Social Norms:

A Publicly Funded, Cost-Effective Approach

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One issue of recent interest in the field of health promotion is the support provided by segments of the alcohol beverage industry to a small number of universities' social norms campaigns. While this support has been welcomed by these schools for its invaluable assistance, it does not reflect the funding experience of the vast majority of institutions. In point of fact, "industry" support for social norms is very recent and, relatively speaking, minor. That is, the overwhelming majority of schools employing the social norms approach to address alcohol-related issues have been either self-funded or obtained supplemental funding from federal and/or state agencies.

This document is intended to put this issue into perspective, and is divided into four sections:
I.   The Historical Record: Growing Federal and State Support for Social Norms
II.   How Many Schools Are Using Social Norms, and How Are They Doing So?
III.   The Level and Impact of Industry Funding
IV.   Social Norms: Beyond Alcohol

I. The Historical Record:
Growing Federal and State Support for Social Norms

Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, all of the funding in support of social norms interventions came from the federal government. Specifically, financial support for the social norms approach was provided by the Department of Education (DOE), which awarded generous grants through its Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). When the drug prevention component of the FIPSE program was discontinued, subsequent DOE support for social norms came through grants from its Safe and Drug Free Schools Program. Early and important federal support was also provided by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).

Two of the earliest recipients of federal funding in support of social norms were Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the University of Arizona (UA), and the grant experience of these two institutions reflect the historical record described above.

In 1988, NIU received the first of two grants from FIPSE. These grants enabled NIU to spearhead the development, implementation, and dissemination of the approach now widely known as *social norms marketing*.[1] Subsequent to this, in 1994, the University of Arizona received funds from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (CSAP) High-

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[1] Haines, M. P. (1996). A Social Norms Approach to Preventing Binge Drinking at Colleges and Universities. Newton, MA: The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, Education Development Center, Inc.

Risk Youth Demonstration Grant Program for a five-year project to implement and test strategies to prevent heavy drinking on its campus. The university also received two-year institutional and research grants from FIPSE and two additional two-year grants from the Department of Education.[2]

As the number of social norm interventions with positive outcome data has increased over the years, more and more federal and state agencies have begun to fund proposals implementing this approach. Clearly, what makes social norms appealing to this growing list of federal and state agencies is the fact that it is a cost-effective, evidence-based approach with a history of proven results. One recent example of this can be found in Minnesota. There, in 1998, a collaborative of seven private and public colleges were awarded $130,000 by that state's Department of Public Safety for a three-year initiative to reduce impaired driving using a social norms marketing campaign. With funding of approximately *$6,000 per school, per year* significant reductions (13%) were achieved in the number of students reporting impaired driving.[3]

Below is a list of some of the federal and state agencies that have provided—and, in most cases, continue to provide—supportive grants for projects using the social norms approach:

Federal Agencies

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Department of Education
Department of Justice
Department of Health and Human Services
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse
National Science Foundation

State Agencies Funding Individual Programs or Regional Consortia

California State University System
Illinois Department of Human Services
Iowa Department of Human Rights Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning
Iowa Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau
Massachusetts Governor's Highway Safety Bureau
Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Office of Traffic Safety
Montana Department of Transportation

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[2] Johannessen, K., Collins, C., Mills-Novoa, B., & Glider, P. (1999). A Practical Guide to Alcohol Abuse Prevention: A Campus Case Study in Implementing Social Norms and Environmental Management Approaches. Tucson, AZ: Campus Health Service, The University of Arizona.

[3] "Collaboration and Social Norms: The Key to Reducing Impaired Driving Among College Students in Minneapolis/St. Paul." *The Peer Educator*, October 2002, Vol. 25, No. 3, 7-9.

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
New York Department of Health (OASAS)
North Carolina's Governor's Highway Safety Program
Pennsylvania Alcohol Beverage Control
Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control Board and Department of Health
Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board

In addition, a small number of private foundations have awarded grants in support of social norm projects. Among them are:

Private Foundations

Chicago Community Trust
Kansas Health Foundation
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

II. How Many Schools Are Using Social Norms, and How Are They Doing So?

To date, there appears to have been no systematic national survey that has attempted to gather information about the number of institutions using the social norms approach and, more importantly, the extent and quality of their attempts to do so. Therefore, no one can say for sure at present just how many schools that report "using social norms" are doing so as part of the data-driven, integrated process generally referred to as *social norms marketing*.

