

# Sustainability Plan

Ohio's Strategic Prevention Framework – State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG)

**UNIVERSITY OF MOUNT UNION**

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**Strategic Prevention Framework – State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG): Sustainability Module**  
**The University of Mount Union, Alliance, OH**

“The key element of sustainability is providing continued benefits, regardless of particular activities delivered or the format in which they are delivered.” –Mancini & Marek (2002)

There are four clarifying questions that need to be answered in order for sustainability planning to move forward:

1. *What* are you trying to sustain? (or, *What* needs to be sustained?)
2. **Public Value:** What *evidence* do you have that what you are doing is *worth sustaining*? (or, Why does this initiative *deserve* to be sustained?)
3. **Authorizing Environment:** What *institutional supports, structures, and/or policies* need to be in place to achieve sustainability?
4. **Operational Capacity:** What *capacity* is necessary to sustain this effort and *where* will that capacity come from?

**A. Building the Sustainability Team**

Before these questions can be answered, it is essential that you *identify the key players*. It is very important to consider your authorizing environment (Moore, 1995).

Who are the individuals on your campus that need to be involved in conversations about sustainability?

Two distinct groups of key players have been identified: those who are able to support the initiative from the top down with an institutional scope, as well as those who will likely carry out the initiative at the staff level.

At the institutional level, the following key individuals have been identified as individuals with authority and power in terms of moving this initiative forward:

- Dr. Richard F. Giese, President of the University
- Dr. Patricia Draves, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the University
- Patrick Heddleston, Vice-President for Business Affairs
- John Frazier, Vice-President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
- Larry Kehres, Director of Athletics

At the staff level, the following key individuals have been identified as essential in carrying out this initiative:

- Michelle Gaffney, Associate Dean of Students
- Kelleen Weber, Director of Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education
- Phil Rathosky, Graduate Assistant for Office of Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education
- Jessica Douglas, Director of First-Year Initiatives
- Aaron Berger, Graduate Assistant for First-Year Initiatives
- Deborah Minton, Director of Student Conduct
- Katherine Carnell, Director of Student Involvement and Leadership
- Pam Newbold, Director of Human Resources
- Representative from Office of Marketing
- Representative from Information Technology Department

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## B. Sustainability Question #1: What are you *trying* to sustain? (or, What *needs* to be sustained?)

Weiss, Coffman, Bohan-Baker (2002) identified four categories related “initiative sustainability.” These categories are very broad and are very applicable to alcohol prevention initiatives. These categories may be helpful for your team as you plan for sustainability. If your team has already clearly articulated what you are trying to sustain, you may want to categorize your objectives. Please feel free to create your own category if you need to.

*Please remember that you do NOT need a sustainability objective/goal for each category. We are providing these categories as conversation catalysts, not as requirements.*

1. *Organizations and/or Projects*: securing additional funding for projects begun or supported under the initiative
2. *Ideas*: maintaining the initiative’s core principals, values, beliefs, and commitment
3. *Relationships*: maintaining connections among people and institutions
4. *Outcomes*: maintaining initiative results

Please choose the question that most appropriately applies to your project: What are you *trying* to sustain? (or, What *needs* to be sustained?) Please state your sustainability objectives/goals as bullet-point statements. Each objective/goal must be specific, measurable, and observable.

The University of Mount Union believes in a holistic approach to education, and an online student-based alcohol education program continues to provide education for the whole student. Based on the three-in-one framework, from which the Office of Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education at the University of Mount Union is modeled, we strongly believe in a multivariate approach to alcohol education. An online education module complements programming and education opportunities currently offered by the Department of Student Affairs as well as the University community as a whole. Because of this philosophy, we recognize the importance of sustaining an alcohol education module that emphasizes collaborative efforts and partnerships with other campus offices, specifically the Office of First-Year Initiatives.

First-year students have many unique challenges and opportunities when arriving at college that have never been presented to them before. Because of the prevalence of alcohol in today’s American culture, students are often misinformed or unaware of the realities of alcohol use on college campuses, and often do not understand what the responsible use of alcohol actually looks like. Considering the above information, an online alcohol education module serves an essential step to reach and educate students before they arrive on campus and put themselves in potentially dangerous situations involving alcohol. *Preview*, a summer orientation program designed for first-year and transfer students, is an optimal setting to begin the discussion of alcohol education and the requirement to participate in the online education module.

Utilizing the information provided in the alcohol education program, the Offices of First Year Initiatives and Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education are able to provide educational and social environments in a variety of venues. In addition to providing the opportunity for alcohol education before arriving on campus, working with the Office of First Year Initiatives is paramount to continuing this education throughout the students’ first academic year. The University of Mount Union firmly believes in programming for first year students, and the Office of Alcohol Drug and Wellness Education echoes that sentiment, especially as it pertains to responsible alcohol use.

