Virginia College Alcohol Abuse
Prevention Standards

Background
Professionals from throughout the state gathered in 2001 to identify what can be done statewide to help maintain, and ideally increase, the attention given to alcohol abuse prevention on campuses and in their surrounding communities. Emerging from this group of approximately 25 professionals was the belief that a “set of standards” or guidelines for all institutions of higher learning in Virginia would be very helpful. The rationale was that if clear standards and criteria for implementing sound, thoughtful approaches could be generated, individual college campuses would benefit.

For the preparation of this document, the wide range of existing frameworks and recommendations has been coupled with the professional experience, expertise, and perspectives of college professionals dealing with substance abuse on their campuses throughout the Commonwealth. The organization identified for this document is based on the philosophy of having successful and meaningful prevention efforts to address alcohol abuse and related problems. Specifically, the professionals working on the Virginia Alcohol Prevention Standards were interested more in results and what it takes to make a difference than in simply identifying specific efforts to be implemented.

Overview of the Standards
The Virginia Alcohol Abuse Prevention Standards document is designed to provide clear guidance for campus leaders as they address alcohol abuse and alcohol-related problems on their campuses and in the surrounding communities. These Standards are organized in a way of what will help a campus-based initiative be “successful.” The specific standards are clustered within 14 distinct focus areas. These, in turn, are organized for ease of illustration into four core issues: Foundations, Who Should Be Involved, Focus of Efforts, and Context.

Foundations. The first core issue centers on foundations. Foundations reflect the basis or structure upon which the entire campus-based effort is based. Foundations include three major components:

1. First, campus efforts must be needs based. What is appropriate for a particular campus at a given point in time may not be appropriate at a different point in time. Thus, current needs serve as a foundation for the campus efforts.

2. Second, campus strategy should be locally appropriate. What is appropriate for one campus may not be appropriate for another campus. This is also based on what is appropriate given the campus history as well as the unique factors associated with the community surrounding the campus.

3. The third foundation is the need to engage collaboration. This includes working closely with other professionals inside and outside the university as well as those in the local community.

Who Should be Involved. The second core issue is determining who should be involved in alcohol abuse prevention efforts. Within this context, campus and community initiatives would benefit by the involvement of a wide range of individuals representing multiple constituencies. This core issue includes three major focus areas:
1. The first focus is that of demonstrated leadership whereby campus and community leaders engage actively in their efforts to address alcohol issues on their campuses.

2. The second focus is that of an inclusive planning process whereby approaches to address alcohol issues engage multiple constituencies, and are done in a planful manner.

3. Emphasis on shared responsibility is the third thrust; it is not a single individuals or groups responsibility to “solve” the alcohol abuse issues of a campus. Rather, a range of individuals or groups each have a wide variety of tasks they can accomplish to contribute meaningfully in the reduction of alcohol abuse.

**Focus of Efforts.** The third core issue is the focus of efforts. Building upon the prior two core issues of Foundation and Who Should be Involved, the current section addresses the Focus of Efforts that will be implemented. This core issue incorporates two areas:

1. First, efforts in planning for their implementation should focus on a long-term perspective. Alcohol problems are not such that they can be “solved,” much less “solved easily.” Alcohol abuse issues may be more appropriately categorized as those that can be managed, and done so over a long period of time.

2. Second, the focus of efforts should clearly have a student emphasis. With students as the primary audience of concern within the college and university context, clearly the emphasis must acknowledge that students change, both developmentally with those currently enrolled, as well as the continual turnover of students.

**Context of Efforts.** The fourth core issue of the Virginia College Alcohol Abuse Prevention Standards is the context of alcohol abuse prevention efforts. This core issue has six focus areas:

1. First, it is important to think comprehensive. With this, campus efforts should incorporate a range of approaches inclusive of policies, programs, services, resources, and more.

2. Second, the variety of efforts needed and individuals involved in these efforts makes communication an essential element of campus efforts. Communication is important to implement in a carefully orchestrated manner to maximize this successful implementation.

3. Third is the need for adequate staffing, training and resources for personnel who will be addressing alcohol-related issues. Whether professional or paraprofessional, whether volunteer or paid, alcohol abuse prevention does not simply happen. Rather, it requires thoughtful and skilled preparation of personnel resources to obtain the desired outcome.

4. Fourth, efforts must be results focused, whereby attention is placed on specific outcomes for campus efforts. Keeping the attention towards desired outcomes, including specific results desired—whether these are behavioral, attitudinal, knowledge or other—helps to clarify and direct efforts in a meaningful way.

5. Fifth, a contextual perspective of accountability is important for successful campus-based efforts. Coupled with the results perspective, accountability emphasizes that as stewards of the public trust, both for individuals, as well as institutions of higher education as societal leaders, diligent efforts are essential.

6. Finally, monitoring incorporates the on-going review of the extent to which campuses are addressing, in a meaningful way, those issues and results that it sets out to address.

For more information about the Virginia College Alcohol Leadership Council, see www.vacalc.org