

# The Musings of a Conduct Officer

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## BASICS

By smo17 On February 17, 2015 · [Add Comment](#)

BASICS. More formally known as a Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students. Basics is an alcohol-education program that Penn State uses as an active/educational sanction for students who violate any policy on or off campus relating to alcohol. The cost of Basics for the student is \$200.00, which helps to pay for the program, training materials, counselors, etc.

Penn State is not the only school that uses Basics. For my Internship with the Office of Student Conduct, I got to have an opportunity to actually sit down and talk with one of the Basics counselors on campus and discuss with them the program.

The program is set up to be 2 to 4 one hour sessions with a counselor. These sessions are one on one interactions with a counselor to discuss the student's use and behavior around alcohol consumption.

Basics 1 allows the student to take a questionnaire/assessment related to their alcohol usage. Through this assessment, a lot of interesting information can be ascertained.

For instance, in the assessment, there are several questions related to depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Based upon how a student scores in this section, the student might receive a referral to meet with a CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) counselor to talk

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more about this depression/anxiety and what is causing it.

The assessment also asks the student to look at their consumption of alcohol and it measures the frequency a student drinks, the amount a student drinks, peak times a student drinks, how much a student drinks in a week/month, and how many times a student practices binge drinking.

The Assessment also has questions related to the student and why they drink. What causes a student to drink, how does a student react to alcohol and also family-related issues around alcohol.

The assessment tries to create a clear picture for the counselor on the risk that the student is in based upon their alcohol consumption and their family history. If a student scores a certain number on the assessment, they are automatically assigned to Basics 3 and 4. Also at any time during the first two 1 hour sessions of basics, the counselor can assign the student to continue on through Basics 3 and 4.

According to the basics counselor on campus, 15% of all students automatically are assigned basics 3 and 4 from the results in their assessment.

Basics 1 uses motivational interviewing to talk with the student about their relationship with alcohol (their beliefs about alcohol consumption, their family history about alcohol usage, and current consumption practices). After the first interview session, the student completes the online assessment while also completing a voluntary monitoring of alcohol consumption during the week between Basics 1 and 2.

Basics 2 looks at the information gathered from the assessment and uses social-norming to show students what the reality of alcohol use is on campus. The personal assessment report shows the student where the student falls on campus at Penn State with other students on alcohol consumption reporting. The assessment also talks about negative risk factors, clarifies perceived benefits of drinking, looks at individualized consequences and allows the student to create a plan to reduce alcohol consumption.

Throughout the interview, the counselor talks to students about alcohol. They go over what a standard definition of a drink is, how much the student had to drink in the situation that brought them to take Basics, the risk factors of high BACs, blackouts, passouts, and the bi-phasic affects of alcohol.

The assessment also shows students how many calories a student consumes from drinking and presents it in the concept of the number of pieces of cake a student eats in comparison to alcohol consumption. Since Penn State students are extremely concerned about their health in regards to a physical nature, this is an interesting concept for students to think about.

At the end of the Basics 2 session, the student is encouraged to work with the counselor to come up with an action plan to reduce the consumption of alcohol.

The goal of basics is to offer risk-reduction techniques and offer options to reduce the amount of alcohol a student is consuming in a non-judgmental, non-confrontational manner.

According to the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) which is under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "BASICS was first implemented in 1992, the program has been used in approximately 1,100 sites and has reached approximately 20,000 individuals. Six studies have been conducted to evaluate the effect of the program on student behavior."

According to NREPP, the studies show a significant decrease in the frequency of alcohol being consumed, the amount of alcohol consumed, and the negative consequences associated with high-risk drinking behaviors.

NREPP reported, "One study evaluated the impact of the intervention on students with high-risk drinking over a 4-year follow-up period. Students receiving BASICS had significantly greater reductions in drinking frequency over the first 2-year period than students in the no-treatment control group ( $p < .05$ ). The intervention had its greatest

impact between baseline and 6-month follow-up ( $p < .05$ ) and baseline and 1-year follow-up ( $p < .05$ ). The intervention group reported drinking significantly less frequently at 1-year follow-up than the control group ( $p < .05$ ).

A second study evaluated the short-term effects of the intervention on student binge drinkers. After statistically controlling for gender, participation in BASICS was shown to account for a significant reduction in the number of times alcohol was consumed ( $p < .001$ ) and the frequency of binge drinking episodes ( $p < .05$ ) from baseline to 6-week follow-up. These differences represent large and medium effect sizes ( $\eta^2 = .28$  and  $\eta^2 = .12$ ), respectively.”

When it comes to amount of alcohol, NREPP reported, “One study evaluated the impact of the intervention on students with high-risk drinking over a 4-year follow-up period. Compared with students in the no-treatment control group, students receiving BASICS had significantly greater reductions in drinking quantity that persisted over the 4-year period ( $p < .001$ ), with the intervention appearing to have its greatest impact between baseline and 1-year follow-up ( $p < .001$ ). Short-term changes in drinking quantity were found from baseline to 6-month follow-up. Specifically, students receiving BASICS had greater reductions in drinking quantity ( $p < .05$ ), peak quantity ( $p < .05$ ), and average drinking quantity ( $p < .01$ ) than students in the control group. At 2-year follow-up, students in the intervention group reported drinking an average of 3.6 drinks per drinking occasion, whereas students in the control group reported drinking an average of 4.0 drinks per occasion. This difference represents a very small effect size (Cohen’s  $d = 0.15$ ).

A second study evaluated the short-term effects of the intervention on student binge drinkers. After statistically controlling for gender, participation in BASICS was shown to account for a significant reduction in the number of drinks consumed per week ( $p < .01$ ) from baseline to 6-week follow-up. This difference represents a large effect size ( $\eta^2 = .21$ ).

A third study evaluated the effectiveness of the intervention among fraternity members. In comparison with students in the control group, who received a required, 1-hour didactic presentation on alcohol use, students receiving BASICS had significantly greater reductions in average drinks per week ( $p < .05$ ) and typical peak BAC levels ( $p < .05$ ) 1 year following the intervention. These differences represent small effect sizes (Cohen's  $d = 0.42$  and Cohen's  $d = 0.38$ , respectively).”

And lastly, NREPP reported on the consequences of alcohol consumption, “One study evaluated the impact of the intervention on students with high-risk drinking over a 4-year follow-up period. Compared with students in the no-treatment control group, students receiving BASICS had significantly greater reductions in negative drinking consequences that persisted over a 4-year period ( $p < .05$ ), with the intervention appearing to have its greatest impact between baseline and 1-year follow-up ( $p < .01$ ). Students receiving BASICS reported significantly fewer negative drinking consequences at 1-year ( $p < .01$ ), 2-year ( $p < .01$ ), 3-year ( $p < .05$ ), and 4-year ( $p < .01$ ) follow-up than students in the control group. At 2-year follow-up, students receiving BASICS reported an average of 3.3 negative drinking consequences, compared with an average of 4.7 consequences reported by control group students, a difference representing a small effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.32$ ). In addition, only 11% of students in the intervention group were classified as showing mild dependence at 2-year follow-up, compared with 27% of those in the control group ( $p < .001$ ).”

For more information on NREPP and its studies on basics, please check out NREPP's website at the following web address:<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=124>.

I am glad that I was given the opportunity to sit down with a Basics counselor and to talk to them about the program and what the program consists of. I do think that the program itself plays a huge part in risk-reduction for our college students and really plays a huge role in lowering recidivism rates on campus. I also think it was extremely good to hear about the referral process to CAPS and Basics 3 and 4 based upon the students responses through their assessment.

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