One of the reasons that social norms marketing is so appealing is that, when properly conducted, it is a very cost-effective method of achieving large-scale positive results. Nevertheless, due to severe limitations of staff and funding on many if not most campuses, schools are frequently forced to limit their use of the social norms approach. For example, many schools now routinely incorporate positive norm messages—regarding a variety of issues—into student orientation programs, health education sessions, and the like, and it is both important and appropriate that they do so. However, "using social norms" in this limited way is qualitatively different than conducting a comprehensive *social norm marketing* campaign.[4] The latter necessarily requires a larger commitment of institutional resources. Both are valid, of course, and reflect the fact that each institution can only operate within the context of what it deems possible. Still, the

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[4] On our Frequently Asked Questions web page, we have roughly divided the essential elements of a well-designed social norm marketing intervention into four stages: 1) Data collection stage; 2) Development of intervention strategies stage; 3) Implementation stage; and 4) Evaluation stage. For more information regarding of the various components of each stage, see our response to Frequently Asked Question #11.

fact remains that these important qualitative differences will be masked when a school simply reports that it is "using social norms."[5]

That said, there have been several attempts to survey at least a portion of the more than 4,070 accredited, degree-granting institutions of higher learning in the United States regarding their use of social norms.[6]

In March 2000, the Harvard School of Public Health's College Alcohol Study (CAS) reported the results of a questionnaire that it had mailed to a select list of college presidents in February 1999. "The 734 schools in the sample," the CAS stated, "represented a cross-section of US institutions of higher education located in 50 states and 2 US territories."[7] Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they "regularly measured the extent of the campus drinking problem through some type of survey mechanism," and twenty percent of these institutions "incorporated those findings into social norming campaigns."[8] Thus, approximately 81 of the responding institutions were using social norms in some way. It should be noted, however, that there appears to have been no attempt made in this study to examine the extent and quality of these reported social norms interventions. Still, if these findings are in fact generalizeable, they suggest that at least several hundred institutions nationwide may have been using social norms in some way at this time.

Subsequent to this, in late 2001 the National Social Norms Resource Center issued a query on the SHS Listserv indicating that it was "attempting to compile a current list of schools (and other organizations) that are using social norms to address alcohol, tobacco, sexual health, violence, social justice, academic performance, and/or retention issues." Approximately 117 institutions responded that that they were using social norms to address alcohol-related issues in some way. Again, no attempt was made in this brief survey to examine either the extent or quality of these self-reported social norms interventions.

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[5] Cf. H. Wesley Perkins' recent comment in this regard: "As the approach has grown in popularity, we see intervention projects create new techniques to communicate social norms, incorporate social norms material within more traditional programs, and even rename traditional prevention activities as social norms approaches. This has all led to the emergence of studies under the rubric of social norms work that range dramatically in the degree of effect they achieve. As more prevention programs and research projects construct initiatives that ostensibly use this approach, this expansion is likely to exacerbate the problem of maintaining the fidelity of the model. It has already begun to create such questions and challenges as why the approach might appear to be ineffective in some instances." See: *The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse: A Handbook for Educators, Counselors, and Clinicians*, Ed. H. Wesley Perkins, Jossey-Bass, 2003, p. 280.

[6] "In 1998-99, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 4,070 accredited, degree-granting institutions in the United States. These institutions enrolled 14.5 million students. " [Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2000.* Tables 173 and 245. *As noted on:* http://www.acenet.edu/faq/viewInfo.cfm?faqID=18 . Accessed December 11, 2002.]

[7] Wechsler, H., et al., "What Colleges are Doing About Student Binge Drinking—A Survey of College Administrators." Journal of American College Health, March 2000; 48 (10) 219-226.

[8] Ibid.

Lastly, in 2001 the BACCHUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network indicated that "44% of its affiliates report that their institution is using social norms as a prevention strategy."[9] This figure increased slightly in 2002, when 52% of its 907 affiliates reported doing so.[10] Thus, approximately 471 institutions currently report using social norms in some way. Of course, not all of these reported interventions are designed solely to address alcohol-related issues. And it should again be noted that no attempt was made in the BACCHUS and GAMMA survey to examine either the extent or quality of these interventions.

Whatever the precise figure, it is safe to say that the number of institutions that report using the social norms approach is quite large and appears to be growing.

III. The Level and Impact of Industry Funding

The industry support that is provided to just over a handful of universities conducting social norms campaigns is a very recent occurrence and—when compared with federal, state, and other private foundation support—relatively minor. This becomes increasingly clear when one considers both the historical record described above and the current funding situation. Furthermore, all of this industry support comes in the form of unrestricted grants that in no way affect either the design or the operation of these social norms programs. Thus, the goal of these programs is in all respects the same as those that are funded in other ways: to reduce the incidence of heavy-episodic alcohol consumption and its related harm.

The Level of Industry Funding

The data provided in Section II strongly suggest that there are probably hundreds of universities currently using the social norms approach in some way to address alcohol-related issues on their campuses. Of these, most do so as part of their ongoing and self-funded programmatic efforts. Nevertheless, some do receive supplemental funding from federal and/or state agencies, or private foundations.

By comparison, eight universities have either received in the past or presently receive supplemental funding from a beverage industry source to conduct their social norms marketing campaigns. These eight universities are (in alphabetical order):

California State University-Fresno
Florida State University
Georgetown University
Michigan State University
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Virginia

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[9] BACCHUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network, *Program Services Report*, November 2001.
[10] BACCHUS and GAMMA Peer Education Network, *Program Services Report*, November 2002.

