



A Matter of Degree: Reducing High-Risk Drinking Among College Students

An RWJF national program

SUMMARY

In 1995, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) launched the national program *A Matter of Degree: Reducing High-Risk Drinking Among College Students*. RWJF staff, in partnership with researchers at the [American Medical Association](#) (AMA), designed *A Matter of Degree* to reduce binge drinking among college students through an environmental approach. This approach seeks to change the factors that influence young people to drink excessively, such as easy access to inexpensive alcohol and the failure to penalize underage and high-risk drinking.

A Matter of Degree funded 10 universities between 1996 and 2008 to address this problem. A key component of the program design was the requirement that universities establish campus-community coalitions committed to bringing about changes in the university and community environments.

Key Results

- The AMA decided to include alcohol consumption as one of four key health behaviors addressed by its [Healthier Life Steps™ Program](#). *A Matter of Degree* (along with another RWJF program managed by the AMA, *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions*) led the AMA to focus on alcohol problems as health issues and to involve the medical community in developing and implementing solutions to problem drinking.
- The AMA wrote and passed a series of alcohol control policies, including a policy banning alcohol industry sponsorship of events on college campuses.
- The AMA brought national media attention to issues such as:
 - Alcohol-focused spring break promotions to college students.
 - Distilled spirits advertising on broadcast TV.
 - Alcohol advertising connected to key collegiate sports events.

Key Findings

The evaluators did not publish findings by university site.

- By mid-program (2001), five "high environment" sites had implemented considerably more interventions—and more interventions that addressed the environment—than five "low environment" sites.
- The high environment sites, as of 2001, experienced significant declines in many measures of alcohol consumption (such as binge drinking), alcohol-related harms (such as falling behind in school) and alcohol-related secondhand effects (such as vandalism). Low environment sites and comparison schools (those not involved in *A Matter of Degree*) experienced far fewer declines or even increases in these measures.
- By 2005 declines in alcohol consumption and harm at levels beyond those observed at comparison schools were concentrated in two to three sites. These sites were characterized by above average levels of environmentally and individually oriented interventions for the entire program time period, such as:
 - Environmentally oriented interventions that especially addressed access to and availability of alcohol.
 - Individually oriented interventions that especially addressed students' alcohol-related behaviors and intentions rather than their knowledge and beliefs.

Program Management

The [AMA Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse](#) served as the national program office for *A Matter of Degree*. Researchers at the [Harvard School of Public Health](#) evaluated the program between 1996 and 2005.

Funding

In April 1995, the RWJF Board of Trustees authorized *A Matter of Degree* for up to \$8.6 million for eight sites for seven years. In July 1998, the Board expanded it by \$1.4 million to include two additional sites. In April 2001, the Board renewed the program for up to \$7.5 million for seven more years. The renewal included four years of funding for nine sites and the national program office and one year of funding for one site.

THE PROBLEM

Excessive alcohol use is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death, behind only tobacco use and the combined effects of poor diet and physical activity, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 1990, college presidents classified alcohol abuse as the campus life issue of greatest concern, according to a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching survey

entitled "Campus Life: In Search of Community." Concerns about college drinking escalated in the 1990s in response to the persistence of heavy episodic or "binge" drinking and heightened awareness of date rape and serious injury and death due to alcohol-related accidents.

In 1993 Henry Wechsler, Ph.D., and researchers at Harvard School of Public Health conducted the first [College Alcohol Study](#), a survey of more than 17,000 students at 140 four-year colleges in 40 states. The 1993 survey found:

- Some 44 percent of students were binge drinkers. This means they drank five or more drinks in a row (men) or four or more drinks in a row (women) in the two weeks before the survey.
- One in five students binge drank three or more times in the past two weeks.

According to the 1993 College Alcohol Study, students who attended schools with high rates of binge drinking experienced more alcohol-related secondhand effects than their peers who attended schools with low binge drinking rates. These effects included:

- Disrupted sleep or study.
- Property damage.
- Verbal and physical abuse or sexual violence.

People living near colleges with high rates of binge drinking were also more likely to experience effects of heavy drinking, such as noise disturbances and vandalism, than people living near colleges with low rates of binge drinking and people who did not live near a college.

According to an article published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, (abstract available [online](#)) a 1999 survey found that in the preceding year, over 2 million of the 8 million college students in the United States drove under the influence of alcohol and over three million rode with a drinking driver.

For more information on the yearly College Alcohol Studies, supported by RWJF from 1992 to 2004, see [Program Results](#).

According to researchers advising RWJF, a growing body of research indicated that changing the environment in which drinking could take place held great potential for successfully reducing underage and binge drinking and related problems. Prior efforts to either educate students about the dangers of drinking or provide them with accurate information about the extent of drinking did not significantly reduce their drinking.

CONTEXT

RWJF's first serious involvement with the issue of alcohol abuse came in 1982 with a staff proposal to the Board of Trustees suggesting a Foundation initiative to help address the problems of alcohol-related illness.

According to Robert Blendon, Sc.D., who was a Foundation senior vice president at the time and is a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health as of this writing, staff developed the proposal because the costs to society and to the health care system from alcohol abuse were significant, and there was a great need to know more about alcohol abuse and misuse and how to treat it. The proposal recommended the Foundation put out a call for individual proposals that would evaluate the cost-effectiveness of specific treatments for alcohol-related health problems and their applicability in different settings.

The Foundation's Trustees turned down the staff proposal, however, because it ran counter to a long-standing policy against disease-specific investments. Staff and Trustees, thus, were viewing alcohol abuse as an individual medical issue, rather than as a public health problem—as they would a decade later.

In 1986, in response to public and policy interest in drug abuse, Foundation staff submitted a report to the Trustees that again recommended the Foundation take a significant foray into the field of substance abuse, citing recent opinion polls that documented society's view of and concern with widespread drug use, and emphasizing the cost and mortality associated with alcohol and drug misuse.

The report was a departure from earlier discussions at the Foundation of substance abuse in three ways:

- It regarded drug and alcohol use as a single-issue area. This innovation ran counter to the prevailing sentiment that distinguished between two types of substance abuse when it came to policy and opinion.
- It took a broader, community-based approach to the issue of substance abuse. Rather than approach the issue as a medical condition needing individual solutions, such as supporting halfway houses or treatment centers, this approach addressed the issue from multiple angles with a population-based strategy. This was not a classic health approach to a medical condition.
- It explicitly focused on the social aspects of the health issue. The community-based approach concentrated on increasing public awareness, promoting healthy activities, improving neighborhoods and screening for drug and alcohol problems.

The Trustees, following the staff's reorientation of substance abuse away from an individual medical issue toward a social issue, approved the community-based approach.

So in 1988, the Foundation established *Fighting Back*[®], a community-based program to combat substance abuse, including alcohol abuse.

The \$72.6 million program was based on the idea that, if the right combination of leaders in a community worked together to address drugs and alcohol misuse and abuse, the threat that these represented to the neighborhoods could be significantly reduced, if not eradicated. The program assisted communities of 100,000 to 250,000 people (or sections of larger communities) to implement a variety of anti-drug and alcohol strategies. The program involved local businesses, health care, public schools, government, police, community groups, media and clergy. For more information, see [Program Results](#) on the program.

With the arrival of Steven Schroeder, M.D., as Foundation president in 1991, RWJF formally established reducing the harm caused by substance abuse as one of its three overarching goals.

The Foundation's grantmaking in this goal area clustered around three strategies:

1. **Research and policy change.** These initiatives gathered prevalence data and developed policies to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Programs in this area included *Bridging the Gap* (see [Program Results](#)) and the *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program* (see [Program Results](#)).
2. **Building the fields of alcohol, drug and tobacco prevention and treatment.** RWJF supported the creation of programs such as the [Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse \(CASA\)](#) at Columbia University, [Join Together](#), *Developing Leadership in Reducing Substance Abuse* and *Innovators Combating Substance Abuse*. For more information see [Program Results](#) on [CASA](#), [Join Together](#), *Developing Leadership in Reducing Substance Abuse* and *Innovators Combating Substance Abuse*.
3. **Prevention.** These programs aimed to prevent people, especially youth, from taking up alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. RWJF typically used the environmental approach to preventing substance abuse, which focuses on community-based strategies that reduce the appeal of substance abuse. *Fighting Back*[®] was a prevention program as well.

Soon after the Trustees approved reducing substance abuse as a goal, Henry Weschler, Ph.D., of the Harvard School of Public Health approached the Foundation with a proposal to conduct a survey of college students' alcohol use. That proposal became the College Alcohol Study, which revealed the extent of the problem of alcohol use on college campuses. That led the Foundation to develop *A Matter of Degree*, which fit squarely within the prevention area. Its community-based approach, focusing on collaboration and coalition-building, grew from RWJF's work with *Fighting Back*.

RWJF developed several other community-based programs to combat substance abuse at around the same time as *A Matter of Degree*. They included:

- *Healthy Nations* (1991–2002), a \$13.5 million national program that provided technical assistance and grants to Native American governmental and nonprofit organizations to develop culturally appropriate prevention and treatment programs. (See [Program Results](#).)
- *Free to Grow: Head Start Partnerships to Promote Substance-Free Communities* (1992–2005), which built on the federal Head Start program and mobilized parents and local leaders to combat substance abuse in their communities. (See [Program Results](#).)
- *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions* (1995–2005), which funds state and community coalitions to reduce drinking among high school students. (See [Program Results](#).) This program applied some of the ideas used in *A Matter of Degree* to a younger population.

RWJF also funded a number of ad hoc projects that are relevant to *A Matter of Degree*:

- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (1996–2005), which trained thousands of volunteer members of community coalitions to use the latest research findings on prevention of drug and alcohol use among young people. (See [Program Results](#).)
- From October 1996 to June 1998, with support from RWJF, the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Other Drug and Violence Prevention helped colleges and universities promote evidence-based "environmental management" policies designed to prevent alcohol and other drug abuse.
- A 1998 video was sent to 250 college presidents to motivate them to take an active stand on alcohol and other drug prevention issues. (See [Program Results](#).)
- In April 1999, the National Mental Illness Screening Project (NMISP), in collaboration with [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) (NIAAA), conducted the first National Alcohol Screening Day. About 500 colleges participated in the day's events, which included screening for alcohol abuse and referrals to follow-up evaluation and counseling. (See [Program Results](#).)
- A national campaign (ID# 036929) in September 1999 ran anti-binge drinking ads in 17 major newspapers and more than 100 college newspapers. (See [Program Results](#).)
- A research study from November 1999 to May 2002 assessed the implementation and enforcement of new policies restricting alcohol use among students at Massachusetts state colleges. (See [Program Results](#).)
- In 2000, [Security on Campus](#) produced "Wasted Youth," a 15-minute video on the dangers of college binge drinking, geared toward high school juniors and seniors and incoming college freshmen. (See [Program Results](#).)

PROGRAM DESIGN

In response to the College Alcohol Study findings, in 1995, RWJF launched the national program *A Matter of Degree: Reducing High-Risk Drinking Among College Students*. RWJF staff, in partnership with researchers at the AMA, designed *A Matter of Degree* to reduce binge drinking among college students by fostering collaboration between universities and the communities where they are situated.

The goals of *A Matter of Degree* were to:

- Test the efficacy of the environmental model to reduce high-risk drinking and its impacts. See [The Environmental Approach](#) for information about this model.
- Create sustainable campus-community partnerships to address the student environment on-and-off campus.
- Reduce the secondhand effects of high-risk drinking on individuals and the community.

RWJF invited 17 specific universities with high rates of student binge drinking indicated on the 1993 College Alcohol Study, to apply for grants under *A Matter of Degree*. Ten universities ended up participating in the program. See [The Planning Phase](#) for details about selection of participating universities.

