



**National College Health Assessment 2004
ACHA-NCHA 2004**

User's Manual

Version 2.004 Revised Spring 2004

American College Health Association

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Acknowledgement

The ACHA National College Health Assessment Pilot II-III 1999 survey printing, scanning, data management, analysis and reporting were supplemented with funds made available through ACHA. The development of a new survey required identification and incorporation of useful items from a number of surveys. Survey development was accomplished by the workgroup through selection and modification of items from, but not limited to, the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (Douglas et al. 1997), Student Health Survey (University of Minnesota, Boynton Health Services, 1998), Core Survey (Presley et al. 1993), the College Alcohol Study (Wechsler, 1997), Annual Student Health Behavior Assessment (Northern Illinois University, Health Enhancement Services, 1998), Monitoring the Future (Johnston et al., 1997), and the National Health Objectives as outlined in Healthy People 2000 (1990).

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I. Introduction

The American College Health Association (ACHA) is the principal advocate and leadership organization for college and university health. The association will provide advocacy, education, communications, products and services, as well as promote research and culturally competent practices to enhance its members' ability to advance the health of all students and the campus community.

As part of its goal to promote research, ACHA has organized a national effort to assess college health factors impacting academic performance, retention and campus life. The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) is a national, non-profit, research effort organized by ACHA to assist health service providers, health educators, counselors, and administrators in collecting data about the health of their students. Developed by an interdisciplinary team of college health professionals, the NCHA was pilot tested in 1998-1999 and systematically evaluated with reliability and validity analyses comparing common survey items with national studies such as the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (CDC).

ACHA will undertake the responsibility of forming a national database and provide individualized data sets and results back to the participating Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). ACHA will also disseminate the results of the national survey through presentations at the ACHA Annual Meeting and Affiliate meetings through reports, publications, and, web presentations.

In the fall of 2002 there nearly 15 million enrolled students in Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions in the 50 States and the District of Columbia, (U.S. Department of Education, 2000-2001). Students enrolled in IHEs form a special population with its own unique characteristics. Service providers, health educators, counselors, administrators and trustees need to better understand trends and identify emerging problems.

This is accomplished, in part, through assessment of college health factors impacting academic performance, retention and campus life. The factors include risk behaviors, protective behaviors, prevalence rates, health outcomes, and perceived norms. The assessment of college health factors is conducted using a survey that covers a number of topics. These include demographics, safety and violence, depression and suicide, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, sexual behavior, body weight and nutrition, physical activity, access to health information and health status. The content of the survey questions is based on salient issues and pertinent health problems in higher education.

The NCHA was developed in 1998 by the ACHA-NCHA Work Group, reviewing several established instruments as a foundation for survey development. The Work Group reviewed the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (NCHRBS), Student Health Survey (University of Minnesota, Boynton Health Services, 1998), the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (Presley, et al. 1993), the College Alcohol Study (Wechsler, 1997) Annual

Student Health Behavior Assessment (Northern Illinois University, Health Enhancement Services, 1998) the Monitoring the Future Study (Johnston et al., 1997) and the National Health Objectives as outlined in Healthy People 2000 (1990). The Work Group developed items that reflect the inter-disciplinary nature of the Committee.

Goal(s)

The goal of this assessment project is to create a college-appropriate health instrument that IHEs can use to collect local data and national data about risk and protective behaviors, perceived norms, and incidence and prevalence of a variety of health problems/conditions which may affect academic performance and retention. With a representative sample of institutions, one particular institution may compare results to with an aggregate national data set to see how they compare to other schools.

Results of the NCHA can be used to help generate prevalence rates of student's behavior and perceptions. Having these data will help IHEs to plan programs, prioritize campus needs, allocate resources, design strategies for intervention, identify protective and risk factors associated with academic performance, and measure progress on the National Health Objectives from Healthy People 2000 and Healthy People 2010.

Pilot Testing

The first pilot was conducted in 1998 at nine IHEs with a combined sample size of 2007. Surveying was conducted using classrooms, convenience samples and random mailings.

A second pilot was conducted in the spring of 1999 at ten IHEs. The combined sample size was 3531. Surveying was conducted with students only and used either classroom or survey mailing methods. A third ACHA-NCHA pilot was conducted in Fall 1999. Seven IHEs participated with a sample size of 3,649. One IHE used a web-based surveying method. These data provided descriptive statistics for each IHE and descriptive statistics of the combined pool of IHEs. The data were also merged with the National College Health Risk Behavior Survey (NCHRBS) and the ACHA-NCHA Pilot I-III for the purposes of evaluating reliability and validity.

The pilot NCHA-Web (NCHA-Web) based survey was conducted at one IHE during Fall 1999. A second pilot was conducted in Spring 2000 and third pilot was conducted in Spring 2002. Preliminary evaluation of NCHA-Web compared with the paper surveys forms demonstrates slightly different demographics of students that participate. An analysis of the consistency between these two methods of surveying have been conducted with NCHA Spring 2003 data and results lend support to combining the NCHA Scan Form data with the NCHA-Web data into one report.

NCHA Spring 2000

Thirty-five U.S. postsecondary institutions self-selected to participate in the Spring 2000 National College Health Assessment and 20,164 surveys were completed by students on these campuses. For the purpose of this study and the formation of the aggregate reference group database, only those institutions that used a random sampling technique were included in the analysis, yielding a final data set consisting of 16,024 students on 28 campuses.

Among the demographic characteristics of the 28 campuses surveyed, 20 were public college/universities and 8 were private. The vast majority, 27, were 4-year institutions. School size varied with one school having less than 2,500 students, two schools 2,500-4,999, seven schools 5,000-9,999, ten schools between 10,000-19,999 and eight schools 20,000 or more. The geographical location around the country also varied with five schools in the northeast, 11 schools in the midwest, five schools in the south and seven schools in the west. There was also variation in campus setting with six schools located in urban areas greater than 1,000,000. Ten schools were located in urban settings between 100,000 and 1,000,000. Six schools were located in suburban settings and 4 in rural settings.

The Carnegie classification was as follows: Doctoral Research University Extensive were represented by 14 schools, Doctoral Research University Intensive included five schools, Masters College and University I comprised seven schools, Baccalaureate College had one school as did Associates Colleges.

