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TWIN CITIES

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AN EVALUATION REPORT ON MINNESOTA'S DRUG EDUCATION
PROGRAM FOR MINIMAL-POSSESSION MARIJUANA VIOLATORS

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I. Background

In April of 1976, the State of Minnesota enacted legislation which established a mandatory two session course on drug abuse for those Minnesotans found in possession of a "small amount" (less than 1-1/2 ounces) of marijuana. The purpose of the program is not to provide inter-personal drug counseling but, rather, to present information in an honest, persuasive manner that will encourage participants to adopt more socially responsible behaviors that are compatible with lawful conduct and good health practices. The program serves as an educational alternative to more punitive dispositions involving criminal records, incarceration, and/or large fines. Beyond diversion, the singular objective of the program is to persuade participants not to misuse marijuana, alcohol or other drugs.

In 1978 the Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Programming of the University of Minnesota conducted a review of anonymous questionnaires completed by program participants designed to assess the program's effects on them and their impression or opinion of the program. This report concluded that the Drug Education Program was meeting its singular objective. Two-thirds of the participants indicated that in the future they would make positive changes relative to their use of alcohol and drugs.

The report included two observations:

1. A substantial number of participants were critical of the movies which were part of the program at that time;
2. Respondents desired written information they could take home from the program; a number of them suggested informational booklets.

The 1978 report suggested that these participant reactions be considered in terms of possible program revisions.

II. Study Procedure

The material for this report is based on the questionnaire responses of the last 3255 persons who were program participants. For purposes of data analysis, these participants were divided into two separate groups or cohorts. The division was based on recent changes introduced into the course. The responses of the 2767 participants who attended before these changes took place represent one group of analysis referred to as cohort 1 and those 488 participants who attended subsequent to course changes make up the second group of analysis which is referred to as cohort 2.

The cohorts included in this report completed the same anonymous questionnaire at the conclusion of the class as that completed by earlier course participants. The five item questionnaire was designed to assess participants impressions of the course, attitude change, and self-reported predictions of future behavior change.

III. Descriptive Characteristics of the Class and Class Participants

All classes were conducted by similarly trained instructors who were initially selected for communication skills and knowledge of alcohol and drug issues.

There were few changes in terms of delivery style across the individual class presentations and cohort groups. The average number of participants per class was 12.5 which is the same average presented in the 1978 report. The size of classes ranged from one to 37 with over two-thirds of the classes having between six and 18 participants.

The average age of the participants differed slightly between cohort 1 and cohort 2. The mean age was 19.9 for the first cohort and 20.7 for the second. This shift is largely accounted for by several older participants in the second cohort.

Basically, the characteristics of the class participants have remained uniform over time.

IV. Questionnaire Results

The first item on the questionnaire asked:

What during the four hour class was most interesting to you?

Ninety-five percent of cohort 1 provided an appropriate response to this question. Approximately one fifth (20%) of the participants reported that the topic of "psychotropic effects of drugs" was most interesting. "Discussion in general" (14%) and "movies" (13%) were designated as the most interesting category by the second and third largest groups of participants respectively.

Ninety-three percent of cohort 2 provided an appropriate response to this question. Cohort 2 differed from cohort 1 by having fewer participants mention "movies" (1% vs. 13%) and more mention "marijuana information" (13% vs. 2%) as most interesting. This is consistent with programmatic decisions prior to the cohort 2 classes to focus on health information relating to marijuana and elimination of movies as a standard component for the course (films were used on several occasions for cohort 2 groups by one class instructor on an experimental basis).

All responses to this question are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant responses to the question: "What during this four hour class, was most interesting to you?"

	Cohort 1 (N=2767)	Cohort 2 (N=488)
Psychotropic effects of drugs	20.3%	20.7%
Discussion in general	14.2%	12.7%
Movies	13.2%	.8%
Instructor's presentation style	10.4%	8.4%
Attitudes about intoxication	10.1%	9.6%
"War stories"	8.2%	6.4%
Everything	4.8%	6.4%
No response or answer not pertinent	4.5%	7.0%
Legal aspects	4.4%	6.8%
Marijuana information specifically	3.9%	12.9%
Nothing	3.1%	4.1%
Self-reflection (personal awareness or understanding)	2.3%	1.8%
Evaluations, tests, questionnaires	.4%	.4%
Workbook	0.0%	2.0%

"War stories" were categorized as varied discussion about procurement of street drugs, tales of getting arrested, bad trips, manufacture, buying or selling of drugs, etc.; anything not directly pertinent to the other categories. The "discussion in general" was used for responses that stated group discussion without specifying what the discussion was about. The other categories may include discussion relative to that subject. The category "nothing" was used for responses that specifically said "nothing" or "none". "No response" is meant to indicate that the question was left blank or the response was not pertinent to the question.

