

Spring 2014

# Maladaptive Behavior in College Students and Breaking Student Codes of Conduct

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Maladaptive Behavior in College Students and Breaking Student Codes of Conduct

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends for all of their love and support through this process. I dedicate this paper to my daughters Carter and Berit who are the light in my life. I am inspired by them every day to be the best version of myself and to never give up.

I am grateful for the friendships that I have made on my journey and want to thank my fellow classmates for always being there and supporting me when I needed it. I also would like to thank the faculty for challenging me and guiding me through the process.

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of conduct interventions to deter recidivism among college students. Colleges and universities have adopted student codes of conduct in an attempt to manage the college environment. A 12-item conduct effectiveness survey was emailed to students who had been found responsible of breaking the student code of conduct. Findings showed a 19% recidivism rate and that students who engaged in community service, attended a civility workshop, or lost residence hall privileges were less likely to violate the code a second time. Twenty-two percent of students reported an attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use post intervention and students who were mandated to individual counseling were more likely to report an attitude change. A one size fits all approach to alcohol policies, prevention programs, and intervention strategies may not be an effective way to address problematic drinking on college campuses.

### Maladaptive Behavior in College Students and Breaking Student Codes of Conduct

Young adult college students struggle with multiple challenges related to their college lives. College students face new challenges in time management, responsibilities, advanced academics, and creating and maintaining social and intimate relationships (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009). The strategies college students use to cope with those challenges can have an impact on their overall well-being and mental health (Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012).

Coping refers to a conscious effort by an individual to solve a problem or minimize stress. A coping model is a framework for assessing the procedures of coping with a stressful situation (McLeod, 2010). The Transactional Model of Coping differentiates between two stress coping strategies: maladaptive and adaptive. Maladaptive coping mechanisms are emotion based and attempt to reduce negative emotional states when an individual feels that a situation is out of one's control. Strategies include avoiding, distancing, and selective attention (Scott, 2012). An example of maladaptive coping is a college student who plays video games to escape from working on a difficult assignment. Maladaptive coping mechanisms can further be explained as behaviors which are counterproductive to achieving either individual goals or adapting to real life situations (Ankrom, 2009). Adaptive coping mechanisms are problem based and attempt to change negative emotional states when an individual feels in control of a situation and can manage the negative emotional state. Strategies include defining the problem, evaluating alternative solutions, and learning new skills to manage stress (Scott, 2012). An example of adaptive coping is when a college student proactively seeks out help from a professor when struggling with a difficult assignment. Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) found that college students often engage in negative health behaviors, e.g., drinking and smoking. Students who

self-reported drinking to the point of drunkenness were also likely to report using alcohol as a coping mechanism. For the purpose of this paper maladaptive behaviors will be synonymous with college students' use of alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism or strategy for dealing with stress, a problem, or a difficult situation.

In order to better understand why college students utilize maladaptive behaviors as coping strategies, one must first understand the prevalence of alcohol and drug use on college campuses. Alcohol and illicit drug use are predominant on college campuses. Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, and Schulenber (2009) stated that the highest prevalence of alcohol use is associated with the developmental period between late adolescence and early adulthood. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2012), young adults who were enrolled full time in college were more likely to report current, binge, or heavy drinking than young adults who were not enrolled in college. O'Grady, Arria, Fitzelle, and Wish (2008) stated that more than half of college students who report binge drinking also report using another substance. Heavy alcohol consumption by college students is also associated with illicit drug use (Pedrelli et al., 2013). The 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported the use of illicit drugs among full-time college students at 22% (SAMHSA, 2012). Quintero, Peterson, and Young (2006) identified the college years as a time of transition, experimentation, and risk taking in regards to illicit drug use.

There is a cause and effect relationship for college students who drink or abuse illicit drugs. Results of the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment (American College Health Association, 2012) showed that college students who drank alcohol reported experiencing the following negatives consequences: doing something that they later

regretted (37.7%), having unprotected sex (20.3%), getting in trouble with the police (3.9%), and physically injuring themselves (16.7%). Lee et al. (2010) reported that college students continue to drink despite experiencing negative consequences. Illicit drug use among young adults is associated with negative consequences such as depression, academic problems, and intellectual impairment (Pedrelli et al., 2010). Marijuana users on college campuses are at risk for experiencing severe health and legal consequences and may have difficulty achieving normal developmental tasks such as graduating, finding a job, and staying employed (Lee et al., 2013). Secondary consequences associated with alcohol and drug use include injuries caused by student drinking and damage to the campus environment (Wolfson et al., 2012). Anderson (2011) reported on results from the College Alcohol Survey (2009) and stated that alcohol was involved in over half of campus policy violations and over half of campus property and residence hall damage.

In an attempt to manage the college environment, many colleges and universities have adopted student codes of conduct and a disciplinary judicial system to implement institutional policies. Codes of conduct are institutional policies that reflect federal and state laws regarding the use of alcohol and drugs on campus (Marshall, Roberts, Donnelly, & Rutledge, 2011). For the purpose of this paper, student codes of conduct will be synonymous with alcohol and drug policies. Colleges and universities are required to distribute information regarding school specific alcohol and drug policies to all students. Failure to comply with college alcohol and drug policies can result in a continuum of sanctions from a warning to suspension (Marshall et al., 2011). Students who violate campus alcohol and drug policies may be mandated to complete either civic engagement or an intervention to prevent future problematic drinking episodes (Hustad et al., 2011). For the purpose of this paper, *sanction* is defined as an imposed penalty by

the judicial designee of the college and *mandated conduct intervention* is defined as an assigned penalty designed to address and decrease problematic behavior. Wolfson et al., (2012) stated that there is a need to develop and evaluate effective interventions for reducing problematic drinking on college campuses.

