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Student Perceptions of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Alcohol and Drug Policy

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Purpose
The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of students’ perceptions of the current alcohol and other drug use policy at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU) now and in the future. The study explores undergraduate students’ perceptions through surveys disseminated in the fall of 2010 and fall of 2011. The study is part of a four year longitudinal study, which began in 2010 after the implementation of a revised alcohol and other drug use policy.

Literature Review
Research studies on student perceptions of alcohol and drug use policies have found a majority of students support alcohol and drug use policies, support enforcement actions by the university, and perceive support of the policies by the student body to be much lower than individual support (Buehnter, Bartle-Haring, Andrews, & Khurara, 2010; De Jong, Towvim, & Schneider, 2007; Lavigne, Witt, Wood, Latorge, & De Jong, 2005; Weshler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002). Furthermore, males, intercollegiate athletes, and members of the Greek community were more likely to not support policies while females, those involved in religious activities, and those who began using alcohol later in life were more likely to support university alcohol and drug use policies (Buehnter et al., 2010). Other researchers have found varying degrees of knowledge about alcohol and drug use policies by university administrators and students (Hirschfeld, Edwson, & McGown, 2005; Knight, et. al., 2003). The lack of knowledge and availability of policies may be related to student behaviors, specifically binge drinking. However, there is still debate among researchers on the impact university alcohol and drug use policies have on student behaviors (Weshler et al., 2002).

Methodology
- Survey administered by email to a random sample of 2,500 currently enrolled MNSU undergraduate students ages 18 to 34 in Nov. 2010 & 2011
- Survey developed by Dr. Roy Kamm, Dr. Miranda Hellenbrand, & Dr. Kari Much, MNSU faculty
- 17 questions - mixture of open ended & Likert-scale questions
- Likert-scale questions were coded on a scale of one to three (e.g. significantly less likely and less likely [1], no effect [2], more likely and significantly more likely [3])
- Data was cleaned, coded, & transferred to SPSS for data analysis
- Frequency tables created & T-Tests run to compare mean scores
- In 2010, 344 valid surveys were received (13.8%) & in 2011, 264 valid surveys were received (10.6%).

Results
Almost half of the respondents in 2010 (49.1%) reported being familiar or highly familiar with the current alcohol and other drug use policy. Over half of the respondents in 2011 (59.3%) reported being familiar or highly familiar with the policy. Respondents who reported they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the policy decreased from 30.2% in 2010 to 23.7% in 2011. Continued...

Conclusions
- Students at MNSU are becoming more familiar with policy
- May be attributed to the policy being in place for two years and has provided students with the opportunity to become aware of the policy through orientation, email announcements, and word of mouth
- Statistically significant difference in the level of agreement with the policy from 2010 to 2011, with a higher level of agreement for the policy in 2011
  - Could be a result of students having knowledge of the policy prior to making the decision to attend MNSU
  - Students’ initial intentions to use alcohol or drugs on- and off-campus may impact their level of agreement
- Large majority of students reported the policy would have no effect on their decision to use alcohol or drug on- and off-campus in 2010 and 2011
- May be disappointing as some believed the addition of a formal off-campus adjudication clause would deter alcohol and drug use off-campus
- Students perceived the policy would have no effect on a majority of other students’ decisions to use alcohol or drugs on- and off-campus.

Limitations
- Small response rate
- Question wording may be confusing to respondents
- Different samples each year
- Limited demographic information

References are available from the author upon request.