The second question asked: What new information did you get out of this class?

Ninety three percent of cohort 1 and 94% of cohort 2 participants provided an appropriate response to this question. Approximately one fifth (19%) of cohort 1 and one fourth (23%) of cohort 2 participants reported that the topic of "street drug analysis" provided them with new information. "Nothing" and "relationship of attitudes and behavior to drug use" were listed with the next highest frequencies by both cohort 1 (15% and 15%) and cohort 2 (13% and 12%, respectively).

Cohort 2 had a higher percentage than cohort 1 stating "street drug analysis" as representing new information (23% vs 19%, respectively). A change indicated by these figures is consistent with observations that there has been an increasing interest among course participants in the contents of drugs sold on the street and being able to know if, or how badly, they are adulterated.

Cohort 2 also had a higher percentage than cohort 1 stating "marijuana facts" as new information (9% vs 5%, respectively). Again, this is consistent with a programmatic decision prior to the cohort 2 classes to focus on health information relating to marijuana.

Approximately four out of five participants for both cohort 1 (78%) and cohort 2 (81%) listed some area of new information obtained from the class. These figures are closely consistent with those from classes in prior years.

All responses to this question are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant responses to the question: "What new information did you get out of this class?"

	Cohort 1 (N=2767)	Cohort 2 (N=488)
Street drug analysis	18.7%	23.2%
Nothing	14.9%	13.3%
Relation of attitudes and behavior to drug use	14.7%	11.9%
Psychotropic effects of drugs	11.9%	8.8%
Overdose treatment information	10.1%	2.9%
Legal aspects	8.8%	10.9%
No response or answer not pertinent	6.8%	6.1%
Marijuana facts	4.8%	8.5%
Self-reflection	4.7%	2.0%
Polydrug effects	4.4%	7.4%
Everything	-	5.3%
Workbook	-	.2%

The category "street drug analysis" is meant to indicate new knowledge; using drug analysis services; or new knowledge of street drugs, impurities, etc. When poly drug effects were mentioned specifically, the responses were totaled separately from the category "psychotropic effects."

The third question asked: What, for you, was a waste of time?

Eighty six percent of cohort 1 and 84% of cohort 2 participants provided an appropriate response to this question. Twenty nine percent of cohort 1 and 34% of cohort 2 reported that "nothing" was a waste while 11% and 14%, respectively, of cohorts 1 and 2 reported that everything was a waste of time.

The only notable differences between responses of cohort 1 and 2 are in regard to those areas where programmatic decisions eliminated or introduced categories of response. Between the time of class offerings for cohorts 1 and 2, movies were discontinued and a workbook provided. A very small percentage of cohort 2 respondents (3%) reported the workbook as representing a waste of time. It appears that the 17% figure from cohort 1 indicating that movies were a waste of time became equally distributed across the other remaining categories for cohort 2.

All responses to this question are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant responses to the question: "What, for you, was a waste of time?"

	Cohort 1 (N=2767)	Cohort 2 (N=488)
Nothing (no waste of time)	29.3%	34.2%
Movies	16.8%	-
No response	13.9%	16.4%
Everything (this class)	10.8%	13.9%
Discussion in general	7.8%	8.8%
Cost of class	7.5%	11.7%
Legal involvement	6.9%	6.6%
Discussion about marijuana	2.1%	1.6%
Discussion about alcohol	1.7%	2.3%
Unrealistic comments	1.4%	1.6%
Workbook	-	2.9%

In this case, "legal involvement" refers to the court or police encounter and could be considered a non-pertinent response in terms of the class. Likewise, the cost of attending is not specifically related to the program elements.

It has been of particular importance to attempt to assess if attending this class would influence the subsequent behavior of the participants, since this was the main expressed objective of the program. The fourth question asked: "In what way do you feel your day to day behavior may change as a result of this class?" Ninety three percent of cohort 1 and 89% of cohort 2 provided a response to this question. It should be noted that the responses to this question reflect the participants' own perceptions concerning future behavioral changes subsequent to participation in the program.