There was a mix of randomized classrooms, randomized mailing or sampling of the universe. The overall response proportion was 54% calculated by averaging the response proportion from each school with their selected surveying method.

National Data Compared with NCHA Pilots

The NCHRBS (Douglas et al. 1997), developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with representatives in academia, national health organizations, and federal agencies, was a nationally representative sample conducted in 1995 of undergraduate college students aged 18 or older. Assessed were those risk behaviors associated with injuries, the consumption of alcohol, drug and tobacco usage, sexual behaviors and physical inactivity (Douglas et al. 1997). There was an adequate representation of minorities, sex, and age groups. Sampling was conducted at both two- and four-year institutions of higher education.

The NCHA shares approximately 50 questions with the NCHRBS- making possible reliability and validity testing. The data from the three NCHA pilots, the NCHA Spring 2000, and, NCHRBS were merged together to conduct item reliability and

construct validity with the five samples. Item reliability used Cronbach's alpha. Construct validity used the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between sex and items that were used in the reliability analysis. The purpose of conducting these analyses was not to form scales or to determine the relationship between sex and numerous items. Rather, the analyses were conducted to evaluate the similarities and differences that might exist between the five data sets, especially given the strong methodological and sampling strategies used in conducting the NCHRBS.

Reliability

Items were grouped according to topic areas and separate analyses were conducted for each set of grouped items. Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency among survey items based on inter-item correlation. An Alpha approaching 1.00 indicates very strong internal consistency of the items. Larger average inter-item correlation coefficients, closer to one, indicate strong relationships between items. The ranges that are in acceptable bounds for alpha are approximately .4 to .9. The ranges for the average inter-item correlation are typically found between .2 and .6.

The results of the NCHA demonstrated acceptable inter-item reliability, Cronbach's alpha. Please refer to ACHA NCHA Reliability and Validity Analyses, 2001. Also, conducting the reliability analysis across the four NCHA samples, gives an indication of overall study reliability. This means that other researchers conducting similar studies can replicate the results of a study. An evaluation of the reliability analysis demonstrates similar results over the five studies from different time periods and study methods.

Construct Validity

Construct validity was conducted using the same items evaluated in the reliability analysis. Construct validity is the degree to which a measure relates to other variables as expected within a system of theoretical relationships (Babbie, 1998). The analysis correlated sex with the groups of items used in the previous reliability analyses individually for each study. An evaluation of the construct validity analysis demonstrates that the relationship between sex and the items is reasonably similar across the five studies. Refer to ACHA NCHA Reliability and Validity Analyses, 2001.

Measurement Validity

Measurement validity is the degree of fit between a construct (dependent variable) and its indicators (independent or predictor variables). For example, the term binge drinking is a construct (a variable) that is a source of some controversy, is currently defined by Weschsler (1997), as drinking five or more alcoholic drinks at a sitting for males and four or more drinks for females. When a predicted relation between binge drinking and negative academic consequences is statistically significant and when the effect size (coefficient) is relatively strong, one has achieved a degree of measurement validity. When the researcher also controls for demographics of the individuals that may

be co-factors associated with the outcome measure (consequences), one has measured a phenomena . The better the fit, the greater the measurement specificity. It is not possible to achieve perfect validity because constructs represent abstract ideas and indicators represent concrete observation. When an independent researcher is able to replicate the measurement equation with another population at a different period of time resulting in similar results (magnitude and direction), then measurement validity as well as replication of research findings has been achieved.

Wechsler and colleagues, College Alcohol Study (CAS), performed a number of analyses in their 2000 publication. Table eight is an analysis using Logistic Regression in which the primary coefficient is the odds ratio. As an example, an odds ratio of five would indicated that one is five times more likely to miss a class due to frequently binge drinking than not frequently binge drinking. What makes the analyses more powerful is that age, sex, marital status, race/ethnicity, and parental college education are also in the equation to adjust for the demographic variation. The NCHA has all the variables that Wechsler used except for parental college education. The NCHA would be considered generalizable if it were to replicate the results of the CAS. Please note that 26 logistic regressions are performed and the primary focus is to compare the direction and magnitude of the odds ratio between the two studies across all variables. The resulting analyses found in ACHA NCHA Reliability and Validity Analyses, 2001 indicate strong measurement validity.

Comparing Percentages on Sensitive Indicators

The NCHA covers six content areas: 1) health, health education and safety, 2) alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, 3) sex behavior, perceptions and contraception, 3) weight, nutrition and exercise, 4) mental and physical health, 5) impediments to academic performance, and, 6) demographics. The six content areas comprise approximately 300 questions.

There are certain questions that query about infrequent events. For example, with survey questions on attempted suicide or seriously considered suicide, one would expect a low percentage of students to respond positively. If the survey, survey methodology, or results were flawed (not representative of the population) one would expect to see variation in results comparing the NCHA with national generalizable surveys. On the other hand, with survey items querying about more common occurrences such as allergy problems, small variation in percentages could be attributable to statistical or random error. Please refer to ACHA NCHA Reliability and Validity Analyses, 2001 in which the infrequent event percentages demonstrate remarkable similarity.

II. Pre-surveying Instructions

Surveying is a collaborative effort with typically one individual taking primary responsibility for organization, gaining permission from the IHE, sample selection, collection of data, analysis of results, the reporting of results, and making

recommendations based on the results. Collaboration with others on campus will facilitate the surveying process. Without surveying experience, the tasks may seem at first daunting. For those less familiar with surveying, it is recommended that the surveyors review chapters in the following research methods texts: 1) Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Chapter 10) and Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Chapter 10). Full references are contained in the reference section. Familiarizing yourself with introductory statistics is also highly recommended.

Novice Surveyors

If you are new to research and surveying, after reading the chapters indicated, it may help you list the steps in the process. Listing steps help you to specify the process, identify collaborative partners, and seek cooperation from individuals that will facilitate the survey process with fewer problems. The following section is a scenario of the surveying process. Please skip this section if you are familiar with the surveying process.

Survey Scenario

There are many possible scenarios in the initial stages of planning a survey, depending on the unique characteristics of the IHE. As an example, consider a health professional who decides that conducting the survey at their IHE would be important for comparison to others schools around the country, and a help to plan for program initiatives such as education, intervention, and prevention. If the health educator is not the director of the health program, then seeking that cooperation will be a first step. It is not necessary to conduct the survey through the health center but this is certainly an option.

