

Statewide Collegiate Recovery Initiative: What Does the Literature Tell Us?

Lessons Learned from the State of Washington

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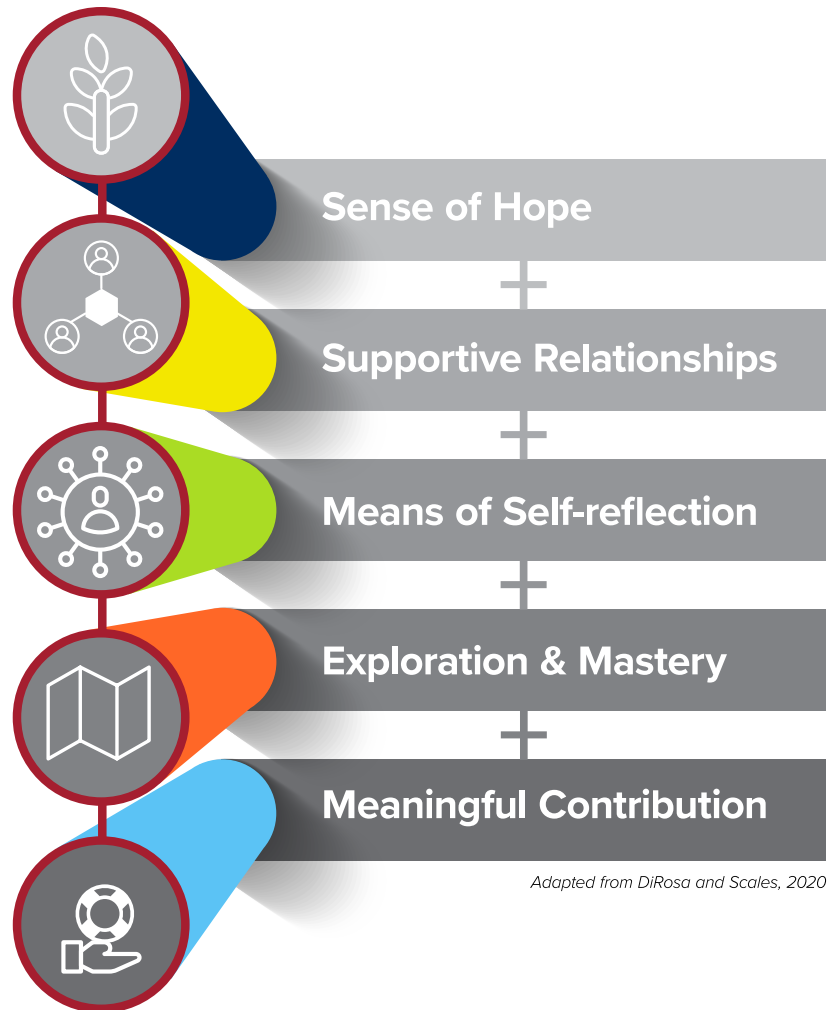


As part of the 2020-2021 State of Washington Collegiate Recovery Support Initiative, Washington State University (WSU) partnered with C4 Innovations (C4) to conduct an evaluation from February to June 2021. Part of this evaluation project was a literature review. C4 conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify the latest research in collegiate recovery¹, best practices in supporting youth and young adults in recovery, Native American populations, and other priority populations. For in-depth findings and recommendations, refer to the [full report](#).

Literature Review Methodology

C4 began the environmental scan by conducting a comprehensive literature review to identify the latest research in collegiate recovery, best practices in supporting youth and young adults in recovery, Native American populations, and other priority populations. Our team developed inclusion criteria to ensure the latest peer-reviewed research was included as well as included local State of Washington evaluations or research.

During the literature review, a matrix was used to track important details, themes, highlights, and strengths and weaknesses for each article. As each piece of literature was reviewed, themes were organized by topic area. The resulting literature review was compiled into a single document and used to identify best practices and known needs and gaps when it comes to collegiate recovery programs nationwide. The final literature review was examined by a subject matter expert to ensure all relevant literature was included and no research gaps exist. In addition to providing information on current best practices and trends in collegiate recovery across the United States, the literature review was used to inform development of qualitative data collection protocols.



