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## **Advocating for Health and Safety through Social Media- Linked In!**

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### **Abstract**

Excessive drinking among college students, which is influenced by an array of factors ranging from campus norms to membership in student organizations, has been linked to consequences including motor vehicle accidents, cognitive deficits, arrests, overdoses, assaults, and death. Considering the severity of consequences related to drinking, education on alcohol safety is essential. Communicating alcohol safety messages via social media outlets serves as a platform for members of campus-based student organizations to influence their peers to practice safe alcohol behaviors, which may lead to a decrease in negative alcohol-related outcomes for college students. This teaching technique will engage participants to develop social media messages to advocate for and promote alcohol safety. The leadership qualities of communicating, listening, and having relationships will guide participants as they create advocacy messages for alcohol safety that can be shared on social media outlets.

### **Introduction**

Excessive drinking among college students has been linked to consequences including motor vehicle accidents, cognitive deficits, arrests, overdoses, assaults, and death (White & Hingson, 2013). Additionally, Perkins (2002) found alcohol consumption can lead to negative outcomes including engaging in unintended or unprotected sexual activity, rape victimization, violence, alcohol poisoning, and unintentional injuries.

Out of all of the consequences associated with drinking, unintentional injuries are a predominant concern. One of the most prevalent causes of unintentional injuries is drinking and driving. Nationally, the prevalence of motor vehicle

crashes resulting from intoxication remains high. According to researchers, potentially more than 1,800 college students, between ages 18-24, die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries. Additionally, each year about 2.7 million college students drive under the influence of alcohol (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009).

Despite the negative outcomes associated with alcohol consumption, an array of factors influence students' decisions to engage in drinking behaviors. Campus norms related to drinking, organizational membership, drinking expectations and benefits, and access to alcoholic beverages can contribute to students' decisions to consume alcohol excessively (White & Hingson, 2013).

Communicating alcohol safety messages via social media outlets is a way for members of campus-based student organizations to influence peers to practice safe alcohol behaviors, which may lead to a decrease in negative alcohol-related outcomes for college students. Mass media campaigns allow for the dissemination of health information to large populations in a relatively short amount of time and may potentially lead to population-level change (Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010). Mass media communication does not depend on direct contact between individuals (Bala, 2013); therefore, messages created by one individual can reach many others via channels such as radio, television, and social media. Social media has been used to advocate for health in areas such as tobacco use (Hefler, Freeman, & Chapman, 2013), mental health (Peek, & Chan, 2015), and HIV/AIDS (Vijaykumar, 2014).

Spreading health messages through social media can be particularly effective for college students due to their frequent social media use. The 2010 report from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011) determined 86% of undergraduate students and 82% of graduate students regularly use social media sites. The most popular social media sites used by young adult Internet users (age 18-29) include Facebook (82%), Instagram (55%), and Twitter (32%) (Duggan, 2015).

In this teaching technique, members of campus-based student organizations practice creating advocacy messages that can be shared on social media platforms, similar to what would be done in a mass media campaign. The purpose of this lesson is to assist organizational members in developing organization-specific alcohol safety messages for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. After building advocacy skills, participants will be encouraged to continue to post alcohol safety messages on their organization's social media sites.

### **Primary Audience**

This teaching technique was designed for college students, 18 to 24 years of age, who are part of a campus-based student organization.

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## Objectives

The participants will:

- Develop a message through a social media platform to educate their peers about alcohol safety
- Discuss using social media to improve personal and organization member safety
- Create positive alcohol safety messages for organization members

## Standards of Practice for Health Promotion in Higher Education

Implementing the *Advocating for Health and Safety through Social Media- Linked In!* teaching technique will satisfy the following Standards of Practice for Health Promotion in Higher Education (American College Health Association, 2012):

- 1.2: Design health promotion initiatives that support student success as defined by the institution of higher education.
- 1.4: Advocate for health as core value of the institution of higher education.