This study explores the factors which contribute to alcohol and drug use among college students and how institutions of higher education respond to maladaptive behaviors that break student codes of conduct. The quantitative data gathered in this study were used to answer the following research question: Do mandated conduct interventions deter recidivism among college students? The purpose of the research study was to explore the effectiveness of mandated student conduct interventions at a comprehensive public college to lower recidivism rates. The overall goal of the study was to assist the college's Student Conduct Office with the evaluation of mandated conduct interventions and future program planning. A purposive sample of college students who were found responsible for breaking student codes of conduct and sanctioned to complete a mandatory intervention were recruited to participate in the study.

This paper explores maladaptive behaviors among college students, the response of institutions of higher education to maladaptive behaviors that violate campus alcohol and drug policies, and the effectiveness of mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism. The literature review explores the factors that motivate college students to utilize alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms, as well as the comprehensive approach institutions of higher education take to deal with problematic drinking on campus. The method section provides an in-depth discussion of the research project including: the design, setting, participants, instrument, and data analysis. Findings related to the research questions will be discussed in the results section.

Lastly, the discussion section of this paper will include an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, the need for future research, and a conclusion of the study.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review will focus on what motivates college students' to use alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms and how institutions of higher education are responding to maladaptive behaviors that break student codes of conduct. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to utilize alcohol and drugs will be discussed. Internal factors such as anxiety, social anxiety, depression, and self-esteem will be explored. External factors such as peer influence and norms such as social, descriptive, and injunctive can contribute to college students' maladaptive behavior and will be discussed. Institutional response to maladaptive behaviors will be examined and includes alcohol policies, prevention programs, interventions, and parental initiatives.

### **Motivations for Utilizing Maladaptive Behaviors**

Motivation explains behavior and provides a reason for wanting to do something. Motivations for drinking among college students include social belonging, mood enhancement, and coping. Drinking on college campuses provides students an opportunity to connect and make new friendships, experience positive emotions, and avoid dealing with negative emotional feelings (Huang, DeJong, Schneider, & Towvim, 2010). According to Lorant, Nicaise, Soto, and d'Hoore (2013) the college environment increases drinking due to social activities and motivational expectations: college students drink because they expect positive social outcomes. Further positive outcomes may outweigh negative outcomes due to the immediacy of the positive effects of drinking: feeling good in the moment versus missing class the next day due to a hangover. The sense that the drinking experience was positive reinforces continued drinking behavior.

Motivation to utilize maladaptive behaviors can be intrinsic or come from within an individual. Thoughts and feelings can ultimately contribute to college students' maladaptive coping behaviors. Negative thoughts and feelings reinforce faulty beliefs resulting in problematic behaviors that can affect all areas of an individual's life (Cherry, 2013).

**Anxiety.** Anxiety is a feeling of worry and is a normal reaction to stress. The National Institute of Mental Health (2013) states that increased levels of stress and an inability to control anxiety symptoms may have a negative impact on an individual. For example, anxiety has been indicated as a common risk factor for problematic substance abuse in the college student population (Schmidt, Buckner, & Keough, 2007). Goldsmith, Tran, Smith, and Howe (2009) found a significant statistical relationship between undergraduate students who were considered heavy drinkers and generalized anxiety. College students who used alcohol to cope with anxiety and to reduce tension and worry were more likely to be problematic drinkers.

**Social anxiety.** College campuses are social environments which provide students with opportunities to interact in both large and small group settings. Students who suffer from social anxiety have a strong fear of being embarrassed or judged by others. People who suffer from social anxiety are self-conscious in front of people and may have a hard time making friends. A risk factor associated with social anxiety is an increase in substance abuse in an effort to self-medicate and cope (National Institute of Mental Health, 2013). There is a connection between social anxiety, problematic drinking, and college students due to the fact that college students are frequently put in social anxiety inciting situations such as group class assignments and meeting new people (Ham, Zamboanga, Olthuis, Casner, & Bui, 2010). Studies suggest that the relationship between social anxiety and alcohol related problems are associated with college students' use of alcohol as a coping mechanism (Ham, Bonin, & Hope, 2007; Lewis et al., 2008).

Norberg, Norton, Olivier, and Zvolensky (2010) found that social anxiety was related to drinking in college students when situations included dealing with negative emotions and conflict with others. Findings also indicated that college aged women were more likely than college aged men to drink to cope with emotionally negative situations.

**Depression.** Alcohol use among college students is consistently associated with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and depression. Mood related symptoms influence decision making and play a role in high risk behavior and alcohol related negative consequences (Ralston & Palfai, 2010). College students who suffer from depression have an increased risk for problematic drinking and using alcohol to cope (Martens et al., 2008). Like alcohol, frequent marijuana use has also consistently been linked to depressive symptoms. Buckner et al. (2007) stated that there is a direct association between depressed mood and marijuana use among college students.

