

AU to Participate in NCAA-funded 'Choices' Program for Athletes

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Alfred, NY -- Alfred University has been awarded a three-year, \$30,000 grant from the National Collegiate Athletic Association to help its student athletes make better choices. "Making Choices, Reducing Chances" is the title of the program, to be administered by the Alcohol and Other Drug Education Program (AOD) and the Office of Athletics. Jennifer George, coordinator of AOD, and James Moretti, director of athletics, are co-directors of the program. The University, through participation in regular NCAA APPLE conferences, had rewritten some of its policies, such as the athletic department substance abuse policy and those covering students acting as hosts for prospective student-athletes, but "We did not implement educational programs specifically for student-athletes," explained George. "We know, though, that student-athletes are among the highest binge-drinkers on college campuses across the United States," she said. "To counter-balance that, we wanted to be able to offer educational programs and alternative activities for student-athletes, and to foster their personal growth and development." Among the goals of the "Making Choices, Reducing Chances" program are to expand the existing peer education programs to include student-athlete mentors; increase the influence of student-athletes among their peers as alcohol educators; implement campus-wide programs on responsible decisions regarding alcohol use, particularly high-risk drinking; incorporate alcohol education and awareness into alternative athletic, social and recreational activities; promote healthy, attractive alternatives to drinking relative to sports events; develop a zero-tolerance policy regarding the use of alcohol at athletic events; and market the events through campus media, emphasizing skills that promote healthy and responsible decision-making and correct misperceptions regarding their peers and alcohol use. The student-athlete mentoring (SAM) program "is one of the most exciting parts of the Choices program," said George. "Student-athletes from each team will be trained in communication, intervention and referral skills so that they can assist their teammates. They will also plan educational sessions that focus on issues relating to alcohol to promote responsible and moderate use, as well as plan non-alcohol-related social activities." The student-athlete mentors will also be involved in developing a campus-wide marketing campaign to promote healthy and responsible decision-making. "We want to correct the misperception many students hold that their peers are use alcohol more frequently than they actually do," said George.