



# The Catalyst

a quarterly publication of Students for Sensible Drug Policy

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**EDITORS' NOTE:** Since our inception in 1998, SSDP has grown to over 150 chapters and graduated thousands of young people dedicated to ending the failed War on Drugs. We created *The Catalyst* to highlight some of our most outstanding chapter and alumni efforts. SSDP members are catalysts because they not only accelerate drug policy change both on their campuses and nationally, but also share creative ideas, passion and expertise. If you're contributing to our work as a student activist or donor, thank you for making these accomplishments possible. We are excited to offer *The Catalyst* as another thread to tie together our youth movement to end the War on Drugs.

-Micah, Tyler, Amber, Stacia and Jon

## Campaign Spotlight: Cinco de Mayo

On May 5th, 2009, students at 50 campuses across the U.S. set up Mexican flags in memoriam of the thousands of Mexicans who have died at the hands of drug cartels this year. The campaign raised awareness about the violent effects of drug prohibition on our southern border.



At American University, we got the Cinco de Mayo Mexican flag memorial idea when another student activist organization made a flag memorial on campus. A group of students supporting Palestine put up flags to commemorate the lives lost during Israel's siege on the Gaza Strip. Hearing about it

on the news was one thing, but seeing the loss of life laid out in front of me on the way to and from class everyday hit me on a different level. I found myself researching more about the conflict because of the impact the sight of the flags made on me.

Adopting the flag memorial idea was a way

to expose the magnitude of violence in Mexico occurring because of our drug policies. It can be frustrating trying to communicate the extent of the damage our drug policies cause domestically and internationally because the connection is indirect and takes a leap of understanding. We dedicated a meeting to coming up with messages for signs pointing out that what the news media calls "drug-related violence" in Mexico is really prohibition-related violence.

Then we delegated responsibilities; someone ordered the Mexican flags, someone sent in a request to Student Activities to use the quad, and others volunteered to make signs and set up 72 flags on the quad representing the 7,200 lives lost to Mexican drug-cartel violence since 2008. When we were putting up flags and a student walking by asked, "What can I do?" we knew it was a success well worth the small amount of work.

Since SSDP is an organization of chapters across the country all working toward the same goal, posting our memorial idea on SSDPtalk - our national e-mail discussion list - was the next logical step. It was awesome watching the idea catch on and evolve as more minds got involved.

The national staff played a key role in solidifying a day of action on Cinco de Mayo by providing resources like flyers, press releases and an online petition. They also held a really useful conference call going over the best ways to contact the media and talking points. Given the close proximity to finals and

how busy we all were, the help of the national staff was really instrumental in making it a success.



I think the Cinco de Mayo day of action was an important tool for us to inform our campuses that this cause is about much more than regaining the right to use drugs - it's about saving lives and protecting basic human rights at home and abroad.

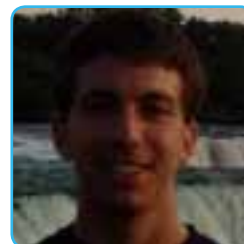
- Julia Peterson, American University

For more information including videos of the campaign, visit [ssdp.org/cincomayo](http://ssdp.org/cincomayo)

## Chapter Spotlight: Kalamazoo College

Kalamazoo College SSDP is engaged in a few different campaigns around campus and around town. On campus, we're challenging misinformation and providing accurate information through flyers, announcements and the Drug Information Resource Center in partnership with our campus health center. We're attempting to establish a Drive Safe program which will offer students a safe and sober ride home on weekends to prevent driving under the influence.

We're also working with the administration and student government to address what we see as problematic and punitive campus alcohol and drug policies. To this end, we've



## Catalyst (n)

1. Chemistry - a substance that causes or accelerates a chemical reaction without itself being affected.

2. a person or thing that precipitates an event or change.

3. a person whose talk, enthusiasm, or energy causes others to be more friendly or enthusiastic.

Questions? Comments? Kudos?  
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established a Good Samaritan Policy, which protects those who call for medical help in an alcohol-related emergency. On a broader level, we're trying to get conversations started among the residents of our community by hosting events such as a Cinco de Mayo demonstration and a debate between SSDP's Kris Krane, and prohibitionist Kevin Sabet. We've been able to get some decent media coverage of these events. Since Kalamazoo is located half way between Chicago and Detroit along the I-94 corridor, it has a large population of injecting drug users, which means an even larger population of people at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

Because of our proximity to this population, we're working to not only change some outdated city ordinances that prohibit syringe exchange programs, but also identify sites and funding in order to establish a syringe exchange program.

