

LIFE AFTER FUNDING: A STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL OF A PROGRAM TO PREVENT SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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Abstract. Problems associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs are among the most serious public health threats found on college and university campuses in the United States. The United States Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education program has supported a nationwide effort among colleges and universities to address these problems. A key issue facing programs to prevent substance abuse is their prospect for survival as grant funding ends. In this article, the survival of one college-based alcohol and other drug prevention program and its move toward institutionalization in an extremely challenging fiscal environment are examined. The strategies described by the authors may be helpful for directors of other programs facing similar challenges.

Key Words: alcohol, drugs, Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE), funding

Binge drinking, poor academic performance, and date rapes are all associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs (AODs) and are among the most serious public health threats found on college and university campuses in the United States.[1-3] To address this problem, the United States Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) sponsored a national competition from 1987 to 1994 for 2-year, grant-funded, university and college-based AOD prevention programs. Approximately 100 institutions were funded each year. Although FIPSE-funded prevention projects have varied in design and focus, a uniform goal of all the projects is the attainment of institutionalization, which involves funding the program or successful portions of the program with "hard money" by the grantee university or college after grant funding ends (personal communication, Ronald B. Bucknam, PhD, to Louise S. Stanger, October 5, 1995).

Although the ultimate goal of institutionalization is for the grantee to assume full fiscal responsibility for FIPSE-sponsored programs, the degree of success of the process is likely to depend on the institution. The level of institutionalization attained by many programs may depend on their responses to fiscal, political, and environmental conditions.

In this article, we briefly examine how the Student-to-Student (STS) program at San Diego State University has managed fiscal, political, and ideological pressures to achieve a measure of institutionalization. We describe the programmatic responses STS has made to particular environmental challenges and outline how these responses influenced the program's processes and prospects for survival.

Challenges to AOD Prevention Programs

The primary environmental threats to AOD prevention programs are current national trends of fiscal retrenchment and organizational restructuring in colleges and universities. The fiscal crisis in higher education in the United States is widespread: According to one report, more than 40% of all states cut appropriations to public universities in recent years.[4] Such fiscal retrenchment has had profound effects on the structure and programs of many universities and colleges; in some cases, universities have actually dismantled entire academic units and discontinued new programs.[5]

Closely related to the fiscal environment is competition for resources. In times of fiscal scarcity, competition among similar programs becomes a factor likely to influence institutionalization. In addition to fiscal resources, competition can occur for resources, such as staff and clientele. Limited resources and high competition are key factors influencing the ability of organizations to survive.[6]

Within the university setting, AOD prevention programs may find themselves competing with other new or small ancillary programs, such as those developed by student affairs offices, residence halls, or resource centers. Moreover, current literature on organizational restructuring in university settings suggests that programs that are not central to the institution's primary mission (ie, education) are especially vulnerable to fiscal retrenchment and restructuring.[7] College-based AOD prevention programs may also find themselves fiercely competing for resources at the local level (eg, for public or private prevention dollars) or at the regional or national level (eg, FIPSE dissemination grants, etc).

Institutionalization

Political and ideological factors may also play an important role in determining the likelihood and pace of institutionalization. Public support is a key issue for the long-term survival of human service programs of all kinds.[8] In the university environment, "public" support can be related to how successful programs are in managing AOD problems on campuses.

Public support may also be influenced by the types of interventions adopted by AOD prevention programs.[8] The congruence of a program's interventions with that of others in its environment may affect its prospects for institutional support.[9] There is some room for flexibility,[8] and the prevention approaches embraced by FIPSE-sponsored programs have been diverse. Werch et al[10] found that the majority of FIPSE-sponsored programs funded in 1987 did not necessarily identify a specific theoretical program philosophy and often varied in their activities.

Despite such environmental challenges, a substantial percentage of FIPSE's drug prevention programs report some level of institutionalization.[10] Dr Buckham, director emeritus of FIPSE's drug prevention programs, has reported that almost all programs attain some level of institutionalization and that a substantial number stay the same size or grow larger after the 2-year grant funding cycle ends. Moreover, institutionalization has sometimes occurred in the midst of severe fiscal problems. Specifically, San Diego State University's (SDSU) FIPSE-funded Student-to-Student (STS) AOD prevention program has maintained a degree of institutional support even during a period of drastic fiscal retrenchment at SDSU. Since STS's inception, SDSU has eliminated more than 550 part-time instructors and 600 courses because of

state-mandated budget reductions.[5] Because every FIPSE-funded AOD prevention program strives for institutional support, the STS case may be useful for programs in similar circumstances, especially programs in public universities that have experienced state budget cuts.