As part of overall program design, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health conducted a multiyear evaluation of *A Matter of Degree*. See [Evaluation](#) and [Evaluation Findings](#) for details on evaluation design and findings.

The design of *A Matter of Degree* was characterized by two key elements: a commitment to the environmental model for change and a reliance on campus-community coalitions.

The Environmental Approach

Three approaches characterize programs that address high-risk drinking among young people:

- The *educational approach* teaches young people about the potential harm of alcohol use to themselves and others. Colleges are comfortable with this approach and it is the preferred approach of the alcohol industry, which stresses personal responsibility.
- The *social norms approach* aims to reduce the influence of peer pressure and inflated perceptions of drinking by providing students with accurate information about how much drinking is actually taking place, in the hope that this information will influence their behavior.
- The *environmental approach* seeks to change the physical, social and economic factors that influence young people to drink such as ease of access to alcohol and the

extent to which illegal drinking is penalized. Said Richard A. Yoast, Ph.D., national program director, "Although the objective was to change student drinking, the focus was not the students. The focus was to change the environment in which students drank. The problem is the environment that encourages drinking."

Campus-Community Coalitions

As a condition of participating in *A Matter of Degree*, universities had to establish campus-community coalitions committed to bringing about changes in both the university and community environments. The connections between campus and community are reflected in the underlying principles guiding the *A Matter of Degree* projects:

- Environmental factors such as alcohol marketing, social beliefs and local ordinances converge to encourage high-risk drinking, but those factors are subject to change through policies and activities designed to prevent and reduce harm.
- Formation of broad-based campus-community coalitions can create long-lasting environmental changes to support healthy lifestyle choices.

Yoast said, "As desperate as the campuses were, the communities were even more desperate. We heard hours of diatribe about the campuses and the students. Just the announcement about doing something began to eat away at the distrust."

The program required the sites to develop coalitions that would:

- Address both campus and municipal policies and their enforcement.
- Use the media to communicate with policy-makers and the public.
- Obtain the active involvement of high-level university and community officials.

Each site structured its own coalition, which ranged from less than 25 members to more than 100. Campus members often included:

- President or designate.
- Officers of student affairs.
- Faculty.
- Students.
- Staff from student health, Greek affairs and security.
- Alumni.
- Parents.

Community members made up between one-quarter and one-half of the membership and typically included:

- Mayor or designate.
- Police chief and/or officers.
- Liquor control board members.
- Neighborhood organization representatives and concerned citizens.
- Bar owners (in some cases working behind the scenes) and other business owners.
- Health care and education professionals.
- Municipal economic development staff.

See [Overall Program Results](#) for information on the experiences of the *A Matter of Degree* coalitions.

THE PROGRAM

In April 1995, the RWJF Board of Trustees authorized *A Matter of Degree* for up to \$8.6 million for seven years. This authorization funded a national program office and eight sites. The Board authorized an additional \$1.4 million in July 1998 for two additional sites.

In April 2001, the Board renewed the program for up to \$7.5 million for seven years. The renewal authorization included four years of funding for nine sites, one year for one site and funds for the national program office to operate the program through March 2007.

Management

National Program Office

RWJF established a national program office at the AMA in Chicago to manage the program and provide guidance and assistance to the coalitions. The AMA was the national program office for RWJF's tobacco cessation program *SmokeLess States* and RWJF sought to engage the AMA in alcohol issues as well, according to Yoast, who also served as director of the AMA's Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse. For more information on *SmokeLess States*, see [Program Results](#) and a [chapter](#) in the RWJF *Anthology*, Volume VIII.

The AMA Office of Alcohol and Other Substances served as the national program office for both *A Matter of Degree* and RWJF's *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions* national program. *Reducing Underage Drinking* supported state coalitions in efforts to reduce underage drinking and its related health and social problems. For more

information about *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions*, see [Program Results](#) on the program.

Yoast was national program director for both programs. The deputy director for *A Matter of Degree* was Donald W. Zeigler, Ph.D., who replaced the original deputy director, Sandra Hoover, in 2002.

National program office staff and consultants provided a range of technical assistance, communication and advocacy services to the sites. See [Technical Assistance to Sites](#) for more information about these services.

National Advisory Committee

A six-member National Advisory Committee provided initial guidance to the program and assisted in grantee selection and technical assistance to the sites selected. See [Appendix 1](#) for a list of committee members.

THE PLANNING PHASE

Site Selection

RWJF and national program office staff invited 17 universities with high binge drinking rates (greater than 50 percent of students reporting recent binge drinking on the 1993 College Alcohol Study) to attend a meeting in March 1996 to learn about *A Matter of Degree*.

In order for universities to be considered for participation, they had to:

- Be part of the College Alcohol Study at Harvard University School of Public Health and rank in the top third of binge drinking rates.
- Have a history of trying to address campus alcohol problems.
- Have the explicit approval and support of the campus president or chancellor.
- Publicly participate, which involved admitting to alcohol problems on campus.
- Agree to participate as co-equal partners with the surrounding community.
- Identify key people on campus and in the community to oversee the project.

Six universities submitted applications. In the applications, each school described what it planned to accomplish if chosen to participate in *A Matter of Degree*. Each school:

- Detailed plans for establishing a campus-community coalition, including their proposed membership.

- Identified alcohol-related problems and concerns the school sought to address through the grant.
- Proposed strategies for addressing the identified problems. Examples included:
 - Changing local regulations such as bar licensing rules or happy hour specials.
 - Developing and implementing marketing and media campaigns.
 - Working with Greek organizations (i.e., fraternities and sororities) to modify how they handled alcohol use.

In August 2006, after national program office staff, RWJF program staff and members of the national advisory committee reviewed applications, RWJF awarded grants to all six schools that applied. Four received full five-year implementation grants and two received one-year planning grants.

In January 1998, program staff held a workshop to attract additional universities. Southern schools in particular were invited in order to increase representation from the South. In July 1998, RWJF awarded grants to four additional schools. Two received full five-year implementation grants and two received one-year planning grants.

The one-year planning grants totaled about \$60,000 per site. The five-year implementation grants ranged from about \$700,000 to about \$830,000 per site.

The Selected Sites

Ten universities ultimately received *A Matter of Degree* grants.

The sites selected in August 1996 were:

- Five-year implementation grants:
 - University of Colorado at Boulder.
 - University of Delaware.
 - Lehigh University.
 - University of Vermont.
- One-year planning grants with an option to apply for the full five years after completing planning (both schools subsequently received full five-year grants):
 - University of Iowa.
 - University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The sites selected in July 1998 were:

- Five-year implementation grants:
 - Louisiana State University.
 - University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- One-year planning grants followed by five-year implementation grants:
 - Florida State University.
 - Georgia Institute of Technology.

See [Appendix 2](#) for a list of site grants and contact information.

THE SITES

The universities represented a range of geographic areas and campus settings. They created a variety of coalitions aimed at altering the campus and community environments.

- **University of Colorado at Boulder.** At the time the University of Colorado at Boulder joined *A Matter of Degree*, undergraduate enrollment was about 16,000. The university is a dominant force in the city of Boulder, which is located at the base of the Rocky Mountains with a young and well-educated population. Boulder's image as a social, recreation-oriented city promotes a lifestyle conducive to alcohol consumption.

Colorado's *A Matter of Degree* coalition, the Standing Committee on Substance Abuse (SCOSA), included representation from the university and the city. Constituencies represented included: student groups, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, campus police, Boulder police, merchants, landlords and other citizens.

SCOSA had a flat organizational structure, without a separate executive or steering committee that characterized coalitions in other sites. Its members felt their charge was to make recommendations to administrators; many felt the coalition lacked the power to set policy. As student alcohol related problems arose in the city, new task forces or community meetings, separate from SCOSA were created to handle them.

- **University of Delaware,** Newark. When the University joined *A Matter of Degree*, undergraduate enrollment was about 15,600, with more than half coming from out of state. The university, according to John B. Bishop, Ph.D., project director, "is a medium-sized university in a small town." University officials felt that "the environmental model might be more workable in our kind of location than in others, such as urban settings where there is more complexity. In this small town, the policy makers were more identifiable."

Delaware's Building Responsibility Campus/Community Coalition had the commitment of both the university president and the Newark mayor. A Coordinating Council, made up of representatives from campus departments and community agencies, acted as a board of trustees for the coalition. Task forces, such as the Student Alcohol Use Committee and the Community Outreach Task Force, focused on specific aspects of the drinking problem. At its peak, 130 people were involved in the coalition.

Newark had few regulations governing how alcohol could be sold or marketed. Liquor licenses were inexpensive and there was no limit on the number issued.

- **Florida State University**, Tallahassee. When Florida State joined *A Matter of Degree*, the undergraduate student population was about 30,000. About 16 percent of students lived in campus housing and another 10 percent lived in Greek housing. According to Christine Franzetti, director of the [Partnership for Alcohol Responsibility](#) (PAR) at Florida State, despite a growing population, "Tallahassee is a small southern town, where you need to be well-connected. It is the state capital and there are a lot of politics, a lot of money and a strong alcohol industry presence."

The partnership began in 1997 as a university effort to integrate various campus substance abuse prevention activities into a single program. When Florida State received funding from *A Matter of Degree*, the partnership developed into a campus-community coalition that included faculty, staff, students and residents of Tallahassee. It included an executive committee and four task groups, such as Community Policy and Media Advocacy.

Owners of the regional distributorship of Anheuser-Busch, the largest brewing company in the United States and a dominant force in Florida, played a large role in trying to influence the university's *A Matter of Degree* program. See the sidebar [Anheuser-Busch and the #1 Party School](#) for a description of how Anheuser-Busch influenced and undermined Florida State's program.

- **Georgia Institute of Technology**, Atlanta. When Georgia Tech joined *A Matter of Degree*, undergraduate enrollment was about 10,000. Georgia Tech was the only urban university in the program. According to [GT SMART](#) (Students Managing Alcohol Risk at Tech) project director Marsha Brinkley, the urban environment is a key influence on student drinking. Many drinking establishments are within walking distance of campus and many others are easily accessible by public transportation.

GT SMART included 62 members—38 from the university and 22 from the community. A 26-member steering committee and a 10-member executive committee guided the work of at first four and later five committees (Neighborhood Relations, Law and Policy, Student Programming, Marketing and Communications). All committees included university and community representatives, but there were few student, faculty or merchant members. The *A Matter of Degree* project extended its activities into city, state and regional policy-making.

- **University of Iowa**, Iowa City. The University of Iowa is a national research university located in Iowa City. Undergraduate enrollment at the time Iowa joined *A Matter of Degree* was about 16,000.

About two-thirds of entering freshmen are from Iowa, and many had already established a pattern of binge drinking. The alcohol-related death of a university student in 1994 was a catalyst that brought together the university and community in an effort to avert more alcohol-related tragedies.

The **Stepping Up Project Coalition** included university students, faculty and administrators as well as civic leaders, police officers, high school students, parents and people involved in alcohol education, prevention and treatment. During the RWJF grants, a 40-member steering committee and a 14-member executive committee (that included the university president and the Iowa City mayor) guided the work of four committees (such as Social Activities and Availability and Accessibility) and other subcommittees.

- **Lehigh University**, Bethlehem, Pa. Lehigh is the smallest and also the only private university that participated in *A Matter of Degree*. When Lehigh joined the program, there were about 4,400 undergraduates. Some 75 percent of students live on campus and the other 25 percent live within four blocks of campus.

Students tend not to go to local bars, which they termed "steel" bars—a holdover from the days when workers from the now dissolved Bethlehem Steel would stop at the bars after work. Greek organizations dominate social life. According to project director Madalyn Eadline, "Lehigh was a lot different environment from the other sites. The alcohol outlets were on campus. The scale is very different at Lehigh versus the others."