There will be costs to pay for printing, shipping, distribution, scanning of surveys, and production of results, and, the personnel time involved in the survey process. Costs for printing and scanning and the NCHA-Web option are presented at:

http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA_Participation_Processing_Fees.pdf

These are a partial list of costs because each IHE may also have in-house personnel cost, for managing the surveying process, returning postage, and possible incentives such as a prize or gift certificate.

The surveyor must decide on the method that will be used in the surveying process. There are four possible methods to implement the NCHA: 1) randomized mailed survey, 2) randomized classroom surveying, 3) IHE campus assessment day, and, 4) randomized NCHA-Web survey. These methods are described in later sections of this manual. The surveyor is not encouraged to use other methods and other methods will not be included in the aggregated reporting of results. Randomization is important for each IHE.

The surveyor must receive permission from the IHE administration, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), registrar's office, along with possible other sources unique to each IHE. Levels of support often depend on who and how you are surveying. For example a randomized mailed or web survey, classroom, or assessment day survey would require cooperation and assistance from the school's registrar office to generate the random list of names or classes.

To gain institutional permission to conduct the survey, a written statement including the research plans, a copy of the instrument, sample selection, survey methods, informed consent, demonstration of human subject protection, and confidentiality are necessary components. Submission of the survey instrument, NCHA Reliability and Validity Analyses, and, a copy of the NCHA Users Manual are typically required.

Review what is involved in the four surveying options. Decide given your budget and staffing, what will be the appropriate choice. Review that section below and become familiar with the procedures. Contact your collaborators and ACHA if necessary to clarify issues. Review the Appendices for sample letters and adapt them as necessary for your requirements.

Student Population: Sample

In most situations it is not necessary to survey the entire population (universe) of subjects (students). Sampling techniques make it unnecessary to survey every student on campus. The only time it would be desirable to survey all students would be if an institution has a very small enrollment such as less than 600.

A primary goal of sampling is to select a representative sample of the universe. However, the universe must first be clearly defined. For example, the universe of students consists of all currently enrolled students, full and part time, at a specific date. Or the universe may consist of all current resident students, or all commuter students. With a representative sample, generalizations from the sample surveyed may be generalized to the universe or whole population at a particular institution.

It is important to use probability sampling, if possible. Examples of probability sampling are: 1) a simple random sample, 2) systematic random sample (every tenth name on a registrar's list), 3) stratified sample (200 names from each year classification in school) and, 4) cluster sample (randomly select a subset of dorms from all dorms on campus and randomly survey a subset of students from the selected dorms). Each surveyor should have experience with research or should work with a researcher familiar with sampling and surveying. Faculty and teaching assistants in Epidemiology, Health Promotion and Education, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology, Statistics, and others, are often familiar with research methodology and sampling.

An example of a randomized classroom survey would be to determine a list of classes to survey that are randomly drawn from all classes. These should be stratified to include a variety of academic subjects and levels, such as 100, 200, 300, and 400 level

classes. It is desirable to end up with a sample that closely matches the population of the institution, which may mean over-sampling 300 or 400 level classes, since these are generally smaller than 100 or 200 level classes

Size of Sample

There are at least two factors to consider in determining a desired sample size: 1) the size of the total population (universe from which samples will be drawn) and 2) the predicted return rate. The desired sample size is the number of individuals that respond to the survey. Larger schools should sample more students; smaller schools should sample fewer students.

A number of national survey instruments come with suggested samples sizes given the school size, predicted return rate, and incentives offered. Mailed and web based surveys tend to have lower response rates, approximately 25%. Therefore it is recommended to over sample by at least 50% of the desired sample size. For example, if the desired sample is 600, 1200 names should be randomly drawn to receive the survey. Sample sizes presented in the *Core User's Manual* (Presley, 1993) is presented as an example of suggested sample sizes and is suggested for this survey. The sample sizes delineated by Core are based on school size so knowledge of predicted response proportion is important for deciding on how many surveys to order and distribute. With classroom surveys, maybe 90% of the students attending class on any particular day will complete the survey so over sampling may not be necessary. However, over-sampling classes may be necessary because the total number of students enrolled in any particular class are not likely to be in class on any particular day. Evaluation of the NCHA Spring 2000 through Spring 2002 suggest that women are more likely to respond to a mailed survey than males thus, over sampling of males is suggested for random mailed surveys as well as the NCHA-Web.

Sample Sizes

Size of Campus	Desired Sample Size (Returned Surveys)
Under 600	all students
600-3,000	600
3,000-10,000	700
10,000-20,000	800
20,000-30,000	900
over 30,000	1,000

Survey Methods

The ACHA-NCHA Pilots I-III were conducted with a mix of sampling methods. As mentioned above, it is recommended that surveyors choose to administer surveys in

one of four ways: 1) survey all students in randomly selected classrooms, 2) survey all randomly selected students gathered for a campus assessment day, 3) survey randomly selected students through the mail, and, 4) survey randomly selected students online through the NCHA-Web. A summary of the steps involved in the surveying process:

- Determine feasibility, target population (e.g. freshman or all students) sampling frame (e.g. randomized list of names from registrar's office),
- Determine cost, identify sources of support and campus resources;
- Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) application approval;
- Determine sampling procedures and level of over-sampling needed;
- Specify the procedures for conducting the survey, the schedule for conducting the survey and the follow-up contacts;
- Determine the incentives to be used, if any;
- Outline reporting procedures with other campus officials about results.
- Complete and return the NCHA Demographic Survey describing characteristics of the IHE and method of survey administration.

Extra Questions

The NCHA is a standardized instrument. When additional questions are asked it makes the testing environment different. Researchers can not control all aspects of testing environments, but it is necessary to control as many elements as possible. One way is through standardization of the instrument.

Extra questions will not be typeset individually for each IHE on the NCHA at this time. ACHA, on the other hand, will not prevent extra questions from being added by the IHE. **It is required that if extra questions are asked, that they be included at the end of the NCHA survey.** Each IHE will attain IRB for approval of the NCHA and any additional questions added by the IHE. Each IHE will be responsible for data entry, and analyses of the additional questions.