University of Wyoming
Virginia Commonwealth University

Details regarding the funding provided to two of these schools, as reported in a November 2000 edition of the Wall Street Journal, are as follows: Miller Brewing Company reportedly gave $25,000 to Georgetown University to help in the development of its social norms campaign, and the Adolph Coors Company made a similarly intended donation of $8,000 to the University of Wyoming.[11]

Currently, seven of the eight universities listed above receive funding from Anheuser-Busch and the Anheuser-Busch Foundation to support their social norms marketing campaigns. They are: California State University-Fresno, Florida State University, Georgetown University, Michigan State University, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Virginia, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

The University of Virginia (UV) was the first of these schools to receive such funding. Nevertheless, in its development stage, UV's social norm campaign—like those of most other schools—was totally supported with funds from its Student Health budget, including all salary, benefit, and facility costs. Only subsequent to the project's inception was supplemental funding secured from Anheuser-Busch. Out of this unrestricted gift, 40% of the total programmatic costs of the social norm campaign were initially covered; this has since increased to 60% of the total programmatic costs.[12] Programmatic costs include items such as graphic arts, printing, advertising, etc. The fulltime staff support systems–including faculty and secretarial support–continue to be covered entirely by the University of Virginia's Student Health budget.

Three other schools in this list (Florida State University, Georgetown University, and Virginia Commonwealth University) each received a four-year unrestricted grant for their social norms campaigns from the Anheuser-Busch Foundation in January 2002. The remaining three schools (California State University-Fresno, Michigan State University, and the University of Missouri-Columbia) received three-year unrestricted grants from the Anheuser-Busch Foundation commencing in January 2003.

Finally, the National Social Norms Resource Center is funded in three ways: a donation from the Anheuser-Busch Foundation, a grant from the BACCHUS & GAMMA Peer Education Network, and income from consultation provided to a small number of colleges, as well as state and private agencies.

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[11]Shailagh Murray and Bryan Gruley. "Uneasy Alliance: On Many Campuses Big Brewers Play a Role In New Alcohol Policies", Wall Street Journal, November 2, 2000.

[12] Jennifer Bauerle, Cynthia Burwell, and James Turner. "Social Norms Marketing at the University of Virginia." Presented at the American College Health Association National Conference, Washington, D.C., May 23, 2002.

The Impact of Industry Funding

As noted previously, the financial support provided by industry sources to a small number of universities comes in the form of unrestricted grants. Because they are unrestricted, these grants in no way affect either the design or operation of these social norms programs. As a result, the goal of these programs is identical to those that are principally funded by other means: To increase the percentage of students who correctly perceive the moderate campus norm, and to achieve significant consequent decreases in heavy-episodic alcohol consumption and related harm. Were it not for this unrestricted funding, these universities might not be able to conduct these social norms campaigns.

IV. Social Norms: Beyond Alcohol

An unfortunate consequence of the focus on industry support is that it diverts attention from the fact that the social norms approach is being used to address issues other than alcohol. For example, dozens of schools are now using the social norms approach to address tobacco use on their campuses; a number of high schools and communities are doing so as well. Among the first of these was the DCP/SAFE project, which has achieved a significant reduction in cigarette use among students in two community high schools. Another example is the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's Comprehensive Tobacco Plan, which includes an innovative social norms campaign component, and which recently reported a 33% reduction in smoking rates. Similarly, the Montana Most of Us Are Tobacco Free campaign now reports a significantly lower proportion of teens who initiated smoking in the seven-county campaign area compared with the rest of the state.

Some of the other applications now in development in college and university settings include using the social norms approach to address safer sex, intimate partner violence, and academic performance and retention.

As knowledge of the social norms approach continues to grow, so do its applications. Among the most interesting to date is the research of Dr. Michael Wenzel in Australia, who has studied the extent to which normative feedback can correct taxpayers' perceptions of relevant norms and thereby increase their level of tax compliance.[13]

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[13] Wenzel, Michael (June 2001). "Misperceptions of Social Norms About Tax Compliance (1): A Prestudy." Working Paper No 7: Centre for Tax System Integrity, Research School of Social Sciences (Australian National University).
See also: Wenzel, Michael (June 2001). "Misperceptions of Social Norms About Tax Compliance (2): A Field Experiment." Working Paper No 8: Centre for Tax System Integrity, Research School of Social Sciences (Australian National University).

To summarize:

- The number of institutions that report using the social norms approach in some way appears to be quite large and continues to grow.

- The vast majority of schools using social norms to address alcohol-related issues have been either self-funded or obtained supplemental funding from federal and/or state agencies.

- To date, eight (8) colleges or universities have received supplemental funding for their social norms campaigns from a segment of the alcohol beverage industry. This support has been provided in the form of unrestricted grants that in no way affect either the design or the operation of these social norms programs.

- Social norms has been and continues to be funded for the most part by a wide variety of federal, state, and local agencies. This will no doubt continue to be the case as this cost-effective, evidence-based approach is used to address issues other than alcohol-related harm, such as tobacco use, safer sex, intimate partner violence, and academic performance and retention.

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The National Social Norms Resource Center
is an independent center that supports, promotes and provides technical assistance in the application of the social norms approach to a broad range of health, safety and social justice issues, including alcohol-related risk-reduction and the prevention of tobacco abuse. It is the only national center devoted exclusively to the understanding and use of the social norms approach.
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