

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow.

The Truth about Underage Drinking and Drunk Driving

A packed high school auditorium can be hard to please. At best, there is an air of polite indifference to the presentation du jour, but at worst, it can get ugly. From my observations and experience, the impersonal nature and lack of accountability found in such assemblies does an injustice to what may actually be a valuable presentation. As I am part of the "angry mob," I know firsthand how critical students can be and how easy it is to lean over and make a cheap joke about the value of the assembly. To be honest, though, the demonstration of proper hand washing technique by our vice principal during the Swine Flu "epidemic" was a little ridiculous. The real problems arise, however, when significant and vital programs like alcohol and drunk driving prevention are sentenced to death before even given a chance. Student bodies tend to be dismissive and insensitive in an assembly environment regardless of how many "A" students and kind people walk the halls on a daily basis. Worthwhile programs like alcohol prevention deserve a stage where they are not predisposed to a negative reaction before the presentation even begins. For this reason, the school-based alcohol prevention program I am responsible for will be engaging, informative, enjoyable, but most importantly, intimate.

Every minute of the school day is scheduled and regulated by the state. Although alcohol and drunk driving prevention is vitally important, the only plausible way to initiate an effective program would be to merge with the state mandated health classes. Students are required to take health education courses in their Freshman and Junior years. "Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." would work closely with the state and health

educators to develop an effective program to teach inside the classroom. This would satisfy the 'intimate' goal of my program. As opposed to an auditorium, the classroom environment is more personal and it encourages students to pay attention. A speaker is much harder to ignore five feet away than at fifty. This strategy stresses quality over quantity. Fewer students may hear the message, but the chance of making a lasting impression is much higher in my opinion. In addition to the classroom presentation and instruction, there will be several supplementary events and field trips that take the students outside the classroom to make the program more exciting and real. There is a program called Alcohol Edu at Pine-Richland High School that I was required to take as a Freshman through health class. The program is online and it consists of listening to short informative videos and then taking subsequent quizzes on the material. The format is stressful and is comparable to the typical quizzes and tests students take on a day to day basis. If students affiliate an alcohol prevention program to studying and homework, an undesirable high school activity to say the least, then students will again be predisposed to trivialize and dismiss what they are learning. For this reason my program will contain little to no testing.

But who is going to teach this program? From my personal observations, students relate more to younger speakers and have a greater respect for them as a whole. "Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." will work closely with local colleges and universities that will provide instructors for our program. College students are a perfect fit for the lively, engaging leaders we want to teach alcohol and drunk driving prevention. They know the pressures of drinking firsthand, and their credibility is almost unquestionable as they experience these pressures at college constantly. High school students look up to college students in many ways and will respond positively to their input. The program will consist of information and statistics, which are valuable to a point, but "Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." will stand out with the help of our college "leaders," as we like to call them. In addition to the information, college students will share personal stories of their own interactions with alcohol. These stories can vary from funny stories of college students embarrassing themselves terribly due to imbibing in alcohol to sobering

stories, no pun intended, of the more tragic and true stories surrounding alcohol and drunk driving. Furthermore, we will look at how alcohol is portrayed in movies and on television and contrast it with reality. We can look at movies like "Beerfest" and "Van Wilder" and how they portray parties and alcohol. The college students can then act out how certain scenes would happen in real life. The goal of our program is to make "Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." come back to their school. Although the program will be fun, it is of the utmost importance that the seriousness of the topic will not be forgotten, hence the title of my program.

The supplementary events and field trips will be an integral part of "Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." We will bring in the Mock Accident program before major dances to discourage drinking and driving. Dances tend to be a popular time for students to experiment with alcohol so the Mock Accident would be most effective at this time. If a picture's worth a thousand words, then the unsettling images of a Mock Accident are worth millions. The fake violent crash will be set up in the middle of the school's parking lot for all students to see on their way in and out of school. Additionally, we will invite guest speakers from Mothers Against Drunk Driving to come in and share their stories with the health classes. The heart-breaking stories these women will have will demonstrate the severe consequences of drinking and driving. Lastly, we will invite doctors to come in and explain the medical effects of drinking on the human body and emergency room stories of drunk driving accident victims.

"Alert Today. Alive Tomorrow." will be engaging, informative, enjoyable, but most important, intimate. Our goal is to tell the truth about alcohol and reach out to students on a close, personal level.

The student included a poster and presentation to go along with his essay.