

Lincoln Police Department

NU Directions Party Patrol

Overview

NU Directions is a project aimed at reducing high-risk drinking by college students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The project is one of several campus-community coalitions funded at universities nationwide by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The national project, managed for RWJ by the American Medical Association, is entitled *A Matter of Degree*. Although the University of Nebraska is the grantee, the Lincoln Police Department plays a key roll in the project. Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady co-chairs the coalition with Vice Chancellor Juan Franco. LPD is deeply involved in efforts to reduce the number and impact of off-campus drinking parties. The Lincoln Police Department's *Party Patrol* is one of many strategies developed by *NU Directions* to reduce high-risk drinking by college students.

Statement of Problem

High-risk drinking has emerged in recent years as a significant public policy issue, and has been revealed to be a major threat to the safety and well being of young people. Public health officials generally define high-risk drinking as the consumption of five or more drinks for men at a single setting, four or more for women. As universities have grappled with the educational, social, and public health implications of high-risk drinking, it has become evident that an environmental approach is needed to impact this issue. An environmental approach focuses not just on the personal behavior of students, but on the larger social and cultural setting in which high-risk drinking occurs.

A common strategy in university efforts to reduce high-risk drinking is to strengthen alcohol prohibitions on campus and in university housing units, and to increase enforcement of such policies. Increasing consequences for on-campus drinking, however, has had the effect in Lincoln of displacing the problem to an even greater extent into the surrounding residential areas. Lincoln police officers often encounter large off-campus drinking parties attended primarily by university students. During the typical academic year, LPD officers will respond to over 1,200 party complaints received from the public. These parties, in fact, are the most frequent location for binge drinking by UNL students, as indicated by survey research. In addition to the health and safety risks to drinkers, large parties have adversely affected several neighborhoods in Lincoln. In areas near campus, it has become increasingly difficult for homeowners and families to endure the litter, noise, parking problems, and other side effects of drinking parties.

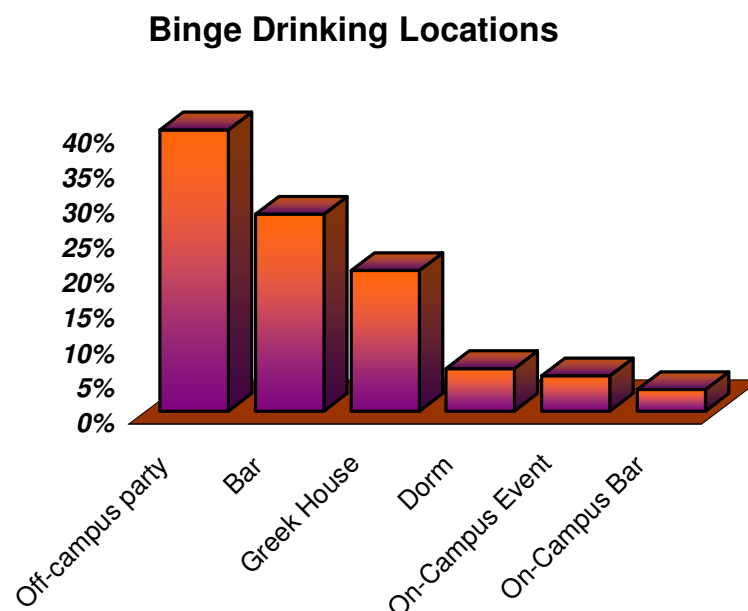
Moreover, students responding to surveys prior to this project's initiation indicated little concern that they would suffer legal consequences when drinking underage at such parties. By the late 1990's, LPD had adopted an order maintenance approach to large drinking parties, seeking to disperse the crowd with a minimal resources, arrests, and

paperwork. Students seemed to be well aware of the limitations of one or two officers responding to a party attended by 100-200 drinkers, half who were likely to be under 21. In many ways, this low-key approach by the police had actually exacerbated the problem, emboldening young drinkers who felt little risk when the police arrived.

Target Group

The *NU Directions “Party Patrol”* project is aimed at off-campus drinking parties attended primarily by college-aged young people. Although the coalition’s efforts are primarily directed at UNL students, in practice the *Party Patrol* interacts with and effects young people from about 17 to 25 years of age. Some of these are UNL students, some are high school students, some are not in school at all, and some attend other colleges. The *Party Patrol* focuses on large parties that have come to the attention of the police through citizen complaints or the on-view observations of officers. The Patrol’s activity is geographically centered in Lincoln’s North Bottoms, Clinton, Malone, Hartley, Belmont, and Near South neighborhoods—generally within two miles of campus—although officers will respond to parties in other areas of town from time to time.