Based on this philosophy, we have outlined the following goals as they relate to sustainability:

- Continue a collaborative partnership with other offices and divisions to ensure that the alcohol education program is able to educate the whole student.

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- Utilize a program that provides norm-based references specific to the University of Mount Union and its peer institutions to educate students on the realities of alcohol and drug use at college.
- Work closely with faculty staff to ensure that a consistent message is being sent to all students.
- Develop and maintain a consistent follow-up procedure so that the results of the program can be measured as accurately as possible.

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**C. Sustainability Question #2: Public Value - What *evidence* do you have that what you are doing is *worth sustaining*? (or, Why does this initiative *deserve* to be sustained?)**

We discussed the idea of *public value* (Moore, 1995). It may be helpful to frame this conversation among your planning team as such. For example, it may be useful to have your planning team respond to these questions (You do not need to write responses to these questions, these are just provided as conversation catalysts.):

- How is this alcohol prevention initiative positively impacting students?
- What results from this alcohol prevention initiative are valued by the campus community? The local community surrounding campus?
- What results from this alcohol prevention initiative are valued by the leadership team?

Once you have answered these questions, please respond to the overarching question (whichever form is most applicable to your situation): What evidence do you have that what you are doing is worth sustaining? (or, Why does this initiative deserve to be sustained?)

Based on the data received from AlcoholEdu this past summer, 85% of incoming Mount Union students reported that the program helped them establish a plan for responsible decisions regarding alcohol, and 84% of students said that they were able to identify signs of alcohol poisoning after utilizing the online education program. In terms of behaviors and attitudes, 66% stated that the program stimulated them to reflect on their personal attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, 62% of students reported a change in their perceptions of their peers' drinking behavior after completing the program. These results suggest that completing an online alcohol education module *before* coming to campus allows students to self-reflect on their own values, which is an important part of the process of education.

In addition to the data from the AlcoholEdu program, every two years the University of Mount Union conducts the Core Alcohol and Other Drug Survey. The survey works to quantify and document college students' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions about alcohol and drugs. It also measures behaviors of actual alcohol and other drug use and consequences of use, allowing staff to get a picture of students' perceptions and actual behaviors. Based on the data gathered from the October 2013 implementation of the survey, approximately 90.2% of students believe that the average student on campus uses alcohol once per week or more. In reality, 43.4% of students reported the average number of drinks they consumed to be zero. In addition, 45.5% of students surveyed believed that the average student on campus uses some form of illegal drug at least once a week. In contrast, only 9.5% of students on campus reported using marijuana in the last thirty days. Being able to provide students with this knowledge before they even arrive to campus can provide an excellent opportunity for them to think about their own perceptions about what alcohol and drug use at college is like and to contrast it with the realities as reported by students on campus.

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**D. Sustainability Question #3: Authorizing Environment - What *institutional supports, structures, and/or policies* need to be in place to achieve sustainability?**

We discussed the idea of *authorizing environment* (Moore, 1995). It is important to determine who holds the ability to make key decisions regarding the sustainability of the project.

What *institutional supports, structures, and/or policies* need to be in place to achieve sustainability of your alcohol prevention initiative? It may be helpful to frame your answer to this question using the following sub-questions:

- What current *institutional supports, structures, and/or policies* support your alcohol prevention initiative?
- Of these structures, which could be strengthened to ensure sustainability of your alcohol prevention initiative?
- What structures are blocking or obstructing your alcohol prevention initiative?
- Which structures are still needed to ensure sustaining your alcohol prevention initiative?

- Alcohol use on campus is not just a problem isolated to the Office of Alcohol Drug and Wellness Education, and it is essential for a variety of offices across college campuses to contribute, as the abuse of alcohol by students can have far-reaching consequences. Building and maintaining an active, campus-wide support system and structure will have tremendous benefits for providing students comprehensive education on alcohol use and misuse. Currently the Office of First Year Initiatives, the Office of Residence Life, as well as the Dean and Associate Dean of Students have been working toward the goal of a sustainable education plan, and have worked to provide support through staffing and policies.
- Promoting and providing the opportunity for faculty support across the University is an area that could be strengthened in order to support this initiative. As stated previously, student alcohol abuse is not confined to the Office of Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education: missing classes, falling behind in assignments, and failing exams can have far-reaching consequences on retention and attrition, which can in turn affect recruitment.
- Coupled with living on-campus as a freshman, athletes in particular have been substantiated as being an especially high-risk student population. Because of this, working with this group and the department of athletics is essential. Improving lines of communication is vital in order to reach the athlete population on campus, which at 36 percent is a significant portion of the University's population. In addition, financial constraints upon the University community as a whole continue to remain a barrier to achieving a truly sustainable initiative.
- Utilizing alcohol counseling as part of the campus conduct system will also prove to be important as the University moves forward with this initiative. Approximately 140 students were referred through the campus conduct process for alcohol-related violations between August 2012 and February 2014, and the office is working toward constant improvement in the process by the conduct hearing officers. Promoting this online education module as a component of the conduct process will help ensure that a consistent message is being spread to all students. In addition, working to create a mandated requirement for the online program for all incoming students will ensure that all students are ultimately receiving the same consistent message.