## Materials and Resources

- 1 Qualities of a Good Leader Handout per group of five (Figure 1)
- 1 Alcohol Safety Scenarios Handout strip per group of five (Figure 2)
- 1 Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook Social Media Template Handout per group of five (Figure 3)
- 1 Campus Alcohol Safety Resources Handout per participant (Figure 4)
- 1 Assessment Survey Handout per participant (Figure 5)
- Access to the Internet
- Participants' personal electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, computers, tablets, etc.)
- Scissors
- Markers
- Pens
- Pencils

### Communicating-

“It’s not what you say, but also how you say it.”

“The leader must be able to share knowledge and ideas to transmit a sense of urgency and enthusiasm to others.”

“If a leader can’t get a message across clearly to motivate others to act on it, then having a message doesn’t even matter.”

~ Gilbert Amelio

### Listening-

“The ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people.”

~ Woodrow Wilson

“A good leader encourages followers to tell him what he needs to know, not what he wants to hear.”

~ John C. Maxwell

### Having Relationships-

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.”

~ Theodore Roosevelt

**Figure 1.** Qualities of a Good Leader Handout adapted from <http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/courses/communicationskills/leaderqualities.pdf>

**Cut along the dotted line and provide one strip to each group**

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**Violence**

Jonathan was at an organization party and had already consumed a few drinks. One of his friends, whom he got into an argument with a couple of days before, walks into the party. Jonathan, who is normally calm, walks up to his friend and starts yelling at him. Jonathan normally wouldn't have acted this way but since he was intoxicated his actions were extreme. Use the social media template to write a post about violence and alcohol use in response to this scenario. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

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**Date rape/date rape drugs**

Hailey is at an organization event and leaves her drink on the table when she goes to the restroom. She comes back and finishes her drink. A little while later, she is feeling dizzy and confused even though she only had one drink. Hailey believes she has been drugged and asks a friend for help before anything else could happen. Use the social media template to write a post about date rape/date rape drugs and alcohol use in response to this scenario. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

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**Drinking and driving**

Chris and Evelyn are getting ready to leave a party. Evelyn drove to the party in her car so she insists she should be the one to drive home. She also claims Chris is a bad driver. The problem is Evelyn has had too much to drink, unlike Chris. Chris is trying to convince Evelyn to let him drive but at the same time he really doesn't want to spoil the fun by arguing with her. Use the social media template to write a drinking and driving post in response to this scenario. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

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**Risky sexual behaviors**

Gina and Ashley attend a fraternity party together. During the party, a fraternity member offers vodka shots to both girls. After consuming several shots, the girls engage in a game of truth or dare with the fraternity members. Gina is dared to make out with one of the members and does so. After the dare, Gina and the guy she makes out with begin flirting and eventually make their way to a private bedroom. Use the social media template to write a post about risky sexual behaviors and alcohol use. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

