



News Release

UMass Amherst Gets National Award for Substance Abuse Program To Help Prevent Binge Drinking

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AMHERST, Mass. – The University of Massachusetts Amherst has received a national award from the federal government for its work to help prevent binge drinking by students.

The Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) project at UMass Amherst is one of only four college programs nationally to receive a 2009 Science and Service Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

BASICS is run by the Center for Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Prevention (CADAP) at UMass Amherst. In 2008, BASICS received national recognition and nearly \$200,000 in federal funds as part of a U.S. Department of Education model program competition. It was one of only two such programs in the nation rated as “exemplary” by the competition’s peer reviewers, and is among just five schools that garnered the funding.

The SAMHSA awards recognize exemplary implementation of evidence-based interventions that have been shown to prevent and/or treat mental illnesses and substance abuse and have been given to 27 agencies nationwide, including four universities, UMass Amherst, the University at Albany, University of Wisconsin Extension and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Now in its third year, the annual SAMHSA award program recognizes public - and private-sector organizations, as well as community-based coalitions, that have worked to improve their communities and the lives of individuals by providing the best services possible.

Sally A. Linowski, associate director of University Health Services at UMass Amherst and CADAP director, says this newest award confirms what health officials have been saying about the BASICS program. “High-risk drinking is the number one public health problem among college students nationwide and UMass Amherst is now recognized as the foremost leader in addressing the issue. BASICS works because it’s theory-based, uses motivational interviewing techniques, is tailored to students’ unique health behaviors, and engages students in creating an action plan to reduce their drinking.”

The BASICS program was launched in 2006 as part of a strategic plan to build a comprehensive substance abuse prevention program. The environmental management approach also included enhanced campus policies and municipal bylaws, normative behavior messages, and increased enforcement. Since then, the university has seen a 38-percent reduction in binge drinking, a 26-percent decline in frequent binge drinking and a 14-percent drop in underage binge drinking.

Nearly 4,000 students have completed the two-session BASICS intervention. Follow-up studies indicate that six months after BASICS, participants showed significant reductions in high-risk drinking. Additional research now underway is measuring program effectiveness at three-, six- and 12-month intervals, while assessing the impact of electronically-delivered feedback on drinking behaviors, negative consequences and recidivism.