



Community College Health Study

How does sexual health education affect the way college students think about sex and relationships?

Welcome back to the Community College Health Study newsletter! **In this issue, we look at how sexual health education may affect the way students think about safe sex behaviors and healthy relationships.**

As a part of the Community College Health Study, community college students were randomly assigned to take a sexual health education course, *Media Aware* or *Health Aware*, or were not assigned to a sexual health course (No Sex Ed). The *Media Aware* course presented information about sexual health and relationships as well as media literacy while the *Health Aware* course presented information about sexual health and relationships, but not media literacy.

After taking (or not taking) a sexual health education course, students filled out questionnaires that assessed their attitudes towards risky sexual behaviors, their confidence in practicing safe sex behaviors (self-efficacy), and ideas about how their peers experience sex and relationships (normative beliefs).

While our study collected information from students who took *Media Aware*, *Health Aware*, or no sexual health course, **this newsletter focuses exclusively on the findings comparing the *Media Aware* and the *No Sex Ed* groups.** More specifically, we will look at the attitudes, self-efficacy, and normative beliefs of students who completed *Media Aware* with those who have not yet taken the course. **With this information, stakeholders may better understand the ways in which providing sexual health education to college students affects their ideas about and confidence in practicing safe sex behaviors.**

Community College Health Study Design

Below, we outline the set-up and timeline of activities in the Community College Health Study. This newsletter presents findings from the post-test, or the immediate changes in student attitudes and beliefs just after they complete their assigned online sexual health program.

Participants

18–19 year old community college students.

Randomization

College campuses were randomized to 3 different intervention groups.

Media Aware

An online sexual health program that includes media literacy education.

Health Aware

An online sexual health program.

No Sex Ed

No access to online sexual health program until a later date.

Pretest

Students shared their demographic information and described their current sexual health behaviors and beliefs.

Media Aware

Health Aware

No Sex Ed

Students in these groups were given 2 weeks to complete their assigned program.

Follow up

Media Aware

Health Aware

Students described what they liked/disliked about the program and what they learned from the program.

Post-test

4 weeks after the pretest, students from all groups described their sexual health attitudes and beliefs.

Short-term & long-term follow up

6 months and 12 months after the pretest, students from all groups described their sexual health knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

No Sex Ed

After the last follow up, students were given access to *Media Aware* and the post-program feedback survey.

This newsletter compares the post-test findings between the *Media Aware* and *No Sex Ed* groups.

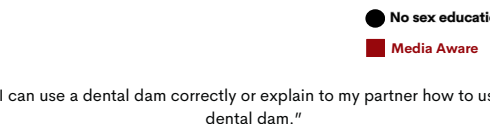
Students' Attitudes Toward Sexual Health Behaviors

Students' attitudes towards risky sexual behaviors were measured by asking students to respond to statements like "It is okay to use alcohol or drugs before or during a sexual encounter" on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). As such, a lower score on this scale represents less agreement with risky sexual behaviors.

● No sex education

■ Media Aware

Student's average agreement with statements about risky sexual health behaviors.



Overall, students who took *Media Aware* reported less agreement with risky sexual behaviors as compared to students who had not yet taken the course.

Students' Self-Efficacy in Practicing Safe Sexual Health Behaviors

Students were also asked to describe their confidence in their ability to practice safe sex behaviors. They responded to statements such as "I can use a dental dam correctly or explain to my partner how to use a dental dam" on a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

● No sex education

■ Media Aware

"I can use a dental dam correctly or explain to my partner how to use a dental dam."



Students who took *Media Aware* reported higher confidence in being able to use a dental dam as compared to students who had not yet taken the course.

Students' Normative Beliefs

To measure students' normative beliefs about their peers' sexual health behaviors, students were asked to estimate what percentage of their peers they believe are engaging in risky sexual health behaviors. For example, students were asked questions like "What percentage of people your age have had unprotected sex?" and "What percentage of people your age have had sex while high on drugs or intoxicated?"