One of the reasons for selecting this target group and problem was data collected from survey research. These data showed that high-risk drinking by UNL students was most likely to occur at off-campus parties—not at bars. LPD had been engaged in a number of efforts to decrease high-risk and underage drinking at licensed establishments, such as undercover “badges in bars” campaigns, enforcement efforts targeted at servers and licensees, fake ID stings, and efforts (ultimately successful) to upgrade Nebraska driver’s license to make alterations more difficult. While many enforcement efforts had focused on licensed liquor establishments, little had been done to impact the venue where binge drinking was most prevalent



Goals and Objectives

The *Party Patrol* is one strategy adopted by *NU Directions' Policy and Enforcement Work Group* during the project's first five years of operation. This effort fell under the workgroup's goal number 4:

Increase enforcement to create greater risk associated with high-risk consumption.

The workgroup's objective 4.2 was:

Increase students' perception of the likelihood of being caught drinking under the age of 21 by 25%, as follows:

- *in a dorm room, from 41% to 51%,*
- *at a fraternity or sorority party, from 28% to 35%,*
- *at an off-campus party, from 30% to 38%*

The *Party Patrol* strategy is aimed at the last of these venues, off-campus parties. The project sought to reach these objectives by increasing the number of arrests at such parties, and by publicizing these results in media outlets likely to reach the target audience.

Methods of Implementation

The on-the-street strategy of the *Party Patrol* is to deploy a group of six officers and one sergeant on each of several Thursday, Friday, or Saturday nights during the academic year. These officers are not involved in other duties, and are normally working extra hours on overtime pay. Their sole responsibility is locating and responding to large parties. The *Party Patrol* relies on both officer observations—especially in densely populated student neighborhoods such as the North Bottoms—and on complaints received from the public at the City of Lincoln Emergency Communications Center.

Officers assigned to the *Party Patrol* work both in uniform and in plain clothes. On most occasions, two officers in plain clothes will be available to enter parties in an undercover capacity. Large parties often involve an open invitation to all comers. In many cases the hosts of the party are actually collecting a direct or indirect cover charge. This may be intended to offset the cost of the beer, but in some cases the party is actually a moneymaking venture known as a “rent party.” Collecting money, directly or indirectly (“admission is free, the cups are \$5 each”) is a violation of Nebraska law: *sale of alcohol without a license*. Other frequent violations include *minor in possession of alcohol*, *procuring alcohol for minors*, and *maintaining a disorderly house*.

By dedicating several officers to these tasks, it becomes practical for the department to do much more than merely disperse parties. Whereas one or two officers have limited options, a full squad can obtain search warrants when necessary, collect evidence in

undercover operations, seize physical evidence such as cash or kegs, detain and issue citations to larger numbers of minors, investigate the source of alcohol, research ownership and lease information, interview residents, and generally ensure that those holding such parties are arrested or cited for the applicable violations.

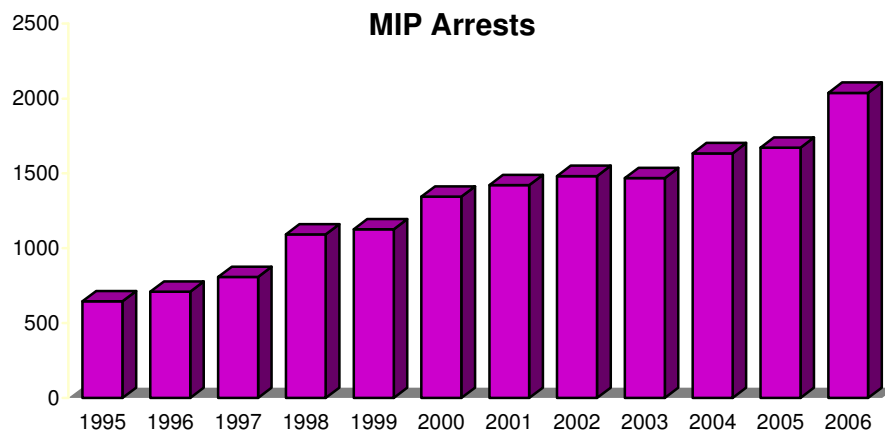
In addition, the department has made considerable efforts to identify specific locations where repeat violations or complaints occur. Using the department's extensive geographic crime analysis system, the locations of multiple complaints have been identified, the owners of the parcels identified, and personal contact has been made with several of these landlords. The department has made presentations to the Lincoln Real Estate Owners and Managers Association, and to the Lincoln Board of Realtors, provided web-based information to officers about property ownership, and to landlords about police dispatches to the specific addresses.

A media strategy is an integral component of the overall project. Each time a *Party Patrol* detail is conducted, the department follows up with a Monday media briefing. These have been covered by local television stations, news radio stations, *the Lincoln Journal Star*, and by the UNL student newspaper, *The Daily Nebraskan*. The small amount of enforcement is accompanied by a large amount of publicity aimed at effecting the students' perception of risk. *NU Directions* employed a communications who assisted in framing these messages in a consistent way, and helped immensely in raising the awareness of students about the changed landscape of the party scene.