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**Alcohol poisoning**

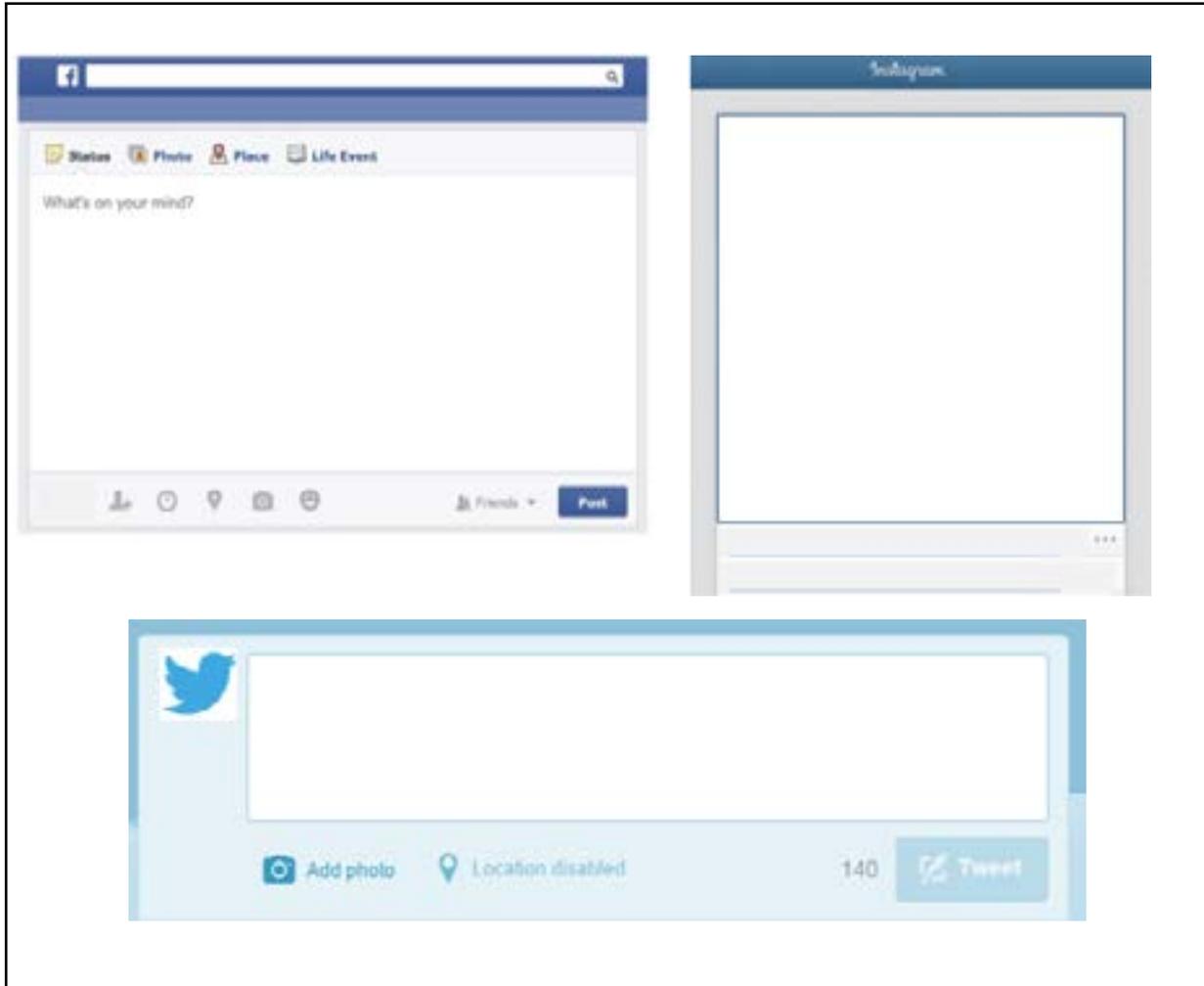
Jesse hosts a birthday gathering at his apartment. He invites all of his organization members as well as other college friends. His friends want him to have a great time, and they insist on a shot-taking contest. After 10 shots, Jesse knows he has had too many but his competitor is still going. By the end of the contest, Jesse has consumed 20 shots of alcohol in a very short period of time. Use the social media template to write a post about alcohol poisoning. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

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**Unintentional injuries**

Miranda and her best friend are graduating this weekend and are having a combined celebration. The celebration is at Miranda's parents' house near a college town. Her parents have a pool, volleyball court, and a pit for bonfires. As the evening progresses, all of the girls' friends have consumed many alcoholic beverages. Everyone decides to get out of the pool and participate in a bonfire. After consuming several more alcoholic drinks, Miranda's friend decides to push her in the pool. Miranda is very intoxicated and not very stable at this point. Use the social media template to write a post about unintentional injuries related to alcohol. The post should aim to prevent a similar scenario from ever happening again. Also, make sure to draw a picture to accompany your message.

**Figure 2.** Alcohol Safety Scenarios Handout



**Figure 3.** Social Media Template Handouts

**Adaptations for Additional Audiences**

This technique can also be adapted for high school students. The discussion of campus-based student organizations can be removed, encouraging high school students to brainstorm alcohol safety messages for their peers. If adapted for high school, this technique addresses the following National Health Education Standards:

- 8.12.1: Utilize accurate peer and societal norms to formulate a health-enhancing message.
- 8.12.2: Demonstrate how to influence and support others to make positive health choices.
- 8.12.3: Work cooperatively as an advocate for improving personal, family, and community health.
- 8.12.4: Adapt health messages and communication techniques to a specific target audience.

