Case study: “A Case Study of the 2011 Maryland Campaign to Raise Alcohol Taxes.” Ordered to follow the class discussion on “Seizing the Moment: How the London Summit on Family Planning Revitalized International Family Planning.”

The role of the case study instructor is to provide a path of inquiry, and guide a process of discovery, not to explain or tell. Direction should be in the form of questions, if possible, derived from prior student comments, but the following are a set of question and exercise options that can be used to guide the conversation.

The questions below are grouped into introductory, alcohol tax/topical, advocacy/political change and closing questions to accommodate various courses and audience backgrounds. Within those categories, questions are ordered in line with possible progression of the discussion and include off-shoot questions and prompts to be used as needed, but question order can come second to the natural flow of the conversation. Where applicable, the page number within the report or supporting materials which generated the text has been included.

Questions can be discussed in multiple formats. The traditional approach to presenting questions in-class for large group discussion can be substituted with giving questions prior to class or providing one or more questions to small groups of students for discussion and subsequent presentation.

Some questions have multiple parts, for instance:

“How was the Lorraine Sheehan Alcohol Tax Coalition built? Why do you think these organizations joined? Why didn’t some organizations join? What would you have said to try to get the AFL-CIO to join? What did it mean to be part of the coalition? What were members asked to do? How was this different from the effort of DFID and the BMGF to organize the summit and revitalize FP?”

Each question part can be asked individually, and students should be given plenty of time to think and discuss. Not all questions need to be asked.

The text in italics that follows the questions comes directly from the case report, the interviews or other background research. It may provide some insight into possible areas of discussion but is by no means exhaustive and is not meant to be lecture material or a substitute for student discussion.

There is an exercise described below, designed to let students learn together, to increase the level of student involvement, to facilitate engagement among all students, especially those less willing to speak in front of the class, and to allow student-to-student discussion. Exercises can substitute or build on the in-class discussion.

Particularly if the class has a range of expertise and background knowledge, a useful tool is to task students with generating their own question(s) prior to class, which will be asked and discussed as a group.
Introductory Questions

What was one important event that led to the alcohol tax being passed? (Solicit multiple responses to list on the board; if responses are broad, “They developed a coalition”, ask students to specify, “What kind of coalition?)

Prompts to class following suggestions: Why do you think student1 suggested this event? Why was it important?

Once many options are listed: What themes seem to emerge from these events? Is there a pattern? What are we missing?

What was one threat to the passing of the tax? Why was it a threat? (Solicit multiple responses to list on the board)

Prompts to class following suggestions: Why do you think student1 suggested this event? Why was it a major threat?

Once many options are listed: What themes seem to emerge from these events? Is there a pattern? What are we missing?

What did the coalition leaders need to know/do to make the alcohol tax bill happen?

Alcohol-Related/Topical Questions

EXERCISE OPTION: To introduce the case study and to ground students’ perspectives in practical realities, divide students into pairs (or small groups or individually, depending on class size), and assign each group a role representing the organizations making up the coalition and their opponents from the following lists (p. 7-9):

Pro-alcohol tax:

- Addictions community
- Developmental disabilities and/or Mental health community
- MCHI
- Labor union
- Small business owner
- Faith-based organization
- Health care organization

Anti-alcohol tax:

- Chamber of commerce
- Alcohol industry representative
- Distillery worker
- Alcohol retail owner

Each group comes up with an argument either for or against passing a bill to increase alcohol taxes. Instruct students to think about the frame/argument that would work best to convince others within their community I.e. What is the health case? The labor union case? The small business case (for or against?) What is the moral case to pass an alcohol tax? What is the social justice case? (p. 9) Groups get
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a few minutes to present their argument to the full class with opportunity for follow-up debate. Students should continue to think about their role once regular case discussion has resumed.

What evidence do you need in order to support an alcohol tax?

- **Alcohol related**
  - Who is harmed by alcohol use?
  - What is the extent of the harm?
  - Would increasing taxes decrease alcohol use?

