

Collegiate Recovery



What is recovery?

Recovery from alcohol and drug problems is defined as “a process of change through which an individual achieves abstinence and improved health, wellness, and quality of life” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). Although some models of recovery typically require abstinence, this is not always the case, particularly for people whose substance use problems have been less disruptive to their everyday life. Importantly, recovery encompasses not just changes to substance use, but also personal growth and self-improvement. It is seen by most people in recovery and by addiction specialists as a lifelong, dynamic process rather than an endpoint that can be achieved.

What is a collegiate recovery program?

A collegiate recovery program (CRP) is “a supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to disengage from” a continuing pattern of use that is interfering in one’s life (Association of Recovery in Higher Education; ARHE). While the services offered by these programs vary, they generally provide a safe environment for college students in recovery to continue their education in a supportive social environment. These programs generally promote abstinence from alcohol and drug use rather than harm reduction.

The first CRP was established at Brown University in 1977. Today, there are 52 CRPs across the United States serving approximately 600 college students.

Who are these programs for?

Substance use occurs on a spectrum, and CRPs can support students at various points on this spectrum. They support students who have realized that they need to make or maintain changes in their substance use. At some colleges where resources are scarce, participation in a CRP may be limited to students who are on the more severe end of the spectrum. Some programs have other requirements to join a CRP, such as a minimum GPA, passing a urine drug screen, or maintaining recovery for a certain period of time.



What do these programs look like?

There are many models of CRPs and ARHE promotes a “no one size fits all” approach to developing new programs. The availability of resources, students’ need for services, and other factors can affect which components a school chooses to offer. However, the typical components are:

- Dedicated physical space, such as a drop-in recreational center
- Space and support on campus for 12-step meetings (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Substance-free housing
- Substance-free events
- Professional counseling or clinical support
- Connection to formalized treatment off-campus
- Dedicated staff members

Other, less common program components include academic courses for credit, retreats, activities promoting other aspects of health and wellness, and life skills workshops. Many of these programs are led by staff members with clinical expertise, such as psychiatrists, Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselors, or social workers. However, at some schools, these programs are student-led rather than administration-led.

Some CRPs require students to sign a behavioral contract. These contracts set a standard to which all members must adhere while they are members of the CRP. Examples of requirements include:

- Complete abstinence from all substance use
- Minimum GPA
- Participation in a minimum number of 12-step or CRP meetings