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Fall Stall Seat Journal: Edition 1b

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Hoo Knew?

Where do misperceptions come from?

The brain is flooded with tons of information every second. In order to process the high volume, the brain chooses what it believes to be most important and ignores the rest. Patterns – and variations in those **patterns** – are particularly important in helping us determine what to focus on. For example, at a large party, we ignore all of the people who are either not drinking or drinking responsibly and **notice** the handful of people talking loudly or the person dancing on the table. Later, we tell stories about the abnormal behavior instead of the actual norm. By **focusing** on the unusual behavior, it starts to look more ‘typical.’ After having a few similar experiences, our brain creates **short-cuts**. While these short-cuts help us make decisions in complex situations, they can also lead us to misperceiving. Don’t believe it? Check out these optical illusions to see how easy it is to trick the brain! (Additionally, research shows it to be true!)

Can you see the dots appearing in the intersection of the grid?

Social Norms

People tend to overestimate certain unhealthy behaviors. One reason is that many of these are visible and they draw our attention, like people smoking or a person passed out at a party. For example, 68% of U.Va. students overestimated how many drinks per week that most U.Va. students consume.

Likewise, people tend to underestimate certain healthy behaviors because they are largely invisible or part of the pattern. Studying and using a condom are both examples of this.

Overestimating unhealthy behaviors and underestimating healthy behaviors can create perceived pressure to behave a certain way. When people know accurate norms, they are more likely to choose behaviors that line up with their values instead of feeling pressure to conform. Each edition of the Stall Seat Journal highlights some U.Va. behaviors with a “HOO Knew?” stat so check out those out for the real scoop!

Stare at the blue dot, and move your head away and toward the circle, do you see the circle move?

The two blue circles are exactly the same size. Their environments distort the way you perceive them.

The Facts

Each year the University’s Office of Health Promotion sends out a web-based survey to UVa students who are randomly selected based on biological sex, ethnicity and academic year. The **surveys** primarily ask about behaviors, perceptions and attitudes around heath. To promote **honesty** and completeness in self-reporting, surveys are **anonymous** and participation is voluntary.

This year, we will be surveying students in the Spring. If you are **invited** to participate, know that your answers will support the Stall Seat Journal and give us all an accurate perception of life in Hooville!

The line that runs down the center of the squares looks crooked, but is perfectly straight.

Hoo Knew?

68.7% of UVa students drink 0-2 drinks in a typical week.\*

81.2% of U.Va students who drink usually or always eat before drinking.\*

\*From the Spring 2013 Health Survey, with responses from 678 UVa students.