



## SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

July 16th, 2013

### Shifting from the Awareness Month to the Prevention Year

All of us are more than familiar with the awareness month paradigm – each cause has a month and each month has many causes. Many schools and campuses have embraced awareness month popularity, but to what effect? Though well-intentioned, awareness months limit our notion of how and when to address critical health and safety issues. They tend to confine programming to 30-day windows, and foster programming at times that do not always gel well with school and campus calendars. They place the emphasis on raising awareness rather than improving prevention. SCOPE believes that prevention practitioners should break out of the awareness month mentality and instead look to a yearlong infusion of a planned prevention curriculum.

Think about the busiest programming months on your campus; they're likely include September, October and April. That's pretty crowded space already. Academic year kickoffs and closings are full of orientations, welcomes, award ceremonies, graduations and more. Designated awareness months also fall within these months: mid-September to mid-October constitutes Hispanic Heritage Month; October includes Breast Cancer Awareness, Domestic Violence Awareness, Bullying Prevention and LGBTQI History; April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Alcohol Awareness Month, Child Abuse Prevention Month and STI Awareness Month. And, don't forget the many awareness weeks interspersed as well, in an effort to counter the confining aspects and problematic timing of the various months. Can we really effectively program to support five major prevention initiatives in one month? Attempts to address these important issues within their designated months may mean that some get lost in the shuffle, and we know the logistical challenges they pose with space, calendars, competing events and resources.

At SCOPE, we believe in an evidence-based approach to prevention, and evidence shows that a month of focus does little to shift a campus culture long-term. Marches, fairs, philanthropy and giveaways have their place, but they do not supplant the need for ongoing, consistent, reinforcing education and primary prevention. More importantly, awareness months create a disconnect with the academic cycle. We don't address specific academic disciplines during only one month of the year. We understand that acquisition of pedagogy requires a syllabus-based curricular approach, building developmentally over time, to produce a student who can understand and speak intelligently to science, history, language and other academic disciplines. Prevention issues deserve the same breadth and depth.

SCOPE recommends that prevention educators form a coalition on campus, be it a centralized prevention office or a committee of engaged faculty, staff and students. Use that coalition to work collaboratively to develop a strategic curriculum that makes sense for your academic calendar, priorities, needs, climate and population. Intentionally focus your efforts not just on raising awareness, but on evidence-based prevention programs, campaigns and trainings. We believe that this paradigm shift will lead to demonstrable change in our communities away from the awareness month and toward the prevention year.

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