The vice provost for student affairs directed Project IMPACT, Lehigh's *A Matter of Degree* coalition. A steering committee comprised of the co-chairs of four task forces (such as Policy Issues and Secondhand Effects), project staff, the on-site evaluator and other university, student and community representatives, guided the project.

- **Louisiana State University**, Baton Rouge. Located in the state capital, the university borders the Mississippi River. When Louisiana State joined *A Matter of Degree* undergraduate enrollment was about 21,400. Close to 75 percent of students lived off campus, although concentrations of off-campus housing are near the campus.

According to a case study prepared by the evaluation team for *A Matter of Degree*, "Louisiana is truly a cultural melting pot, and it is the blending of these influences, particularly the Cajun and Creole factions, which creates an atmosphere of 'joie de vie' in which alcohol plays a great part." The 1997 death of a student from alcohol poisoning related to fraternity pledging motivated the university to address the issue of high-risk drinking on campus.

The Campus-Community Coalition for Change "started big and stayed big," according to project director Nancy I. Mathews, Ed.D. An executive committee and five task groups comprised the coalition. One task group, the Student Social Action task group, included a large (14) student component. Students also served on several other task groups.

- **University of Nebraska-Lincoln.** At the time UNL joined *A Matter of Degree*, undergraduate enrollment was about 18,000. There is little alcohol industry influence at the local level in Lincoln, and no large scale brewing, distilling or wine industry at the state level.

The university and the community had started to take action regarding alcohol-related problems prior to joining *A Matter of Degree*. According to a case study by the evaluation team, "when UNL was approached by [RWJF]... there was a readiness in both the campus and the community to undertake a significant collaborative effort toward combating high-risk drinking and alcohol-related harms."

The UNL Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Lincoln Chief of Police headed UNL's 43-member coalition **NU Directions**. A 13-member Core Planning Team provided planning and direction for NU Directions. Four workgroups (such as Neighborhood Relations and Social Environment) developed objectives and action plans. A Student Advisory Council and a Business Advisory Council supported the work of the Social Environment Workgroup.

- **University of Vermont, Burlington.** When the University of Vermont joined *A Matter of Degree* it had an undergraduate enrollment of about 7,000. The university is well-integrated into the small city of Burlington (population of 39,000), with university students making up about 20 percent of the city population. The 16 Greek houses are located off campus. Alcohol is readily available at many bars, restaurants and stores within a mile of campus.

The **Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment** included close to 60 participants and acted as an advisory group to a steering committee of 10 faculty/staff, students and community members. In addition, 10 committees (working in four task forces, such as Programming and Environment) addressed specific aspects of the coalition's work plan. In total, 147 people were involved in the coalition or in coalition-related activities.

- **University of Wisconsin-Madison.** Located in the state capital, the University of Wisconsin had an undergraduate enrollment of about 27,000 students when it joined *A Matter of Degree*. Madison has a transitory population with many people moving there for school or work for a few years and then moving away. All sororities and fraternities are located off campus and are not under the jurisdiction of university housing.

The alcohol industry plays a significant role in the state's economy. Several major beer companies have their headquarters in Wisconsin, and there are locally run

breweries throughout the state. Both student unions sell beer and wine, two of very few student unions in the country to do so. Statewide, the binge drinking rate among adults is one of the highest in the nation.

During the first six years Wisconsin participated in *A Matter of Degree*, participants called it "the RWJ Project." A 23-member Partnership Council served as the steering committee. Task forces addressed Campus Policies and Practices, Community Policies and Practices, and Media and Education. When RWJF renewed the project in 2002, site staff changed its name to [PACE: Reducing the Consequences of High-Risk Drinking](#), to reflect the pillars of its work: policy, alternatives, community and education.

NATIONAL PROGRAM OFFICE ACTIVITIES

National program office staff engaged in three main sets of activities. They:

- Provided technical assistance to the grantee sites.
- Managed a special communications project: the Advocacy Initiative.
- Used the national name and credibility of the AMA to communicate accurate information regarding binge drinking and advocate for evidence-based alcohol control policy.

Technical Assistance to Sites

National program office staff provided regular and as-needed assistance on topics such as the environmental model of change, national fraternity policies and ways college presidents and city officials can establish alcohol policies.

This assistance included:

- *Disseminating books, articles and other material* about topics such as the environmental approach, working with the media, data on college binge and underage drinking and techniques for building and managing coalitions, etc. These materials were produced by:
 - National program office staff or contractors.
 - Federal government agencies or other organizations.
 - Staff working on projects at the grantee sites.
 - Researchers who reported findings in journal articles or abstracts.
- *Convening monthly conference calls* with all sites to share information and discuss project progress and challenges. Evaluators and staff from the U.S Department of Education's [Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention](#) participated in several calls.

The Higher Education Center is a program within the [Education Development Center](#), a nonprofit agency based in Newton, Mass., that designs, delivers and evaluates programs to address urgent challenges in education, health and economic opportunity. The Education Development Center also received funding from RWJF and, with the Higher Education Center, provided help to sites in activities such as facilitating meetings or workshops. See [Program Results](#) for more information. Site staff served as consultants to the center.

- *Conducting annual site visits* to each site. During these visits, the national program director, deputy director and communications director addressed site staff and coalition member concerns and provided site-specific assistance to project staff, university administrators, students and community members.
- *Convening annual meetings of all grantees* from 1997 in San Diego through 2006 in San Francisco. Program staff and invited speakers provided advice in areas such as the environmental model, research findings regarding drinking on campus and media advocacy. Site staff shared their experiences and insights gained from their projects.
- *Sponsoring topic-specific technical assistance workshops*. Between 1996 and 2002, the national program office sponsored seven meetings, covering topics such as the environmental model, communications and media strategies, translating research into practice, managing coalitions and changing community policies.
- *Producing communications material and training in communications strategies* that included:
 - Creating program brochures, a media advocacy guide, a media relations manual, a press event planning guide, fact sheets on youth and alcohol and talking points about drinking.
 - Convening a communications workshop in October 1997 led by staff from the Higher Education Center. Teams from Colorado, Delaware, Iowa and Lehigh attended.
 - Offering media and spokesperson training to site staff and coalition members through [Sheehan Associates](#), a Washington-based communications training firm.
- *Instituting a regular system of phone calls, e-mails and listservs* to assess progress and facilitate networking and sharing of information. In particular, e-mails and listservs were a major source of communication between *A Matter of Degree* sites and *Reducing Underage Drinking* coalitions on alcohol policy and campus-community issues.

The Advocacy Initiative

Context for the Advocacy Initiative: Shift in Focus from Campus to Community

In the early years of *A Matter of Degree*, sites focused more on changing internal campus alcohol policies and improving enforcement of campus and existing community alcohol policies.

As projects made progress in addressing internal campus issues, project staff and coalition members began to look beyond the campus and into larger community influences on college drinking, such as local laws or marketing policies of local bars. They realized they were not making as much progress addressing these community factors.

Site project staff and campus coalition members were unsure about how to communicate the need for changes in laws and how to effectively advocate for improved policies. In general, they also lacked experience in analyzing laws, proposing new laws and effectively making their case to policy-makers.

The national program office allocated significant time and resources to plan and execute an intensive communications training and technical assistance initiative. The goal of the initiative was to help sites be more strategic and successful in changing community policies that affected student drinking.

Planning the Advocacy Initiative

The national program office undertook several activities to plan and then implement the campaign.

The following activities (supported by grant ID# 036281) led to a two-year, \$2.3 million-communications campaign/technical assistance package called the Advocacy Initiative.

The national program office:

- Contracted with Westerbeck Communications, a marketing consulting firm based in Chicago, to evaluate the communication needs of grantee organizations and recommend strategies to address those needs.
- Contracted with [Berkeley Media Studies Group](#), a Berkeley, Calif., media consulting firm, to train the six original sites in media advocacy techniques.
- Contracted with James Baker of the [Institute for Public Strategies](#), a consulting firm headquartered in San Diego, to assess the readiness of five sites for community policy change and then help those sites use media to build public support for policy change.
- Convened a National Resource Group in December 1999 to help develop a plan for the communications campaign. The national program office also convened a meeting

of a Technical Resource Group in February 2000 to refine the plan. This group remained as an advisory group to the Advocacy Initiative. See [Appendix 3](#) for a list of members.

Implementing the Advocacy Initiative

The Advocacy Initiative (supported by grant ID# 039380) began in September 2000.

Four coalitions received intensive training and technical assistance in media advocacy, strategic planning and community organizing, all with an eye to help them change alcohol-related laws and policies in their communities. RWJF and national program office staff chose the four coalitions based on their readiness to tackle changes in community policies:

- Building Responsibility Coalition (University of Delaware and the city of Newark).
- Stepping Up Coalition (University of Iowa and Iowa City).
- NU Directions (University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the city of Lincoln).
- Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment (University of Vermont and the city of Burlington).

Drawing upon the Advocacy Initiative's assistance and material, each of the four partnerships chose one or two policy changes and developed a strategic plan to implement those changes.

The national program office contracted with Pan American Services, a firm based in Bozeman, Mont., also directed by James Baker (see above), to provide the training and technical assistance. Through monthly on-site visits with staff from Pan American Services and phone and electronic access to research, advocacy advice and communications materials, the coalitions learned how to:

- Research local alcohol-related problems.
- Develop effective media messages to capture media attention.
- Approach the media and decision-makers in a way that would get their attention.

The national program office also contracted with [Fenton Communications](#), a national public interest communications firm, to create national media strategies, materials and campaigns that:

- Helped the public make connections between binge or high-risk drinking, its secondhand effects and environmental factors that contribute to problem drinking.
- Sites could "hook" into in local media to effect policy change at the community level.

Fenton staff also coordinated tele-press conferences to discuss two public opinion surveys conducted by [Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates](#), an international market research and consulting firm with offices in Washington and elsewhere. The surveys asked parents and other adults their views on:

- College binge drinking and the role of the environment.
- Spring break, alcohol and college students.

See [Appendix 4](#) for a summary of key findings of the surveys.

Advocacy Initiative Strategies and Results: The Sites

The selected strategies and their results are:

- **Building Responsibility Coalition in Delaware.**
 - *The strategy:* reduce or eliminate high-risk promotional activities at bars near campus and reduce negative effects of high-risk drinking on neighborhood residents.
 - *The result:* In 2002, the Newark City Council adopted rules regulating the operation of alcohol licenses and increased license fees to fund additional police officers to enforce these rules. The council also placed restrictions on the drink specials that bars could offer.
- **The Stepping Up Coalition in Iowa.**
 - *The strategy:* enact a city ordinance restricting drink specials and institute civil penalties for bars serving underage or intoxicated people.
 - *The result:* The Iowa City Council adopted a compromise ordinance in 2001, but court tests have questioned the legality of the ordinance. In 2002, police increased enforcement of underage alcohol possession and service laws.
- **NU Directions in Nebraska.**
 - *The strategy:* create a statewide policy on driver licensing to reduce production of false licenses.
 - *The result:* In March 2001, the state legislature enacted a digital driver's license system.
- **The Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment in Burlington, Vt.**
 - *The strategy:* develop a mandatory, comprehensive responsible alcohol service training program for bar owners, managers and employees.
 - *The result:* in 2001, this training became a requirement for liquor license renewal in the city of Burlington.

Advocacy Initiative: Overall Results

The national program office contracted with:

- The Center for Science in the Public Interest to produce a series of issue briefs to educate the public on college binge drinking, its harms and the environmental factors supporting binge drinking.
- The [Silver Gate Group](#) (a California company engaged in research, publishing and educational services promoting public health and safety) to create case studies of the four sites' experiences in the Advocacy Initiative. In 2003, Silver Gate staff produced a [report](#) that incorporated the case studies.

