Introduction

The Challenge Before You

Large or small, urban or rural, commuter or residential, technical or liberal arts, every college and university in America is committed to providing an experience that allows students to rise to their full potential. As a key member of the higher education community, you work hard to make the learning experience a positive one. Naturally, you strive for excellence. You want your institution to turn out the best and the brightest, the nation's next generation of leaders.

That challenge is reflected in the face of every student on your campus. For these young men and women, the college years are a period of growth and transition. They are a time for examining beliefs and developing new points of view, a time for reflection and discovery.

The rewards of your efforts are immense. And so too is the challenge.

Your challenge as a college or university administrator is to promote that richness of experience and at the same time eliminate obstacles in each student's path to success. Parents expect the university or college not only to provide intellectual opportunities for their sons and daughters, but also to protect them from harm. From the beginning, the institution enters into a covenant with students and their parents. The understanding is that the exploration of new ideas will occur under conditions flexible enough to allow for discovery, but with sufficient controls to ensure a reasonable measure of safety.

New Thrills, New Threats

For some students, college is a time to experiment not only with new ideas, but with new thrills, including alcohol and drugs. Alcohol abuse in college is well documented. The latest results from Monitoring the Future, an ongoing national survey of behaviors, attitudes, and values among young people, indicate that more than more than two-thirds (68.9 percent) of college students are current drinkers—that is, they have had one or more alcoholic drinks in the previous 30 days. Not all of them are problem drinkers, of course. Still, a large number of students (40.1 percent) say they consumed 5 or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion within the previous two weeks. With this high rate of alcohol consumption come clear consequences. As reported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, some 1,400 people age 18 to 24 die each year from injuries suffered in alcohol-related accidents, including motor vehicle crashes.

Equally troubling is the widespread use of illicit drugs on campus. In the 2002 Monitoring the Future survey, more than a third (37 percent) of college students reported they had used illegal drugs in the past year, and nearly a quarter of them (21.5 percent) reported having done so within the past month. A decade earlier, by contrast, just over 16 percent had reported past-month drug use. Another important report, the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, showed that well over half (59.8 percent) of all 18- to 25-year-olds have used, or at least tried, an illegal drug at some time during their lives.

For too many young people, casual experimentation with drugs turns to addiction. Even for nondependent users, drug use creates a barrier to achievement that can be extremely difficult to overcome, even life-threatening. Drug-using dropouts are a blot on the institution's reputation and a disappointment to their families, their friends, and to themselves. Users who manage to graduate often find they are unable to compete for the best jobs, and the treatment needs of those who are addicted can strain family and community resources.

Although some people look at illegal drug use as a natural phase or a youthful rite of passage, the hard reality is that drugs can destroy lives and undermine a school's best efforts to educate and protect. College officials must understand how drug use on their campuses—even by those who show no outward signs of harmful consequences—can interfere with students' mental, social, and emotional growth.

A Guide for Administrators

The Office of National Drug Control Policy has put together this guide to give administrators at institutions of higher education a basic understanding of illegal drug use among the college population and to urge their support in ridding campuses of this threat. Along with an overview of the problem, the booklet explains the risks associated with drug use when left unchecked, and why it is important to discourage all drug use by students.

Case studies appearing throughout the booklet describe the innovative approaches some schools have developed to combat drug use.
The purpose of these examples is to illustrate the variety of strategies available to colleges and universities hoping to develop or refine programs of their own.

The booklet offers useful advice as well, with suggestions on how to assess the drug problem at your institution and what you can do about it. In the back is a Guide to Common Campus Drugs, featuring photographs of problem drugs and related paraphernalia, as well as a list of resources to help you keep your campus drug free.