Overview and Purpose

Literature suggests that the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) program is an effective intervention for addressing high-risk alcohol use among college students. The research has shown that using the BASICS model for face-to-face interventions for high-risk drinkers may have both long- and short-term student outcomes for drinking-related behaviors. Effects are generally most pronounced for alcohol-related negative consequences, which researchers have attributed to the nature of the intervention; BASICS takes a harm-reduction approach by targeting individual choices and risk-reduction. Effects have been found to persist for months or even years (Baer et al., 2001).

The BASICS program (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) is designed to move a student in the direction of reducing risky behaviors and harmful effects from drinking, as opposed to focusing explicitly on a specific drinking goal such as abstinence or reductions in drinking. At Boston College, BASICS is conducted over the course of three 1-hour interview sessions. In the first interview, the facilitator assesses the student's consumption pattern. During the second interview, the facilitator provides personalized feedback based on the assessment, including specific suggestions about ways to reduce future health risks associated with alcohol use. The third and final interview is a follow-up conversation about progress made towards the student's goals.

The purpose of this assessment was to measure the impact of the BASICS program on students mandated to participate through the Boston College conduct system. Research questions included:

- Is there a decrease in risky drinking behavior after participation in the program?
- Is there a decrease in behaviors associated with a high-risk drinking style (e.g., taking shots, not counting drinks) after the program?
- How do perceptions around drinking norms change over the course of the program?
- Is there a decrease in the negative consequences of drinking (e.g., blacking out, vomiting) after the program?
- After the program, is there a decrease in the frequency with which students binge drink (4 or more drinks a day for females, 5 or more drinks for males)?

Process and Methods

Students who participated in the BASICS program during the 2011-2012 academic year were asked to complete an on-line survey prior to participation in the program and again two months after completion of the program. The sample consisted of all students who completed
the BASICS program during the 2011-2012 academic year and filled out both the pre and post surveys (n=97). Data from each participant was matched and analyzed by Todd Reeves—a graduate student consultant for the Vice President of Student Affairs office.

Participants

During the 2011-2012 academic year, 341 students participated in the BASICS program. Of the 286 students who were invited to participate in the pre-intervention survey, 258 individuals responded; and of the 244 students who were invited to complete the post-intervention survey, 134 individuals responded. After matching participant data, 97 individuals completed both the pre- and post-evaluation surveys.

Fifty-three percent of participants were female and 10 percent of participants were of legal drinking age (i.e., 21 or older). With respect to race/ethnicity, 7 percent reported being Asian/Pacific Islander, 4 percent reported being Hispanic/Latino, 77 percent reported being White/Caucasian, 4 percent reported being multiracial and 7 percent chose not to respond. While 81 percent of participants reported being a “non-athlete,” 7 percent reported being a varsity athlete and 11 percent reported being a club sport athlete. Only 9 and 5 percent of participants reported that a member of their immediate family has been an alcoholic/problem drinker, or abused drugs besides alcohol, respectively. In terms of drinking behavior before the intervention, the mean weekend blood alcohol content (BAC) was .09 (with a minimum of .00 and a maximum of .19) and the mean peak BAC was .22 (with a minimum of .05 and a maximum of .51).

Summary of Findings

Is there a decrease in risky drinking behavior after participation in the BASICS program?

- Frequency of drinking did not change significantly from pre to post.
- Typical number of drinks (quantity) decreased significantly from pre to post.
- Weekend BAC decreased significantly from pre to post (.09 to .07).
- Peak BAC decreased significantly from pre to post (.22 - .13).

Is there a decrease in behaviors associated with a high-risk drinking style (e.g., taking shots, not counting drinks) after the program?

- Behaviors associated with a high-risk drinking style decreased significantly from pre to post.
- The greatest changes from pre-to post included:
  - Before participating in the BASICS program, 67% of students did not set a drinking limit near a BAC of .06, as compared to only 20% of students after participating in the BASICS program.
  - Before BASICS, 76% of students engaged in pre-gaming (consuming alcohol in a short time prior to going out), as compared to only 20% after BASICS.
  - 80% of students consumed shots before participating in BASICS, as compared to 38% of students after BASICS.
  - Before BASICS, 73% of students played drinking games and after BASICS, 15% of students played games.
How do perceptions around drinking norms change over the course of the program?

- Perceptions around the frequency with which an average university student drinks did not change significantly from pre to post.
- Perceptions around the amount that an average university student drinks on a typical weekend evening decreased significantly from pre to post (participants perceived the amount to be less at post).

Is there a decrease in the negative consequences of drinking (e.g., blacking out, vomiting) after the program?

- Negative consequences decreased significantly from pre to post.
- The greatest changes from pre to post included:
  - Getting physically sick (felt nauseated or vomited) due to drinking
  - Having a bad time
  - Noticing a change in your personality due to drinking
  - Suddenly finding oneself in a place they could not remember getting to
  - Causing shame or embarrassment to someone
- Negative consequences decreased significantly from pre to post.
- The greatest changes from pre to post included:
  - Having a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking
  - Being unable to remember the night before due to drinking

After the program, is there a decrease in the frequency with which students binge drink (4 or more drinks a day for females, 5 or more drinks for males)?

- Frequency of male binge drinking (more than 5 drinks) decreased significantly from pre to post.
- Frequency of female binge drinking (more than 4 drinks) did not change significantly from pre to post.

Limitations

- Not all students who participated in the BASICS program received the pre and post surveys
- Small sample size - not all students who completed the pre survey also completed the post survey – there may be some bias in which students chose to responded to both surveys (may not be representative)
- Readiness to change scale may not be appropriate for post intervention due to the fact that if changes were made between pre and post survey, we would expect the readiness to change score to decrease

Discussion and Implications

Nationally, the BASICS program is used on many campuses and is heavily supported by the research literature. This study supports the efficacy of the BASIC program with Boston College students who are mandated to participate through the conduct system. Students who participated in the BASICS program and completed the pre-post surveys demonstrated positive changes such as fewer drinks per occasion, lower blood alcohol concentrations, less risky drinking behaviors and fewer experiences of alcohol-related negative consequences.
The staff resources necessary to implement the BASICS program makes it challenging to bring this program to scale. Last year, through referrals from the conduct system, 341 students were sanctioned to participate in the BASICS program. For each student who participates in the BASICS program, an Alcohol and Drug Education (ADE) program staff member spends approximately 4-5 hours (between one-on-one appointments and administrative work). In fact, each year, the ADE program trains and supervises 4-6 graduate students (interns and assistants) to meet the demand of referrals to the BASICS program. While it may be deemed ideal to offer BASICS to all BC students who meet the criteria for high-risk drinking, this is likely infeasible with current staff resources.

### Recommendations and Action Items

Given the demonstrated efficacy of the BASICS program, nationally and at Boston College, the Alcohol and Drug Education Program will continue to offer BASICS as part of the intervention program for alcohol-policy violators. Given positive behavioral outcomes for students who participate in BASICS, it would be ideal for more students to have the opportunity to participate in the program. It is critical to consider training additional staff members to implement the BASICS program and to find ways of encouraging more students to participate (not just through the conduct system). It may be helpful to re-assess the BASICS program in a few years.

### Appendices

The pre-intervention and post-intervention survey instruments are available upon request.