According to national program office staff, in a 2002 report to RWJF, broad achievements of the Advocacy Initiative included:

- **AMA officials with assistance from the national program office staff dissuaded NBC from advertising hard liquor on television.**

The national program office used the Advocacy Initiative to raise awareness of alcohol industry influence by publicly questioning the [National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges](#)' joint sponsorship of "Celebrate Responsibly" advertisements with Anheuser-Busch during the Final Four basketball championship. (The association is now called the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.)

- **The national program office convinced the AMA to call for major restrictions on alcohol advertising on network and cable television with the "hook" of a paper on the effects of alcohol use on students' brains.** An expanded version of this paper became an official AMA Council on Scientific Affairs report. The summary report is available [online](#). (The council is now called the Council on Science and Public Health).

National Program Office Communications

National program office staff took advantage of the AMA's ability to attract national media attention to speak out—through a range of regional and national media—about binge drinking and alcohol problems as health issues and behaviors. The AMA, thus, became a major nongovernmental voice on alcohol and health, according to program staff.

Representative activities included:

- Delivering a Congressional Briefing on Underage Drinking to 100 congressional representatives and staff on June 11, 1997. The AMA organized and funded the briefing session.

- Creating slide presentations on underage drinking and environmental approaches to alcohol control for use at conferences and by organizations and agencies across the country.
- Creating Alcohol and Youth fact sheets on topics such as: *Youth, Young Adults and Alcohol: Key Facts and Prevention Strategies*; and *The Minimum Legal Drinking age: Facts and Fallacies*.
- Making presentations at conferences, including among many others:
 - Prevention '97—National Preventive Medicine Conference (1997).
 - National Adolescent & Youth Coalition (1997).
 - American Public Health Association (multiple years between 1997 and 2007).
 - Alcohol Policy Conference XI (1998) and XII (2000).
 - National Alcohol Beverage Control Association (1999).
 - Marketing to Kids National Conference (2000).
 - Global Alcohol Policy Advocacy Conference (2000).
 - National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Advisory Council (2004).
 - World Conference on Health Promotion & Health Education (Australia, 2004).
 - National Meeting on Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) & Violence Prevention in Higher Education (various years).
 - NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2007).
 - Oxford Roundtable (2007).
 - National Conference of State Liquor Administrators (2008).
 - Medical Grand Rounds and Continuing Medical Education (various schools and conferences).
- Conducting interviews with national and broadcast media. These included, among many others:
 - CNN
 - National Public Radio
 - *Denver Post*
 - *Los Angeles Times*
 - *Teen Magazine*

- *Journal of the American Medical Association*
- *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.
- Working with Westerbeck Communications, through which:
 - Grantee sites were featured in stories in 1999, including a *U.S. News & World Report* story on alternative spring breaks and a National Public Radio interview about parental notification policies.
 - News releases covering alcohol issues were sent to national media contacts every other month starting in 2000.
 - National program, RWJF and site perspectives were included in a 2000 *New York Times* article entitled "Effort to Curb Binge Drinking in College Falls Short."
- Publishing a book chapter (in *Principles of Addiction Medicine, Third Edition, from the American Society of Addiction Medicine*) and eight articles in peer-reviewed journals. These included:
 - A 2007 article entitled "Community Alcohol Policy Coalitions in 10 College Communities: The 'A Matter of Degree' National Program to Reduce High Risk Drinking Among College Students" published in the *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*. Available [online](#).
 - A 2005 article entitled "The Neurocognitive Effects of Alcohol on Adolescents and College Students" published in *Preventive Medicine*. Available [online](#).

See the [Bibliography](#) for details.
- Producing:
 - Some 15 issues of a newsletter, *Exchange: Creating Solutions by Changing Environments*, between 1999 and 2003.
 - A report on lessons learned from the program, *A Matter of Degree Initiative to Reduce Binge Drinking at Colleges and Universities: Lessons Learned*, in 2007. The report is available [online](#).
 - A CD-ROM of an Internet broadcast from the University of Delaware and three AMA Web streaming programs on alcohol use and high-risk drinking.
- Working with staff at related alcohol prevention organizations to exchange information and resources and identify ways to collaborate in addressing college drinking. These organizations included (among many others):
 - RWJF's national programs:
 - *Reducing Underage Drinking through Coalitions*.
 - *SmokeLess States*.

- *Substance Abuse Policy Research Program.*
 - Center for Science in the Public Interest
 - Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth
 - Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
 - Join Together
 - Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

National program office staff reported several challenges it and the sites faced in implementing *A Matter of Degree*.

Lack of State and National Support

The alcohol policy field lacks state and national alcohol-focused voluntary organizations. Organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association and the American Heart Association support tobacco-cessation efforts through education, media connections and lobbying. The only national voluntary organization addressing alcohol issues is Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD); however, it only addresses issues related to drinking and driving.

The absence of alcohol policy organizations with strong volunteer bases necessitated far more extensive work and time by site staff to build their coalitions. This in turn meant it took longer for them to develop effective interventions and initiatives.

Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of the Alcohol Industry

No one had fully analyzed the alcohol industry's tactics and influence or state alcohol policy control and decision-making practices. As the campuses became more involved in trying to change local alcohol licensing policies, they ran up against state laws and, in a few communities, opposition from an organized alcohol industry.

In general, this opposition stimulated greater coalition efforts, and a number of projects began to work effectively at the state level to secure some changes in state legislation.

See descriptions of the efforts at the state level of Louisiana State University and University of Nebraska-Lincoln in *Statewide Collaboration* under [Key Site Experiences and Results](#). For a description of the experience of the national program office with the alcohol industry, see the sidebar on [Dealing With the Alcohol Industry](#). Florida State's

project was undermined by the alcohol industry. See the sidebar called [Anheuser-Busch and the #1 Party School](#).

Discomfort with Policy Change and the Environmental Model

Focusing on alcohol problems through policy change and environmental influences was a radical shift for universities accustomed to addressing them with small group education and counseling. National program office staff devoted a good deal of time educating site staffs and coalition members to secure their commitment and adherence to the environmental model.

Within a year, most sites had become advocates of the model. While initial project staff tended to be student services personnel, over time new hires with community organizing and media skills began to take their places. Some project directors became such experts in community organizing that they shared their knowledge and skills with other campuses.

EVALUATION

Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health conducted a multiyear evaluation of *A Matter of Degree*. The principal investigator was Henry Wechsler, Ph.D., principal investigator of the College Alcohol Study, which preceded and ran concurrently with *A Matter of Degree*. Elissa R. Weitzman, Sc.D., was co-principal investigator. See [Program Results](#) on the findings from the College Alcohol Study.

The goals of the evaluation, which included both qualitative case studies and quantitative student surveys were to:

- Assess and document whether project sites could develop coalitions to create and implement environmentally-based interventions.
- Assess whether the interventions reduced student drinking, alcohol-related harms (such as missing classes) or secondhand effects of drinking (such as campus or neighborhood disturbances).

The evaluation began in 1996 and ended at the end of the 2005 school year. Evaluation staff included the Harvard-based researchers and an on-site evaluator at each university. Harvard evaluation staff trained the on-site evaluators, but Harvard and the universities shared funding responsibility for their salaries. The evaluation had qualitative and quantitative components. The on-site evaluators:

- Collected project data.
- Drafted case studies of the individual sites.
- Collected or facilitated collection of university and community documents.

RWJF staff initially intended to fund the evaluation through the life of the national program. In 2001, when RWJF renewed *A Matter of Degree* for four additional years, it also provided funds for evaluators to collect data through 2005. However, some sites started later than others and some were able to extend their programs through no-cost extensions. Evaluators did not collect data beyond the 2004–2005 school year.

The Qualitative Component: Case Studies

Evaluators prepared in-depth case studies of each site. The case studies described the site's project and the formation, structure and functioning of its campus/community coalition. Evaluators collected data for the case studies through:

- Site visits and interviews of coalition members and others on and off campus.
- Open-ended surveys of all coalition members.
- Feedback collected from coalition members at the start and end of their tenure.
- Secondary data from sources such as police, merchants, landlords and clinics.
- Review of campus and community alcohol control policies and practices.
- Focus group data collected from students, administrators and community members.

In 1998, evaluators produced case study reports on the first six sites (the universities of Colorado at Boulder, Delaware, Iowa, Lehigh, Vermont and Wisconsin-Madison) and a cross-site analysis that identified common themes and differences among the sites.

In 2000, evaluators produced case study reports and a cross-site analysis on the four remaining sites (Florida State, Georgia Tech, Louisiana State and Nebraska-Lincoln).

The Quantitative Component: Student Surveys

Evaluators compared results of student surveys at the 10 *A Matter of Degree* sites with student survey results at 32 other schools that the 1993 College Alcohol Study found to have high binge drinking rates. These 32 schools served as the comparison group for the *A Matter of Degree* colleges.

Evaluators surveyed students at the 10 *A Matter of Degree* schools annually between 1997 and 2005, excluding 2004. They surveyed students at the 32 comparison schools four times (1997, 1999, 2001 and 2005), with 26 of the 32 schools participating in the last survey.

Over the length of the evaluation, a total of approximately 42,000 students from the 42 schools participated in the surveys.

The surveys examined:

- Seven measures of alcohol consumption (e.g., any alcohol use in the past year, binge drinking in the past two weeks, experiencing intoxication three or more times in the past month).
- Thirteen measures of alcohol-related harms (e.g., hangover, unplanned sex, medical treatment for overdose).
- Nine measures of secondhand effects of alcohol use by others (e.g., property vandalized, study or sleep disrupted, date rape).

See [Appendix 5](#) for a complete list of measures in all three categories.

Additional Analyses: The Uptake of Binge Drinking, Alcohol Outlet Density, Drinking and Driving

Evaluators used data from the project to conduct additional analyses regarding:

- Factors associated with the uptake of binge drinking in college among students who did not binge drink in high school.
- The relationship between alcohol outlet density and heavy drinking and drinking-related problems in eight *A Matter of Degree* communities to determine whether heavy levels of drinking and drinking problems were related to alcohol density.
- The effects of *A Matter of Degree* on student drinking and driving.

Evaluation Challenges

The evaluation presented a number of challenges: for the evaluators, for the national program office and for the site project directors.

Challenges to the Evaluators

A Matter of Degree was "not a great program to evaluate since every site was different," according to James Knickman, Ph.D., former RWJF vice president of research and evaluation. According to Knickman, the program had several inherent challenges for evaluators:

- It tested a lot of different models.
- Many factors influence young people's drinking, making it difficult to isolate the effect of this one [albeit complex] intervention.
- While there were concrete measurable outcomes (e.g., stopping binge drinking), it takes years and years for the outcomes of environmental change to become clear.

The decentralized aspect of the evaluation—the use of on-site evaluators—benefited the evaluation team but also posed some challenges, according to evaluator Weitzman:

- "The on-site evaluators offered the opportunity to closely observe at the sites and this was a key element of the evaluation methodology. It is hard, in a multisite program, to describe what is happening at the local level. Many questions are best answered by having the knowledge of a local person.... They regularly observed the implementation of the study and how the community responded to the interventions.

"The local coalitions were often unsophisticated and the universities had limited evaluation capabilities. Having a trained person on site was a resource to them. Information went back to sites with the help of the local evaluator.

"At the same time, there was considerable evaluator variability across sites. Some on-site evaluators had lots of expertise, some did not. The sites that were the most able—from a management, implementation, etc., perspective—were most able to engage and use the on-site evaluator. It was part of their efficacy. There was a range of ability to use that resource."

Challenges to the National Program Office

National program office staff noted the advantage that academic evaluators bring by their ability to report results in respected journals. Along with this advantage, however, comes the challenge of having to wait for findings to be published in journals while wanting to report findings on a timely basis in order to promote the program and inform the alcohol-prevention field.