Depressive symptoms and impulsivity (reaction to stimuli without regard to negative consequences) increases risk taking behaviors as a response to negative emotional functioning (Dvorak, Lamis, & Malone, 2013). College students who experience depressive symptoms may be more vulnerable to peer influences regarding their own drinking behaviors and are more likely to consume more alcohol more frequently (Linden & Lau-Barraco, 2013). Depression among college students is often linked to feelings of vulnerability, anxiousness, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Backer-Fulghum, Patock-Peckham, King, Roufa, & Hagen, 2011).

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem is vital to college student development and has an impact on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For the purpose of this paper self-esteem refers to an individuals' overall sense of self-worth or personal value (Cherry, 2013). Zeigler-Hill, Stubbs, and Madson (2013) defined self-esteem as a reflection of how an individual evaluates themselves and stated that low self-esteem plays a role in the development of depressive symptoms. There

are a variety of reasons why college students with low self-esteem drink alcohol, including coping with negative emotional states (Backer-Fulghum et al., 2011). College students with low self-esteem are more likely to drink in order to cope and escape from the negative emotional states that they are experiencing and often report suffering negative consequences in direct response to using alcohol as a coping mechanism (Zeigler-Hill, Madson, & Ricedorf, 2012).

Motivation to utilize maladaptive behaviors can be extrinsic or come from external factors. Outside influences can affect an individual's decision making ability and behavior. The social learning theory states individuals can learn new information and behaviors by observing and modeling other individuals (Cherry, 2013).

**Peer influence.** College is a time when young adults are affected by other people's influence and behavior. Peer influence refers to the sway friends have on each other and is an important variable that can be linked to excessive drinking on college campuses (Doumas, McKinley, & Book, 2009). Drinking attitudes are influenced by observable behavior and conversations about drinking amongst friends (Prince & Carey, 2010). Varela and Pritchard (2011) found that friends have a strong influence in regards to high risk taking behaviors (drinking, smoking, and illegal drug use). College students reported that they were more likely to engage in high risk behaviors in the presence of their friends. Conformity was important in this study as well. Findings indicated that when students were faced with risk taking behavior while with friends it was difficult not to engage. Personal approval as well as perceived approval by friends is significantly associated with college student heavy drinking (Neighbors et al., 2008). Perceptions of peers in different class years also influence college students' decision to drink. Pedersen, Neighbors, and LaBrie (2010) sampled 522 college students and asked them to estimate the drinking behavior of peers within their own class year as well as the drinking

behavior of the other three class years. Findings suggested that perceptions of class year specific drinking norms can have an impact on individual drinking rates within the class years. The college social environment increases the opportunities for students to drink through a combination of social activities and normative and motivational expectations: college students drink for the positive consequences and because they overestimate the amount their friends drink (Lorant et al., 2013).

**Social norms.** A standard pattern of behavior is considered a norm and social norms are unwritten rules regarding the accepted standards of behavior in any given social group (McLeod, 2008). Halim, Hasking, and Allen (2012) stated, “Individuals who drink for social reasons (i.e. social drinkers) most likely observe those around them and take into account their behaviors and beliefs, and drink in order to enhance their experience with those people” (p.1336). Social influences also have an impact on marijuana use. The perception of more frequent marijuana use by one’s friends can be associated with one’s own use. Neighbors, Geisner, and Lee (2008) stated that college student marijuana use increased when friends were perceived as being more approving of the behavior. Social norms influence college drinking due to the fact that students’ perceive the drinking behavior of their friends to be higher than it actually is and then those perceptions influence one’s own drinking behavior (Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007).

**Descriptive norms.** College students’ impression of their environment is based on what they notice and observe. Descriptive norms describe an individual’s perception of other people’s behavior (Fritz, 2013). Demartini, Carey, Lao, and Luciano (2011) defined descriptive norms as perceptions of what others do and include estimates of how much and how often college students consume alcohol. The authors also stated that the accuracy of descriptive norms is significant

and can be a predictor of current drinking behavior. According to Neighbors et al. (2008) young adults overestimate the occurrence and approval of high risk behavior among their peers. Students' misconceptions regarding these descriptive norms impact their own individual behavior.

**Injunctive norms.** For some college students drinking is a rite of passage or an expected behavior. Injunctive norms are defined as an individual's perceptions of whether a behavior will be approved or disapproved by a certain group (Fritz, 2013). In the college environment injunctive norms include the perceptions of an acceptable amount of drinking (Demartini et al., 2011). Crawford and Novak (2010) stated that injunctive norms had a positive effect on drinking among individuals who believed that abusing alcohol was an expected behavior of college students. This is significant in the college population because injunctive norms may influence students' drinking due to the predictable consequences of choosing to either conform or not to conform to a group drinking norm (Prince & Carey, 2010). Lee et al. (2007) reported that injunctive norms or the perceived approval of drinking by peers resulted in a stronger relationship between the students' perception of the amount of alcohol being consumed on campus and actual student behavior.

### **Institutional Response to Maladaptive Behaviors**

In an effort to manage the college environment many colleges and universities are taking a comprehensive approach to address problematic drinking on campus. Institutions of higher education are developing alcohol programs which encompass institutional policies, prevention initiatives, and intervention strategies to educate students. These programs include incorporating counseling into the adjudication process, dedicating money and staff for specific alcohol programming, partnering with on-campus departments, and collaborating with the off campus

community (Creemeens et al., 2011). According to Anderson (2011) most campus based efforts to address problematic drinking focus on policies, procedures, enforcement, information dissemination, and deal with the outcome of substance abuse rather than the cause. Research has indicated that not all mandated students demonstrate the same degree of risky behavior and that a one size fits all intervention approach may not be appropriate. Prevention programs and intervention strategies are most effective when tailored to the specific campus environment (Borsari et al., 2012).