- **Policy related**
  - What do other states do? (i.e. how does MD tax rate compare?)
  - Would it cost us money?
    - Would consumers go elsewhere to buy alcohol (cross-border sales), in effect losing the state the current tax money?
    - Would retailers lose money?
    - Would alcohol prices increase more because to offset loss of profits, the alcohol industry would raise prices? (p. 16)
  - Would it save us money?
    - Saved costs from less excessive drinking
    - Extra $ from the tax
      - Supports effected groups
  - Is there voter support?
    - See if voters support the measure. This can also help you define the bill itself – i.e. where the money should go that would get the most support. (p. 10)
    - Political power: supporting the alcohol tax was shown to pull voters from the Not Sure category, to increase the proportion voting for the dem by nearly 30% (37% to 48%), and increased republican support by 76% (21% to 37%). (p. 11). That poll also provided this was an issue a politician could “run on” (see below)

What’s helpful about arguing for a new tax solely on the grounds of the revenue it would bring in? What are some reasons to not frame it solely on revenue? What are some reasons to/to not frame it solely as a public health issue? How can you strategically use both a public health angle and tax revenue angle?

- **Reasons for tax argument:**
  - Appeal to groups/people who don’t care about the alcohol issue: MCHI was able to appeal to a broad coalition of organizations and individuals on the grounds that the revenue would benefit expanded health care coverage; later, developmental disabilities and mental health and eventually education. Same case with the passage of the sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) tax in Philadelphia – The tax was argued for not on the grounds that it would benefit public health, but that the money from the tax would be used to support schools. The people who supported the bill were largely NOT SSB drinkers, so didn’t feel personally negatively affected.
  - Revenue provides a reason for groups who might be negatively affected by the tax to be in support.
  - Sometimes data in support of the public health argument is lacking or unclear; stronger argument is for tax to benefit other issues
• Reasons for public health argument:
  o Without a parallel public health argument, opponents of the tax (i.e. alcohol industry, distillers, retailers, etc.) can argue they are being unfairly targeted.
  o Having a specific public health argument makes the issue (and the policy) more salient, more powerful. Vinny used the data on the harmful effects of alcohol to help get people to sign the resolution, to earn media coverage, as well as convincing legislators.
  o Tax argument alone can be commandeered, i.e. funds go to schools rather than alcohol prevention.

• Reasons to use both:
  o When one argument comes under attack, you can fall back on the other
  o “The LSATC simultaneously used this research to write a letter to the Governor requesting that funding for their health-related causes be included in any supplemental budgets independent of the passage of the alcohol tax legislation.” (p. 16) – Highlighting an unmet need with broad support but that (without the alcohol tax) can’t be paid for.

Advocacy/Political Change Questions

How was the Lorraine Sheehan Alcohol Tax Coalition built? Why do you think these organizations joined? Why didn’t some organizations join? What would you have said to try to get the AFL-CIO to join? How was this different from the efforts of DFID and the BMGF to organize the summit and revitalize FP?

• Mechanism of joining through the resolution
• Revenue from tax as well as benefit of decreased alcohol use
• The ultimate MCHI goal of health care for all
• Health care worker training
• Conflicts of interest from working with the alcohol industry
• FP efforts got key players’ support: Melinda Gates, Andrew Mitchell (UK Secretary of State), Hillary Clinton (US Secretary of State) that brought with them large organizations, major media attention; timed it Golden Moment; etc.

What did it mean to be part of the coalition? What were members asked to do? What were the strengths of the LSATC coalition? What were some weaknesses? How else could they have used the coalition to get more out of the tax bill? How did their objectives differ from the FP revitalization?

• Sign the resolution, contact legislators, activate base to vote, no money, etc.
• Takes time, lots of effort, to build a large coalition
• Inner circle made up of organizational leaders (p. 6)
• Broad coalitions represent diverse strengths: addictions brought a strong relationship to the alcohol tax and long history of working to pass a tax and lobbying experience; Developmental disabilities and mental health communities had strong grassroots constituency; MCHI had lobbying and organization experience, plus a 501(c) 4 which could fund efforts; labor unions knew how to impose political pressure; small businesses could provide an argument from authority against the alcohol industry claims that the tax would kill jobs, etc. (p. 7)
• Large group meant lots of support, voters to turn out, i.e. faith based organizations (p. 8)
• Did cause some turmoil when some groups got money and others did not
• Should have rallied the communities during the legislative session? (Miles interview, p. 12)
• The summit in some ways provided similar benefits as the resolution – a coming together of diverse groups in support of one issue; this is politically and socially powerful, and newsworthy.

