

SHEDDING LIGHT ON ALCOHOL AWARENESS

East considers adopting online alcohol prevention program AlcoholEdu



Written by Evan Nichols | illustration by Toni Aguiar

With the number of in-season violations of the drug and alcohol contract by East athletes approaching 40, principal Karl Krawitz has realized that the current methods of prevention have lost their effect. Although East has tried multiple approaches — the alcohol presentation on Meet the Coaches night, the quadriplegic students who gave a presentation in the auditorium earlier this year — Dr. Krawitz still thinks the administration has done only an “average job of putting the message out.”

“What we’ve currently been doing [to prevent underage drinking] hasn’t worked,” Dr. Krawitz said.

But a relatively new program may be coming to Shawnee Mission East next year — a program that has already seen success in reducing underage drinking and increasing alcohol-related knowledge among high school students across the country. Dr. Krawitz is considering implementing AlcoholEdu, an alcohol prevention program used by hundreds of high schools across the country, for next year’s incoming freshman class. Shawnee Mission South has announced they will be using the AlcoholEdu for their incoming freshman class — South received a grant for the program from the Johnson County Regional Prevention Center (RCP) earlier this year to fund the program.

AlcoholEdu is on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, meaning the program is based on research studies that support its methods. Dr. Krawitz hopes the program would help cut back on what he considers a “gross violation” of the school’s drug and alcohol

contract.

The 120-minute online class relies on an interactive, multimedia format that both educates students and encourages them to make safe decisions when it comes to alcohol. The course begins with an anonymous survey that polls students’ previous experiences and mindset concerning alcohol. Using the student’s responses, the course is tailored to meet each individual user’s needs. According to John Boynton, National Director of EverFi, Inc. (the company that runs AlcoholEdu), this aspect of the course helps it to be more receptive to users.

“We want to be relevant,” Boynton said. “If you say you’re a non-drinker, and I say, ‘well a good way to cut down on your drinking is X,’

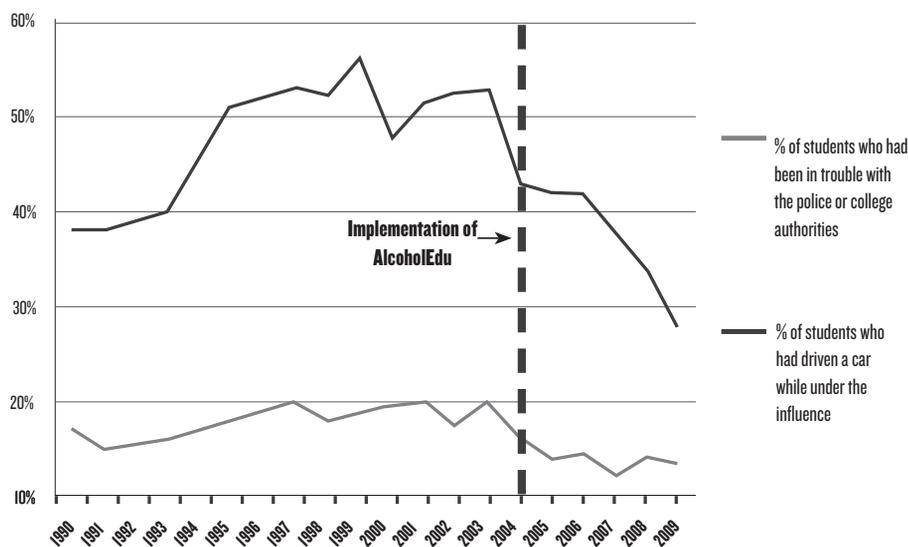
[you’re going to say] ‘What the heck, I just told you that I was a non-drinker, you assume that I drink?’ And vice versa.”

The program’s effectiveness is limited by students’ honesty while filling out the survey — “If students lie, they lie,” Boynton says — but the confidentiality of the program encourages honesty.

The college version of the program, introduced in 1999, has been adopted by over 500 college campuses and universities, including KU, KSU and Emporia State — these schools require their incoming freshman to complete the program on their own time before starting classes. Bill Arck, director of KSU’s Alcohol and Other Drug Education Service (AODES) said the pro-

gram has provided “significant changes in knowledge level, perception of drinking and drinking intentions and behavior” among students.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ALCOHOLEDU*



*Based off study of the College of Charleston by Outside the Classroom in 2010

“I think [AlcoholEdu] is the best prevention effort I have been a part of during the 26 years I have been the director of AODES,” said Arck. “There is no proven ‘silver bullet,’ but AlcoholEdu seems to be the very best available today.”

According to Boynton, 35 percent of all incoming college freshman in the country (approximately 600,000 students) took AlcoholEdu last year. Although the statistics support the program’s success, former East student and current KSU freshman Andrea Donahue* completed the course last summer and felt it had little impact on her drinking habits and perception of alcohol. Donahue still drinks 3 days a week.

“AlcoholEdu made me think that all college students who do consume alcohol are out of control with their drinking habits,” Donahue said.

Another former East student Bill Thompson* took the class before starting classes at KU last summer with similar experiences to Donahue. The class, although a “solid resource” of information about alcohol, did not change his perception of alcohol or his drinking habits.

“It did not change [my views] at all,” Thompson said. “Honestly, I feel that ex-

perimenting with drinking in high school has its benefits. If I had gone into college without ever having a sip of alcohol before it would have been a disaster. I’m not saying I promote underage drinking, I just feel that experiencing it beforehand has its values.”

AlcoholEdu also uses what it calls “Population Level Prevention,” that is, focusing on the community as a whole rather than only students who have gotten in trouble because of alcohol. The program strives to make a change within the entire community by offering the program to drinkers and non-drinkers alike.

SAMHSA’s 2008 study of the high school AlcoholEdu program found that it decreased the acceptance of underage drinking — the percentage of students reporting that drinking underage is never acceptable increased from the baseline 37.8 percent to 47.5 percent after course completion. It also reduced the number of students who said they had ridden with a drunk driver from 27.1 percent to 23.5 percent. **CONTINUED ON P. 8**

*names changed to protect identity

COURSE BREAKDOWN
a look at the different components of the program

PART 1 (90 MINS.)	Survey + Pre-Test
PART 2 (15 MINS.)	Course Lessons
PART 2 (15 MINS.)	2nd Survey + Final Exam
PART 2 (15 MINS.)	Intersession (30+ days)
PART 2 (15 MINS.)	Survey 3 + Follow-up Lesson