



## Case Study

### **Morrisville State College uses MyStudentBody program to harness "teachable moments" for prevention**

Comprehensive, evidence-based student health program helps administrators reach students and parents, 24/7

#### **About Morrisville State College**

Morrisville State College (MSC) is a small public undergraduate institution with a strong reputation for innovation and ingenuity. The college's mission is to provide "a high quality educational experience for students leading to associate and baccalaureate degrees by utilizing cutting-edge technology, innovative methods of instruction, and an entrepreneurial focus."

A member of the State Colleges of New York (SUNY) system, MCS currently serves a student body of approximately 3,269 students at two campuses in central New York: one in Morrisville and another in Norwich. Despite its small size, the college offers more than 70 specialized associate and bachelor degree programs, including a new program that enables students to earn a bachelor's degree in renewable energy technology.

#### **Challenge**

One of the biggest challenges that Morrisville State College faces in promoting healthy behavior is finding creative ways to reach students regardless of time or budget constraints.

"We are a small college with a lean staffing model. We have very dedicated, hard-working employees, who must accomplish a lot in a limited time," explains Geoffrey Isabelle, Dean of Students at MSC. "As a result, we strive to use our resources wisely. That includes leveraging 'teachable moments' to communicate with students about important issues."

As part of this effort, college administrators take advantage of freshmen orientation to talk to students and their families about alcohol and other drugs. "Starting college is a unique time in a student's life, and a critical opportunity to address the health challenges of college life," says Isabelle. "We work to reach parents as well as students, so we can deepen our impact."

Administrators also work to gather information that can be used to create targeted prevention initiatives. "We review the statistics from alcohol and drug violations, to find ways to reach students who may be vulnerable to health risks," explains Isabelle.

Another challenge the college faces is providing plenty of alternatives to leaving campus for social activities that involve drinking. "We have a relatively remote location, so we offer a great deal of student programming on campus," says Isabelle. "We're always looking for new ways to entice students to alcohol-free events and encourage healthy behavior choices."

#### **Solution**

In 2007, MSC administrators began searching for an online prevention program that would provide the most value for students and staff. After evaluating several programs, they selected MyStudentBody, and began using it in the 2008-2009 school year.

"Of all the programs we looked at, our counseling staff, the 'chief investigators' in the selection process, were most impressed with MyStudentBody," explains Isabelle.

Developed with \$6 million in grant support from the National Institutes of Health, MyStudentBody is a comprehensive student health and wellness program. It offers student courses on Alcohol and Drugs, and gives students 24/7 access to learning modules on Alcohol, Drugs, Stress, Tobacco, Nutrition, and Sexual Health.



Each topic area integrates "Rate Myself" questionnaires, brief self-assessments that are based on the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention of College Students (BASICS) model. These assessments give students personalized normative feedback on their health-related behaviors, an approach that has been shown to impact behavior.

"Ultimately, we chose MyStudentBody because of its research-based presentation and educational methodology, and because we value the 24/7 access, ease of use, overall format, and test-retest assessment capability," says Isabelle. "Personally, I like that students are able to 'free roam' the suite any time, and get valuable information about their behavior choices."

To increase the impact of the program, MSC mandates completion of the Alcohol and Drugs courses, as well as review of the Tobacco module, for first-time violations of the applicable substance-abuse policies. The college has also integrated MyStudentBody in orientation sessions with new students and their families.

"We feel that MyStudentBody helps us address important health challenges as a part of a comprehensive education, prevention, and intervention program," reports Isabelle. "And when I've talked about the educational approach and personalized feedback that students get from the program, I've seen parents nodding approvingly."

MSC will soon begin to offer MyStudentBody-Parent, a new learning module that has been integrated in the program, to families as a resource of practical strategies for keeping students safe, healthy, and happy.

Administrators also plan to increase their use of MyStudentBody-Admin, a module that offers extensive resources and tools to support college health administrators. These include a continually updated library of articles on prevention strategies such as offering alcohol-free student programming, and robust data reporting tools, which enable administrators to identify the specific health trends and challenges on their campus.

Using these data reporting tools, administrators can get up-to-date information about students' self-reported knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to alcohol and other drugs, which they can use to develop targeted interventions for specific student groups.

According to Isabelle, both students and staff have responded enthusiastically to the program.

"Given our staffing and time constraints, we have to implement what does the greatest good for the greatest number of students," says Isabelle. "MyStudentBody helps our students learn about important issues. They like the user-friendly presentation of statistics and facts in the module, before they take the quiz. It's more engaging for students when information is broken down into smaller chunks, rather than presented in a lengthy article.

"On the administrative side, we feel that the program has so much to offer that we haven't had the time yet to explore all of our options. In the future, we hope to be able to dedicate more time to analyzing and using the information the program is generating."