

## Undergrads complete campus-wide student health assessment

By Julianna Williams

The majority of UNF students report that they rarely or never text while driving, don't smoke, have never used marijuana, rarely or never binge-drink, are eating their fruits and vegetables and get plenty of exercise. Our students are the picture of health. At least that's what some of the preliminary results from a recent campus-wide student-health survey seem to indicate.

The comprehensive survey was distributed to 15,232 UNF students via e-mail over a four-week period beginning in February. It included 72 questions on health behavior and demographics, with the bulk of the questions focusing on the six dimensions of wellness: social, physical, spiritual, environmental, mental and emotional health.

Researchers wanted to know about students' nutrition, physical-activity level, tobacco, drug and alcohol use, sexual behavior, mental health, interpersonal relationships and spirituality, among other things. Although it was a huge undertaking and the data collected will be tremendously helpful to the University, the survey itself is not all that unique. What is unique is that the survey was designed, built and conducted by a group of undergraduate students majoring in health science.

"A few students and I were at the American College of Health Association conference last year and part of what that organization does is deliver a student-health assessment for various colleges. It's something that you have to pay for and it's pretty standardized," said Julie Merten, an instructor in UNF's Department of Public Health. "While we were there, it occurred to me that we should encourage our own students to develop a health assessment. How cool would it be for our students to come up with a survey rather than have it designed by crotchety, old college professors (present company included) who don't really know what students are up to?"

So the idea was born — and a group of 15 undergraduate community health students, with Merten as their faculty mentor, stepped up and agreed to volunteer their time to tackle the project.

"All the students who volunteered are members of Eta Sigma Gamma, which is an honor society for health education that I'm president of," said UNF senior Adrienne Williams, who served as the project leader. "We met once a week from October to January to research different surveys, discuss possible questions and topics and lay out the survey, which was a really long process."

Merten said she provided the students with resources, encouraged the group to review national surveys and provided a lot of guidance along the way, but it was a student-run volunteer project that required a lot of student collaboration, cooperation and teamwork.

"Adrienne spearheaded the entire project, organizing students and getting them mobilized to help," Merten said. "We found out that narrowing down the survey was the most difficult part, getting it down to a manageable 72 questions that were relevant and meaningful. We all got really attached to many of the questions because we really wanted to know the information, so cutting was very painful."

Williams said the students involved had already completed half of the community health program, which includes coursework on creating and conducting effective surveys.

"We'd been learning about surveys and implementing and assessing the needs of the campus, our population, and we had already gotten some great hands-on experience evaluating students' surveys in class," she said. "Probably the hardest thing with this survey was making it so it was not leading or biased. Wording some of the questions was really challenging because we didn't want to lead the students in any sense of the way."

Once it was polished and perfected and had been reviewed by various constituents on campus, the survey went live Feb. 25 — and both Merten and Williams said that's when the real fun began.

"We were like children on the first day the survey went out," Merten said. "We kept watching the response rate to see how many students had completed the survey, and it blew up. We were so excited."

Of the more than 15,000 students who received the survey by e-mail, nearly 2,000 opened the e-mail and more than 1,300 completed the survey.





“We think that’s a very good response rate, especially considering the fact that it was a very long survey with a lot of very personal questions,” Williams said. “We were so excited to finally have the results that we could start looking at.”

Merten, Williams and community health student Kristen Houston presented the survey’s findings to a group of stakeholders at a State of the Student Health Address April 14 in the Student Union.

Key findings highlighted in the presentation include the following:

Those who responded were representative of UNF’s student body by ethnicity and age, with slightly more females than males responding. All campus majors were represented as well, with an expected higher response rate from students in the Brooks College of Health and College of Arts and Sciences.

76 percent agreed or strongly agreed that physical activity is important in their lives.

60 percent perceived their weight to be healthy, with a Body Mass Index between 18.6 and 24.9.

83 percent reported they had not used tobacco in the past 30 days; 10 percent of students who smoke have tried to quit.

60 percent reported they had never used marijuana, while 13 percent reported they had used it in the past three months and 6 percent reported daily use of marijuana.

80 percent reported they would not drive after having a drink.

When it comes to binge-drinking, 66 percent said they rarely/never do it, 30 percent said they sometimes do and 3.6 percent said they do it every time they drink.

60 percent report that they did not use a condom the last time they had sex; and 19 percent said they used alcohol prior to engaging in sex.

58 percent report they’ve never been tested for HIV.

9 percent of female respondents reported having had an abortion.

30 percent reported having experienced clinical depression, with the top three stressors being death of a close family member or friend, failure of a college course and discrimination.

51 percent reported having between 101 and 500 Facebook friends; 45 percent said they had only 3-4 close friends.

52 percent said they rarely or never text while driving; 46 percent said they do it daily or weekly.

58 percent said in the past 30 days they spent 15 minutes in the sun without sunscreen; 85 percent said they never use a tanning bed.

69 percent claim Christianity as their designated religion.

Dr. Pam Chally, dean of the Brooks College of Health, attended the presentation along with many other stakeholders from the college, the University and the community who were interested in hearing the final results. “This was a huge project that was not even a part of a class and the students really went above and beyond to complete it,” she said. “This is something you might anticipate from a graduate student group but not an undergraduate group. Julie did such a remarkable job mentoring these young women, who were so poised, gracious and professional. Their performance speaks so highly of how special Julie is and what a great job she does mentoring undergraduates.”

Merten said that although the survey’s completed and the results are “hot off the press,” there’s still much more work to be done. The group will provide stakeholders with an executive summary, identify interesting findings for further investigation, conduct focus groups to strengthen student involvement, solicit faculty reviews to improve the instrument and hopefully continue to deliver the survey every spring semester to monitor student health-behavior trends.

“We would like for the survey to be used as a marketing tool for parent and student recruitment because it shows we have a campus that cares about health, we’re involved, and we have some positives to share,” Merten said. “Now that we have this up and running, there’s no reason it can’t be done annually. We’ll do a few tweaks every year, keep up with the trends and do some focus groups to have students review it and give us some feedback.”

Merten said the group also applied for and will receive TLO [Transformational Learning Opportunity] funding so they can take what they’ve done and present it at the American Association of Health Education’s national conference in Boston next March.

“At the conference the students will be able to tell others about how exciting it is to have a student-led health assessment on campus. It not only gets students involved and is good for the student learning, it’s great for the college to show parents and the community how they’re doing a survey that says they care about students’ health — and they can market it,” she said. “It’s good for the administration, it’s good for health promotion, it’s a win-win in so many different ways.”

Williams, who graduates Aug. 5, said she’ll use this real-world, hands-on experience to her advantage when interviewing for jobs in public health.

“I actually got internship offers because this experience is exactly what some of them are looking for to survey their employees or their customers,” Williams said. “This is in my portfolio now and it’s something I’m always going to be proud of.”