The NCHA and the database of extra questions can be merged by using the individualized tracking number (Litho code) at the bottom of each survey. If a surveyor wanted to ask additional questions on a separate sheet of paper, simply add the tracking number (litho code) to the sheet of paper with the extra questions. You must instruct the student to answer the extra questions **after** the NCHA has been filled out. **You must request that the Litho codes at the bottom of the survey are to be read when the surveys are sent in to be scanned. ACHA will not read the litho codes unless instructed. If the surveyor holds a key (list) that matches student name to litho code for purposes of contacting non-responders this key must be protected from access by anyone who has access to the data set. This key must be destroyed before the data set is prepared for access.**

Open-ended Questions

Please note there are two questions that allow a student to write in a “other” response. The scan machine can not read this information. If a surveyor wants this information a request needs to be made to the ACHA Research Director to save the scanned surveys and have them mailed back to the IHE. The individual schools are then responsible for tabulating the answers to the two open ended questions.

Human Subjects Protection

Most IHEs will have an IRB. Often there are different names for this group such as Institutional Review Board, Internal Review Board, Human Subjects Committee, Grant Review Board, Research Review Board etc. In some institutions it may be a single individual, typically from administration. In the case of a single individual, this individual must be familiar with issues related to human subject protection and follow suggested guidelines of the NCHA User’s Manual and make it clear that the survey is voluntary, and to insure that the survey is anonymous and/or confidential. It is necessary to determine this process prior to any data collection. **A copy of the IRB approval notification must be attached to the Demographic Survey form and returned to ACHA. No data sets will be processed or used in the Reference Group Reports unless IRB approval is on file.**

The IRB was initiated to protect human subjects from potential harm due to the nature of the research. The approval of the IRB is both necessary and critical when seeking cooperation from campus departments, such as the registrar's office, in obtaining or using mailing lists of students, or an academic department to allow time for a survey to be administered and completed. Some IHEs may not require IRB approval for anonymous classroom surveys but should insure that the survey is anonymous and/or confidential. IRB approval strengthens the overall credibility of the survey and offers the IHE protection.

Informed Consent

Each IHE should conform to the institutional requirements for informed consent and human subjects' protection. The informed consent states that the survey is anonymous/ confidential (depending on survey administration methods) and that participation is voluntary. **It is expected that systems are in place to protect the privacy of all survey participants. If non-responders are re-contacted the names of survey participants need to be kept separate from survey responses and survey responses separate from medical records.** A sample form is included in Appendix A. This is a sample form and the minimum age may vary between states. A separate cover letter can also be written in a way that contains all the information for informed consent, if approved by the IHE IRB. Each IHE should provide a copy of their respective informed consent forms to ACHA. Each IHE that participates in the NCHA must submit the Internal Review Board (IRB) and/or Administrative Approval to survey to ACHA.

III. Surveying Steps and Choices

Introduction

It is recommended that the Spring survey be conducted between the last week of March and the first week in May and more than 30 days after spring break or semester winter break. Schools may also choose to survey earlier such as in mid February. Fall surveyors should survey in a reasonable period of time after the academic year begins and/or more than 30 days after any academic session break. It is also possible to survey during orientation or before classes begin.

Surveying is predominately quantitative in nature and the data collected will be subject to parametric and non-parametric statistical tests. The sampling technique that is chosen will affect the generalizability of the results derived from these tests. If the surveyor handed out the survey in front of the student union building from two through five o'clock on Thursday and Friday, the surveyor could only hope to generalize the results to students who go by the student union building from two to five o'clock on Thursdays and Fridays, if at all. If the surveyor distributed the survey to an upper division history class that would be the only group for whom the results could be generalized.

The more powerful data sampling and data collection methods (i.e., some form of randomization) is recommended. Three methods are suggested for your data collection: 1) surveying in randomly selected classes, 2) surveying all students selected for a campus assessment day, 3) surveying randomly selected students through the mail, and, 4) survey randomly selected students online through e-mail contact using the NCHA-Web. We encourage you to use just one of these methods. These options provide a choice that might work better for a particular campus. If the survey is randomly mailed to students the data are more comparable with selected data items from other studies such as the NCHRBS, College Alcohol Study and the Core.

The surveying method must be noted on the Demographic Survey, Appendix F. The Demographic Survey provides data describing the IHE and the survey methodology. The completion of this form is an important step since IHE characteristics and method of collecting data will be incorporated into the databases and analyses may be performed testing for systematic differences that vary by IHE characteristic and surveying method.

Incentives may be given to survey participants such as discounts at a bookstore or student union. Incentives are used to increase the survey participation proportion. Incentives can also be used with the NCHA-Web.

Following are four sampling techniques in which surveying may occur. The principals of randomization should be incorporated into each technique. With appropriate sampling, generalizable data for individual IHEs may be developed as well as contributing to a generalizable national data set.

Random Classroom Surveying

Survey Steps

One method used is to survey in a classroom setting during instructional time. It is important that permission is received from an IHE official and cooperation with the instructor is obtained. The instructor should receive a letter stating the purpose, the need, and encouragement to participate. Agreement must be reached and cooperation enlisted with the instructor prior to surveying. Informing the instructor of the method and time needed to complete the task will help clarify any questions or resolve any conflicts. Conduct the survey prior to instruction rather than at the end of class since many students' natural reaction might be to leave as soon as class is over. The following is a list of steps in the survey process:

- It is recommended that you have a letter of support from campus administrators or a letter of support from the health service.
- Get permission from IRB and instructor.
- Bring appropriate number of surveys, extra ball point pens or number 2 pencils and ballot box(s) or large envelope(s).
- Instructor introduces surveyor.
- Surveyor introduces survey:

“The American College Health Association National College Health Assessment is used to track student health outcomes, protective behaviors, risk behaviors, and perceived norms on a national level. The survey will take approximately 35 minutes to complete.”

- Discuss Informed Consent. State the purpose of the survey and indicate the survey is anonymous and voluntary.
- Distribute and collect consent forms if required. Distribute survey.
- Emphasize anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honesty.
- Remind students not to look at other students' responses.
- Surveyor should remain in front of the room. Students having questions can come to the front of the room.
- After the survey is completed, the students should deposit the surveys in the box (sealed is preferred so other students can not view other student's answers . Do not pass the surveys from student to student. The surveyor should not individually collect the surveys.
- Thank the instructor and the students for participating.
- Send Demographic Survey and IRB/administrative approval to ACHA and surveys to ACHA.

