

The NCHERM 6-P Model for Campus Culture Change

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Every campus faces challenges of culture change. Some (most) campuses need to change their alcohol cultures. Some campuses have difficulty encouraging campus sexual assault victims to report and seek campus services, and face the need to change the culture of non-reporting on campus. Some campuses have student affairs divisions that take a clear backseat to the faculty in the realm of campus politics, and face the need for culture change that embraces student development as essential to shared governance. Some campuses are fighting the implementation of business models as keys to successful campus management and endowment, and face the challenge of whether campus leaders ought to be CEOs, scholars or both. Many campus culture change initiatives fail. This article seeks to elaborate a formula for success by recognizing that in order to have any recipe turn out well, you have to start with the right ingredients.

At NCHERM, we have developed a successful recipe, which we call the 6-P model. It is not the only model for successful culture change. It is merely one model amongst many, and it shares many key characteristics with approaches like “environmental management” pioneered by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention. Our model is marked by the uncompromising perspective that culture change can only succeed when efforts to bring it about are holistic. We think of the recipe for culture change as resembling a 100-piece jigsaw puzzle. When the puzzle is complete, you can clearly see the big picture. With only half the pieces in place, you have nothing. With even one piece missing, you still do not have the complete picture. Culture change requires us to have each of the pieces available, in the right location, at the same time, interlocking for form a whole. While this is a simple visual, simple is often best. The 6-P model is our way of categorizing the pieces to the puzzle, and make sure they are all available and ready to be assembled. Each piece of the puzzle will fall under one of the P’s of our culture change formula. Our 6 P’s are:

- People
- Practices
- Policies
- Procedures
- Protocols
- Programming

Any campus culture change challenge can be addressed using the 6-P formula. Using this approach will give you a solid shot at success. The 6-P’s will help you to get the right puzzle pieces assembled on the table, but you still have to fit them into each other in the right order.

A Commitment to the Holistic

The 6-P's demand that we address culture change holistically. For example, we can try to change culture through new policies or procedures, but if our campus practices do not match our written policies, we have a disconnection. Not only do we need the policies, but we need the people who implement them to follow them. A new policy cannot function well without our willingness to provide training to the implementers of the policy, and a commitment from them to alter their practices to accord with the policy. Much has been written about top-down leadership, servant-leadership and the latest pop management theory.

What Lies Beneath?

The 6-P model is not superimposed over these, but instead lies beneath them. For example, if you need people to implement policies, your management style will impact on how willing your people are to fit their puzzle pieces to yours. If you demand compliance from the top-down, they may cooperate, but only because they have to and not because they want to. A servant-leader will inspire people to shape their own puzzle pieces, expend the energy to work them into the puzzle in just the right way, and take pride in the perfect fit. The 6-P's are not a management theory or fad. They are a simple way of recognizing the truth that culture change cannot be accomplished piecemeal, and that culture is an all-encompassing environment. Change part of the environment, and you will only change part of the culture. Culture does not merely exist. It is formed and forged, and it can be shaped and reshaped. Sometimes, it is reshaped by crisis, such as a student death. More often, it can be reshaped by courage. Those on your campus who want change are catalysts. Those on your campus who resist change are usually fear-driven. Fear is the opposite of courage. The fear operators will tell you that culture cannot be changed. They will tell you, "Students have always gotten drunk, will always get drunk, and there's not a darn thing we can do about it. Why try?" They are wrong. They underestimate the power of a committed, concerted effort. Sometimes, they are overwhelmed by the enormity of a challenge. Yet, culture change can and must occur in both small and large scale.

An Example of Alcohol Enforcement

While we can look at campus drinking culture as a large scale challenge, and see that enforcement is but one part of that challenge, enforcement can be a culture change issue in microcosm, as exemplified by a recent campus visit. On this small, liberal arts campus, student development administrators identified an enforcement-based culture change challenge. Historically, campus alcohol violations have been processed through a centralized, faculty-led conduct process, with a ten-tier escalation of sanctions before separation from the community would be considered. Administrators in student development have recognized for a long-time that this approach is not serving the campus well. They put forward a proposal for change six years ago, and it has been stalled since it was proposed. Entrenched campus forces have dug in to either oppose it or simply allow it to languish without action. If student development administrators wanted this initiative to take flight, a strategic approach using the 6-P's could help. Here is what it might look like. First, accurate diagnosis is needed. Sometimes data collection will help

to provide a factual basis for a change initiative. Sometimes, program assessment is needed. In this case study, culture change is going to depend on the ability to alter the decision-making process for approving this type of change on this campus. History and politics are the way. There is clearly institutional will to make a change, including support from the president, residential life and student development. But, both student government and faculty senate have historically had approval power of this type of change. This is where the earlier initiative stalled. This earlier initiative recommended utilizing residential life staff, such as RDs, to address a student's initial and secondary alcohol violations through an educational conference and progressive sanctions. This would take away the power of the conduct board to address these initial violations, reserving them for additional and more severe violations. This conduct board is a faculty fiefdom, advised by a faculty member and populated by faculty and staff. A loss of responsibility for these lower-level alcohol violations will be a diminishing of the reach and authority of this faculty-led process. Their potential resistance, therefore, is understandable. Additionally, students like the ten-strikes approach. It gives them a lot of freedom without fear of serious consequences. Student government has no vested interest in making a change, because the status quo favors their freedom and the relative immunity from serious consequences for student infractions. So, let's look at how the 6-P approach can serve to help address this change initiative.