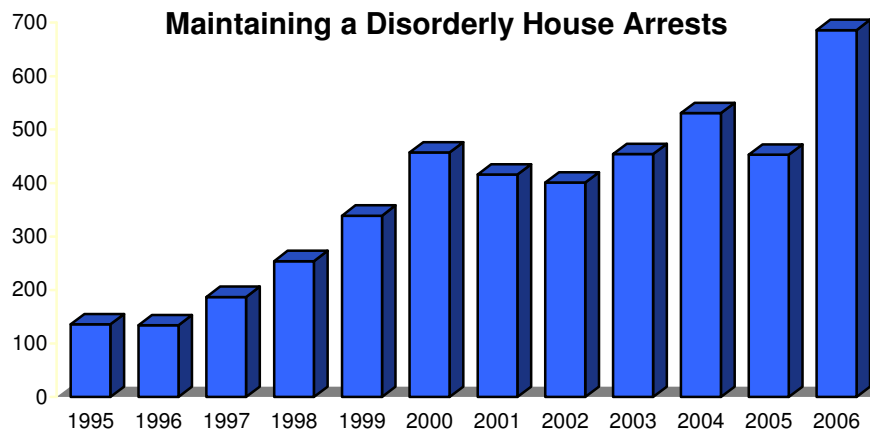
Measurements

Progress towards goals and objectives was measured by survey research conducted annually at UNL by the Harvard School of Public Health. Dr. Henry Wechsler, the principle investigator, conducted this research at each of the ten *Matter of Degree* sites. In addition, the Lincoln Police Department maintains descriptive statistics concerning arrests for minor in possession of alcohol. The department has also conducted geographic analysis to determine the impact on complaints of disorderly parties near campus and in the specific neighborhoods where targeted. Among the key findings:

- Arrests for minor in possession of alcohol by the Lincoln Police Department have more than quadrupled in the past decade.



- Arrest for Maintaining a Disorderly House have also more than quadrupled during the past decade.



- Police dispatches at particularly troublesome apartment complexes, such as Claremont Park and Stadium View, plummeted following intervention with the property owners.
- Survey data revealed that with the first three years of the project, underage UNL students' perception of the risk of being caught if they drink at an off-campus party increased from 33% in 1997 to 43% 2000.

Resources

NU Directions was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation beginning in the 1998-99 academic year. Initial funding was \$732,000 over five years, but only a very small amount was dedicated in the budget for the *Party Patrol*. A trail program was conducted within the police department's normal operating budget during the fall semester of 1998. After this initial trial the *Party Patrol* has been conducted on a budget of \$10,000 for each academic year. This budget item offsets overtime costs incurred by the department for the actual project hours. Minor expenses for court overtime, automobile mileage, and indirect costs are absorbed by the police department's ordinary operating budget.

What We Have Learned

- ***Importance of media***

The media strategy has been critical to our success. Making the most out of small numbers of arrests is vital to changing students' perceptions. In a campus environment, virtually everyone reads the student newspaper, and word can travel fast. This worked to our advantage. On the first weekend of our trial in 1998, student interns at two television stations were aware that something different was happening well in advance of any news releases. Reporters from these stations

contacted the department to make inquiries on Sunday after these interns discussed their observations with the news staff.

- **Importance of message**

We have been very concerned about backlash from students who might perceive that the crackdown on parties was unfairly targeted. After some initial problems with our message, we sought and received professional assistance. Rather than using warlike terms (“crackdown”, “get tough”, “zero tolerance”), we have modified our message to reflect our concern with neighborhood impacts and high-risk behaviors. The new message has consistently been focused on safe, responsible parties, employing common-sense precautions. These precautions that reduce the likelihood of a party coming to the attention of the police also reduce the likelihood of high-risk drinking.

- **Working with Property Owners**

We have discovered the value of working with and through landlords, managers, and owners of rental property. Most landlords are responsible and want to help reduce any problems caused by their tenants. Most landlords are quite helpful and supportive. We discovered that a key problem involves communication: landlords simply don’t know what the police know about the events occurring at their property. By educating landlords, and making information available to them about police dispatches, an important ally can be engaged in resolving problems at a specific residence or apartment complex.

- **An Overall Strategy**

The Lincoln Police Department Party Patrol project is a small part of a comprehensive campus-community initiative. Each strategy supports and enhances other efforts. Overall, NU Directions has dramatically effected change in the political landscape, elevating high-risk drinking and related issues to a high position on the public agenda.

For more information:

nudirections.org
lincoln.ne.gov/city/police

Tom Casady
Chief of Police
Lincoln Police Department
575 South Tenth Street
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 441-7237
<mailto:tcasady@ci.lincoln.ne.us>

Linda Major
NU Directions Project Director
University of Nebraska Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68509
(402) 472-6601
<mailto:lmajor1@unl.edu>