- Dan Mitler, Kalamazoo College

**Making Connections Through SSDP**

It's funny, I never thought of it as "networking," but whenever I went to SSDP conferences I would collect the contact information of the amazing people I met just because I admired their stories, thought they were awesome and wanted to be like them. That must be how you know you're in the right field -- even though it's been five years since I graduated, I've never felt quite as home as I do with people from SSDP.

During law school when I didn't have as much free time to contribute, I kept up with my friends' activities in the movement and helped out advising the undergraduate chapter whenever I could.

Then, this year, when I decided to quit my firm, I called up everyone I knew from SSDP and asked them to let me know of any job openings. When I finally heard of a perfect opportunity in my area, I did everything I could, including bringing in references from



my seven years with SSDP; to show I was the woman for the job. It worked, and I couldn't be more excited to join this effort - I am so grateful to SSDP for assisting me on this

path! Sensible drug policies are "on the march!"

- Shaleen Aghi, University of Illinois alumna and Speakers Bureau Director, Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

**New Chapter Spotlight: Northern Virginia Community College**

After attending the 10th annual SSDP conference at the University of Maryland, I felt deeply inspired to change our nation's backwards drug policies. The important information I learned at that conference has been instrumental in developing my advocacy skills. After returning home, I started planning how to start a chapter of my own at Northern Virginia Community College.



My first event was at a club fair in the hallways of my college. Walking up to the table my feelings of doubt and nervousness mounted. As the club fair progressed I started to relax. I thought about all the intelligent people that I had met at the conference and how they all had my back. Surprisingly, the students passing by seemed more interested in our table than any other. It felt good to be reaching out to students, and their response was overwhelming. That was the last time that I ever felt nervous talking about drug policy.

In one semester we organized an amazing amount of activities, and since then our chapter's email list has grown to around 200 members, a phenomenal feat considering the size of our community college. We have held weekly meetings to plan our activities, raised money selling baked goods at weekly tabling events, attended the Northeast and Southeast regional SSDP conferences, hosted a Law Enforcement

**"SSDP provided much of the inspiration I needed and helped instill in me the courage to take a stand..."**  
- Jason Matthys

Against Prohibition speaker, screened a National Geographic Documentary, held an anti-marijuana prohibition protest in Washington DC and gathered petition signatures for Americans for Safe Access's letter in support of medical marijuana research. We also ran a campaign to

reach out to other students who were attending nearby community colleges as an attempt to spark the creation of new chapters.

I seriously doubt that any of this would have been possible without SSDP's support. SSDP provided much of the inspiration I needed and helped instill in me the courage to take a stand and stop worrying about what people's reactions would be. They provided the blueprint for what an effective chapter leader does and what strategies are effective when talking to people. The War on Drugs will never end if we cannot stand together as one people in opposition to it. SSDP's network of college students is one of the only things standing in the way of the propagation of Drug War ideology on college campuses.

- Jason Matthys, Northern Virginia Community College

**Event Spotlight: Midwestern Regional Conference**

It was an honor to organize and host the Midwest regional conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In the first weekend of April students from all over the Midwest came to Ann Arbor not knowing what to expect.

We decided to hold this conference the day after the 37th annual "Hash Bash" hosted by UM-NORML to illustrate the rich cultural history of Ann Arbor. Thousands attended this long-standing protest against marijuana prohibition. Although many folks just come to smoke marijuana, we intended to transform the enthusiasm of people at that event into action.



Our expectations were exceeded, and not just in terms of turnout. The energy and spirit contained within our conference ballroom was extraordinary. I have to say that my favorite part was seeing the students work together when we split them off into groups by state--you could clearly see the faces of focused and determined individuals in those circles.

I am incredibly thankful for the chance I've had through SSDP to meet so many amazing people with unparalleled motivation, intelligence and commitment.

- Chris Chiles, University of Michigan



## Board of Directors Update

The Board of Directors started off 2009 by restructuring the composition of the board. By approving an amendment to our organizational by-laws, the board reserved one appointed director seat for our executive director and created an additional SSDP alumni seat. With these changes, we welcomed two new appointed directors to the board: Marc Brandl (SSDP Alumnus, American University) and Derwin Dubose. In addition to our two new appointed directors, first alternate Irina Alexander (University of Maryland) joined the board in April.