The Student-to-Student Program

STS was SDSU's first organized attempt to address AOD problems. The STS program has maintained a peer-education component, is active in campus AOD policy issues (focusing on environmental prevention), and works with other local colleges and universities to develop community-wide AOD prevention initiatives. In addition to its peer educators, STS has had access to a variety of professional volunteers who provided technical support. The program has also designed several campuswide health education campaigns.

As a new program, STS was particularly vulnerable to competition for dwindling resources among nonacademic programs at SDSU during this fiscal crisis. University programs with similar functions and service concerns, such as counseling and psychological and health services, competed with STS for university support. To respond to this crisis, STS took a broad approach to resource acquisition. Although SDSU cut funds for similar services on campus (eg, counseling and psychological services), STS managed to survive by relying on "in-kind" supports from SDSU -- physical space, student and faculty volunteers, and so forth --rather than funds. At the same time, STS aggressively sought funds from various external sources at the federal and local levels. The program also used professional volunteers to help develop fund-raising strategies.

STS simultaneously engaged in efforts that greatly increased the public and campuswide support of the program. Skillful use of the media, including a partnership with a local radio station that targets the 18-to 20-year-old audience and a local television station's "Smart Tips" show for college and high school youth, brought a wealth of positive attention to the STS program and put a positive frame on university-based efforts to address AOD problems.

The media attention, coupled with other activities, resulted in some 25 awards to the program and its volunteers: Saturn Company cited the program for teamwork, three student participants received the university president's Quest for the Best awards for service, the San Diego Business Journal cited the head of the program in its Women Who Mean Business competition. Such recognition was valuable currency in a university environment where awards are a familiar way of acknowledging excellence.

Support for STS in the local AOD prevention community was achieved by employing a variety of intervention strategies. The prevention field at the local level was largely influenced by an environmentally based public health perspective.[11-13] Despite the public health orientation among AOD prevention professionals in San Diego, many others working in AOD prevention (ie, social workers, AOD treatment staff, school counselors) held beliefs consistent with the dominant abstinence-based prevention ideology (ie, targeting problem or potential problem AOD users) based on the "medical" or "treatment" model.

A flexible approach to programming allowed STS to accommodate variations in orientations to AOD prevention found among local and national prevention professionals. For example, even

when STS moved to implement a community-wide public health approach, the program maintained its peer education component with a largely abstinence-based orientation. This accommodation was less a strategic decision than a consequence of the program's volunteer base and fiscal opportunities. It was critical, however, to public support within the university, where issues of underage access to alcohol required that programs promote abstinence even when they addressed broader concerns about the health implications of alcohol use.

Summary

STS is a classic example of a program that has managed to develop and survive in a competitive fiscal environment. The success of the STS program resulted, in part, from skilled use of in-kind resources from the home institution to secure external funding. The program was also able to frame the sensitive issue of AOD problems at SDSU through media coverage in such a way that both the program and the university benefited. The program's standing in the university community was greatly enhanced by its having won several awards. A flexible approach to programming and a willingness to accommodate multiple prevention strategies further helped the program secure public support in the AOD prevention communities at the local level.

STS continues to pursue creative strategies for achieving both fiscal integrity and ongoing campus and public support. A recently begun joint venture with a very stable, revenue-generating department at SDSU (athletics) is expected to insulate the program from internal competition and may eventually lead to increased funding. This and the other activities we have described may be useful strategies for programs attempting to achieve institutionalization in similar environments.

As we have noted, a substantial percentage of FIPSE-funded, 2-year prevention programs attain some level of institutional support at the end of the grant period. For instance, 94% (N = 297) of the 2-year FIPSE substance abuse prevention projects funded in 1987, 1988, and 1989 were still in operation in 1992. Of these, 67% maintained or increased their level of activity after funding ended (Bucknam letter).

Further research may illuminate the processes used by other programs to gain institutional support. In addition, future research might explore how institutionalization varies across different university types (ie, public v private). The results of the case described here suggest that several strategies may influence university support in institutions experiencing fiscal retrenchment. Systematic inquiry into how similar programs have fared in attaining ongoing institutional support may further refine such strategies.

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