



## Anheuser-Busch and the #1 Party School

In most states, alcohol control policies occur at the state level, and it is at that level that the alcohol industry is likely to exert control. However, most of the enforcement is local, but even there the alcohol industry can influence product advertising and promotions and the drink-serving practices of bar owners. In addition, the local reach of the industry extends beyond bars and taverns to retail outlets, restaurants, hotels and other entertainment venues.

Efforts to change the drinking environment can directly oppose the sales interests of the alcohol industry and, in areas with a strong industry presence, lead to confrontation between campus and community groups and the industry. The most striking example of the opposition that the alcohol industry can present was the experience of Florida State University (FSU).

In the 1990s, FSU had a reputation as a hard-drinking school, having been named as the "number one party school" by the *Princeton Review* three times during the decade. Football is especially big at FSU. The FSU Seminoles played in five national championship games between 1993 and 2001, winning the championship twice. According to Christine Franzetti, project director, "Tailgating and football are a huge influence on drinking."

Florida State was one of the last two sites to receive funding from *A Matter of Degree*, with a one-year planning grant in September 1998. This was followed by a five-year implementation grant through 2004, then a four-year renewal grant through August 2008. Its coalition, Partnership for Alcohol Responsibility (PAR), has had a rocky history.

The first project director, Florida State's vice president for student affairs, was a strong supporter of *A Matter of Degree*, but left after the first year. His replacement was supportive but new to Florida State, to academia and to student affairs. The head of the student health center took over the job of representing PAR to the public and, when the second project director left, the third director reported to the student health center director. This reporting relationship put the project director at a lower level within Florida State.

Florida depends heavily on tourism and associated alcohol sales. Anheuser-Busch, the largest brewing company in the United States and the third largest (by volume) in the world (prior to its 2008 purchase by Belgian brewer InBev), dominates the state's beer

industry. Anheuser-Busch owns four theme parks in Florida: Busch Gardens and Adventure Land near Tampa; and Sea World and Discovery Cove in Orlando. Busch Entertainment Corp. owns a total of 10 theme parks; Busch Gardens is largest with a 2007 attendance of 14.5 million.

At about the time that PAR began, Susie Busch-Transou, daughter of August Busch III (the immediate past Anheuser-Busch CEO), moved to Tallahassee to become vice president of Tri-Eagle Sales, the main Anheuser-Busch distributorship in that part of Florida. Busch-Transou became very involved in civic life in Tallahassee. She successfully lobbied the city council to allow alcohol service and related signage in city parks and to turn downtown Tallahassee into the Anheuser-Busch sponsored drinking event "Downtown Getdown" on football weekends.

Busch established a connection with the Florida State president, and Anheuser-Busch provided \$457,000 to the university to conduct a social norms campaign aimed at reducing peer influences on drinking. They sponsored a visit to the campus by a well-known advocate of the social norms strategy who told everyone that they should not be addressing policy change (the strategy used by *A Matter of Degree*) since it could "interfere" with a social norms campaign. Prior to Anheuser-Busch funding, the campus social norms campaign heavily emphasized policies. Afterward, policy messages were greatly deemphasized.

In 2001, PAR released its strategic action plan that emphasized altering campus and city alcohol policies rather than individual education or social norms strategies. Busch gathered alcohol industry associations and other associations connected to the alcohol industry (e.g., Florida Restaurant Association, Beer Industry of Florida, Retail Beverage Council of the Florida Retail Federation) and issued a 10-page attack on the plan.

When PAR began to actively advocate for community policy changes, Anheuser-Busch's chief lobbyist (and Florida State Booster Club president) complained to the university president. PAR was then marginalized on campus. For example, the Web site and e-mail addresses were removed from newspaper ads and university literature, the president no longer mentioned the project and PAR meetings could not take place on campus.

Starting in 2002, national program office and RWJF staff began expressing concerns about FSU's stepping away from the *A Matter of Degree* goals and principles by placing the project lower in the university's hierarchy, reducing the authority of the project's director and failing to mention the project in public speeches. RWJF and the national program director asked the university's president for a plan to address these problems.

Yet, during this time, the university worked openly with the alcohol industry and "allowed itself to be publicly portrayed as being in collaboration with it" according to a report by the national program office. The university participated in a new alcohol

industry-funded Hospitality Resource Panel of retailers and community groups established to promote voluntary means to handle alcohol service and sales problems.

A *Wall Street Journal* article (October 14, 2003) chronicled the entanglement of Anheuser-Busch and Florida State's alcohol control efforts. The article noted that the PAR director had been quoted in an earlier *Journal* article as critical of the university's acceptance of Anheuser-Busch money. This led to the further disenfranchisement of PAR and a reprimand of PAR's director by the university president. The director resigned in the fall of 2002. Franzetti, the fourth and current director, replaced him in February 2003.

In 2006, Busch-Transou joined the Florida State University Board of Trustees.

Over time Franzetti has reconvened a smaller group, the "Leadership Team," which focuses on neighborhood projects and includes Florida A&M University and Tallahassee Community College, both also located in Tallahassee. Franzetti said, "There is a larger appreciation for the need to change the culture. It sure is different than it was before. People are starting to get it. Binge drinking has decreased from 52 percent to 43 percent." At the same time, she notes, "Around town there is no difference. It is the same or worse. The environment on campus is better. But the number of alcohol ads in the campus paper has increased."

Florida State is now a member of a statewide coalition of colleges and universities, Florida Higher Education Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention, which seeks to coordinate the prevention work of colleges and universities throughout the state and to advocate for stronger prevention policies, help organize campus-community partnerships and help members develop science-based prevention programs.