The national program office found it hard to obtain and use evaluation findings, which could be held back for extended periods pending journal publication. This delay impeded the office's ability to promote the project's accomplishments and placed staff in an awkward position when trying to discuss outcomes without being able to reveal any data.

According to national program staff, their inability to release evaluation data on the projects fed an impression among activist academicians and alcohol industry leaders who supported the use of social norms strategies, "that they were hiding negative outcomes." Staff reported that this "raised a lot of resentments that we would not share what we learned."

In addition, the evaluation team in many instances released data without providing prior notice to the national program office. When this happened, it was difficult for national program office staff to respond adequately to media inquiries or questions from university staff or coalition members regarding findings from their projects.

Challenges to Site Project Directors

The presence of the on-site evaluators was a very positive component of the evaluation design for most site project directors. These evaluators provided timely feedback that was useful to the sites.

At the same time, several site project directors identified challenges related to the overall evaluation. The following comments are representative:

- The Vermont project director (in a report to RWJF) said: "When the evaluators periodically released papers related to the evaluation of the project with little lead time or coordination with the national program office or the individual sites, we found ourselves at times unprepared for the media inquiries that followed. While not a simple fix, a clearer mandate from RWJF regarding communication collaboration and media relations among the sites, the evaluators and the national program office may have helped reduce the negative impact that the stories created and minimized the loss of goodwill with city partners that incomplete information can create."
- The Georgia Tech project director said: "The evaluators sent things to the media—that's how we saw the feedback. We would get the data at least a year late. It was old news. We couldn't do data-driven interventions. Having an advance on the data would have been helpful but nobody would tell us about it. The on-site person couldn't interfere with how the [evaluation] was done. [The evaluation would have been more useful to us] if we had gotten data faster than a year-or-more late, when you can't do anything with it."

OVERALL PROGRAM RESULTS

Results for the AMA

National program office staff reported key results in a 2007 report to RWJF and in interviews.

- **The AMA decided to include alcohol consumption as one of four key health behaviors addressed by its Healthier Life Steps™ Program.** This program offers information and tools to help physicians support patients' efforts to change health behaviors regarding alcohol consumption, diet, physical activity and tobacco use. *A Matter of Degree* (along with *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions*, also managed by the AMA) led the AMA to focus on alcohol problems as health issues and to involve the medical community in solving the problem.
- **With the assistance of *A Matter of Degree* national program office staff, the AMA wrote and passed a series of alcohol control policies.** These included policies on:
 - Banning alcohol industry sponsorship of events on college campuses.
 - The need to address suicide and substance abuse on campuses.

- Drinking and driving.
- Alcohol screening and brief intervention.
- Call for exclusion of alcohol and tobacco in global trade agreements.
- World Medical Association global statement on alcohol policy.
- **National program staff recruited several AMA presidents to promote the strategies of *A Matter of Degree* at a national level.**
- **The AMA brought national media attention to issues such as:**
 - Alcohol-focused spring break promotions to college students.
 - Parental concerns about college drinking.
 - The fallacy of the *Princeton Review's* annual rating of party schools.
 - Blocking distilled spirits advertising on broadcast TV.
 - Eliminating alcohol advertising connected to key collegiate sports events.

College-Community Coalition Results

National program staff reported results of coalition formation in a 2007 report to RWJF.

- **Eight of the 10 sites developed a functioning, long-term campus-community collaborative structure.**
 - Five sites had a formal, centralized coalition with detailed goals, objectives and work plans. The coalitions had broad memberships and standing committees.
 - Coalitions at three other sites were more complex and less structured. These sites had a broad coalition and a separate campus coordinating committee. The campus coordinating committee created ad hoc community task forces coordinated by a project staff member.
 - Two projects failed to develop effective coalitions.
 - At the University of Colorado at Boulder, campus and community efforts were not well integrated, with different individuals and groups operating fairly independently.
 - At Florida State, an initial coalition formed but local alcohol industry representatives objected to most of its efforts and many members backed off. See the sidebar [Anheuser-Busch and the #1 Party School](#) for more on the Florida State experience.

- **As funding ended for each site, the coalitions changed towards models that incorporated:**
 - Development of statewide higher education coalitions.
 - Campus task forces to continue on-campus activities.
 - Campus-community collaborations to coordinate activities undertaken on campus and in the community.
- **In most cases, the communities developed long-term strategic plans to address alcohol policy and enforcement that extended beyond student drinking concerns.**

The national program director reported on the differences in the characteristics of higher performing and lower performing coalitions in an article published in 2007 in the *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*. Higher performing coalitions had the following characteristics compared with lower performing coalitions:

- **They had more formal structures and processes.**
- **Staff and leaders were more facilitative and attentive to building consensus.**
- **Coalition members were more positive about:**
 - Campus and community support for change.
 - The coalition's management and ability to effect change.
 - Their own participation in the coalition and its value.

Elements of Successful Coalitions Identified by the National Program Office Staff

National program staff identified 10 key elements of successful coalitions in a 2007 report entitled "A Matter of Degree Initiative to Reduce Binge Drinking at Colleges and Universities: Lessons Learned." Available [online](#).

1. **High-level university and community leadership.** Support from both the chief executive on campus and the active support of community leaders are critical to coalition success.
4. **Campus policy development and enforcement.** By focusing on developing and enforcing campus drinking policies before looking to communities for solutions, colleges and universities gain credibility among community leaders.
5. **Staff qualifications.** The project director of a campus-community coalition must have expertise in coalition work, political organizing and media advocacy. The position should be full time.

6. **Campus and community coalition: structure and process.** A successful coalition will have a formal structure, with clearly defined roles for members and open communications to keep members informed.
7. **Education and the environmental change model.** Evidence shows that changes in the environment can reduce problems caused by high-risk drinking. Coalition members have to learn about and support the environmental approach.
8. **Data collection to support problem assessment.** The availability of local data on student alcohol use and related problems will help garner necessary broad-based support for a coalition.
9. **Commitment to advocacy and policy change.** To make significant changes, a coalition must include members with political skills and knowledge of how to operate politically on and off campus.
10. **Media advocacy and communications.** Purposeful and planned use of media can raise public awareness and support for environmental approaches to prevention.
11. **Shared responsibility for solutions.** Both campus and community have a role in student drinking behavior; they must share responsibility for creating solutions.
12. **Long-term view and commitment.** Environmental change takes time. Strategic planning is needed that defines the problem and considers community norms and values before developing policies and implementing solutions.

KEY SITE EXPERIENCES AND RESULTS

The 10 *A Matter of Degree* projects were all located at universities with a significant rate of high-risk drinking among the students and in many cases were located in states with high adult binge drinking rates.

Each site incorporated the fundamental elements of the program by following the environmental model and establishing a campus-community coalition. Within this framework, the staff and coalition at each site carried out activities relevant to the site's own campus and community.

Seven key issues were common among many of the sites.

1. Responding to Campus and Community Cultural Influences

The Issue

The environmental model of behavior change seeks to alter the environment that supports certain behaviors in a way that fosters other, more healthful and appropriate behaviors.

Several types of environment were especially supportive of high-risk drinking. These included:

- A focus on sports, particularly one where football is an important part of the culture. While this was the case for many sites, sports were particularly important at Florida State University, Louisiana State University, the University of Colorado at Boulder and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Alumni can be especially supportive of a drinking culture at sports-focused schools.
- A "work hard/play hard" view prevalent among students at some of the sites, especially Lehigh University. This view justifies, to the students, their party behavior to offset the hard studying they do.
- An urban campus with easy access to many alcohol-serving establishments. Such was the situation at Georgia Tech.
- A "joie de vivre" mentality as exemplified by the southern Louisiana "let the good times roll" culture. This culture emphasizes food, drink and partying for everyone and posed a special challenge at Louisiana State University.

Site Experiences and Results

All of the sites worked actively through *A Matter of Degree* to address cultural influences on campus and in the community. Here are three examples:

- At the **University of Colorado at Boulder**, the project coalition addressed the overall campus culture of drinking and partying. Three key accomplishments were:
 - A beer ban at the football stadium.
 - An increase in substance-free residence hall space.
 - A reduction in the number of alcohol licenses on campus.

Since the implementation of the stadium beer ban, project staff reports that the university has seen a 69 percent reduction in fans being kicked out of the stadium, a 75 percent decline in arrests and a drop in the number of assaults from nine to zero.

- **Louisiana State's** project director, Nancy I. Mathews, Ed.D., described the strong cultural influences there: "The southern Louisiana culture is still drinking-oriented. Louisianans are very proud of their cooking, dancing, music, food and camaraderie. It can be very uncontrolled. This is particularly true in Acadiana [an area that is the heart of Cajun culture] and the New Orleans region. There are festivals year-round. It is warm here year-round, which makes it easier to party and drink. The controls on alcohol [that *A Matter of Degree* promoted] were considered to be ruining the fun."

At the same time, Mathews said, "Football is king here. When we started, everyone was openly drinking alcohol in the stadium."

LSU's Campus-Community Coalition for Change was the driving force behind the changes to the university's drinking culture. "The community was very negative about LSU," said Mathews. "This was the first opportunity for community leaders to be invited on campus—and they took the job seriously. We had a huge coalition. We had anyone there [who] had anything to do with alcohol. The ones who stayed with it were totally committed."

The coalition was research-oriented, according to Mathews, and conducted public opinion polls at the beginning. "These provided data about rules and regulations that showed that the voters supported this. These polls were probably the most important things we did and provided needed data," said Mathews.

Over time, things began to change. There are more rules governing alcohol use and the stadium is now dry. While there is "a whole Mardi Gras mentality," Mathews said, "It is much better than it was. Things on campus are much more controlled. Change will come but very gradually. This has been a very exciting change, but very slow."

- The *University of Wisconsin-Madison's* PACE Project had to address "a long history of Halloween and other celebrations that bring in young people from all over the region and have often resulted in major drinking related riots and vandalism," according to national program director Richard Yoast.

Making Halloween a safe event and reducing alcohol-related incidents was a priority of the PACE Project. Coalition members worked to ensure the enforcement of campus and community policies and regulations during Halloween celebrations. Through its involvement in *A Matter of Degree*, the coalition was able to deal with this ongoing "cultural" problem and "over time has helped to greatly reduce the severity of the problem," said Yoast.

2. Engaging Students in the Effort

The Issue

Initially the national program office encouraged sites to include students in their projects and on their coalitions. The sites did this to varying degrees but in most cases, students were viewed as impediments to the process. Challenges in involving students included:

- Students not understanding the goals of the program.
- Students working actively to circumvent program efforts.
- Students concerned about appearing "nerdy" or "uncool" if they got involved.
- Students being involved for a short period and then losing interest or graduating.

Over time, student involvement generally waned and sites were less inclined to count students as members of their coalitions, although some sites made progress in this area.

Site Experiences and Results

Three sites commented on their efforts to engage students.

- Project staff at **Lehigh University** established good working relationships with students. There they focused on the athletes. "We looked for partner support and found it in athletics," said John Smeaton, Ph.D., vice provost for student affairs, "We had an opportunity to influence and engage this particular group of students. Alcohol impinges peak performance. The coaches were great in helping with this and some student captains came on board. They developed the slogan, 'Hard Bodies, Soft Drinks,' and organized an alcohol-free Student-Athlete Formal that continues as a regular event."

Smeaton summed up the value of student involvement: "We needed to engage the students to lay the foundation for campus change, because the initial response to IMPACT [the Lehigh campus-community coalition] was very negative. One watershed moment, which raised the level of awareness and engendered more debate about it was an editorial in the student paper, which said, 'I agree with the goals [of *A Matter of Degree*], I just don't like how it's being done.' This was a huge success. You can always talk about how to actually do it if you agree on goals."

Said Smeaton: "It is a healthier, safer campus today. The students now work with us. We still have kids at risk, but it is not as accepted now. There are more nonalcohol-based student social options. There is an acceptance of an attitude of 'we can be better.' There is more pride in Lehigh."