**Alcohol policies.** Institutions of higher education have developed campus alcohol policies as an environmental strategy to reduce alcohol and drug use among its students. The effectiveness of alcohol policies relies on whether or not the policy is known and is consistently enforced (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012). College administrators suggest that students should receive a consistent message about alcohol use, policies, and consequences associated with policy violations (Creemens, et al., 2011). Increasing college students' awareness of institutional alcohol policies may decrease alcohol consumption on campus (Marshall et al., 2011). According to Barnett et al. (2008) common alcohol policy violations include possession of alcohol, being within the vicinity of alcohol, behavioral problems, and medical complications due to alcohol use or abuse. Lavigne, Witt, Wood, Laforge, and Dejong (2008) revealed that a high level of college students supported campus alcohol policies and perceived that other students were supportive of the policies as well. Colleges and universities can reduce the negative impact that can result from alcohol use and abuse by implementing prevention programs in addition to alcohol policies (LaBrie, Hummer, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2010).

**Prevention programs.** Alcohol related problems are a concern on college campuses and prevention efforts are focused on addressing the environmental factors which increase

consumption (Lavigne et al., 2008). Prevention programs on college campuses are designed to impact the college environment, school processes, and work in conjunction with alcohol policies (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012). The emphasis of college alcohol prevention programs should address problems at the individual, group, institution, and community level and include interventions which focus on knowledge, perception change, environmental change, and health protection (Neighbors et al., 2007). A range of prevention programs and intervention strategies have been developed to reduce college students' overall level of alcohol consumption (Neighbors et al., 2007).

**Interventions.** College alcohol prevention programs include specific strategies designed to influence students' patterns of alcohol and drug use. Alcohol related interventions address affected students as well as the negative consequences associated with drinking (Amaro et al., 2010). Intervention strategies must address the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of college students as well as the environmental factors which contribute to maladaptive behaviors (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012). Many college alcohol policies require students charged with an alcohol violation to complete either an alcohol assessment or intervention (Carey, Scott-Sheldon, Carey, & DeMartini, 2007). Interventions can be delivered in a group setting, via the web, or on an individual level. Social norms interventions are delivered in small group settings and approach the problem of college drinking by providing normative feedback to the group in an effort to influence students' perceptions of drinking (Reilly & Wood, 2008). Web-based interventions are being adopted and show promise in addressing the amount of alcohol consumed on college campuses, especially for school that have limited resources (Hustad, Barnett, Borsari, & Jackson, 2010). Individual level alcohol interventions have been found to be most successful in reducing

alcohol consumption on college campuses (Carey et al., 2007; Hingson, 2010). This paper will specifically focus on individual level harm reduction interventions.

Harm reduction interventions aim to reduce the effects of problematic drinking behaviors on college campuses by focusing on students' personal experiences with alcohol or drugs. Students may view drinking as normative and perceive the negative consequences of drinking as actually positive. The harm reduction approach explores both the positive and negative consequences of problematic drinking so students are less resistant to the intervention and can consider changing their behavior (Whiteside, Cronce, Pedersen & Larimer, 2010). Consequences for both the individual student and for the college campus, including the risks to other students due to the individual's behavior are the focus of harm reduction interventions (LaBrie, Hummer, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2010). The realistic goals and nonjudgmental approach of harm reduction interventions has proven long term benefits for college students (Logan & Marlatt, 2010). Techniques of harm reduction interventions include motivational interviewing, personalized feedback, and the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS).

Motivational interviewing is a nonjudgmental but directive approach which focuses on student self-efficacy. Students are supported in exploring reasons to change maladaptive behaviors through goal setting, identifying alternative behaviors, and practicing refusal techniques (Logan & Marlatt, 2010). College students who are either considering or beginning to think about behavioral change are most affected by a motivational interviewing strategy (Whiteside et al., 2010). Intervention research has concluded that mandated students who were sanctioned to motivational interviewing were influenced towards less risky drinking behaviors (Borsari et al., 2012). In conjunction with personalized feedback, motivational interviewing has shown to be a successful intervention with college students who smoke marijuana. The students'

indecision to change is influenced by focusing on inherent motivation to change (Lee et al., 2013).

Personalized feedback interventions are based on the assumption that if a student receives information about his or her alcohol and drug use pattern in relation to their peers the student will then be motivated to implement change in their own behavior (White, Mun, & Morgan, 2008). Interventions include general alcohol educational information, specific alcohol coping and harm reduction skills, as well as personalized normative feedback which compares the students self-reported drinking behavior to the average drinking behavior of typical college students (Cronce & Larimer, 2011). Although students may be reluctant to discuss their drinking with administrators or health care practitioners, they are interested in comparing their own pattern of behavior with their peers (Doumas, McKinley, & Book, 2009). Web-based personalized feedback interventions have been proven to reduce hazardous drinking among college students (Palfai, Zisserson, & Saitz, 2011). The advantages to computer delivered personalized feedback are user convenience, efficiency, anonymity for students, and reduced costs in regards to personnel and training (Wagener et al., 2012).