Adapted from DiRosa and Scales, 2020

1 Currently, the field lacks an agreed upon definition of collegiate recovery and what supports comprise collegiate recovery in institutions of higher education across the United States. For this environmental scan, our team developed the following definition of collegiate recovery/ collegiate recovery supports to ensure a shared understanding during data collection, analysis and reporting: *Services and/or programs that provide support to students in higher education who are in or seeking recovery from substance use disorders and/or co-occurring disorders.*

Literature Review Findings

As part of the environmental scan, C4 conducted a thorough literature review, examining 118 peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations, and more. Out of the 118 pieces of literature, 26 were applicable to the research questions for this environmental scan. Often, topic areas identified for the environmental scan were lacking in literature. This is not surprising considering that collegiate recovery programs are a relatively new initiative. [Note: Much of the early literature uses the term collegiate recovery programs (CRPs). Although our team uses the language “collegiate recovery services and supports,” CRP is used within this literature review to stay consistent with language used in those articles.] Overall, there is a lack of research regarding the long-term effectiveness of CRPs (Reed et al., 2020), although a small body of research has attempted to elucidate the key program components of CRPs that are most effective in supporting students in their active recovery (Laudet et al., 2014; Vest et al., 2021). The need for more research on the efficacy of CRPs and efficacious implementation was supported by key informant interviews conducted during our environmental scan (see full report, pages 47 to 53).

Collegiate Recovery is a New and Expanding Field

With the first collegiate recovery programs beginning in the 1970s, collegiate recovery is a relatively new idea. In the late 1970s, Brown University became the first institution of higher education to report housing a collegiate recovery community. Over the next few years, additional collegiate recovery communities slowly developed across the country at Rutgers University, Texas Tech University, and Augsburg College. Each university’s programs were designed to support students in recovery to navigate and balance their education and recovery in a recovery hostile environment (Beeson et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2020) through a variety of approaches.

Collegiate Recovery Definitions and Frameworks Continue to Evolve

The collegiate recovery movement continues to struggle to identify common definitions and frameworks. Currently, there is not an agreed upon definition of recovery (Ashford et al., 2019; Witkiewitz et al., 2020) and CRPs are based on multiple models, such as abstinence-based or harm reduction (Association for Recovery in Higher Education, 2020; Laitman et al., 2014; Transforming Youth Recovery, 2018). [Note: We encourage you to review definitions for abstinence-based recovery by Bugbee et al., 2016 at <http://www.cls.umd.edu/docs/CRP.pdf> or Brown et al., 2018 at <https://recoverysciencejournal.org/index.php/JORS/article/view/8>. See SAMHSA descriptions of multiple pathways to recovery and harm reduction at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery> and <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction>]. Additionally, the collegiate recovery movement continues to struggle to find common definitions and frameworks for collegiate recovery,

ARHE defines the term collegiate recovery program as: “A College or University-provided, supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to engage in a lifestyle of recovery from substance use. It is designed to provide an educational opportunity alongside recovery support to ensure that students do not have to sacrifice one for the other.” (ARHE, n.d.)

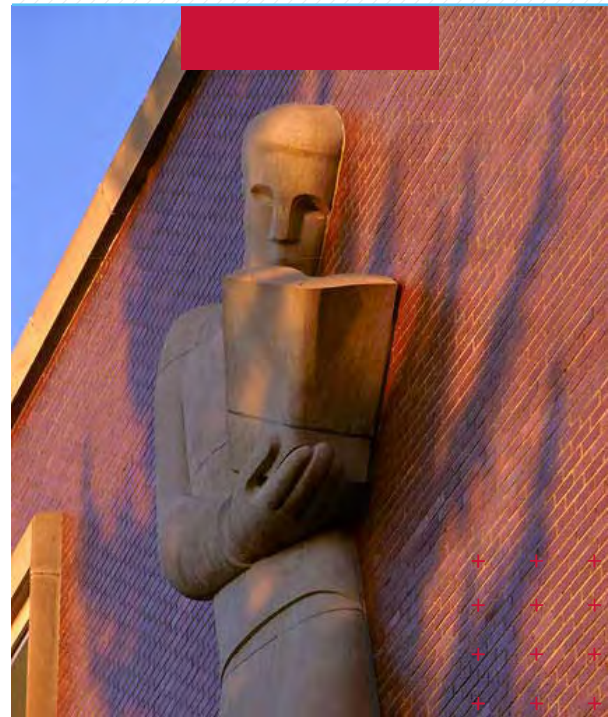
as communities and programs vary, depending on campus culture, available resources, and student needs (Reed et al., 2020).

As the collegiate recovery movement continued to grow, organizations emerged to provide some standardization, structure, and definitions to these efforts. The Association for Recovery in Higher Education (ARHE) developed abstinence-based official definitions (see definition on previous page) and increased accountability by creating standards for programs. Beeson and colleagues (2017) defined a collegiate recovery program, describing it as providing specific opportunities, services, and supports to the broader collegiate recovery community on campus and beyond. Others, such as Harris et al., (2007), stated that a collegiate recovery community is a peer-driven community where collegiate recovery program components have been developed according to student needs. A collegiate recovery community specifically incorporates recovery support, access to higher education, educational support, peer support, family support, and broad community support/service in an effort to help individuals attain what is a systems-based sustained recovery. The goal of a recovery community is to create, implement, and maintain peer-to-peer support services that promote a culture of abstinence from substance use and relapse prevention. The terms collegiate recovery community and collegiate recovery program are used interchangeably at times or can be used differently from one Institution of Higher Education (IHE) to another. The ARHE (FAQs, n.d.) encourages individuals to inquire how terms are being used for clarity.

