

Saferide: A Strategy to Address High-Risk Behaviors Associated with Alcohol

Jesse M. Ketterman and Heather Holmes

College campuses across the country continue to identify strategies to address high-risk behaviors associated with alcohol consumption. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) estimates that among college students each year, there are 1,700 alcohol-related deaths, 97,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults, and 696,000 assaults by someone under the influence of alcohol. In addition, the NIAAA estimates that each year about 2.8 million college students drive under the influence of alcohol

(www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/1College_Bulletin-508_361C4E.pdf).

In order to provide a safer environment for students, many campuses have implemented Saferide programs.

What is Saferide?

Saferide programs vary in structure from campus to campus, but they all operate with the goal of providing students safe rides home during late-night hours. Students call a designated phone number, give their location and home address, and are picked up by a program driver within a short time.

The first question often asked about Saferide programs is "What is the difference between Saferide and a 'drunk bus'?" The answer is simple. A "drunk bus" promotes drinking by taking individuals to and from bars, and often from bar to bar or from house party to house party. In contrast, Saferide provides a ride only to a student's home address. It also is intended for and often used by those who choose not to drink. Walking down the street late at night in a college town will show one the importance of providing this safe alternative.

Finding the best program

Approaches to operating and staffing Saferide programs differ from campus to campus. Although some programs are university-coordinated, others are outsourced to private companies. Some programs are operated by paid staff while others are staffed by uncompensated volunteers or by volunteers in return for contributions to student organizations.

Institutions need to assess their campus cultures to determine what is best for them. Questions to consider include:

- What type of support—student, institutional, and community—is available on your campus?
- What resources are available to you—money, vehicles, volunteers?
- Is the student body interested in this type of program?
- How do you determine your program's geographic boundaries?
- Does your institutional insurance policy cover such a program?
- How will you promote the program?

Two example programs

At Frostburg State University, student Dave Tiscione led such an effort working with the campus Alcohol Task Force. As a member of the student government association, he was able to leverage the support of the student body. After receiving support from the president and Executive Committee, he was able to move forward with his proposal.

In the first year, FSU's program was operated entirely by volunteers. Students visited local bars and walked through student neighborhoods to promote the program. There was a call center established in a vacant residence hall room used to coordinate pickups. Each van was operated by two staff members, one to drive and the other to coordinate stops and observe rider behavior. In the second year, the student government association

provided compensation to student groups that volunteered with the program.

FSU's program initially was established to provide students with safe rides home at the end of the night. Soon after implementation, the campus learned of other benefits of the program. The local law enforcement agency indicated that there was a decrease in nighttime vandalism. The local neighborhood group reported that nighttime noise also had decreased. And most important, students enjoyed and used the program. With an undergraduate population around 4,500 students, average use ranges between 100 and 150 students a night on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.

The Salisbury University student government association attended the Conference on Student Government Associations (COSGA) at Texas A&M in February 1993. In fall 1993, the association took the lead to establish a Saferide program based on the Texas A&M model, but on a much smaller scale. Students garnered support from the student body and student affairs administrators. The mission of the Salisbury program was "to support late-night safety by providing free, reliable transportation in the hope that tragedy will be averted for students and the surrounding community." Saferide addresses campus and community concerns such as drinking and driving, sexual assault, vandalism, and pedestrian safety.

Resources for starting your own program

Organizations such as BACCUS (www.bacchusgamma.org) provide information and tips on establishing programs. Saferide programs also network among institutions through organizations such as COSGA. We suggest that anyone inter-

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ested in starting a program visit another institution with a program in operation.

An Internet search of college Saferide programs quickly shows the popularity of these programs. In fact, these programs have grown in scope beyond college campuses. A similar program was

developed throughout the state of Wisconsin through which individuals can get a ride home from a tavern.

Information on this program can be found at www.thw.org/publicsaferide.shtml. As seen on the website www.saferidesunlimited.org, programs have evolved in the metropolitan areas of New Jersey, New York, and Florida. Similar programs have emerged at the high school

level to reduce drunk-driving risks in that population.

Dr. Jesse M. Ketterman, Jr., is the assistant vice president for student services and dean of students at Frostburg State University. Dr. Heather Holmes is the director for the Center for Student Achievement at Salisbury University. ●