Protocol

What is the protocol for making policy and procedural changes on this campus? An initiative is proposed, circulated, modified, and then submitted to Faculty Senate and student government for a full vote. Neither body has even put the proposal to a vote. Investigation revealed that this approval process, while well-established, is not a formalized governance requirement. Faculty and students have traditionally voted on these types of changes, but there is no written policy demanding that the approval process work in that way. Can we change the approval process itself?

People

The President supports the authority of student development administrators to make policy and procedural changes administratively, without an elaborate approval mechanism. Yet, student development cannot just change the process by fiat, without a political blowup that would be costly and counter-productive. There are allies. Some faculty members on the conduct board do not want to deal with all the lower-level alcohol violations. It is time-consuming for them. They are comfortable with turning over this authority to residential life staff. Some student leaders recognize that the campus alcohol culture is too permissive, and would prefer consist rules with more effective enforcement. They are negatively impacted by the alcohol abuse of their fellow students, and would champion the changes.

Practices

Hopefully, with presidential support, a Working Committee or Task Force approach could be announced. This approach would include elements of the previous approval process, in that faculty senate and student government representatives would have a real presence on the committee, along with residential life and student development administrators. Whether you can appoint the student and faculty allies could be critical, though an alternative might be faculty senate and student government-appointed representatives. A draft for a new policy and procedure would be written, with clear ground rules established for the process.

First, if possible, the committee should announce a consensus proposal. That should be followed by a defined and finite period of COMMENT by Faculty Senate and student government. A short process of incorporating valid input from those constituencies will ensue. From there, several strategic options may work. Politics are still in play, so it may be necessary to put the proposal to a vote of the Faculty Senate and student government. It would be best to avoid this, but it may not be avoidable. If it is avoidable, the committee can simply finalize the draft, at which point it will be implemented. If a vote is necessary, the members of the committee should take it to their respective bodies with recommendations to approve it. The committee should control the process, with a rule that there is a one-month approval period. There is no authority for either body to demand changes, as their input has already been sought. They may only take an up or down simple majority vote. If, after one month, no action has been taken, the new policy and procedures will be implemented as written. If the bodies approve the policy (this is likely), it can be implemented. If the policy and procedures are voted down, the committee will have to go back to the drawing board, to come up with a draft that addresses the reasons why the proposal failed. Again, this revision process should have clear timelines and deadlines.

Programming

Programming means educating the community. It is often needed before, during and after a culture change initiative. Before, we need to educate stakeholders on why the current policy and procedures are not working, and why the new initiative is an improvement. Perhaps we have data showing that the current sanctions do not minimize repeat offenses. Perhaps we have exit interviews showing that students do not take the alcohol policy seriously, and do not fear its application to them. Perhaps studies and articles can demonstrate that many campuses are moving to 3, 4 or 5-tier approaches, and away from ten-tier approaches, to make the presence of suspension a more proximate and more real consequence for students. To educate the stakeholders and community, we can benchmark our cohort institutions, and show that the clear best practice is moving to a residential life-led early intervention system for alcohol. Perhaps we can ask colleagues at our peer institutions to draft a one-page letter on why they implemented such a system, and on how it is working for them. These should be included in a set of findings as appendices to the committee proposal.

Policy

The new policy itself should bring about worthwhile changes. It should be crafted to take some of the caseload burden off the conduct board. It might make a peace offering by proposing that the conduct board retain jurisdiction over lower-level violations by non-residential students, though the more compact 3-5 tier sanction approach would apply to any alcohol violation, regardless of where it is referred for resolution. The policy should encourage engagement in the conduct process by RDs, ACs, RLCs and the like. This is both professional growth for them, and an enhancement of the educational and developmental emphasis that the campus can direct toward alcohol violations.

Procedures

Once the new policy is approved, procedures should determine when and how it will take effect. It will also need to determine where a student on his 8th tier will now fit into the current 3-5 tier model. We should also circle back to programming, this time at the end of the process, where we can educate students on the new policy and procedures, set clear expectations, and invite compliance and community cooperation. A procedure for annual revision and modification should also be incorporated, so that the new policy does not with time become as ossified and hidebound as the one it replaced.

All information offered in this publication is the opinion of the author, and is not given as legal advice. Reliance on this information is at the sole risk of the reader.

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