



Dealing With the Alcohol Industry

The AMA and the *A Matter of Degree* consistently took the stance of not working directly with the alcohol industry.

AMA policies are "very strong" regarding alcohol advertising and promotion to college students, according to Richard Yoast, Ph.D., national program director. Policies that were strongly critical of alcohol promotion on campuses existed prior to the naming of the AMA as the national program office for *A Matter of Degree*.

"As part of the AMA," Yoast said, "we early on decided that we should focus on the health (as opposed to the social disorder) impacts of alcohol as our most appropriate and strongest platform. This was something few other organizations were doing at the time. The industry attacked a report we issued on alcohol and the brain of underage drinkers." (A summary of this official report of the AMA's Council on Scientific Affairs, *Harmful Consequences of Alcohol Use on the Brains of Children, Adolescents, and College Students*, is available [online](#).)

While the national program office had contact with alcohol industry organizations (such as DISCUS—the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S., the Century Council and Anheuser-Busch), the policy of both the national program office and the AMA board, according to Yoast, "was not to collaborate." Even in areas with specific common policy goals, said Yoast, AMA staff indicated to industry representatives that the national program office and the AMA would "pursue our own strategies and not collaborate with their efforts."

Yoast noted, "As a national program office we were very critical of industry product development and marketing targeting underage and collegiate drinkers. Their stance was that essentially everyone was to blame for underage drinking and college binge drinking except the alcohol industry."

The AMA participated in initiatives such as blocking distilled spirits advertising on broadcast television and alcohol industry sponsorship of college sports and the NCAA tournaments.

The national program office also issued a report on the alcohol industry's role in policy development: *Partner or Foe? The Alcohol Industry, Youth Alcohol Problems, and Alcohol Policy Strategies*.

In 2003, the [Center for Consumer Freedom](#), a Washington-based nonprofit organization devoted to promoting personal responsibility and protecting consumer choices released a report entitled *Behind the Neo-Prohibition Campaign*. This report attacks RWJF's broad-based strategy for addressing alcohol problems and for its investments in organizations dealing with alcohol, including the AMA and *A Matter of Degree*.