In an attempt to reduce student alcohol use and the potential negative consequences associated with drinking college prevention programs utilize the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS). The BASICS intervention is usually a two session approach comprised of a 50 minute assessment session followed by a 50 minute feedback session. The intervention combines motivational interviewing strategies, cognitive behavioral skills training, and personalized feedback (Whiteside et al., 2010). The first session focuses on rapport building, alcohol education, identifying patterns of alcohol use, and related consequences. The second session includes an evaluation of the student's self-reported alcohol

use and an exploration of protective strategies (DiFulvio, Linowski, Mazziotti, & Puleo, 2012). BASICS programs operate under the assumption that change in alcohol and drug behavior is dependent on students' readiness to change (Amaro et al., 2010). Findings show that the BASICS intervention has been implemented on college campuses across the country and appears to work best in reducing student alcohol use (Borsari et al., 2012; DiFulvio et al., 2012; Whiteside et al., 2010).

**Parental Initiatives.** The last institutional response to be explored in this paper is parental initiatives or parent based interventions. Studies indicate that parents continue to influence their children's alcohol use through young adulthood and that parental intervention may be useful in reducing drinking behaviors among college students (Doumas, Turrisi, Ray, Esp, & Curtis-Schaeffer, 2013). Due to the role parents play in influencing their children's decisions regarding alcohol and drug use, colleges and universities can leverage student/parental relationships to promote student success (LaBrie & Cail, 2011). Students whose parents received educational materials regarding college drinking were less likely to drink upon entering college (Ichiyama et al., 2009). An effective tool to encourage parental intervention is parental notification. Colleges and universities have implemented a notification policy which alerts parents when students under the age of 21 years of age violate federal, state, or institutional policies regarding drugs and alcohol. The intent of the parental letter is to increase communication between parents and their college-aged children to reduce maladaptive behavior (Thompson-Beseler, Hall, & Eighmy, 2013).

The main findings of this literature review show that alcohol and drug use is problematic on today's college and university campuses (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012). College students who use maladaptive coping strategies are more likely

to drink and or use drugs to deal with stress or a difficult situation (Pierceall & Keim, 2007; Pritchard et al., 2007). The motivations or reasons to drink- coping, friends and norms- outweigh the negative consequences associated with drinking (Perceall & Keim, 2007; Rice & Van Arsdale, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2007). Environmental strategies addressing problematic drinking on college campuses include alcohol policies, prevention programs, and interventions (LaBrie et al., 2010; Neighbors, et al., 2007; Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012). Harm reduction interventions such as motivational interviewing, personalized feedback, and BASICS have been proven to be successful in lowering high risk maladaptive behaviors in college students (Borsari et al., 2012; DiFulvio et al., 2012; Palfai, Zisserson, & Saitz, 2011; Whiteside et al., 2010). College students are influenced by their parents. Institutions of higher education have incorporated parental initiatives into prevention programs to provide additional support for students (Doumas et al., 2013; Thompson-Beseler et al., 2013).

### **Method**

This study was designed to answer the research question: Do mandated conduct interventions deter recidivism among college students? Topics discussed in this section include the research design of the study, the setting and participants, the instrument, the procedures for data collection, and data analysis.

### **Research Design**

Action research is conducted to advance knowledge in terms of practical application. This action research study was a quantitative analysis of mandated conduct interventions. The study used statistical analysis to describe the characteristics of the population, examine specific relationships, and recommend a course of action which is generalizable for a larger population. The researcher developed an online survey to gather data to examine the cause and effect

relationship between mandated interventions, attitude change, and recidivism. The results of the study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of mandated conduct interventions and to assist the college's Student Conduct office with future program planning.

### **Setting**

This study took place in a nationally recognized four year comprehensive public college located in New York State. The college reported a population of 8,128 students enrolled in the fall of 2013. Full-time students totaled 6,729 and part-time students made up 1,399 of the population.

### **Participants**

A purposive sample of college students were utilized for this study. Criteria for participation included students who were at least 18 years of age and who were sanctioned to at least one mandated conduct intervention at the college between fall 2011 and spring 2013. Approximately 1,400 students met the criteria for eligibility. Of the 1,400 possible participants, 172 students responded to the survey and 166 participants completed the instrument. The sample included 50% (n = 86) male to 50% (n = 86) female ratio. Sophomores made up 26.74% (n = 46) of the sample and the junior and senior classes combined comprised 73.26% (n = 126). The freshmen class was not represented in the study due to the inclusion criteria. Participants living on campus made up 43.02% (n = 74) of the sample while 56.98% (n = 98) reported living off campus.

