The Origin of UMatter

uwosh.edu/umatter
The origin of UMatter

UMatter is a strategy to build a safer, more caring and compassionate University of Wisconsin Oshkosh community, pulling together programs and services into a comprehensive, branded structure to ensure the continuity of prevention strategies, messaging, learning and values.

The UMatter campaign is built on a solid foundation of national principles. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Health Education and Leadership Program addressed the necessary focus on administrative leadership and campus community health in its 2004 report, “Leadership for a Healthy Campus: An Ecological Approach.” Its findings and recommendations have served as just one resource in UMatter’s development.

The NASPA report emphasizes that “Students regularly report health factors as high on the list of issues affecting their academic performance. There is a strong correlation between students’ health, academic achievement, and completion of a degree. Given these facts, institutional efforts to ensure a healthy campus environment can have an impact on student success and potentially affect retention.”

Since 2005, UW Oshkosh, with support from the SAMSHA Garrett Lee Smith Memorial grant, has focused on initiatives to create an environment that fosters leadership, personal growth and success among community members. In 2009, the Staying Safe committee convened to assess and address high-risk behaviors of our students. Four problem areas emerged:

- Lack of cohesion among departments, causing efforts to be duplicated and programming opportunities to be missed.
- Underutilization and overlooking of many existing programs.
- A data-reinforced need to provide better awareness of intervention training for students in difficult situations, including programming in drug and alcohol use, mental health problems, physical wellness and bystander intervention.
- Greater need for promotion of the exemplary safety resources offered to the campus community.

The UMatter campaign grew out of these target areas. One of its guiding principles is the understanding that one student’s well-being is connected with all others. When alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, violence, unsafe sexual behavior, suicidal ideation, depression, stress, eating disorders or other issues affect one student, all are affected. Not every student who attends a college campus will be directly affected by these issues. However, most will be indirectly impacted by the consequences of such problems. (NASPA, Leadership for a Healthy Campus: An Ecological Approach, 2004).

Survey reinforces UMatter strategy

More than 1,150 UW Oshkosh students participated in a recent survey, with a completion rate of 88 percent. Students reported how they felt on a variety of safety issues on campus.

Almost 100 percent of the respondents were, at the time the survey was administered, enrolled at UW Oshkosh. There is an even breakdown of students from various class standings. Nearly 25 percent of respondents were freshmen, 22 percent were sophomores, 20 percent were juniors, 15 percent were seniors and 13 percent were seniors who had attended UW Oshkosh for more than four years. Several non-degree-seeking and graduate students completed the survey as well.
Results showed:

- High need for students to be more aware of safety training offerings on campus and a direct need for stronger involvement from campus resources to improve the campus environment.

- Excessive drinking was the highest rated issue for UW Oshkosh, with an average of 60 on a scale to 100 followed by: “property theft” with an average 57; “distressed individuals,” 56; “unwanted sexual contact,” 55; and “racist language,” 52.

- Close to 60 percent of UW Oshkosh students have witnessed a fellow student drink excessively without intervening.

- 39 percent of UW female students did not intervene in unsafe situations because they didn’t know how, 33 percent felt it was none of their business and 28 percent perceived a safety risk that prohibited them from intervening.

- 80 percent of students believe consequences from problematic situations could have been avoided if someone had intervened.

- The most common reasons for not intervening are: Students “didn’t know how to intervene” (35 percent), “it was none of my business” (34 percent) and “I felt my own safety would be at risk” (28 percent).

- 34 percent of students were unsure whether or not racism was still a problem on campus, 60 percent indicated it was; 45 percent witnessed discriminatory (homophobic and racist) language; and half of African American students surveyed witnessed racist language without intervention.

UMatter: Long-Term Outcomes

A number of long-term outcomes developed as part of the UMatter campaign:

- Increase UW Oshkosh’s identity as a safer and more secure environment.

- Establish a better sense of community among members of the campus.

- Instill responsibility to protect and preserve the campus community and its fellow members.

- Ensure a safe environment where ideas, people and programs can grow and succeed.

- Encourage retention and continued involvement in the campus community.
The work of UMatter is supported by a number of areas on and off campus including:
Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, The Counseling Center,
Dean of Students, Department of Residence Life,
Provost’s Office, Oshkosh Student Association,
STEP Internship, Student Health Center,
CARE, Reeve Memorial Union,
LGBTQ Resource Center, University Police,
Integrated Marketing and Communications,
Oshkosh Police and Fire Departments,
Reach Counseling Services and
Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services.

This brochure was developed in part under grant number SM57492 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.