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**E. Sustainability Question #4: Operational Capacity - What *capacity* is necessary to sustain this effort and *where* will that capacity come from?**

We discussed the idea of *operational capacity*. In order for your sustainability goals/objectives to become reality, your alcohol prevention initiative must have the *capacity* necessary to achieve those outcomes. Capacity is defined in many ways, including (but not limited to): securing diverse resources and acquiring the appropriate expertise. Basically, the purpose of this question is to determine the resources (e.g., time, personnel, funding, etc.) needed to achieve each sustainability goal/objective.

What operational capacity is necessary to achieve sustainability and where will the capacity come from to sustain your alcohol prevention initiative? It may be helpful to frame your answer to this question using the following sub-questions:

- What current resources are necessary to sustain your alcohol prevention initiative?
- Of these resources, which is insufficient or vulnerable?
- What current skills and expertise does your initiative rely on to sustain your initiative's positive outcomes?
- Of these skills and expertise, which could be strengthened to ensure sustained positive outcomes?
- Which skills and expertise are still needed to sustain positive outcomes?

Despite being a campus-wide initiative that is not directly tied to one specific office, it is important to recognize that the Office of Alcohol, Drug, and Wellness Education will serve as the point of contact for this initiative. Because this office is staffed by only one full-time and one part-time staff member, it is essential to work with other offices within Student Affairs to ensure that the initiative remains consistently delivered during the summer months specifically during the University's *Preview* program. Time is certainly an institution-wide resource that many offices find insufficient, and so partnering with other offices, specifically the Office of First-Year Initiatives, becomes even more essential in terms of delivering a consistent and coherent message. Additionally, a lack of consistent training and information sharing between offices within the Division of Student Affairs is something that the staff continually strives to improve, and doing so will go a long way in promoting consistent program delivery.

In terms of current skills and expertise, the initiative relies heavily on strengths in advertising, publications, and general public relations aspects. In order to continue the initiative, it is important to continue our endeavors with those areas, as well as to continue to be a leader in effective communication. Giving presentations to students and families about the importance of an online alcohol education program, as well as getting faculty and University-wide buy-in, hinges on the ability of our staff to communicate soundly and effectively. The offices also have a good deal of inter-office communication that occurs regularly, but it will be essential to increase the level of cooperation across Student Affairs offices in order to ensure that all staff are educated on the program and its goals and objectives. It is also important that they see the relevance of the initiative to their respective offices and are able to buy into the idea of this initiative as well.

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## F. Strengths/Challenges

In any projects, there are strengths and challenges. The purpose of the following questions is to help you identify ways you can capitalize on your strengths and prepare for probable or potential obstacles.

1. In what ways do you believe your alcohol prevention initiative is positioned to achieve sustainability?
2. What are the probable or potential obstacles to sustainability?

Providing an online alcohol education program of some sort is poised to achieve success and sustainability in several ways. First, many staff members on campus recognize that alcohol use and misuse is a pervasive problem that is not necessarily isolated to a specific office within the campus community. It affects many people and departments, and so it can be clear that several departments and offices can and should have a vested interest in this initiative as a whole. In addition, the position of the University of Mount Union as a small, private liberal arts institution promotes the idea of collaboration in that there is often less bureaucracy to contend with when compared to larger institutions. The smaller environment fosters a strong sense of teamwork and cooperation by its very nature, which is certainly a positive attribute that will position this initiative toward a sustainable future.

Another strong advantage that the University of Mount Union holds is that it is one of only two schools in the state of Ohio that has a dedicated office to focus on alcohol, drug, and wellness issues. Additionally, this office is staffed by a full-time alcohol and drug counselor, which allows this program to be delivered by an office that is dedicated specifically to the topic of alcohol, drug, and wellness education.

Additionally, there are several important obstacles to consider in terms of sustainability. One obstacle is creating a sense of consistency and buy-in among the academic and athletic areas of campus. Being able to articulate the vision and goals of the initiative to these offices and getting them to commit to our endeavors is essential in order to ensure the consistent delivery of the message of responsible alcohol use to incoming students. Also, the idea of gaining parent buy-in of incoming students is important to consider as well, because in that way, parents will be able to discuss alcohol use with their students before coming to the University of Mount Union. Finally, money continues to be an obstacle for all areas of campuses, and this initiative is no different. Balancing the needs and values of other campus offices with the importance of this alcohol education program is essential and it becomes important to relay the relevance of this program to the campus decision-makers. Being able to anticipate the need for funding ahead of time through partnerships with offices with similar and vested interests will serve the initiative well and ensure that the education module will be able to be sustained.

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