- At **Louisiana State**, Nancy Mathews, project director, saw student interest decline over time as students graduated and moved on. "We had a big student component, which was new every year. Students were initially very motivated by this. They were honored to be selected. They were selected based on their university affiliation." But as time went on, she said, "We have had different kinds of student leadership. We don't really need students now. You get as much done without them."
- At the **University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, project director Linda Major viewed students as one of the project's most important partners. However, working with students was not smooth. Noted Major, "Early and mid-project there was student opposition. They tried to paint us as prohibitionists. We countered that and brought those students to a meeting. We were very open and public. We invited a really resistant student to be a member of the coalition."

This approach worked. "We could not have made the progress we did without the great student investment," Major said. "They bought into the outcome (i.e., to decrease high-risk drinking). We were not about underage drinking, so we could all come to the table on high-risk drinking."

3. Working with Greek Organizations on Campus

The Issue

All of the sites had substantial numbers of active Greek organizations, either on campus or just off campus. Such organizations, especially fraternities, have long been associated with a drinking culture.

Site Experiences and Results

Some 35 percent of Lehigh University students belonged to a Greek organization in 2004. Lehigh made addressing issues with Greek life a major priority.

At Lehigh the "big cultural issue," according to Madalyn Eadline, project director, is the Greek system, which physically dominates the campus from a hillside of fraternity houses overlooking the rest of the university. Most drinking occurs on campus at the fraternity houses. Lehigh addressed the issue of drinking and Greek life head on with its "Strengthening Greek Life" initiative, which began in April 2002.

Revisions to Greek life policies included establishing a new accreditation system and changing the rushing procedures (e.g., male students are no longer able to pledge in their freshman year). The university hired seven professional staff members as Greek life coordinators who acted as resources, liaisons and advocates for the fraternities and sororities.

Smeaton described the effort: "We challenged frats to become an asset and a contribution to campus life. Our motto was 'Be Great or Be Gone (We'll Help Either Way).' The university poured money in—\$5.5 million—to clean up the frat houses. They are generally much better now. So they all felt that Lehigh was willing to invest for success."

4. Dealing with Local Bar Owners

The Issue

Bars situated just off campus can be a prime source of alcohol for students—and students are a prime source of revenue for these bars. There may be little incentive for bar owners to limit service to college students; instead, many bars engage in practices designed to attract young drinkers. Such practices include:

- Drink specials, such as "two-for-one" pricing deals.
- Happy hours, with reduced prices at certain times.
- Ladies nights, when women drink free or for a reduced price.
- Advertisements in college newspapers.

- Sponsorship of athletic and other events.

Site Experiences and Results

Four sites represent the range of approaches to dealing with local bar owners.

- When the **University of Delaware** established its Building Responsibility Coalition, "there were few town regulations that governed how alcohol could be sold or marketed," according to John Bishop, project director. "Students knew the regulations but didn't believe the university took them seriously. There were happy hours every hour of every day the establishments were open. Fake ID's were a cottage industry in Newark. So the environment sent messages to students that there are no barriers to getting cheap alcohol."

"Some bar and restaurant owners were willing to work with the coalition," said Bishop, "and help identify unintended consequences. These were some of the more responsible owners and actually helped us think through issues in some cases."

- **Georgia Tech**, the only AMOD university located in a large urban area, had a similarly positive experience. Many bars and other alcohol outlets lie within walking distance of the campus, and students can access many more in the greater Atlanta area. Nevertheless, said GT SMART project director Brinkley, "Once we partnered with the police and hospitality industry it changed dramatically. Students were finding it more difficult to get alcohol off campus."

One program in particular that helped this effort was Responsible Alcohol Sales and Server Training, an online program that GT SMART licensed from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The program trains workers and managers at restaurants, bars and package stores about alcohol laws and the procedures required by them. According to Brinkley, "User surveys have shown very positive responses. People going through the training felt they knew how to do this after they had had the training."

As a result of GTSMART's efforts, off-campus alcohol is less available and accessible.

- The experience at **Louisiana State** was very different. There, relations with the local bar owners were so difficult that the coalition decided not to continue trying to work with them.

Catherine Childers was chair of the Campus-Community Coalition for Change and a former lobbyist for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). While enthusiastic about the work of the coalition and its results, she said, "One thing that did not work well was working with the bar owners. I had been working with the industry longer than anyone. The industry fights dirty. They don't play fair."

"The Alcohol Industry Task Force, which was the bar owners, was a very difficult experience. We made all the effort. The bar owners would not hold up their end. They

were trying to sabotage us. So we decided not to do any more. We didn't want the whole coalition to suffer."

- The **University of Vermont's** Coalition to Create a Quality Learning Environment "re-examined the nature of downtown life [in Burlington] and took a lot of steps to increase and improve enforcement on and off campus," said national program director Richard Yoast.

In particular, the coalition helped form the Burlington Hospitality Resource Panel, which reports to the Burlington City Council's Licensing Committee. This group focuses on environmental factors in the downtown area such as bar management, crowd control and city ordinances.

5. Changing Local Ordinances and Working with Local Police

The Issue

Local ordinances that regulate the sale and use of alcohol can influence young people's drinking behavior. These ordinances include:

- "Open Container" laws that prohibit open containers of alcohol in cars while driving.
- "21 Only" laws that prohibit people under the age of 21 from entering a bar, even if they do not drink.
- "Keg Registration" that requires people renting a keg of beer for a party to register his or her contact information so that keg use can be connected to someone responsible for outcomes related to its rental.
- Requiring Responsible Alcohol Service Training of bar and restaurant workers.

Site Experiences and Results

Five sites changed local ordinances to help reduce the availability and accessibility of alcohol to underage college students.

- At the **University of Delaware**, the Building Responsibility Coalition was looking for an early win, according to Bishop. "We had an ordinance that protected certain properties (such as schools, churches, residences, etc.) from nearby alcohol sales," said Bishop. "We thought this should be expanded to residence halls. It was easy for City Council to support this. Most signed onto this and we got an early win."

Bishop noted, however, that when a new mayor was elected, he wanted to make Newark attractive to business and evening activities. As a result, the city weakened the prohibition against selling alcohol near dormitories.

- GT SMART, at **Georgia Tech** in Atlanta, focused on campus issues during its first three years. In the fourth year, Brinkley, community liaison for the mayor of Atlanta and a board member of GT SMART, was hired to direct the project and turned the

coalition's attention off campus. Over the next three and a half years the coalition made recommendations to the City Council, which passed 11 pieces of legislation. Brinkley noted, "I knew city issues and who to contact. I had been co-chair of the coalition, so I knew the coalition and the city."

According to Brinkley, the Atlanta police have been one of GT SMART's critical partners. To help enforce the ordinances, the coalition and the Atlanta police established an anonymous tip line. A caller can give the name and location of a business violating an ordinance, noting whether it is a one-time or ongoing problem. The information is passed to the police. "The police gave so many citations initially," said Brinkley, "that things changed and now there are hardly any more. We even had students using the tip line, and we did not advertise this to students."

- The **University of Iowa's** Stepping Up Project Coalition worked with Iowa City officials to ban drink specials and prohibit people under the age of 19 from being in bars after 10:00 p.m., according to national program director Richard Yoast. "The city really made tremendous strides in examining alcohol policies, making changes and really trying to change the alcohol environment." As in many states, although licensing is a combination of state and local decisions, Iowa license revocations need state approval. The university reached out to the state liquor control agency, which then began offering training to licensees in Iowa City and other Iowa towns with colleges and universities.
- NU Directions at **University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, established a Party Patrol-law enforcement officers who are available to break up loud parties in local neighborhoods.
- Among all the states in which *A Matter of Degree* sites were located, Wisconsin has the greatest degree of local control over alcohol licensing and enforcement. The **University of Wisconsin** coalition quickly reached out to the local alcohol control board, one of whose members became a co-chair of the coalition. University officials for the first time began attending control board meetings to explain the impact their licensing decisions had on student drinking. One of the early steps the board took was to agree not to allow any new bars to open near a new sports arena the university built. Eventually, the *A Matter of Degree* project was able to influence many of the decisions made to redevelop the downtown cultural and entertainment area, and the city government now has a full-time staff person to work on alcohol-related issues.

6. Using the Media and Other Communication Vehicles

The Issue

Great attention was given to communications by the national program office and the sites. See [The Advocacy Initiative](#) for a description of a two-year, \$2.3-million communications campaign/technical assistance package that began in September 2000.

Individual sites also engaged in extensive communications activities on campus and in the local media.

Site Experiences and Results

Three sites in particular accomplished a lot with their media and communications efforts.

- At the **University of Delaware**, Bishop, described the Building Responsibility Coalition's view on communications: "We were in the media regularly and frequently. Nothing stayed in the news as long as the university's efforts to deal with the alcohol issue. It became very visible and high profile. We wanted to use media advocacy and we came up with a media campaign that had themes like 'Good Neighbors,' '10 Reasons Not to Get Drunk' and posters about alcohol."

Richard Waibel, coalition chair, mentioned one effort. "In order to make the public aware, we did some well-placed, well-written op-ed pieces, he said. "It put a flame under people. They gave the university credit for changes in binge drinking but said that Newark was still a party town. People said that finally someone was speaking on their behalf."

- NU Directions, at **University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, engaged in numerous communications activities. According to Major, the project director, a communications director writes a newsletter and handles the website. Coalition staff and members have written articles and a monograph chapter and speak at national conferences.

NU Directions also capitalizes on regular press conferences held by the chief of police. No one in the press misses these and the chief is happy to include news about the coalition in his press conference. This has been a key communications strategy, according to Major.

In order to promote their model nationally, project staff worked with the U.S. Department of Education to schedule its [21st Annual National Meeting on Alcohol and Other Drug and Violence Prevention in Higher Education](#) in Nebraska in October 2007. The meeting focused on campus-community coalitions.

- At the very start of the **University of Iowa Stepping Up Project**, Steve Parrott, the university communications director noted that the *A Matter of Degree* project had to confront a negative image in the local media and city council. He launched a communications campaign that lasted throughout the project and was instrumental in changing how the media, the city council and city residents viewed student drinking. As with other sites, the community perspectives changed from one of blaming the students and the university, to accepting the community's role in creating and working with the university to solve alcohol-related problems—and to see that it was a much larger issue than student drinking alone.

7. Expanding the Program's Reach

The Issue

While the program sites focused on the universities and the communities that surrounded them, the experience gained by the campus-community coalitions sometimes translated to a wider environment. The process of engaging the local community and working to change local ordinances and regulations introduced some coalitions to statewide efforts to address high-risk drinking among young people.

Site Experiences and Results

Three projects branched out to make an impact statewide.

- Several GT SMART initiatives have expanded beyond the **Georgia Tech** campus:
 - Responsible Alcohol Sales and Server Training is used in 17 counties throughout the state, and the Atlanta City Council is considering mandating it in the city.
 - The anonymous tip line operates in multiple jurisdictions.
 - GT SMART receives requests for information about its interventions from communities throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.
- At **Louisiana State**, the Campus-Community Coalition for Change ended when the RWJF grant ended in August 2007. At that time, the coalition formalized its statewide focus and became the Louisiana Center Addressing Substance Use in Collegiate Communities. The group has expanded the work of the original coalition to include all 31 state campuses in Louisiana. It is a collaboration of three entities:
 - The LSU Campus Challenge, funded by Louisiana State's Office of Student Life and Academic Services, addresses campus environment, culture and substance use policies.
 - The Baton Rouge Alliance Coalition, funded by a contract with the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, targets entertainment, quality of life and other issues in the Greater Baton Rouge area.
 - Louisiana Higher Education Coalition, funded under a contract with the Department of Health and Hospitals' Office for Addictive Disorders, uses a statewide collegiate survey, statewide training and state legislation to combat underage drinking.