**Procedure**

**Before the Lesson**

- Print copies of the Qualities of a Good Leader Handout (Figure 1)
- Print and cut Alcohol Safety Scenarios Handout (Figure 2) into strips
- Print Social Media Template Handouts (Figure 3)
- Print copies of the Campus Alcohol Safety Resources Handout (Figure 4)
- Print copies of the Assessment Survey Handout (Figure 5)

**Part I: Lecture (5 minutes)**

- A. The educator will begin by explaining the purpose of the *Advocating for Health and Safety through Social Media-*

### Campus Alcohol Safety Resources Handout

1. For sexual assault: <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/sas.svp>
2. Date rape: <https://scs.tamu.edu/?q=node/79>
3. Drinking and driving (CARPOOL): <http://carpool.tamu.edu/>
4. Violence: <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/wrc.save>
5. STI Testing: <http://aggiereach.tamu.edu/testing>
6. Alcohol poisoning: <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/adep.alcoholpoisoning>

**Figure 4.** Campus Alcohol Safety Resources Handout

*Linked In!* activity. The purpose of this activity is to assist campus-based student organization members in developing organization-specific messages advocating alcohol safety for Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The educator will inform the participants by the end of the lesson they will be able to identify unsafe alcohol practices and formulate strategies for maximizing personal, peer, and organization member safety.

- B. After distributing the Qualities of a Good Leader Handout (Figure 1) to six volunteers, the educator will introduce the qualities (i.e., communicating, having relationships, and listening) by asking the volunteers to read the quotes on the handout that correspond to each of the three qualities. These qualities were adapted from Maxwell's (2007) *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*. The educator should explain that these qualities are important for individuals to have as they progress through college and into a professional setting.
- C. The educator will ask the participants to think about how exhibiting the qualities of a good leader could help them share alcohol-related safety information within their organizations. A few participants will be asked to respond. Potential responses could be: "I need to be able to communicate in a way my organization members can relate to," "Before I communicate about alcohol safety, I should listen to the concerns my organization's members have," and "If I build a trusting relationship with my organization's members, they will be more likely to listen to my alcohol safety messages."

#### **Part II: Create the Message (20 minutes)**

- A. The educator will split participants into groups of five. The educator will then distribute the Qualities of a Good Leader Handout (Figure 1) (one per group; may be obtained by the volunteers for Part I), Alcohol Safety Scenarios Handout (Figure 2) (one slip per group; scenario slips should be prepped before the lesson), and the Social Media Template Handouts (Figure 3) (one per group). For the Social Media Template Handouts, the educator should distribute different

templates to the groups (one per group). The educator will also provide markers, pens, and pencils to each group.

- B. After all of the materials have been distributed, the educator will explain the *Linked In* activity. In this activity, participants will collaborate with their group members to identify consequences to the behaviors and changes that need to occur within the provided scenario (Figure 2). First, the participants will research possible consequences of the behavior described in the scenario using their cell phones, tablets, computers or other connected devices. They will then create a media message to post, aimed at preventing a similar scenario from happening again, on their designated social media site. The participants should consider what would appeal to their organizational members when creating the advocacy messages. Participants should also include an illustration representing a picture they could include with their social media post. The participants should be reminded to consider the qualities of a good leader when deciding what the message should say, the tone of the message, and the picture accompanying the message. The educator will inform the participants to prepare for a discussion at the end of the activity.
- C. During the activity, the educator should walk around the room to assist participants, check for progress, and answer any questions.

#### **Part III: Find Themes in Social Media Outlets (15 minutes)**

- A. This part of the lesson is intended to guide participants in a reflective exercise. After all groups have completed their social media outlet messages/images, the educator will ask the groups to share and describe their image.
- B. The educator will ask the following questions to facilitate the reflection exercise:
1. What are some similarities and differences between the social media outlets?



