Optimal Buzz and B'Low Optimal
Residential Life Office
Division of Student Affairs
Melissa Flowers, Assistant Director for Residential Education
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Assessment Summary

Description

The Optimal Buzz program, offered by Dr. Richard Reams in Counseling Services, encourages participants to make informed choices that result in healthy behavior. During the 45-minute presentation, students who currently drink alcohol (or who will drink in the future) are taught a strategy for alcohol consumption that provides pleasurable effects while keeping the risk of negative consequences very low because the drinker consumes alcohol in a strategic manner that targets a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of no more than .04-.06. This program is for all first-year students. The B'Low Optimal initiative is connected to the Optimal Buzz program. Students who are confronted by Residential Life Staff for potential violations of the alcohol policy may request the opportunity to blow into a breathalyzer. If the students blow below the Optimal Buzz level of .06 BAC, they will face no additional judicial consequences (i.e. no appearance at Student Conduct board, fines, or sanctions) and the incident will not be reported on the student’s conduct record. This program is meant to be a reward for students who are drinking responsibly.

Assessment Method

In February, all 509 first year students were invited to complete an online survey regarding their entire residential experience. This survey included one question about the B'Low Optimal program. 169 students responded to this question for a 33% response rate. At the end of the semester, first year students were also invited to complete an online survey which included questions about the Optimal Buzz and B'Low Optimal programs. 144 students completed this survey for a response rate of 28%.

Results

For the B'Low Optimal question on the residential survey, 67% of respondents were female and 33% were male. For the Optimal Buzz and B'Low Optimal survey, 69% of respondents were female and 31% of the respondents were male.

The Optimal Buzz and B'Low Optimal program learning outcome supported one of the CAS Development Outcomes (F7: Health and Wellness). These initiatives were offered in the hopes that students would engage in behaviors that reduce risk as a result of attending the Optimal Buzz program. Survey data indicates that this learning outcome was met with some success.

- The B'Low Optimal question included in the residential survey asked students to what extent introduction of the B'Low Optimal program impacted their level of alcohol consumption in the residence halls. Of the 169 students who responded to this question, 36.7% indicated that the program had no impact on their level of consumption, 26% indicated that it had a moderate impact on their level of consumption, 5% indicated that it heavily impacted their level of consumption, and 32% indicated that they do not drink.
- Of the 53 students who self-reported as being drinkers prior to attending the Optimal Buzz program, 53% experimented with the Optimal Buzz method after hearing the presentation, 30% did not experiment because they prefer to drink less than the Optimal Buzz amount, and 17% did not experiment because they prefer the effects of heavier drinking.
- Of the 34 students who self-reported as being non-drinkers prior to attending the Optimal Buzz program, 62% experimented with the Optimal Buzz method after hearing the presentation, 29% did not experiment because they prefer to drink less than the Optimal Buzz amount, and 9% did not experiment because they prefer the effects of heavier drinking. It is important to note that
responses to this question were markedly different for males vs. females with 80% of males and 55% indicating that they had experimented with Optimal Buzz after hearing the presentation, 10% of males and 36% of females did not experiment because they prefer to drink less than the Optimal Buzz amount, and 10% of males and 9% of females did not experiment because they prefer the effects of heavier drinking.

- When students were asked to describe the outcome of experimentation with Optimal Buzz (if they had tried it), of the 34 students who responded to this question, 68% indicated that they had positive results from the Optimal Buzz drinking method and used it multiple times, 18% enjoyed the method but only used it for certain nights, and 15% did not enjoy its effects (i.e. they didn’t feel drunk enough). Responses to this question include:
  - “The outcome was very positive! Optimal Buzz has been a helpful tool for me to safely enjoy alcohol.”
  - “The experience was great because I was still aware of my surroundings but was able to have fun at the same time. There was also no hangover the morning after.”
  - “I feel like the B-Low optimal buzz program is very smart because it shows that the school truly does promote safe drinking rather than the unrealistic approach of ‘don’t drink at all’.”
  - “I think the Optimal Buzz strategy is nice for certain nights out, but I do not follow it every weekend.”
  - “It’s a good strategy for some nights, but other nights I honestly want to drink more.”
  - “With the Optimal Buzz strategy, I really just used it when I was drinking without going to a party or going out. The experience was normal, I would say. It was just drinking in moderation, in order to have a glass of something without trying to get drunk.”
  - “It was a little boring staying at the optimal buzz. I was not buzzed.”
  - “I find it nearly impossible to not go over the optimal buzz.”

**Discussion**

Survey results indicate that the Optimal Buzz and B’Low Optimal initiatives have effectively lowered the level of alcohol consumption for certain students. The programs seem to have a larger impact (measured by percentages of experimentation with the Optimal Buzz method) on students who did not drink prior to coming to Trinity. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the Optimal Buzz program is influential and beneficial.

These initiatives are relatively inexpensive – the only money spent was for two breathalyzers for the B’Low Optimal readings. These cost approximately $200 each. Additional resources include staff time to present the Optimal Buzz program (two 45-minute presentations) and time to train the Residential Life Student staff on how to implement the B’Low Optimal program and utilize the breathalyzers (two 30-minute presentations). Though the student staff regularly respond to situations including alcohol, it is important to note that incidents during which students ask to use the breathalyzers typically take longer as they need to be calibrated for twenty minutes in between readings. This adds an additional twenty minutes to an hour for each incident. That being said, the programs have had positive impacts on first year students, and it is the recommendation of the Residential Life Office that these initiatives be continued. Furthermore, the B’Low Optimal initiative should expanded to the sophomore area. In order to do so, the only modification to the program will be to purchase additional breathalyzers and to train additional student staff members.