Literature Review Observations, Gaps, and Areas of Tension in Collegiate Recovery

Strong collegiate recovery programs are responsive to the needs of their communities. The needs of students in higher education who are in recovery may vary widely based on the availability of services, programming, and supports in the community, the population of the college or university, and other social or cultural differences. An effective collegiate recovery program will be responsive to the needs of the students it is serving; therefore, it is recommended that each institution conduct a needs or readiness assessment prior to establishing a program (Kollath-Cattano et al., 2018).

High schools and IHEs should collaborate to support students in this transition. There is a gap in the literature regarding trends, best practices, and barriers in supporting students in recovery as they transition from high school settings to institutions of higher education. Recovery high schools can provide support for students in recovery as they transition, but all students, regardless of recovery status may be at an increased risk for alcohol and substance use as they enter college due to the accessibility of substances and less supervision.



Efforts must be made to ensure equitable access to recovery for marginalized populations and communities. The literature lacks data on best practices for supporting marginalized students in collegiate recovery spaces, despite the heightened levels of behavioral and mental health challenges that racial and ethnic minorities, gender and sexual orientation minorities, previously incarcerated students, and disabled individuals experience. In order to appeal to marginalized communities, collegiate recovery programs should ensure that their space is viewed as a “welcoming space” for all students and allow for the opportunity for students to see themselves represented among the students in the program, regardless of their identities (Snethen et al., 2021).

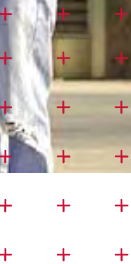
Collegiate recovery efforts must incorporate Pacific Northwest Native American perspectives on recovery. The 29 federally-recognized Tribes, six Recognized American Indian Organizations, and several unrecognized Tribes within the State of Washington have a wide variety of histories, experiences, challenges, strengths, and orientations and it is of the utmost importance that the commonalities and nuanced differences be understood when considering culturally-specific, appropriate, and responsive programming and supports for Native American students.

Pillars for Collegiate Recovery Support Development

In 2020, DiRosa and Scoles described five pillars for a strong collegiate recovery program (see graphic on p. 2). While their research focused on a community college setting, it is likely the pillars apply to other types of higher education settings as well. The five pillars include:

- 1** a sense of hope through self-awareness and self-efficacy that students can influence their life trajectories and manage current and future events through their new life perspective;
- 2** secure and supportive relationships that extend past the collegiate recovery program or student services and into the larger college community, destigmatizing students in recovery through awareness initiatives and professional development;
- 3** a means for self-reflection through the availability of clubs, support activities, and services for the on campus recovery community;
- 4** avenues for exploration of competence and mastery by providing opportunities for students to take on leadership and advocacy roles in their recovery communities; and
- 5** generativity and meaningful contribution through the opportunity to share and include life experiences for students in recovery into their course work.

Collegiate recovery programs should consider whether these pillars are evident in their programs and the role each plays in the development and sustainability of their collegiate recovery services and supports.



Intersections Between Literature Review and Report Recommendations

Observations from our literature review and overall report recommendations highlight two important next steps for the field:

1. Conduct further research and disseminate findings related to collegiate recovery, as it is a new field of study. This was evidenced by the limited literature that was available during a comprehensive literature review conducted by our team.
2. Create shared and widely understood definitions.
 - + In the field of collegiate recovery, a commonly acknowledged challenge is that collegiate recovery and what comprises collegiate recovery support are often defined differently by researchers, IHEs, individuals providing collegiate recovery supports, and those receiving supports.
 - + Although collegiate recovery supports should be tailored to the needs of students within each community, having a shared definition of collegiate recovery supports reduces ambiguity related to policies and funding and provides a standard for what services and supports should be available as part of collegiate recovery, thus creating clarity for IHEs, service providers, peer supporters, families, and students.

Standard definitions within the field of collegiate recovery create an important opportunity, not only in the development and implementation of services, but also effective evaluation of those services.

Evolving Contexts in Collegiate Recovery Support Development

The State of Washington is in the beginning stages of developing a sustainable state-wide system of care of collegiate recovery support services that are linked to the broader continuum of care services provided on college campuses. As we consider the field of recovery, the development of collegiate recovery programming is in its infancy. It is critical that research and evaluation in this area continue and findings be broadly disseminated. This evaluation project gives impetus and challenge to policy makers, state agencies, IHEs, community partners, and others to build “welcoming places” (Snethen et al., 2021) for students in recovery through the creation of inclusive environments and relationships on campus and in the surrounding community that offer an accessible needs-based continuum of recovery supports and services for students.



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