- In organization meetings our social media page can be presented on a large screen and viewed by each member. The alcohol safety messages can also be read aloud.
  - Members can give input on what they think the alcohol safety messages should say.
  - I could listen to the member's needs when considering what to post.
  - Messages should appeal to the other members by using relatable pictures and phrases.
6. What kind of alcohol-related posts have you seen people post on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media sites that may have a negative impact on an organization? On an individual?

*Potential responses:*

- Pictures of underage members holding alcohol beverages
  - Posts about parties that are against the university's policies
  - Pictures of people using alcohol inappropriately
  - Pictures of people in university-affiliated attire (e.g., t-shirts and hoodies) engaging in risky activities
7. In what ways can you encourage members to better monitor their social media posts?

*Potential responses:*

- Send out reminders before events
- Talk about responsible social media use at orientation

#### **Part IV: Closure (5 minutes)**

- Now that participants have practiced advocating through social media in a safe environment, the educator will encourage participants to post the messages they created or similar messages on their organization's social media page.
- The educator will direct the participants to the Campus Alcohol Safety Resources Handout. An example has been provided using resources from an actual campus in Texas (Figure 4). This handout allows participants to seek more information if needed.
- The assessment will also take place in the closure; see Assessment Technique for more details.

#### **Assessment Technique**

To assess if transfer of knowledge and skills occurred, questions will be asked through an assessment survey. The educator will pass out the Assessment Survey Handout (Figure 5) and give participants a moment to provide feedback. Additionally, the objectives were assessed in the activity in the following ways:

- *Develop a health message through a social media platform to educate their peers about alcohol safety.* During Part II, participants created at least one alcohol safety message with a group using a Social Media Template and shared it with the class.
- *Discuss using social media to improve personal and organization member safety.* In Part III, question 4,

participants discussed the impact of sharing alcohol safety messages on social media. Suggestions on how to reach and grasp the attention of organizational members were discussed in question 5.

- *Create positive alcohol safety messages for organization members.* During Part II, participants found information regarding alcohol safety online and adapted the information for their organization, keeping in mind what would appeal to their organizational members. This message was shared with the class.

The lesson was designed to be assessed informally, without the quality of messages being a significant indicator of success. On the other hand, if an educator prefers a more formal process for assessment within the classroom setting, the educator can assess the messages for overall quality (e.g., relevance to intended population, accuracy of information, appropriateness of the message, and creativity). Additionally, the group discussion can be informally assessed based on overall participation.

#### **Activity Adaptations**

If working with a small group, (i.e., less than 12 participants), the educator may assign two alcohol safety scenarios to each group (i.e., three groups with two members and two alcohol topics). If groups become too large (i.e., more than six participants in a group), the educator may create more than six groups and assign scenarios multiple times (e.g., more than one group will have alcohol poisoning as a topic).

Additionally, the educator should consider what social media sites are popular with the audience at the time and adaptations should be made to reflect the current, popular social media trends.

#### **Lessons Learned**

This teaching technique was pilot tested in a class of approximately 15 college students majoring in health. Participants appreciated the use of social media as it is relevant to their generation and interests. Participants also recognized the importance of discussing alcohol use without simply saying that they should not be drinking alcohol. Implementation suggestions, provided by participants, are compiled below:

- The discussion questions in Part III can lead to a valuable dialogue, so allow the questions to start a discussion where participants can share their personal experiences and beliefs.
- Make sure to monitor downtime while the participants create the message in Part II. Some groups will finish more quickly than others, so encourage them to continue working by having them analyze how their post will appeal to their organization members. They can make improvements based on the analysis. You can also allow them to create another post, if time permits.
- Opportunities to do the activity electronically or on larger sheets of paper should also be considered. The templates provided in this lesson provide a quick and easy way to implement the activity but educators should have the freedom to adjust the techniques used to create appropriate messages.

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**This article may provide one  
Continuing Education Contact Hour Opportunity for CHES (Approval Pending)  
Instructions and self-study questions may be found on page 29**

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