The Board of Directors also revamped the planning and implementation process for our organizational strategic plan. By condensing the plan, the Board felt we would be better equipped to share our goals and strategies with our membership, donors and other interested parties. A copy of the 2008-2009 Strategic Plan is available at [ssdp.org/strategy/](http://ssdp.org/strategy/)

The Board has also been working with the national staff to develop an alumni outreach and engagement plan. We look forward to working with SSDP's new alumni director, Tyler H. Smith, to further implement this plan.

The Board of Directors will be meeting this July in Washington, DC for our annual

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strategy summit where we will re-evaluate our Strategic Plan, begin planning our annual SSDP Congress and brainstorm campaigns and strategies that will serve to strengthen our organization. A full report of summit activities will be available to the SSDP community in early August.

Enjoy the rest of your summer and in the words of new board member Irina Alexander, "Keep fighting the good fight!"

- Alison Grimmer, Roosevelt University alumna and Chair of SSDP's Board of Directors

## SSDP Alumni: Making An Impact

When I chose my classes for my first semester at UC Berkeley, I could have never imagined that signing up for a seminar on European folk tales would change my life. On the first day of the class, the professor asked all of us why we had chosen Berkeley. Unsurprisingly, a few of us had come to Berkeley because of its history of activism, but I was surprised and elated when I heard Scarlett Swerdlow (former SSDP executive director) explain that her activist experience had been in drug policy - something I too had great interest in but knew little about at the time. I excitedly introduced myself to Scarlett after class and that week we founded UC Berkeley's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy.

The rest of my journey through the world of drug policy activism has unfurled much like that day, involving a bit of serendipity, a lot of enthusiasm and the willingness to take chances and put in hours of hard work. Scarlett and I quickly grew our SSDP chapter by tabling nearly every day, holding events with expert speakers and even by teaching classes to our peers. I also took on leadership roles within the national organization, serving two years on the Board of Directors and helping launch the alumni network.



Immediately after graduating, I was hired to direct a Democratic National Committee fundraising office that raised more than one million dollars for the 2004 presidential campaign. Serendipity then hit me again when I found out that Americans for Safe Access (ASA), the largest national member-based organization promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic use and research, was hiring a field coordinator. I had volunteered extensively for ASA during my college years, including bringing 200 Berkeley students to a rally of theirs in Sacramento, so I knew it would be a perfect fit.

After two years of working with ASA's chapter and activist leaders, I moved on to become ASA's chief of staff. I manage ASA's staff and projects and I have the incredible opportunity to hire new staff. For nearly every position we advertise an SSDP leader applies. I always look closely at their applications because I know firsthand what it takes to run an SSDP chapter.

- Rebecca Saltzman, UC Berkeley alumna and Chief of Staff, Americans for Safe Access





## Movement Leaders on SSDP:

**Alison Green, MPP**



“SSDP’s role in identifying, recruiting and training drug policy reformers is enormously useful to MPP. Not only is SSDP educating class after class of college students, it’s also serving as a ‘farm system’ that prepares students to do effective work in marijuana policy after graduation, either professionally or as a volunteer. When I see that a job applicant has been active in SSDP, I know that he or she likely already has a solid understanding of rhetoric, persuasion tactics and what is and isn’t effective.

**SSDP is a real boon to our work.”**

*- Alison Green, Chief of Staff, Marijuana Policy Project*

# SSDP STAFF

*San Francisco, CA Office*

**Micah Daigle**

Executive Director  
micah@ssdp.org

**Jon Perri**

Outreach Director  
jon@ssdp.org

*Washington, DC Office*

**Amber Langston**

Outreach Director  
amber@ssdp.org

**Stacia Cosner**

Outreach Director  
stacia@ssdp.org

**Tyler H. Smith**

Alumni Director  
tyler@ssdp.org

✂  
“I want to support the work SSDP members like Jason, Julia, Chris and Dan are doing to end the War on Drugs.”

To continue changing drug policies at the campus, local, and national levels, we need your help! SSDP is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, so your donations are tax deductible.

You can donate online at [ssdp.org/donate](http://ssdp.org/donate)

“Yes, I’d like to become an SSDP Sustainer with an automatic, recurring monthly donation!”

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Please send contributions to: Donations, SSDP, 1623 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC, 20009.

# THANK YOU!