Class Selection

Selecting random classes is necessary for generalization thus, the method of selecting classes is very important. The classes should be representative of the universe from which you are drawing your sample. The registrar's office can be of assistance in identifying the appropriate classes. A random selection can be made from a pool of classes required of all majors or that are taken by most majors, such as introductory classes. A second step of randomly selecting upper division classes can help increase sample size.

The instructor should introduce the survey administrator who will give a description of the survey, note that it is anonymous, and provide a sealed box in which to deposit the surveys, introductory page face up.

The survey will take approximately 35 minutes to complete. Remind the students that the survey is confidential and anonymous. The administrator should not walk around the room to answer questions in order to maintain privacy of respondents. Students that have already taken the survey may not take it again.

A number 2 pencil or ink pen (Blue or Black Ballpoint/ and or Pilot not felt tip) must be used to complete the survey for scanning purposes. Extra pencils or ink pens should be provided by the surveyor. Request that the ovals are filled out individually and that using lines to answer groups of questions can not be read by scanning machines. You should preview your surveys. If a respondent does not follow directions and simply draws a line instead of filling out the oval the scan machine will read these data as missing. The scanner will read pencil and ball point ink pens only. Be very careful when determining what type of pen was used to complete the surveys. Felt tip pens that soak ink through the survey can not be used. The survey will have a brief explanation of the purpose and content. The students should be encouraged to participate if possible. The student must know that they do not have to take the survey or may stop taking it at any time.

When all surveys are returned to the box, the administrator should thank the students and instructor for their time and effort.

Advantages

Classroom surveying is relatively convenient, cost effective and typically results in a high response rate. A randomly selected class that has a wide coverage of majors helps to ensure that the survey results will be reflective of the student population in general. The registrar's office will typically have information regarding classes that all majors are required to take or that most majors will take such as required general introductory classes.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages are that instructors may be reluctant in giving up class time for survey purposes, the classes may not be representative of the various majors given by the school or demographics of the student body. Depending on who participates, results may not be as generalizable as desired.

Informed Consent

Each IHE should conform to the institutional requirements for informed consent and human subjects' protection. A sample form is included in Appendix A. This is a sample form and the minimum age may vary between states. A cover letter can also be handed out with the survey and written in a way that contains all the information for informed consent. If applicable to institutional standards, the informed consent may be read to the class as a whole. If a form is required, all students taking the survey must complete and sign the form prior to taking the survey.

Survey at IHE Assessment Day

Some IHEs have an Annual Assessment Day. At smaller IHEs, it may be possible to survey the entire student body. At middle or large IHEs a random sample of students selected from the registrar's office are sent to students requesting participation. Annual Assessment Day surveys may also cover a number of questions relevant to campus administrators as well as health educators and service providers.

Assessment Day is usually organized through an academic department or office of institutional research. In brief, an example of how an assessment day might be structured is to randomly select students who would bring a consecutively numbered letter of invitation to the survey area, which would then be checked off a master list to determine participation rate. As always, the surveys would be anonymous and confidential in that no individual survey would name the respondent or be published. Only aggregated results would be reported.

Incentives offered as prizes or discounts may increase response proportion. Free refreshments may help to increase response, as well.

Advantages

Assessment Day surveying is relatively convenient, cost effective and may result in a high response rate. A randomly selected subgroup of students that has a wide coverage of majors helps to ensure that the survey results will be reflective of the student population in general. The registrar's office will typically generate the random selection of students and provide the facilities to conduct the surveying. Also, the survey process does not take away from instruction time.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages are that only a small proportion of invited students may attend the assessment day surveying and the students that partake in the surveying process are not representative of the demographics of the student body.

Informed Consent

Each IHE should conform to the institutional requirements for informed consent and human subjects' protection. A sample form is included in Appendix A. This is a sample form and the minimum age may vary between states. A cover letter can also be handed out with the survey and written in a way that contains all the information for informed consent. If applicable to institutional standards, the informed consent may be read to the class as a whole. If a form is required, all students taking the survey must complete and sign the form prior to taking the survey.

Mailed Survey

A randomized mail survey is a common form of surveying. In general, the steps involve securing permission from the IRB and/or IHE official, cooperation with the registrar's office, random selection from a list of the student body, providing an addressed stamped return envelope and follow up by sending out a combination thank you and reminder.

A checklist is provided as an outline in the survey steps. The following check list is adapted from the *Core Survey Manual* (Presley et al. 1993):

- Identify random sample of names, addresses and telephone numbers;
- Order stationary, envelopes and postage;
- Generate master list of names and addresses;
- Prepare and duplicate cover letter;
- Prepare self-addressed and stamped envelopes;
- Prepare envelopes with respondent name, address and postage;
- Train staff for tracking and follow-up procedures, if used;
- Prepare staff for returned "not at this address" procedures.
- Mail cover letter, survey and pre-addressed stamped return envelope as one package;
- Respondents send surveys to health center, other IHE department or ACHA;
- If surveys are sent to ACHA the envelope must clearly indicate the IHE name;
- Do follow-up mail contact with all students using a combined thank you and reminder to complete and return the survey;

- Submit IRB/ Administrative Approval and Demographic survey to ACHA.

Cover Letter

A cover letter is sent with each survey. See example letter in Appendix C. The cover letter should explain:

- The purpose of the study and its importance;
- Survey confidentiality and anonymity; that the survey processors do not have access to the coding system of the surveys;
- Ask the student to send the survey in the addressed stamped envelope;
- Individuals can be contacted to thank them for participation and/or remind them to submit the survey to the appropriate location for processing.

Re-Contacting Students

The surveyor may choose to send a thank you letter to all participants and to remind those that have not sent in the survey to please do so. Non-responders can be tracked by use of the Litho code at the bottom of the survey. This requires a master list of names and Litho codes which must be treated with the same regulations as medical records. The survey becomes confidential not anonymous if this method is used and must be indicated to the student.

