



The U.S. Department of Education's

**HIGHER
EDUCATION
CENTER**

for Alcohol,
Drug Abuse, and
Violence Prevention

PREVENTION UPDATE

AOD Screening Tools for College Students

Overview

According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) (NIAAA), the goal of screening in student health or other college settings is to reduce alcohol-related harm. “Abstinence is an unrealistic expectation for many college campuses. Screening students goes beyond simply identifying and referring students who are alcohol-dependent and require referral to a specialized alcohol treatment program. For example, there is a direct dose-response relationship between drinking and a number of alcohol-related consequences. Persons drinking 3-4 drinks per day have a 2- to 3-fold risk for accidents, stroke, liver disease, cancer, and hypertension. This effect is independent of the presence or absence of alcoholism.”

NIAAA points out that identifying those students at greatest risk for alcohol problems is the first step in prevention. Screening instruments must be selected that will accurately detect the problem within the population of interest, and be feasible to implement. Colleges and universities have used a number of screening tests that have been evaluated. “The [CAGE](#) has been used in college student populations but has been criticized for its inability to detect the full range of drinking problems experienced by people in this age group. Another test, the [MAST](#), includes 9 to 25 questions; the longest version takes less than 10 minutes to complete. The MAST is particularly useful in detecting more advanced problems with alcohol (such as dependence), but this may limit its usefulness within a college population. The Young Adult Alcohol Problems Screening Test ([YAAPST](#)), which consists of 27 items, takes less than 10 minutes to complete and has demonstrated good sensitivity. Other screening tools—the [College Alcohol Problems Scale–revised](#) (CAPS-r), the [Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index](#) (RAPI), and the [AUDIT](#)—can be used to detect alcohol problems experienced in the past year, making them good candidates for use with students.”

[BASICS](#) (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) is a frequently used screening instrument at colleges and universities. It was developed to target college students considered at risk because of heavy drinking behaviors and includes an online assessment and in-person interviews. Some students are referred to BASICS sessions to fulfill a requirement as a result of an alcohol-related offense, while others participate because they would like to learn moderation strategies to reduce negative consequences from drinking.

The use of online screening tools is becoming more prevalent at campuses as part of alcohol education efforts. A number of such tools have been developed, such as [e-CHECKUP TO GO](#), which is a personalized, evidence-based, online prevention intervention for alcohol and marijuana. This assessment tool is an anonymous, interactive Web survey that allows college and university students to enter information about their drinking patterns and receive feedback about their use of alcohol or marijuana. An online alcohol prevention assessment developed by the [Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board](#) compares 18 tools, 14 of which are specifically for college students.



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What the Evidence Tells Us

A 2009 [study](#) tested the effectiveness of brief primary care provider interventions delivered in a college student health center to a sample of college students who screened positive for high-risk drinking. Participants in the experimental group received two brief intervention sessions that were founded in motivational interviewing techniques and delivered by four specially trained providers within the student health center. Data on alcohol use and related harms were obtained from a Web-based Healthy Lifestyle Questionnaire, 30-day Timeline Followback alcohol-use diaries, the Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI), and eight items from the Drinker Inventory of Consequences-2L. The researchers concluded that brief interventions delivered by primary care providers in a student health center to high-risk-drinking students may result in significantly decreased alcohol consumption, high-risk drinking, and alcohol-related harms.

A 2012 [study](#) on the effectiveness of the BASICS program with a mandated population collected data on college students at a large Northeastern public university. A total of 1,390 students (67 percent) in the intervention group and 508 students (61 percent) in the comparison group completed baseline and 6-month follow-up surveys. Male students in the intervention group significantly decreased their drinking at follow-up, whereas those in the comparison group increased their drinking. Women in both the intervention and comparison groups decreased their drinking at six months. The researchers concluded that when implemented with fidelity, BASICS is a generally effective intervention, especially for male adjudicated college students. The intervention was most effective for moderate- and high-risk drinkers.

Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities

At [Fordham University](#) in New York City, during every spring semester, the Alcohol and Other Drug Education Program and the students in PARty (Peers Advocating Responsibility) collaborate with Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) to hold an alcohol screening event at which students are invited to complete the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) that is scored and interpreted by a trained professional staff member. Students receive resources and are encouraged to schedule an appointment with a CPS staff member if they are interested in learning more about their use of alcohol. Peer educators provide incentives for completing the AUDIT and receiving the feedback. Incentives may include free pizza, free BAC (blood alcohol concentration) cards for males and females, and several items that contain harm reduction messages (stickers, pins, key chains, and magnets).

Related Higher Education Center Resources

- [Case Study: Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#)
- [Model Program: University at Albany, State University of New York](#)
- [Model Program: University of Massachusetts Amherst](#)
- [Prevention Update: Screening and Brief Interventions: Research Update](#)

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