Nearly two-thirds of both cohort 1 (64%) and cohort 2 (62%) indicated potential positive behavioral change as a direct result of having attended the program. There were no respondents who reported that their behavior might change negatively relative to misusing intoxicants.

The percentage of participants from cohorts 1 and 2 responding to each category are essentially the same. All responses to this question are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Participant responses to the question: "In what way do you feel your day-to-day behavior may change as a result of this class?"

	Cohort 1 (N=2767)	Cohort 2 (N=488)
No change	28.8%	26.4%
Think about appropriateness of use	22.7%	19.9%
More cautious about use pattern	21.2%	23.0%
Reduce use or otherwise change use	13.8%	14.5%
No response	7.4%	11.1%
Assume responsibilities	4.3%	2.7%
Seek more information	1.6%	2.5%

The category of "more cautious use" generally reflected concern about legal involvement rather than any other negative consequences. Those responses which indicated an awareness of the need for responsible use were put in the "think about appropriateness of use" category. The responses that indicated an overall reduction in use, abstention, change in drugs, or elimination of polydrug use were categorized as "reduce/change use".

The participants were asked to comment on the programmatic content and procedure of the class. The fifth question asked: "What changes would you suggest to make this class more interesting/informative?"

Approximately half of cohort 1 (55%) and cohort 2 (50%) made a response to this question. As in past years' evaluations, around 17% of participants made some kind of comment referring to movies. Seventeen percent of cohort 1 made comments suggesting the elimination, change or addition of movies. Seventeen per cent of cohort 2 stated an interest in having movies as part of the course. Twelve percent of cohort 1 and 13% of cohort 2 suggested having written handouts for the course.

Nine percent of cohort 1 and 7% of cohort 2 suggested creating better course discussion.

All responses to this question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Participant responses to the question: "What changes would you suggest to make this class more interesting/informative?"

	Cohort 1 (N=2767)	Cohort 2 (N=488)
No response or answer, not responsive	44.9%	49.6%
Provide written handouts	12.4%	13.1%
Other	9.1%	7.6%
Better movies	10.7%	-
Facilitate better discussion	8.6%	6.8%
More movies	5.2%	17.2%
Better lectures	4.8%	3.7%
Alternative format	2.0%	1.2%
Different setting	1.3%	.8%
No movies	1.0%	-

The response categories for question 5 are largely self explanatory.

V. Discussion

The participant responses to the questionnaire lend support to a conclusion that the Drug Education Program continues to meet its singular objective. As in the 1978 evaluation review of the program, two thirds of both cohort 1 and 2 respondents indicated that in the future they would make positive changes relative to their use of alcohol and drugs.

It should be noted that the data comes from self-reports and additionally is based on future intent. We do not know what relationship there will be between self-reported intent and future behavior. It is our opinion, however, that reasonable confidence can be placed in the veracity of the self-report, even if projected future behavior must be considered speculative. Persons completing questionnaires for evaluators are subject to what has been termed a demand characteristic. That is, the respondent, knowingly or unknowingly, wishes to please the evaluators by telling them what they wish to hear. Because a substantial number of the participants felt free to criticize some aspect of the program, and fully one-third of the respondents indicated no anticipated behavioral changes, it seems reasonable to assume that any operating demand characteristic did not overwhelm the general results.

Nor does it appear likely that hostility toward the criminal justice structure and the mandatory attendance requirement of the program caused an overly critical reaction to the questionnaire items. The responses of the participants were generally favorable toward the program.

Based on participant responses, the review recommended course changes in regard to the movie format and suggested the use of written informational materials. These recommendations were acted on by elimination of movies altogether for the cohort 2 classes (except for a few instances of experimental use) and introduction of an informational booklet.

Seventeen percent of cohort 2 indicated that use of movies would make the class more interesting/informative. The relatively small magnitude of this proportion and the extensive expense and difficulties of showing films lend support to the programmatic decision to use an alternative approach to showing movies.

Thirteen percent of cohort 2 indicated that the class could be made more interesting/informative by providing written handouts. It was intended that the informational workbook would address this need of the participants. The observations of the class instructors were that participants found the workbooks interesting and informative and desired additional written information.

The increasingly positive participant responses over time to the program noted in the 1978 report appear to have reached a plateau. This is not surprising in light of the high absolute level of satisfaction in and effectiveness of the course indicated by the questionnaire results. These results, although representing a single vantage point on the program, support an assessment that the Marijuana Education Program is now a mature effort that is operating at an effective level.