### **Instrument**

The Student Conduct Effectiveness Survey (Appendix A) was created by the researcher. The 12-item electronic survey was developed to measure the effectiveness of mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism and to measure attitude change regarding drug and alcohol use

post completion of the intervention. Participants were asked to respond to each item using a scale (*yes, no, or don't know*), checklist (*sanction continuum*), or dichotomy statement with an open ended option (*yes or no, if yes please explain*). The survey consisted of four demographic questions including class year, gender, cumulative grade point average, and residence (on or off campus). Items 5 and 6 assessed the participant's knowledge of conduct policies and procedures (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012). Item 7 determined if students were found responsible for violating the college's alcohol/drug policy. The rate of recidivism was determined by item 10. Items 8 and 11 were a checklist that represented the pretest-posttest of the college's continuum of interventions (*Alcohol Workshop, AOD Assessment, Apology Letter, Behavioral Assessment, Building Restriction, Civic Engagement/Community Service, Conduct Probation, Counseling, Developmental Experience, Drug Workshop, L.A.U.N.C.H. Workshop, Loss of Parking Privileges, Loss of Residence Hall Privileges, No Contact Order, Parental Notification, Party Smart Workshop, Removal from Residence Hall, or Warning*). Items 9 and 12 were designed to be dichotomous with an open ended option to determine attitude change after the intervention. The validity and reliability of the Student Conduct Effectiveness Survey has not been established due to the fact that the instrument has not been utilized in any previous study.

### **Procedure**

The overall goal of the project was to assist the Conduct Office with the evaluation of current mandated conduct interventions and future program planning. The researcher worked with the college's Conduct Coordinator to determine the focus of the study. A research proposal including an informed consent document (Appendix B) was submitted to the college's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. All procedures met the criteria for the protection of human participants.

The survey was administered electronically through Campus Labs, a specialized comprehensive assessment program and platform for data collection and reporting used by institutions of higher education. Eligible participants received a recruitment email and one reminder email via their college email address inviting them to participate in the survey. The recruitment email contained a link to an electronic consent document and survey. Completion of the survey indicated the participant's consent to participate. As an incentive, participants were given an opportunity to submit their name and email address after completing the survey for a chance to win one of two gift cards to Barnes & Noble in the amount of \$25.00 each. Instructions for entry into the drawing were posted at the end of the survey and two winners were chosen randomly. Participants were able to click on the link to the survey from any computer, smart phone or tablet.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were compiled by Campus Labs and the researcher was able to view quantitative descriptions of the sample. Inferential statistics were conducted by the researcher using SPSS predictive analytic software. A nonparametric chi-square statistic was utilized to test for significant relationships between the variables of intervention, attitude change, and recidivism.

### **Results**

This quantitative action research study was designed to answer the research question: Do mandated conduct interventions deter recidivism among college students? A 12-item electronic survey was developed by the researcher to measure the effectiveness of mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism and to measure attitude change regarding drug and alcohol use post completion of the intervention. Descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed to

describe the sample and determine the relationship between intervention, recidivism, and attitude change. This section will present the statistical findings related to the research question.

### Frequency Analyses

The researcher utilized frequencies to analyze total participant participation for each mandated conduct intervention. Table 1 notes the frequencies for each mandated intervention.

Table 1  
*Mandated Conduct Intervention Participation*

Intervention	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Alcohol workshop	76	1.55	.49
Conduct probation	55	1.68	.46
Parental letter	42	1.75	.43
Warning	36	1.78	.40
Counseling	26	1.84	.36
Party smart workshop	16	1.90	.29
L.A.U.N.C.H. workshop	15	1.91	.28
Prohibited substance (drug) workshop	10	1.94	.23
Alcohol and other drug (AOD) workshop	8	1.95	.21
Apology letter	8	1.95	.21
Behavioral assessment	6	1.96	.18
Community service	6	1.96	.18
Removal from residence hall	6	1.96	.18
Building restriction	5	1.97	.16
Loss of residence hall privileges	4	1.97	.15

Intervention	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Developmental experience	1	1.99	.07
No contact order	1	1.99	.07

*Note.* *N* = total number; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

The rate of recidivism was determined by utilizing frequencies. Results indicated that 34% ( $N = 73$ ,  $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) of respondents reported that they had not been found responsible for breaking the code of conduct after the initial violation and completion of the mandated intervention. Recidivism or the number of respondents who reported being found responsible for breaking the student code of conduct a second time (after completing the initial mandated intervention) was 19.1% ( $N = 41$ ,  $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ). The remaining 47% ( $N = 101$ ) was missing from the data set as participants could decline to answer any questions.

Student attitude change regarding high risk maladaptive behaviors or alcohol and drug use were also analyzed using frequencies. After the completion of a mandated conduct intervention 29.8 % ( $n = 64$ ,  $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) of respondents reported no attitude change. Findings also showed that 21.9% ( $n = 47$ ,  $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) of respondents self-reported that their attitude regarding alcohol and drug use did change after completing the mandated conduct intervention.

### **Cross-Tabulation Analyses**

The researcher utilized cross tabulation to determine relationships between mandated conduct interventions, recidivism (breaking the code of conduct a second time), and attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use. Chi-square analysis was used to determine whether a significant statistical relationship existed between the variables. The dependent variables in the

study were recidivism (breaking the student code of conduct a second time) and attitude change after completing a mandated conduct intervention. The independent variable was the mandated conduct intervention. An alpha level of .01 was used for all statistical tests.

**Post intervention recidivism.** Table 2 notes the relationship between mandated conduct interventions and recidivism (being found responsible of breaking the student code of conduct for a second time). Significant relationships were found among several interventions. Community service, L.A.U.N.C.H. workshop, removal from residence hall, conduct probation, and loss of residence hall privileges were related to less recidivism. There was no statistical significance between the remaining mandated interventions and recidivism.

