve as the peer education program director? How much time will that individual devote to running the program?

- How many hours will the program operate? How many students will be needed to operate the program, and what will be their time commitment?

- Where will the program be located? Who will supply the furniture for the office? How will the phone system work?

- How much funding and other resources will the program need to operate?
Consideration #3: Training & Supervision

- What will be the training focus of the peer education program?
- What training model shall we use? How will the training program be structured?
- What will be the training contract with students (volunteer basis, course credit, money)?
- What is our mechanism for ongoing supervision of students?
Consideration #4: Recruitment & Retention

- How will you recruit students for my peer education program?
- What qualifications should you look for in student applicants?
- How should you conduct the application process?
- How can you motivate and reward your peer educators once they become a part of the program?
- How should you address issues of performance and discipline in your program?
Consideration #5: Marketing the Program

- How will you market your program?
- Who will fund your marketing efforts?
- Can you partner with other campus groups, offices, or community agencies to help advertise our programs?
- How can your own students serve as ambassadors for our program?
- How can you work with our campus and community media offices to advertise our services?
Consideration #6: Liability Issues

- Does your program have clear protocols addressing how to respond to situations that are urgent or life-threatening? (e.g., sexual assault, suicide or homicide risk)

- Does your program have a mental health backup system staffed by a licensed mental health professional or agency in place to respond to urgent and emergency situations?

- Do referral networks with community agencies exist for times in which your program is not open, and are these advertised?

- Does your university have a document/contract specifying who accepts the liability for the program?

- Is there a malpractice policy in place for your program?
Consideration #7: Evaluating Effectiveness

- What mechanisms do you have in place to track and monitor the course of contacts to your peer education program? How are these records kept secure and confidential?

- What mechanisms do you have in place to track the performance of your undergraduate peer educators/mentors?

- Do you have templates to produce annual reports for your program, highlighting data on effectiveness?

- Do you have a “brag document” or organizational resume that you can use to let people know of your accomplishments and successes?
Questions for the Panel

- Tell us about your role within the Middle Earth program.
- What has interested or inspired you to engage in work within the peer intervention space?
- What have you seen as the benefits to you, the UAlbany campus, and the community about working in the peer intervention area?
- What are some of the challenges you have experienced from the perspective of your role within the Middle Earth program? How have you addressed these challenges?
Thank You!

Questions?
Contact Information

M. Dolores Cimini, Ph.D.
dcimini@albany.edu

Center for Behavioral Health Promotion and Applied Research
Health and Counseling Services
University at Albany, SUNY
Albany, NY 12222

518-442-5800
www.Albany.edu/behavioralhealth/