U of I weighed use of TigerHawk, beer logos

Above is an example provided by the University of Iowa of a hat showing both the front and back sides using the TigerHawk and Anheuser-Busch logos. / SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

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Showing off the combined logo. / SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

ABOUT THE ISSUE

University of Iowa officials recently approved an agreement to allow Anheuser-Busch to use the TigerHawk logo on items that also incorporate its products’ logos.

Members of a University of Iowa athletic advisory committee were so livid in June about being shut out of major decisions over the use of the school’s logo in beer promotions that some wanted to discuss the group’s future role at an upcoming meeting, emails obtained by The Des Moines Register show.

“For the second consecutive year, PCA’s advice was not sought before the university entered into a new contract with enterprises that promote products — gambling and alcohol — arguably inconsistent with the campus’ core values as seen by its faculty and staff,” committee chairman Bill Hines, a U of I law professor and chairman of the Presidential Committee on Athletics, wrote on June 18 to Sally Mason, university president, and athletic director Gary Barta.

“Please be prepared to discuss these ongoing concerns about PCA’s advisory role in matters like this when we meet on August 30th.”
In June, concerns flared after committee members and others learned that the U of I athletic department had signed off on a deal allowing Anheuser-Busch to place the TigerHawk logo on retail displays such as posters and flags, and promotional giveaways like caps, cups and T-shirts.

The deal was made without consulting with the advisory committee, which is supposed to weigh in on issues involving the athletic department. Last year, committee members complained they weren’t informed of a decision by the athletics department to renew a partnership with the Iowa Lottery.

After this summer’s slight, members subsequently questioned the purpose of the advisory committee if it wasn’t going to be informed in advance of major decisions made by the athletics department, according to emails obtained by the Register through a public records request.

“This sounds like a colossal waste of time,” wrote U of I journalism professor Lyombe Eko in an email to a fellow committee member. “If this continues, I will have no choice but to re-evaluate my membership in the (committee).”

Mason, on Friday, said the committee provides an important service by advising officials on a wide range of matters. But, she added, “as this dealt with a previous contract and an agreement that is very similar to an agreement between Anheuser-Busch and Iowa State University, the discussions were conducted by leaders in the university and the athletic department.”

Opinions about the deal with Anheuser-Busch have evolved since June, Hines told the Register on Friday. He said he now doubts the group will lose any members over the issue.

Executive committee members will likely discuss the group’s role with Mason and Barta, but the issue probably won’t get much attention at a meeting of the overall committee on Aug. 30, Hines said.

The issue, however, is continuing to get attention with community members. Some say the deal is inconsistent with the university’s high-profile efforts to curb binge drinking. The latest round of criticism came on Wednesday at a meeting of the Partnership for Alcohol Safety, an Iowa City group tasked with combating high-risk drinking.

“I think it’s a really bad idea,” said Johnson County Attorney Janet Lyness, a member of the group. “What are you going to say if a cigarette vendor comes to you and says the same thing? Are you going to let Camel cigarettes use the logo?”

The deal to use the TigerHawk logo on Anheuser-Busch promotions was signed with Hawkeye Sports Properties; however, the U of I athletics department approved the agreement.

Hawkeye Sports Properties paid the athletics department $5.8 million last year for the right to handle all sports marketing and sponsorships.

Hawkeye Sports Properties, a private company owned by Missouri-based Learfield Communications, will pay the athletics department $114 million through 2026.
Skepticism from some on the presidential committee, however, softened when the administrator who oversees the U of I’s two-year-old anti-binge drinking campaign said the university would benefit overall because Anheuser-Busch will contribute $185,000 to programs that have helped lower incidents of alcohol abuse, emails show.

Tom Rocklin, vice president for student life and co-chairman of the Partnership for Alcohol Safety, wrote in a June 14 email to committee members that the sponsorship would likely have little impact on student alcohol abuse rates because young people are already saturated with alcohol marketing.

“It’s safe to assume that AB expects the TigerHawk to increase sales, and there is some risk that some of those increased sales will lead to negative outcomes,” Rocklin wrote. “My staff and I believe that represents a very small incremental risk to our students.”

Research shows the “Responsibility Matters” tag line added to the promotional materials likely will not reduce alcohol abuse, Rocklin wrote. But he added that the financial support will allow the expansion of programming that has helped lower incidents of binge drinking among students.

In 2011, the university budgeted $300,000 for late-night programming to reduce dangerous drinking, $200,000 less than the year before.

“This is not an easy call, but I can assure you that we put some serious thought into it,” Rocklin wrote.

Justifying the deal because students are already exposed to advertising makes no sense because alcohol consumption is the leading killer of college-aged students and results in thousands of assaults every year, said David Jernigan, director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

“It’s a little bit like saying roads are already dangerous so we won’t put up any stop signs,” Jernigan said.

Drinking among college students every year, on average, results in 696,000 assaults and 97,000 date rapes or sexual assaults, according to a widely cited 2009 study published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs.

Jernigan said universities in the past have ended sponsorships with alcohol companies. The University of Wisconsin cut advertising ties with Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors three years ago.

Also in 2009, Iowa joined more than a dozen universities in pressuring Anheuser-Busch to stop the sale of Bud Light “fan cans” decorated with school colors. The universities said the cans infringed on trademarks and undermined campaigns to reduce dangerous drinking.

“This isn’t something that automatically happens on university campuses. It is a choice that administrators make,” Jernigan said. “It’s a huge and costly problem, and $185,000 from
Anheuser-Busch to do a few programs on a college campus is not going to go far at all in mitigating damage.”

Some committee members appear to agree.

“If this new agreement extends the visual association of the TigerHawk and the words Bud Light, associating the culture of sports with the culture of alcohol, it takes the hypocrisy to a new level,” committee member Jeff Cox, a U of I history professor, wrote in an email to another committee member.

Michael O’Hara, a psychology professor and committee member, said he doubts public debate about the sponsorship will reverse a historical trend toward increased corporate sponsorships at universities.

“There’s an inexorable and grinding pressure on athletics and the university, more generally, to find new sources of revenue,” he said.