Table 2

*Post Intervention Recidivism*

Intervention (variable 1, nominal)	Recidivism (variable 2, nominal)		
	$X^2$	$V$	$p^*$
Community service	11.27	.315	.001
LAUNCH workshop	14.54	.357	.001
Removal from residence hall	11.27	.315	.001
Conduct probation	8.77	.277	.003
Loss of residence hall privileges	7.38	.254	.007

*Note.*  $X^2$  = chi-square;  $V$  = Cramer's  $V$ ;  $p$  = probability.  
\* $\alpha$  = .01

**Post intervention alcohol and drug use attitude change.** Findings showed a relationship between mandated interventions and student attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use after completion of the intervention. A significant relationship was found between the

counseling intervention and attitude change  $X^2(1) = 7.38, p = .01$ . There was no statistical significance between the remaining mandated interventions and student attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use.

Analysis of the data gathered from the Conduct Effectiveness Survey revealed findings that answer the research question: Do mandated conduct interventions deter recidivism among college students? Results showed a 19% ( $n = 41$ ) recidivism rate after completion of a mandated conduct intervention. Respondents who completed community service, the L.A.U.N.C.H. workshop, conduct probation, and who were either removed from their residence hall or lost residence hall privileges were less likely to break the student code of conduct again. Attitude change regarding the use of alcohol and drugs after completing a mandated intervention was 22% ( $n = 47$ ). There is evidence that specific mandated conduct interventions are effective at deterring recidivism among college students as well as influencing student attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use.

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of conduct interventions to deter recidivism among college students. There is a cause and effect relationship of alcohol and drug use on college campuses. College students are faced with negative consequences associated with their alcohol and drug use, while secondary negative consequences affect the campus environment. Colleges and universities have adopted student codes of conduct in an attempt to manage the college environment. When students violate the college's codes of conduct the judicial designee of the college may sanction the student to complete a mandated conduct intervention. How effective are mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism? Do student attitudes change regarding alcohol and drug use after completing mandated conduct

interventions? In order to answer these questions a 12-item conduct effectiveness survey was emailed to students who had been found responsible for breaking the student code of conduct.

### **Major Findings**

The results of this study provided some evidence that recidivism and attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use may be influenced by mandated conduct interventions. Findings showed a 19% recidivism rate and those students who engaged in community service, attended a civility workshop or lost residence hall privileges were less likely to violate the code a second time. Twenty-two percent of students reported an attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use post intervention.

The alcohol workshop was the most sanctioned intervention (35%) and is a combination of personalized feedback and the BASICS intervention. The literature indicates that the BASICS intervention has been implemented on college campuses across the country and appears to work best in reducing student alcohol use (Borsari et al., 2012; DiFulvio et al., 2012; Whiteside et al., 2010). Findings from this study are not consistent with the literature as results indicated that there was not a significant relationship between the alcohol workshop and deterring recidivism, or change in attitude toward alcohol and drug use.

Parental letters were sent home to 20% of the sample with the intent to alert parents of problematic behavior and underage drinking. The literature indicated that the parental letter was an effective tool to increase communication and reduce maladaptive behavior among under age college students who drink (Thompson-Beseler et al., 2013). Parental letters were not effective in this study as findings indicated that there was not a significant relationship between parental letters and recidivism or attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use.

Findings indicated community service, removal from residence hall, and loss of residence hall privileges were statistically significant in regards to deterring recidivism. These interventions were punitive in nature, did not include an educational component, and focused on the risks for other students, as well as consequences for the college campus. In this study these intervention strategies were more likely to deter recidivism than other interventions that included an educational component. Results of this study are consistent with the literature which stated that most campus based efforts address problematic drinking with the enforcement of policies and deal more with the outcome of drinking and drug use rather than the cause (Anderson, 2011).

Seven percent of the sample completed the L.A.U.N.C.H. workshop which is a harm reduction intervention. A significant relationship was found between completing this workshop and likelihood to not break the student code of conduct again. Findings in this study are consistent with the literature as harm reduction approaches focus on the individual and secondary consequences of student drinking and have shown long term benefits for students (LaBrie et al., 2010; Logan & Marlatt, 2010).

Results from the study indicated that individual counseling was moderately effective at deterring recidivism and that there was a significant relationship between counseling and attitude change regarding student alcohol and drug use. Findings in this study are consistent with the literature which indicated that individual level interventions (counseling) have been found to be the most successful in reducing alcohol consumption among college students (Carey et al., 2007; Hingson, 2010).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to the study related to the instrument. The first limitation is that the survey was created by the researcher and the validity and reliability has not been

established due to the fact that the instrument has not been utilized in any previous study.

Although the study provided some evidence to answer the research question it is unclear whether the survey actually measures the effectiveness of mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism. A second limitation is that the researcher did not take into account potential participant bias when creating the self-report survey. Respondents who were unsatisfied with the conduct process or who thought completing a mandated conduct intervention too severe a punishment may have been prejudiced when asked to report recidivism and or attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use post intervention. The third limitation is due to the limited amount of questions and the limited scope of the questions on the survey. Results do not differentiate between the effectiveness of the intervention and a response to the sanction alone. Therefore it is unclear whether the intervention was effective at deterring recidivism or if simply getting caught and sanctioned deterred students from getting in trouble a second time. The limitations listed above may have skewed results and affected the internal validity of the study.