Mathews, the project director, describes the expansion of efforts to the state level: "The most important thing the Campus-Community Coalition for Change has accomplished is that we have become the experts in Louisiana about using environmental techniques to change behaviors. People now understand the power of data and all are using it."

"A big change is that people feel there is something to be done and that can be done with everyone's involvement. Having the model tested at LSU—the flagship state school—gave credibility. They are using the model as a result of the coalition. Because of the training I got through this grant process and the influence of the other members, we gained confidence. The model is here to stay."

- At the **University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, NU Directions has established both city and state connections beyond the campus and its immediate community. According to director Major:
 - "NU Directions expanded into the Lincoln College Partnership. This includes two 2-year schools, two 4-year private schools and University of Nebraska-Lincoln."
 - "We are collaborating with others across Nebraska to have statewide efforts." New state legislation includes:

Legislation allowing municipalities to deny new liquor licenses based on evidence that additional outlets in a geographical area would place undue strain on law enforcement resources.

- Legislation establishing a server/manager certification process, with NU Directions' Web-based seller/server education program serving as the primary curriculum.
- "The Nebraska Office of Highway Safety continues to provide funding. Also, linkages with the state of Nebraska have generated additional state prevention funding."

In addition, at least **three universities—Georgia Tech, Louisiana State and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln**—have expanded their initiatives to other campuses within their university systems and to other campuses and organizations within their states.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Case Study Findings

Evaluators reported case study findings in two reports to RWJF: "Phase I Report" in September 1998 (the first six sites) and "Cross-Site Analysis: Wave II Sites" in November 2000 (the remaining four sites). Early indicators of success and challenge for the campus-community coalitions were similar for both sets of sites:

- **Early indicators of success included:**
 - Active and regular involvement of the university president (or designate) and the local mayor (or designate) and other campus and community leaders.

- Capacity to educate diverse participants—including community members—about the fundamentals of environmental change models.
- Commitment to building a partnered relationship with students.
- Inclusion of multiple community members, such as police, business and civic leaders.
- Commitment to the research and evaluation effort as a means of informing change.
- **Early indicators that a site was experiencing challenges in building its coalition and negotiating the planning year included:**
 - Turnover among key staff members.
 - Absence of follow-through and limited participation from the highest leaders on campus and in the community.
 - Attrition and burnout among participants.
 - Absence or underrepresentation of student members and low levels of involvement. While coalitions promoted student participation, most were discouraged by a lack of student interest or by a student presence limited to few issue areas. Faculty and athletic department participation is also limited on most coalitions.
 - Absence or underrepresentation of community members and low levels of involvement. In particular, conflict with the alcohol industry was a significant challenge at some sites, especially Florida State University.

Student Survey Findings

Evaluators reported interim findings for 1997 through 2001 in an article published in 2004 in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* entitled, "Reducing Drinking and Related Harms in College: Evaluation of the 'A Matter of Degree' Program" (abstract available [online](#)—click article 1). (NOTE: The number of measures of alcohol-related harm and secondhand effects differ between the article abstract and full text and the tables. Numbers of measures used in this report are from the tables.)

Key findings include:

- **When considered in the aggregate, the group of 10 program sites did not differ significantly from the group of 32 comparison sites over time.**
 - The two groups did not differ on any of the seven measures of alcohol consumption (e.g., any alcohol use in the past year, binge drinking in the past two weeks, experiencing intoxication three or more times in the past month).

- The program group exhibited significant declines in only two of 13 alcohol-related harms compared with the comparison sites:
 - Missing a class due to alcohol use. There was no significant change for the comparison group over time.
 - Driving after consuming five or more drinks. The comparison sites showed a significant increase over time on this measure.
- The program group did not exhibit significant changes in any of the nine alcohol-related secondhand effects (e.g. property vandalized, study or sleep disrupted, date rape) compared with the comparison sites.
- **When examined individually, the 10 program sites differed substantially from each other in the extent to which they implemented *A Matter of Degree*.** Five sites fell into each of two groups.
 - Five "high environment" sites implemented considerably more interventions (188 versus 67) and more interventions that addressed the environment (158 versus 46) than the five "low environment" sites. Examples of environmental interventions included:
 - Mandatory responsible beverage service training.
 - Substance-free residence halls.
 - Ban on alcohol ads in student newspapers.
 - The number of implemented interventions that targeted the individual (such as educational programs) was closer for the two groups (30 for the high environment sites versus 21 for the low environment sites).
- **The five high environment implementation sites showed significantly different behavioral effects over time compared with the five low environment implementation sites.**
 - Six of seven measures of alcohol consumption (all except "any alcohol use") significantly declined among students at the five high environment schools.

Low environment schools showed no significant changes on any measure of alcohol consumption and the comparison schools either showed no change or significantly increased.
 - Nine of 13 measures of alcohol-related harms declined significantly in the high environment sites.

Three harms declined significantly in the low environment sites. One harm—unplanned sex—declined in the comparison schools and four increased.

- Five of nine measures of alcohol-related secondhand effects declined significantly at the high environment sites.

No significant declines in any secondhand effects were found at the low environment sites. The comparison sites showed significant declines in three measures and remained flat in the others.

Evaluators reported updated evaluation findings in a 2007 report to RWJF.

- **While behavioral outcomes were realized almost exclusively by the high environment sites during the first half of the evaluation period, differences between the high and low environment sites decreased by 2005.** By that point, low environment sites had broadened their level of implementation.
- **Key findings on alcohol consumption over the total evaluation period (1997–005) are as follows:**
 - Frequent binge drinking (i.e., three or more times in past two weeks):
 - Remained stable in the 10 program sites.
 - Increased significantly in the comparison sites.
 - Frequent drunkenness (i.e., three or more times in past 30 days):
 - Declined significantly for the 10 program sites.
 - Increased significantly for the comparison sites.
 - Heavy total volume of drinking (i.e., 20 more drinks in the past 30 days):
 - Remained stable for the 10 program sites.
 - Increased significantly for the comparison sites.
- **Reports of any five or more of the drinking-related harms declined over time among surveyed students at program schools, but increased among surveyed students at the comparison schools.**
- **Reports of any three or more of the alcohol related secondhand effects declined over time among surveyed students at both the program schools and the comparison schools.**
- **Declines in alcohol consumption and harm, at levels beyond those observed at comparison schools, were concentrated in two to three program sites.** These sites were characterized by above-average levels of both environmentally and individually oriented interventions for the entire program.

According to Weitzman, co-principal investigator, "the combination of programmatic focus in these multiple dimensions may determine change beyond what was achieved in sites with a more singular approach." Effects were most likely where:

- Interventions spanned both campus and community.
- The scale of the intervention was somewhat proportional to community size (i.e., larger, more urban sites appeared to lag in effect relative to smaller, more geographically bounded university/community sites).
- Interventions emphasized both:
 - Those that focused on the environment as the target for change, especially those that addressed access and availability.
 - Those that focused on the individual as the target for change to address student behaviors and intentions rather than knowledge and beliefs. These interventions include prevention programs and information about secondhand effects of alcohol.

Additional Analyses: The Uptake of Binge Drinking, Alcohol Outlet Density, Drinking and Driving Findings

The Uptake of Binge Drinking

Evaluators reported findings about factors affecting the uptake of binge drinking in college among students who did not binge drink in high school in an article published in 2003 in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* entitled "Taking Up Binge Drinking in College: The Influences of Person, Social Group and Environment" (abstract available [online](#)—click on article 5).

Key findings include:

- **Students exposed to "wet" environments were more likely to take up binge drinking in college than were students without similar exposure.** "Wet" environments included:
 - Having friendship networks that endorse binge drinking.
 - Living in housing where binge drinking is common.
 - Having easy access to alcohol in terms of availability and pricing.
- **Students who took up binge drinking in college were more likely to hold inflated views on what constitutes binge drinking than students who did not.**
 - Some 57 percent of students who took up binge drinking in college defined binge drinking as "consuming eight or more drinks" for men. Some 79 percent defined binge drinking as "consuming six or more drinks" for women (NOTE: The table

in the article defines binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks for women).

- One-third of students who did not take up binge drinking defined binge drinking this way.
- **Students who took up binge drinking in college were more than twice as likely to believe the legal drinking age should be 18 years or less, than students who did not take up binge drinking.**

Alcohol Outlet Density

Evaluators reported findings relating alcohol outlet density with heavy drinking and drinking-related problems in an article published in 2003 in *Health & Place* entitled "The Relationship of Alcohol Outlet Density to Heavy and Frequent Drinking and Drinking-Related Problems among College Students at Eight Universities" (abstract available [online](#)—click on article 1).

Key findings include:

- **There was a significant correlation between outlet density and heavy drinking, especially for men and for students who took up binge drinking in college.**
- **There was also a significant correlation between outlet density and frequent drinking, especially for non-Greek affiliated students, women, underage students and students who took up binge drinking in college.**
- **Outlet density was significantly correlated with problem drinking (i.e., reporting five or more problems—such as hangovers, missing classes or unplanned sex—since the beginning of the school year) among all drinkers.**

Student Drinking and Driving

Evaluators reported findings related to student drinking and driving in an article published in 2005 in *Traffic Injury Prevention* entitled "The Effect of a Campus-Community Environmental Alcohol Prevention Initiative on Student Drinking and Driving: Results from the 'A Matter of Degree' Program Evaluation" (abstract available [online](#)).

Key findings include:

- **High environment sites exhibited significant reductions, compared with both low environment sites and with comparison schools, in:**
 - Driving after drinking.
 - Driving after consuming five or more drinks.
 - Riding with a high or drunk driver.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons Related to the Sites

Leadership and Staffing

1. **To ensure credibility, include two key people in efforts to change the alcohol environment at a university: (1) the president or other top university official—his/her support is critical, and (2) the top local political figure, for example, the mayor.** (Community Coalition Member/ University of Delaware)
2. **Appoint a high level senior person at the university to lead a campus-community effort to change the environment.** "The fact that the vice provost for student affairs 'owned' the Lehigh project was really instrumental. I could not imagine not having this type of structure." (Project Director/Lehigh University)
3. **Hire individuals with very strong community-organizing skills when initiating projects that include a strong community component.** Some sites did not hire the right person to lead their *A Matter of Degree* project. They focused on social workers and others experienced in working with and educating individuals, when they needed someone who could get the community to do things. (Deputy Program Director, Project Director/Florida State University)
4. **Get the right people involved before you figure out what you want to do.** It does no good to have a plan if the wrong people are expected to implement it. (Project Director/University of Vermont)

Strategy

5. **Focus first on the campus and then on the community in order to gain trust from the community that the campus is serious about the alcohol issue.** Initially the site programs faced a lot of hostility by local media, community groups and even city administrators. As coalitions addressed campus issues first, the media gradually became more receptive to looking at the community's role in alcohol policy. (National Program Director)
6. **Invest time in educating others about the goals of the project when trying a new approach to an old problem.** "A campus/community coalition forces many people to think differently about the nature of organizations. Traditional organizational hierarchies and decision-making models may not be consistent with the shared responsibility concepts that are found in true coalitions." (Project Director/University of Delaware)
7. **Be sensitive to exposing students who are willing to describe the "real deal" behind closed doors.** The information is useful to the effort, but exposure could constitute social suicide for the student and eliminate any further connection to student perspectives. (Project Director/Lehigh University)