Could someone other than a Vinny DeMarco build a coalition such as the Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative (MCHI) or LSATC? What is needed in a leader of such an effort?

Define a “resolution” (there were 2: the original organizational resolution and the candidate resolution). What’s useful about using a resolution?

• People can support it without agreeing to take action; it’s a low-risk ask
• It activates people (p. 3)
• Gives you access to people – a way of introducing yourself and getting people to get part of your group, also allows you to keep them updated and engaged (p. 3)
• Politicians can publicize their signing as showing support for issues their constituents care about
• Politicians who signed can be called out if they change their support (p. 12)
• Provides supporters and others with a clear metric for support – how many people signed it?

What are some things you have to consider when writing a bill? What problems might arise?

• Receive input from all coalition partners, satisfy their interests
• But, know the law! The coalition divvied up profits from the tax revenue without knowing that there was a rule against that in MD.
• Is it supported by the public? Polling can help you define the bill itself – i.e. where the money should go that would get the most support. (p. 10)

What levers of change can you use when trying to get a bill passed?

• Bills require legislators to vote, and if their constituents don’t like the way they voted, their electability might become threatened. What can you do about that?
• Poll the voters! See if they support the measure.
• Political power: supporting the alcohol tax was shown to pull voters from the Not Sure category, to increase the proportion voting for the democrat by nearly 30% (37% to 48%), and increased republican support by 76% (21% to 37%). (p. 11). That poll also provided this was an issue a politician could “run on” (see below)
• Name the bill after someone

How can you strategically use timing to motivate individual politicians to take on issues?

• Poll prior to an election cycle to prove to politicians that the issue is one they can “run on” (p. 11)
• Poll between new year’s day and the opening of the session when there is heightened interest in legislative matters; will get high response rate and media attention (p. 13)
• Propose similar bills in multiple legislative sessions to learn the arguments of the opposition (p. 13)
• Get media attention before the legislative session begins so awareness is already high and the bill has greater salience/recognition. Earlier media attention to the fact that there’s a story/fight there also tips off the media that they should plan to cover the debate in-session and ask questions about it.
Act on your toes – Diageo publishes a statement, and coalition researchers publish a response immediately

Could this be done in any state? What lessons learned from this case could you apply to other cases, and what might you need to do differently?

Why is data powerful? What kinds of data would you want? What could you do if the polling results had not shown majority support for an increase in the alcohol tax?

- Data on the problem (amount of suffering, cost, who is affected, etc.) is powerful – can persuade individuals, politicians, and garner media attention
- Polling data can help persuade politicians to take on the issue
- Data can help counter arguments from the opposition, such as cross-border sales

What is it about media that can help you further a cause? How do you get it and what does it do? Is it ever bad? Should that stop us from using it?

- Agenda-setting – high coverage increases issue salience, makes the audience believe it is an important issue
- Issue framing
- Journalist objectivity
- Mass media exposure
- Controlling the narrative
- Earned vs paid & authenticity
- Foster good relationships with journalists/reputation for trustworthiness
- “Educate the public, recruit potential coalition members, provide legitimacy to the coalition”, and keep the campaign and the issue visible to legislators. (p. 13)
- Hold press conferences or make announcements, for every update, even if you’re repeating yourself; do it during slow media cycles (p. 14)
- Lobby editorial boards to publish supporting statements (p. 14)
- Earlier media attention to the fact that there’s a story/fight about to happen in a legislative session also tips off the media that they should plan to cover the debate in-session and ask questions about it
- Act on your toes – Diageo publishes a statement, and coalition researchers publish a response immediately

Closing Questions

Why did we read this case? Why now? Can you apply anything from this case to your own work?

- Clear action plan; media advocacy guide
- With the summit, they expected each country delegate to go home and put into place their own bills, so much bigger project; this is an on-the-ground drilled down look at how that might come about.