Advantages

The advantages of a mailed survey are ease of randomization and greater generalizability of results. A follow-up notice thanking those that have returned the survey and reminding those that have not completed and returned the survey to please do so, helps to increase response proportion. Randomized mailed surveys have a long history thus information on expected responses rates and detailed methodologies and procedures are well documented.

Disadvantages

Mailed surveys are more expensive and require more administrative work than surveying in a classroom or on an assessment day because there are the costs of materials, mailing, tracking and re-contacting with a combination thank you and reminder. Typically, lower response proportions result from mailed surveys therefore the surveyor should attempt to get a response rate above 50%. This can be done with incentives and with student re-contact.

Informed Consent

Each IHE should conform to the institutional requirements for informed consent and human subjects' protection. A sample form is included in Appendix A. This is a sample form and the minimum age may vary between states. The cover letter can also be written in a way that contains all the information for informed consent. If the IHE requires the student to return the consent form to the IHE, a separate addressed and stamped envelope must be included.

Online Survey

Web Surveying

The Fall 1999, Spring 2000 and Spring 2002 NCHA had one pilot school at each time period surveying via a web-based methodology. Web surveying will be conducted by identification of a random sample of students or potentially the entire IHE student body. Notification will be made through e-mail by ACHA with an invitation/introductory letter, and unique ID from ACHA or from the institution. This will prevent one individual from taking the survey multiple times. These procedures must adhere to all rules of confidentiality. It is possible to add extra questions to the NCHA-Web but there are additional costs associated with programming, limitations in report generation since reports are standardized. Contact E. Victor Leino Ph.D. at vleino@acha.org to discuss the costs and procedures for extra questions on the NCHA-Web.

The National College Health Assessment web-based survey (NCHA-Web) is an additional option to the paper-based survey option. The Spring version of the NCHA-Web (with the time frame of "last school year" for a subset of questions) is available. The Fall version of the surveys (with the time frame "last 12 months" for a subset of questions) was available in August 2003.

Convenience

The respondent may easily scroll through the survey as it is filled out, review questions already answered, make changes, and then submit the survey online when it is completed. Students are encouraged to complete the survey in one sitting, which takes approximately 20-30 minutes. Although not suggested, the respondent may also fill out part of the survey, logoff the web, and then return online to complete the survey at a later time.

E-mail Notification

The simplest way to send an e-mail notification to the randomly selected students is through ACHA. This requires that the IHE send a list of e-mail addresses to ACHA in an Excel file. It is also possible to request that ACHA randomly select students from a complete list of e-mail address of the entire student body. Non-responders can be re-contacted for a minimal price. If the IHE decides to send the e-mail invitations to the

student each student must be notified individually with an e-mail that has the unique ID and school code as part of the URL to access the survey.

E-mail Invitation

Please see Appendix E. for a generic Letter of Invitation to the students. A customized e-mail invitation based on the IHE's IRB may be used to contact the students.

Students are invited to participate via an e-mail message sent by ACHA or the participating institution. Non-respondents can be automatically reminded to take the survey, for an additional charge. ACHA can assist campuses in drawing random samples of students from their campus population. This is done by having the participating IHE provide ACHA with the entire e-mail list of the school and then a selected percentage of students are randomly selected.

The easiest means of contacting the students is through ACHA. This requires each participating IHE to provide a list of student e-mail addresses in an Excel file with the e-mail addresses in the first column. ACHA then populates the second column with an unique ID in the second column and the school identifier in the third column. The students are automatically contacted through an e-mail invitation in which describes the survey, indicating that taking the survey is voluntarily and indicating informed consent through linking to the survey. Each student receives an individualized URL that has the unique ID and school identifier embedded in the URL. When the survey is submitted the unique ID and school identifier is placed next to the survey responses.

Although e-mail addresses are not placed next to survey responses, ACHA temporarily holds the Excel file of e-mail addresses and unique IDs thus making the NCHA-Web confidential and not anonymous. The e-mail address and unique IDs are destroyed after data are compiled. The unique IDs are stripped from the data set before each IHE receives their compiled data from ACHA. ACHA Research Director, E. Victor Leino, Ph.D. holds the Excel file with e-mail addresses and unique ID and is responsible for confidentiality and destruction of this information after surveying is completed and data are compiled. E. Victor Leino, Ph.D. holds a Completion Certificate for the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 01/23/03.

Non-responders

A reminder may be sent to each student that does not respond to the survey for a minimal charge. Products and pricing and order forms may be found on the ACHA web site under Projects and Programs or the following URL:

http://www.acha.org/projects_programs/ncha_participate.cfm

Incentives

The NCHA-Web data collected will have the unique IDs embedded in the data. It is possible to request that a randomized drawing of submitted surveys be identified for e-mail notification of prizes or incentives. It is also possible to provide all students who submitted surveys with an incentive.

Privacy/Security Statement

Please see Appendix D for the ACHA Privacy/Security Statement for the NCHA-Web. There are also links to the Web Surveyor Corporation which sub-contracts software and server hosting for survey administration and data collection.

Security

The NCHA-Web data transmission is encrypted and firewall securities are in place. Please see Appendix D, *Privacy/Security Statement*.

Affordability

Institutions can implement the NCHA web-based surveys at half the participation and processing costs of the paper-based surveys. ACHA Institutional Members receive substantial discounts.

Please visit

<http://www.acha-ncha.org/getstarted.html>

on the ACHA website for pricing and ordering information, as well as a background of the NCHA and highlights of selected data sets.

For further information or to schedule a phone consultation, contact ACHA Research Director E. Victor Leino, Ph.D., vleino@acha.org or call (410) 859-1500, ext. 239.

A checklist is provided as an outline in the survey steps. The following check list is adapted from the *Core Survey Manual* (Presley et al. 1993):

- Seek IRB and/or Administrative Approval from the appropriate IHE department;
- Identify random sample of e-mail addresses or the entire schools e-mail addresses;
- Purchase the NCHA-Web service by sending in the NCHA-Web order form;
- Form an Excel file that has the student e-mail addresses in the first column;
- Send the Excel file to E. Victor Leino, Ph.D.

- Generate a letter of invitation based on the schools IRB or chose to use the generic letter of invitation. Please see Appendix E.
- Determine in advance if non-responding students are going to be re-contacted. This service will be billed at the same time processed surveys are billed. Draft a re-contact letter.
- Determine if incentives are going to be offered for participation;
- Submit Demographic Survey and IRB and/or Administrative Approval to ACHA.