■ No Sex Education ■ Media Aware



As a part of the *Media Aware* program, students were encouraged to think critically about how media can normalize unhealthy sexual health behaviors (i.e., make these behaviors seem more common). Students were also provided with information that is often left out of these media messages, such as statistics about how many of their peers actually report engaging in risky sexual behaviors. As a result, **students who took *Media Aware* reported that they thought a lower percentage of their peers have had unprotected sex or have practiced risky sexual behaviors**, such as having sex while intoxicated, compared to students who had not yet taken the course.

Key Takeaways

This newsletter shared findings that **students who took a sexual health education course, *Media Aware*, had more positive attitudes towards safe sex behaviors, greater confidence in their ability to practice safe sex behaviors, and healthier normative beliefs about their peers** compared to students who did not take the course.

These are important findings because The Theory of Planned Behavior¹ suggests that young adults' attitudes and self-efficacy about safe sex and relationship behaviors can influence their future health decisions. In addition, according to Social Norms Theory², young adults' views of their peers' behaviors (normative beliefs) also influence their behavior as they may imitate their peers to fit in. **As such, promoting healthier attitudes, self-efficacy, and normative beliefs may improve the likelihood that young adults will make healthy decisions in their future sexual or romantic relationships.**

Previous newsletters reported that many students have not yet received comprehensive sex education. **Findings from this newsletter suggest that by providing sexual health education to their students, community colleges may be able to promote healthier ideas about sex and relationships and confidence in practicing safe sex among their students.**

1. Ajzen I. The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 1991;50(2):179–211.

2. Cialdini RB, Trost MR. Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance. In: Gilbert DT, Fiske ST, Gardner L, eds. *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. 4th ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill; 1998:151–192

Next Steps

Learn More

Find more information about the Community College Health Study and view our previous newsletters on our website.

[Visit Our Website](#)

Read About Our Recent Presentation

Members of iRT recently attended the Fact Forward Adolescent Health Spring Summit and presented information on *Media Aware*.

[Read More](#)

Explore Programs

Media Aware is an evidence-based comprehensive sexual and relationship health promotion program designed to fill gaps in previous sex education and meet the unique needs of young adults.

[Explore Media Aware](#)

Share This Information

Click the button below to visit our study website where you can find a downloadable email template. Feel free to use this template to share our findings with your college listserv or on other relevant platforms. If you decide to share this information, please cite the information using the following:

Ahuna, K., Evans-Paulson, R., Porter, E., Scull, T., and The Community College Health Study Team (2024). *Community College Health Study Newsletter, 7th edition*. <https://cchealthstudy.com>

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CCHStudy@iRTinc.us.

Meet the People Behind This Newsletter



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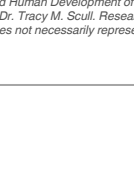
Kyla Ahuna is a Master of Public Health student with a concentration in health behavior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has experience in conducting research in behavioral neuroscience and maternal and pediatric health. Her current research interests involve developing and evaluating health interventions and programs, and she is particularly passionate about making research more accessible.



Elizabeth Porter

Content Marketing Specialist

Elizabeth Porter studied communication media, rhetoric, and professional writing at North Carolina State University, and she is passionate about creating content that is relevant, engaging, and helpful for others. She has experience in marketing, writing, social media management, web content creation, email design, and editing.



Tracy Scull, PhD

Senior Author and Principal Investigator

Over the past 16 years, Dr. Scull has conducted rigorous research on child, adolescent, and family health, with specific focus on promoting sexual health and preventing substance abuse. Dr. Scull has secured over 10 million dollars in federal funding for her research and has published her work in esteemed peer-reviewed journals such as *Pediatrics*, *Developmental Psychology*, and *the Journal of American College Health*. She holds a doctorate in developmental psychology from Duke University.

Reina Evans-Paulson, PhD

Senior Author and Project Director

Dr. Evans-Paulson conducts research related to adolescent and young adult health with a focus on implementation and evaluation of sexual health interventions, parent and family influences on adolescent sexuality, and sexual communication. Dr. Evans-Paulson has published in esteemed peer-reviewed journals such as *JAMA Pediatrics*, *Journal of Sex Research*, and *Pediatrics*. She received her doctorate in applied social and community psychology from North Carolina State University.

Meet the Community College Health Study Team

Funding for this study was provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) under award number R01HD099134 to Dr. Tracy M. Scull. Research reported in this newsletter is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH.