Posters from the edge

Displays depict effects of substance abuse

The posters don't look like the usual university display of intellectual pursuit. But, like a scientific explanation of disease, pollution, or other topic traditionally illuminated on a poster, these works show how things can add up.

In this case, it is the consequence of alcohol and drug use/abuse that is framed and hung on about 100 walls around campus, the graphic material displaying the often-times distasteful and regretful results of poor decision-making around drugs and alcohol.

The works, crafted through collaboration with Mass Art and with guidance from marketing professor Felicia Lassk, are the result of an alcohol and drug use education campaign sponsored by Bouvé College of Health Sciences and the College of Business Administration.

"The posters were created as the result of two federally-funded studies," said Professor Hortensia Amaro, director of the Institute on Urban Health Research. Her team of researchers and collaborators developed an educational campaign to encourage Northeastern students to think about decisions around drinking and drugs, and encourage discussion.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the department of Health and Human Services sponsored the works.

The posters are the result of a three-year research project involving surveys of university students on their attitudes and experiences with alcohol and drugs.

Last fall, sample posters were rolled out at a widely attended student event aimed at gathering input. Lassk's marketing students, who conducted in-person interviews with 400 students, led the survey.

The results generated two posters offering tips for staying safe while drinking, and four posters based on results of surveys into the reasons students drink, and the negative consequences experienced.

Two additional posters were created to inform students about the university's policies and consequences of policy violations, Amaro said.

Amaro posed recently with one of the posters, a graphic depiction of a student sick from alcohol.

"This year, we hope to get out these posters and gauge the reaction people are having to them," Amaro said. "Our next step will involve getting support from our students on ways to distribute the posters more broadly, and for keeping the ideas developed in our research alive, over time."

— By Susan Salk