Letter of Invitation

A letter of invitation is sent to each selected student through e-mail. See generic letter in appendix E. The letter of invitation should explain:

- The purpose of the study and its importance;
- Survey confidentiality;
- Benefits and risks;
- Informed consent.

Advantages

The advantages of the NCHA-Web is easy of administration and cost. Re-contacting non-responding students can be done automatically for a small fee.

Disadvantages

Students may not trust the Web security and choose not to participate. Typically, lower response proportions result from web surveys much like mailed surveys therefore the surveyor should attempt to get a response rate above 50%.

Informed Consent

Each IHE should conform to the institutional requirements for informed consent and human subjects' protection. A sample form is included in Appendix A. This is a sample form and the minimum age may vary between states. The cover letter can also be written in a way that contains all the information for informed consent. If the IHE requires the student to return the consent form to the IHE, a separate addressed and stamped envelope must be included.

IV. Guidelines and Recommendations for Blind or Vision Impaired Students

1. Present the situation and plans to the University Internal Review Board.
2. Arrange to have a licensed practitioner to have a private meeting with the student.
3. Introduce the survey by describing the nature of the survey and the purpose.
4. Indicate that the survey is completely voluntary.
5. Indicate that the student may refuse to answer any question.
6. List the seven content areas that the survey covers.
7. Indicate that there are sensitive questions regarding alcohol, smoking, drugs and sexuality.
8. Assure the student that any answers provided will not be used by the interviewer to recommend counseling, therapy or treatment unless the student requests the interventions.
9. Assure the student that no information provided will be documented anywhere except in the survey itself which again has no identifying information contained.
10. If subject agrees to participate read the IRB consent form and have the student sign the form or verbally accept to participate if that is the IRB instructions.
11. Read the instructions on the face of the survey.
12. Fill in the survey responses with a #2 pencil, blue or black ballpoint pen (not felt tip).
13. Skip any question that the student refuses to answer. Do not try and coax an answer.
14. Do not respond or react to any particular answer. For example if the student reports drinking 12 beers a day, make no response such as “wow that is a lot”.
15. If the student is clearly lying in the response pattern just continue with the survey and note afterwards that the student may be lying and contact E. Victor Leino Ph.D. research director at ACHA 410-859-1500 ext. 239 for further instructions.
16. Thank the student for participating.
17. Return the survey to the surveyors and witness the survey being randomly inserted amongst completed stacks of surveys.

V. ACHA Data Archive

All surveys that are conducted using the Classroom Method and IHE Assessment Day Method are collected by the IHE and returned to ACHA or the sub-contractor. If the Mailed Survey Method is used, surveys will be returned directly to the IHE, ACHA or the sub-contractor.

The survey response forms will be electronically scanned and a database formed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2002). Data will not be integrated into the Reference Group Data Base without IRB or administrative approval. These data will be cleaned and checked for errors. Each school must indicate the data set format for their analysis system. A codebook describing variable names and numerical values and a data disk will be returned to each participating institution, or, an electronic transfer will be made if requested.

ACHA will release individual IHE data sets only to the IHE surveyor. The NCHA Advisory Committee under the direction of the ACHA Board of Directors will decide on the process for release of the full data set with school identification removed to interested researchers

VI. Distribution of Institutional Data

After cleaning and error checking, the data set and institutional report will be returned to the surveyor. Frequency data including appropriate summary statistics for each institution will be presented along with the same information from the large merged data set so comparisons may be made. Surveying methods will be coded in the data sets allowing for determination of systematic differences in survey methods. The information will be presented comprising all students and also separately by sex.

Analyses of the combined data set will be conducted, summarized and reported through ACHA. Aggregate analyses will be conducted and broken down by sex and race. Further analyses will be conducted by type of IHE, including size, state affiliation, and IHE location. The combined data set will be made available for further analysis after ACHA Board of Directors provides guidelines. Statistical tests will be conducted with bi-variate model and models containing more than one independent variable including control variables.

VII. Additional Institutional Analysis Suggestions

Each institution is encouraged to analyze their data with appropriate statistical methods. Suggestions include determining variation by age, sex and race as initial analysis. Tests of significance are also encouraged using bi-variate analyses as well as models including more than one variable as appropriate control variables.

Surveyors are encouraged to seek statistical advice in the cases where necessary or to contact:

E. Victor Leino, Ph.D.
American College Health Association
Research Director
891 Elkridge Landing Road, Suite 100
Linthicum, MD 21090
410-859-1500 ext. 239
fax 410-859-1510
e-mail <mailto:vleino@acha.org>

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Appendix A: *Sample Informed Consent Mailed Survey*

The ACHA National College Health Assessment **Spring 2004** Survey
(ACHA-NCHA)

Informed Consent

Do not fill out this survey if you are under the age of 18.

The ACHA National College Health Assessment Survey (ACHA-NCHA) is a research project used to track student health outcomes, protective behaviors, risk behaviors, and perceived norms on a national level. The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. Please read the instructions and complete the survey using a # 2 pencil or ink pen (blue or black ballpoint pen, not felt tipped). The survey contains items concerning health behaviors such as substance use and sexual activity.

The ACHA-NCHA survey will help to: generate incidence rates for a variety of health issues; plan programs; prioritize student needs; allocate resources; design programs or strategies for intervention; identify protective and risk factors to academic performance; and measure progress on the national health objectives.

You have been randomly selected to participate and we hope that you will be willing to help us. The survey is confidential and anonymous. Identification numbers are contained on the survey to determine response rate only. At no time will surveyors holding the master list of names and tracking number have access to any completed survey nor will results from an individual survey be released. Your name or other identifying marks should not be made on the survey.

Contact the ACHA-NCHA Survey Administer on your campus (*name and number*) for any pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

Include instructions from the IHE IRB.