8. **Do not feel you must involve students in everything.** Student involvement is important, but not always essential. Their input and initiative can help, but students can easily derail your well-thought-out efforts. (Project Director/University of Vermont)
9. **Think out clearly in advance what you are looking for when advocating for changes to local laws and regulations.** "After new ordinances regulating alcohol sale and purchase were passed in our community, their lack of workability became evident and opponents were able to chip away at them. It would have been better to have thought out what we needed in advance." (Community Coalition Member/University of Delaware)
10. **Always be prepared, be strategic and have all supporting research ready when approaching organizations, the City Council, and/or administrative bodies with proposals for new ordinances or policies.** This helps to avoid delays, decrease confusion and increase understanding about the costs and benefits of a new initiative. (Project Director/University of Iowa)
11. **Acknowledge and celebrate successes.** "At the president's house we gave awards to staff, students and community members who had made a difference. This worked well." (Vice Provost for Student Affairs/Lehigh University)
12. **Celebrate the small, incremental changes in culture to keep people positively focused in the right direction.** Otherwise, success will always seem elusive and distant. (Project Director/University of Vermont)
13. **Build the organizational structure for the project with funding other than the grant.** Use grant dollars to support initiatives, not people. This avoids the inevitable end of the project when the money runs out. (Project Director/University of Vermont)
14. **Manage organizational expectations so that measurements of success or failure are realistic.** It takes a long, long time to see even the beginnings of a shift in an entrenched culture. (Project Director/University of Vermont)

Internal and External Communications

15. **Work with the media when seeking to make significant social changes.** Social change doesn't happen overnight and there is no substitute for working with the media to help it happen. If the coalition doesn't know how to work with the media, it should hire a consultant to help. (Community Coalition Member/University of Delaware)
16. **Have coalition members rather than project staff talk to the media, so everyone seems to be together on the issue.** A thoughtful communications strategy with a coordinated response and multiple voices talking about the issue—not just the usual suspects—is critical. (Project Director/University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

17. **Try hard to understand all points of view.** "Because we understood a variety of perspectives we could anticipate opposition and inoculate against it." (Project Director/University of Nebraska-Lincoln)
18. **Pay close attention to cultural differences when working with multiple organizations to implement policy changes.** Universities and city governments are completely different institutions with very different cultures, and these must be accounted for in order to implement change successfully. (Project Director/University of Iowa)

Lessons Related to the Evaluation

19. **Include a local evaluator as part of the evaluation design for multisite evaluations.** Both the Harvard evaluators and the site project directors found the local evaluators to be valuable members of the program team.
 - Said evaluation co-principal investigator Weitzman, "Many questions are best answered by having the knowledge of a local person.... The [local evaluators] regularly observed the implementation of the study and how the community responded to the interventions. The local evaluators were exceptionally helpful, especially at the start of the program." (Evaluator)
 - "The most valuable facet of the evaluation was the local evaluator," said Major, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln project director. "He started as a member of the team. We used the data to modify our work as needed. There was national feedback on occasion but it paled in comparison to [that of] the local evaluator. Having a person on-site was really important to tease out the data, identify new data sources, etc."
20. **Consider case studies as an early part of a long and complex evaluation; they are less useful in the later years of the evaluation.** "In the first three to four years, the evaluation was formative and the case studies were very good for that," said evaluation co-principal investigator Weitzman.

"The case studies were less useful in the latter phases of the grants when everyone shifted to an outcomes-related view. [Also] case studies are so resource-intensive and you have fewer resources at the end of the grant. As the program continued, everyone was ready to focus on straight epidemiological outcomes."
21. **Use a quasi-experimental design if possible, when designing a complex evaluation.** "The quasi-experimentation was just tremendous," said evaluation co-principal investigator Weitzman. "It was perfectly appropriate to what was being studied. At the start there were not refined, testable hypotheses to support a randomized, controlled trial. Now we are poised for that. But this was the right way at the time, given where things were."

22. **Provide training on the purpose and design of the evaluation to project directors at grantee sites.** This will help them understand the evaluation, be stronger participants in the evaluation and make better use of evaluation findings.

Said Franzetti, Florida State project director, "I wish I had had an orientation to the evaluation and how it was being used. I wish there was more conversation about why they were asking what they were asking. The Harvard people were actually both process and outcome-but it was hard to know that. I would have liked more regular feedback. I would have liked training on the purpose of the evaluation and on what to do with the information." (Florida State Project Director)

23. **Design evaluations to ensure that data, even if preliminary, can be shared with participants and projects through the life of the program.** Project and national program staff urgently need evaluation feedback as the program evolves, especially when the intervention is new or controversial. In this case, staff felt that their inability to provide any outcome data to political leaders or the media made it difficult to sustain their projects. (Writer/Reviewer)
24. **Inform national program office and relevant project staff before releasing evaluation findings.** Having this information before it reaches the media allows staff time to understand the findings and prepare for questions. (Writer/Reviewer)

AFTERWARD

National Program Office—American Medical Association Office of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Prevention

Under a transition "roots and wings" grant from RWJF (ID# 059226) that extended through October 2007, the national program office undertook several activities to encourage the involvement of the medical community in underage and binge drinking:

- Presented a webcast in October 2007 entitled "Medical Schools, Physicians and Medical Students Address College High-risk Drinking: A National Web Cast and Expert Panel."
- Produced two Web streaming programs for the AMA website entitled "[Binge Drinking](#)" and "[Reducing Excessive Alcohol Use: Engaging Community Action](#)."

Under the same grant, the national program office also:

- Continued to assist the remaining four active sites (Florida State, Georgia Tech, Louisiana State and Nebraska).
- Made presentations at conferences, including Oxford Roundtable in the United Kingdom. Presentations included publication of related articles.
- Working through state medical societies, influenced several colleges and one athletic conference to end alcohol advertising in college sports broadcasts.

Since the completion of the transition grant, the American Medical Association, through its Office on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Prevention, continues to offer and provide technical assistance on underage and binge drinking issues to coalitions and community organizations working on environmental strategies.

University Sites

Each site continues to address high-risk drinking issues. All campuses assumed funding for the project director position. In some cases, the original coalitions continue. In others, the coalition has evolved into a restructured entity and in yet others, the work of the project has been incorporated into another university department or program. Overall, the work of the *A Matter of Degree* projects has been institutionalized at the respective universities.

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APPENDIX 1

National Advisory Committee

Chair

Manuel T. Pacheco, Ph.D.

President
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, Mo.

Garrey Carruthers, Ph.D.

President and CEO (former governor of New Mexico)
Cimarron Health Plan
Las Cruces, N.M.

Victor Ashe, J.D.

Mayor of Knoxville
Knoxville, Tenn.

Bobby Heard

Director of Youth Programs
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Irving, Texas

Lissa Bradford

Chair
National Panhellenic Conference
Nashville, Tenn.

Mark P. Pattison

Mayor of Troy
Troy, N.Y.

APPENDIX 2

Funded Projects in *A Matter of Degree*

University of Colorado at Boulder (Boulder, Colo.)

Grant ID# 030197 (September 1996 to February 2002): \$860,769

Grant ID# 042691 (September 2001 to June 2003): \$117,000

Project Director:

Robert N. Maust, J.D.

(303) 492-4278

maust@colorado.edu

University of Delaware (Newark, Del.)

Grant ID# 030198 (September 1996 to August 2001): \$699,677

Grant ID# 042689 (September 2001 to February 2006): \$468,000

Project Director:

John B. Bishop, Ph.D.

(302) 831-8107

john.bishop@udel.edu

Florida State University Research Foundation Inc. (Tallahassee, Fla.)

Grant ID# 035109 (September 1998 to February 2000) (Planning Grant): \$59,903

Grant ID# 037546 (September 1999 to October 2005): \$700,325

Grant ID# 042702 (September 2004 to August 2008): \$468,000

Project Director:

Christine M. Franzetti, M.Ed.

(850) 644-6489

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Georgia Tech Research Corporation (Atlanta, Ga.)

Grant ID# 035110 (September 1998 to August 1999) (Planning Grant): \$59,912

Grant ID# 037547 (September 1999 to December 2005): \$700,118

Grant ID# 042701 (September 2004 to August 2008): \$468,000

Project Director:

Marsha Brinkley

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University of Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa)

Grant ID# 030425 (September 1996 to December 1997) (Planning Grant): \$59,985

Grant ID# 030844 (September 1997 to February 2003): \$699,431

Grant ID# 042696 (September 2002 to August 2007): \$466,729

Project Director:

Phillip E. Jones, Ph.D.

(319) 335-3557

phillip-jones@uiowa.edu

Lehigh University (Bethlehem, Pa.)

Grant ID# 030199 (September 1996 to August 2002): \$821,180

Grant ID# 042695 (September 2001 to November 2005): \$468,000

Project Director:

John W. Smeaton, Ph.D.

(610) 758-3890

jws1@lehigh.edu

Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, La.)

Grant ID# 035107 (September 1998 to June 2004): \$700,468

Grant ID# 042700 (September 2003 to August 2007): \$468,000

Project Director:

Nancy I. Mathews, Ed.D.

(225) 578-5650

mathews@lsu.edu

University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Lincoln, Neb.)

Grant ID# 035108 (September 1998 to August 2004): \$699,618

Grant ID# 042699 (September 2003 to August 2007): \$468,000

Project Director:

James V. Griesen

(402) 472-3755

jgriesen1@unl.edu

University of Vermont (Burlington, Vt.)

Grant ID# 030200 (September 1996 to August 2002): \$700,000

Grant ID# 042694 (September 2001 to August 2006): \$468,000

Project Director:

David Nestor

(802) 656-3360

David.Nestor@uvm.edu

University of Wisconsin-Madison (Madison, Wis.)

Grant ID# 030426 (September 1996 to December 1997) (Planning Grant): \$59,678

Grant ID# 030845 (September 1997 to October 2003): \$699,900

Grant ID# 042698 (September 2002 to August 2007): \$468,000

Project Director:

Aaron Brower

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APPENDIX 3

Advocacy Initiative Technical Resource Group

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Portland State University
Portland, Ore.

Tim Westerbeck

President
Westerbeck Communications
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APPENDIX 4

Key Findings of Public Opinion Surveys Conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates

Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, an international market research and consulting firm with offices in Washington and elsewhere conducted two public opinion surveys of parents and other adults about their views on:

- College binge drinking and the role of the environment.
- Spring break, alcohol and college students.

Key findings include:

- *College binge drinking and the role of the environment.*

- Some 95 percent of parents surveyed believed that binge drinking is a serious threat to their children.
- Some 85 percent of parents said that easy access to alcohol contributes to too much drinking.
- ***Spring break, alcohol and college students.***
 - More than half (56 percent) of parents surveyed were completely unaware that tour companies market spring break destinations to students, emphasizing heavy drinking and sex.
 - Some 88 percent of parents and 71 percent of adults surveyed expressed outrage at such marketing practices.
 - More than 80 percent of parents were concerned about college students drinking during spring break.

APPENDIX 5

Measures of Alcohol Use, Alcohol Related Harms and Secondhand Effects of Drinking

Measures of Alcohol Use

- Any alcohol use in the past year
- Binge drinking
- Frequent binge drinking
- Take up binge drinking in college
- Drinks on 10 or more occasions in the past 30 days
- Was drunk on three or more occasions in the past 30 days
- Usually binges when drinking.

Measures of Alcohol Related Harms

- Hangover
- Miss a class
- Fall behind in school
- Do something regretted
- Forgot where they were

- Got into an argument
- Unplanned sex
- Unprotected sex
- Vandalism
- Got in trouble with police
- Got hurt or injured
- Got medical treatment for overdose
- Drove after five or more drinks
- Had five or more of the above problems.

Measures of Secondhand Effects of Drinking

- Was insulted
- Got in an argument
- Was assaulted
- Had property vandalized
- Had to babysit a student who was drinking
- Found vomit
- Had study or sleep disrupted
- Had an unwanted sexual advance
- Date rape
- Had three or more of the above problems.

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SIDEBAR LIST

- [Anheuser-Busch and the #1 Party School](#)
- [Dealing With the Alcohol Industry](#)