

Collegiate Recovery Programs

A Win-Win Proposition for Students and Colleges



What is recovery?

Recovery from substance use disorders (SUD) not only means abstaining from all mind-altering substances (i.e., sobriety), but also embracing a positive view of personal growth and self-improvement. Treatment professionals understand recovery as “a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”



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What are collegiate recovery programs?

A collegiate recovery program (CRP) is “a supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to disengage from addictive behavior.” These programs provide a safe haven for students in recovery to further their education within an alternative social environment that supports their recovery, and helps them guard against the risky influences of other students’ substance use.

What are the most common components of a collegiate recovery program?

- Substance-free housing
- Substance-free social events
- Dedicated space (e.g., a drop-in recreation center)
- Multiple on-campus 12-step meetings
- Full-time, dedicated staff
- Professional counseling by addiction treatment specialists

How many college students are in recovery?

The exact number of college students who are in recovery is not known. One survey of college students at ten colleges/universities in Maryland found that 2% identified as being in recovery from alcohol and/or drug use problems.

Why do college students need recovery programs?

The college social environment can pose significant challenges for students in recovery, especially in settings where drinking and drug use define the social environment. Those challenges are compounded by adjusting to new academic demands, freedom from parental supervision, and financial pressures, which can also trigger a relapse. A pro-drinking, pro-drug college social scene thus becomes a barrier to college enrollment and completion. In the face of such challenges, many young people in recovery find themselves choosing between recovery and staying in school. CRPs enable students to further their education without jeopardizing their recovery.

Preliminary evidence suggests that CRPs contribute to both better academic outcomes (e.g., higher graduation rates and GPAs) and successful recovery.