I am over 18 years of age and agree to participate _____

(Signature)

Printed Name _____

Appendix B: Surveyor Instruction Sheet in Class Survey Administration

- A. Bring appropriate number of surveys, number 2 pencils, and ballot box(es) or large envelope(s).
- B. Instructor introduces surveyor.
- C. Surveyor introduces survey:

“The American College Health Association National College Health Assessment is used to track student health outcomes, protective behaviors, risk behaviors, and perceived norms on a national level. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.”
- D. Discuss Informed Consent. State the purpose of the survey and indicate the survey is anonymous and voluntary.
- E. Distribute and collect consent forms if required. Distribute survey.
- F. Emphasize anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honesty. Remind students not to look at other students' responses.
- G. Surveyor should remain in front of the room. Students having questions can come to the front of the room.
- H. After the survey is completed, the students should deposit the surveys in the sealed box. Do not pass the surveys from student to student. The surveyor should not individually collect the surveys.
- I. Thank the instructor and the students for participating.
- J. Send Study Methods Form and IRB approval to ACHA and surveys to ACHA or sub-contractor.

Appendix C: *Sample Letter*

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip code

Dear *Student*,

The American College Health Association, in cooperation with *IHE name* is conducting a survey about students' health. You have been randomly selected to participate. We hope that you will be willing to help us.

The survey is confidential and anonymous. Identification numbers are contained on the survey to determine response rate only. At no time will the surveyors with your name and tracking number have access to any completed survey nor will results from an individual survey be released. The completed survey will be mailed to the American College Health Association or sub-contractor. Your name and tracking number will be held by the surveyors at *IHE name*. After the surveys are compiled the list of names and corresponding tracking numbers will be destroyed.

Your responses are important and we hope that you will agree to participate. However, you are under no obligation to participate if you so choose.

If we do not receive the completed survey by *date* we will contact you again to participate or to determine if you need another survey.

Each IHE must include any instructions for the Informed Consent.

IHE may want to include an incentive for returning the completed survey such as a onetime discount in the bookstore etc.

Please complete the survey and mail in the stamped pre-addressed envelope. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Surveyor

Appendix D: Privacy/Security Statement

The American College Health Association (ACHA) has contracted with WebSurveyor Corporation to make the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) available as a web-based (on-line) survey (NCHA-Web). ACHA offers this privacy statement in order to demonstrate its firm commitment to online privacy. E-mail contact information obtained from survey respondents will only be used for internal purposes. At no time will ACHA or WebSurveyor Corp. sell, rent, or otherwise distribute personally identifiable information to a third party.

Surveys

Students access the NCHA-Web through a URL which is included in their invitation to participate. A unique URL, embedded with an identification number and school code, is generated for each invited participant. ACHA and WebSurveyor Corp. will not provide identification numbers, school codes, or e-mail addresses to any other person or entity.

System Availability

WebSurveyor software and hosting facility is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, every day of the year including holidays. The hosting facility is monitored 24 hours a day and has technicians on staff to troubleshoot, diagnose and repair any problems that may be encountered. WebSurveyor Corp. has a state of the art firewall system that helps protect their servers from outside intrusions and hacking attempts. This firewall has both automated systems to detect intrusion attempts as well as staff that monitor any suspect activities the system detects.

Survey Results

When NCHA-Web survey respondents' data are received by WebSurveyor Corp., they will be stored on secure hardware and software. WebSurveyor Corp. will only allow the NCHA-Web survey data to be downloaded directly to ACHA.

WebSurveyor Corp. will not attempt to read the NCHA-Web survey data at any time unless explicitly instructed to do so by ACHA. WebSurveyor Corp. does not own the data for the NCHA-Web survey. WebSurveyor Corp. has access to the NCHA-Web survey data purely for purposes of backup and troubleshooting. WebSurveyor Corp. has security measures in place to protect data while stored on their servers and will prosecute, to the fullest extent of the law, any unauthorized attempt to access this information .

Security and Privacy

When WebSurveyor, is used, the questionnaire, respondent lists and survey data are kept completely confidential and private. WebSurveyor also works to assure the security of data, both on their servers as well as when it is transmitted over the Internet. When data are transmitted from respondents to the Websurveyor server, and from the WebSurveyor server to ACHA, all data are encoded. ACHA is the only entity that can download NCHA-Web data from the WebSurveyor server.

Data security is achieved through use of SSL encryption during storage and transmission to protect it from external access or viewing.

For questions about the WebSurveyor privacy statement, as well as any other policies and practices of the web site, please feel free to contact WebSurveyor Corp. by sending an email to: privacy@websurveyor.com .

WebSurveyor:

Privacy Statement http://www.websurveyor.com/about_privacy.asp

Use Policy http://www.websurveyor.com/about_usepolicy.asp

Anti Spam Policy http://www.websurveyor.com/about_spampolicy.asp

For questions about the NCHA-Web, please contact: vleino@acha.org .

Appendix E: Letter of Invitation (Generic)

Dear Student,

You have been randomly selected to participate in the National College Health Assessment Web survey (NCHA-Web) sponsored by the American College Health Association (ACHA). The NCHA-Web is a survey designed to assess student health behaviors in order to provide better services and support for *SCHOOL NAME* students. You may benefit by knowing that you have assisted in providing accurate information regarding health behaviors on your campus. The information will be used to develop health programs for your campus.

The NCHA-Web is completed online via the Internet. You may scroll through the survey as you fill this out. We encourage you to complete the survey in one sitting, which typically takes about 20-30 minutes.

[Incentive information]

There may be some personal discomfort with the content of certain questions. For example, there are questions regarding illegal behaviors such as illegal substance use and sexual behavior. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Your name or e-mail addresses will never be associated with your responses. You may answer only some questions, or you may choose not to participate in the survey at all.

You have been assigned an ID number in order for the secure Internet server to manage your online survey input. This number is imbedded in your URL address. To ensure confidentiality, ID numbers and e-mail addresses are destroyed before data are compiled and shared with your college or university.

Data transmission is encrypted and firewall securities are in place. After you submit the survey to secure server, you will receive a message thanking you for taking the NCHA-Web. The final survey responses will be housed at ACHA. Again, the version of the data set that is forwarded to your institution will not include personal identification such as e-mail addresses or ID numbers.

More directions follow as you link to the web site. By linking to the survey web site you are acknowledging that you are 18 years of age or older, and you are agreeing to participate in the NCHA-Web.

[Local contact information]

If you agree to participate in the ACHA NCHA-Web survey, click on the following Internet address to continue:

[URL HERE]

Thank you for you cooperation!
American College Health Association