



SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

October 8th, 2013

Online Prevention Program News: SCOPE Responds

Recently, online prevention programs have been generating some mixed coverage in the press pertaining to victim-blaming and triggering, as well as the confluence of alcohol and sexual assault (see e.g.: <http://jezebel.com/popular-alcohol-edu-program-implies-rape-is-a-thing-d-1069870539/>; <http://acvoice.com/2013/08/07/blurred-lines-amherst-college-sends-mixed-messages-on-alcohol-and-sexual-assault/>). As SCOPE hosts a [clearinghouse](#) of such programs, e-CHUG included, we felt it necessary to recognize the difficulties inherent with such programs.

It is important to note that e-CHUG responded to the Amherst College student journalist's concerns with accountability, editing the wording of their question. This incident should serve as a catalyst for further dialogue around the role of online prevention programs, how to best implement mandated education and how to involve students in assessment and activist efforts.

The reason SCOPE does not endorse one online prevention program over another is because no perfect program exists. We know it is a challenge to avoid victim-blaming language in a face-to-face presentation and the issue is compounded when the presentation is in a written format. Written questions, if not perfectly phrased (a near impossibility) can result in triggering based on further interpretation of tone, intent and meaning. It is incumbent on all of us to strive for neutral, factual and informative materials.

As noted in the articles referenced above, it is also important to recognize and understand the difference between a correlation versus a causation amongst alcohol and sexual assault. Alcohol abuse is a risk factor for sexual assault; sexual assault can be a secondary effect of alcohol abuse. The correlation is strong, as proven time and again by data. Accordingly, any program targeting sexual violence on a college campus would be delinquent and incomplete if the relationship to alcohol were omitted (note that the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has repeatedly stated that institutions must provide training on this correlation). Training on the correlation between sexual violence and alcohol or other drug abuse is appropriate, but it does not mean that victims should be blamed for their assault, nor that alcohol excuses criminal behavior on the part of perpetrators. We encourage institutions to focus group or request targeted feedback from students and staff to ensure that the language used is appropriate.

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