### **Future Research**

Based on the results of the study there are several recommendations for future research. First, student perception of college policies and the adjudication process were not measured in this study. Future studies should focus on students' understanding of college policies, the consequences associated with breaking codes of conduct, and overall satisfaction with the adjudication process to assist with program evaluation and future programming. Second, this study did not consider the sanction effect (Carey et al., 2010). Future studies should measure student response to an intervention and response to the sanction separately to determine the effectiveness of the intervention and strategy. Third, restorative practices or interventions are gaining popularity amongst student conduct administrators (Lipka, 2009) and need to be studied

to determine the effectiveness of those interventions to address problematic drinking on college campuses.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study lead to three conclusions that include implications for college counseling and mandated conduct interventions. First, in order to address maladaptive behaviors which break student codes of conduct colleges and universities may want to incorporate interventions that are punitive but also provide the student with an opportunity to reflect on how their behavior and choices affect themselves, their peers, and the campus community as a whole. Interventions which include interactive harm reduction and restorative practices would benefit the student by providing an educational component, counseling, and an opportunity to make amends with their community. Second, mandated conduct interventions must address the violation as well as the cause or purpose of the maladaptive behavior. Although punitive interventions have been proven effective, the actual problem has not been addressed. The rate of recidivism and the occurrence of the behavior may decrease if the root cause of the behavior was the focus of the intervention. Third, there is a need for professional college counselors to hold positions in the conduct office or to act as the judicial designee of the college so that students who break the code of conduct are mandated to interventions that will ultimately address the problematic maladaptive behavior. Not all students who violate conduct policies are in need of professional counseling services. However students who are in crisis or who require assessment would benefit from having a professional counselor adjudicating their case.

A cyclical relationship exists between college student maladaptive behaviors and institutional response to problematic behaviors that break student codes of conduct. Despite institutional efforts to manage the college environment, students continue to utilize alcohol and

drugs for social belonging and coping with stress or a difficult situation. Although mandated conduct interventions have been shown to be effective in deterring recidivism and attitude change regarding alcohol and drug use, a one size fits all approach may not be an effective way to address problematic drinking on college campuses.

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Appendix A  
Student Conduct Effectiveness Survey

1. Classification:
  - Freshman
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
  
2. Gender:
  - Female
  - Male
  - Transgender
  
3. Approximate cumulative grade point average:
  
  
4. Current residence as a student:
  - On-campus
  - Off-campus
  
5. Does the College at Brockport have alcohol and drug policies?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
  
6. If yes, are they enforced?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
  
7. Have you ever been found responsible of breaking the college's codes of conduct or alcohol/drug policy?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know

8. What was your sanction? (check all that apply)

- Alcohol Workshop
- AOD Assessment
- Apology Letter
- Behavioral Assessment
- Building Restriction
- Civil Engagement/Community Service
- Conduct Probation
- Counseling
- Developmental Experience
- Drug Workshop
- LAUNCH Workshop
- Loss of Parking Privileges
- Loss of Residence Hall Privileges
- No Contact Order
- Parental Notification
- Party Smart
- Removal from Residence Hall
- Warning

9. After completing the sanction did your attitude change regarding high risk maladaptive behaviors or alcohol/drug use?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please explain:

10. After completing the initial sanction were you found responsible for breaking the code of conduct again?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

11. What was your sanction the second time? (check all that apply)

- Alcohol Workshop
- AOD Assessment
- Apology Letter
- Behavioral Assessment
- Building Restriction
- Civil Engagement/Community Service
- Conduct Probation
- Counseling
- Developmental Experience
- Drug Workshop
- LAUNCH Workshop
- Loss of Parking Privileges
- Loss of Residence Hall Privileges
- No Contact Order
- Parental Notification
- Party Smart
- Removal from Residence Hall
- Warning

12. Did your attitude change regarding high risk maladaptive behaviors or alcohol/drug use after the second sanction?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please explain

Thank you for participating in the survey. If you would like to be entered in the drawing for a chance to win one of two \$25.00 gift cards to Barnes & Noble, please email your name to [irboffic@brockport.edu](mailto:irboffic@brockport.edu) from your Brockport email address. Winners will be selected at random on December 19, 2013.

## Appendix B Informed Consent

The purpose of this action research project is to measure the effectiveness of the College at Brockport's mandated conduct interventions to deter recidivism among students who break the college's codes of conduct. This research project is being conducted in order for the primary investigator to complete a Master's Degree in the Department of Counselor Education at the College at Brockport, SUNY.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to participate in the project. If you want to participate in the project, and agree with the statements below, your completion of the survey signifies your consent. You may change your mind at any time and leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

This project has been approved by the SUNY College at Brockport's Institutional Review Board. Approval of this project only signifies that the procedures adequately protect the rights and welfare of the participants. Please note that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. My confidentiality is protected. My name will not be linked to the survey. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. If you choose to participate you will be providing valuable information regarding mandated conduct interventions. There is a minor risk in the time that it takes to complete the survey.
4. My participation involves reading an electronic survey of 12 questions and answering those questions. It is estimated that it will take 5 minutes to complete the survey.
5. Approximately 1400 people will take part in this study. The results will be reported in aggregate form only. The research is being conducted as a requirement for the primary investigators Master's Degree. A final report will be presented at the Master Level Graduate Research Conference.
6. Data will be kept on a password protected computer and will be erased when the research has been completed.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study realizing I may withdraw without penalty at any time during the survey process. Submitting the survey indicates my consent to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

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