



2026 WMSF Media Plan Case Competition

Campus Reset: Driving Alcohol 101+ Adoption Across South Carolina's Public Higher Education System

The South Carolina public higher education system stands at a critical juncture in campus alcohol education policy. Following several high-profile alcohol-related incidents across state campuses in 2025, state legislators and higher education policymakers are facing mounting pressure from parents, alumni, and media to take decisive action on campus alcohol safety. The governor has called for accountability measures, and the state legislature is debating between evidence-based prevention programs and stricter zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. State-level education officials responsible for coordinating system-wide policies are evaluating alcohol education requirements for South Carolina's public colleges and universities.

Your media agency has learned that in the months ahead, key stakeholder meetings and committee sessions have the potential to establish or reject system-wide alcohol education mandates. Both evidence-based prevention advocates and zero-tolerance policy supporters want to influence state education policymakers and university leadership to shape the system's approach to campus alcohol safety.

Your client, Responsibility.org, is a national nonprofit working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking. One of their flagship programs is Alcohol 101+, an interactive online course that has reached over 60,000 students since its inception in 2021. Responsibility.org seeks agency support for building a comprehensive media campaign to influence state higher education decision-makers to mandate Alcohol 101+ system-wide across South Carolina's public colleges and universities.

At this time, the campaign budget is expected to be approximately \$300,000 over 9 months (January-September 2027), leading to a policy decision in October 2027. In April 2026, requests for proposals (RFPs) for media strategy and plans will be issued to finalist teams.

To prepare for the RFP opportunity, agency teams must become deeply immersed in the landscape of college and university alcohol education policy, South Carolina's higher education governance structure, and stakeholder dynamics.

Each team should prepare professional deliverables that include the following sections and content:

Strategic Brief (5 pages maximum, not including appendices and sources)

Analysis of the Situation

- Research college alcohol education policy generally and specifically in South Carolina
- Note the roles of influential stakeholders including the Commission on Higher Education, university presidents, state legislature, and student affairs administrators
- Understand Alcohol 101+ program features and competitive positioning
- Identify other key state university systems and policies at the forefront of this conversation
- Examine media campaign strategies, channels, and messaging used in similar policy debates
- Identify potential counter-arguments and how to address them strategically

Problem Definition and Campaign Frame

- State your campaign's goal and strategic rationale
- Write a clear problem statement that will guide the formation of a media plan
- Identify meaningful calls to action (CTAs) for your agency's media plan: Contact Commission members, submit public comments, sign petitions, share testimonials, pressure university presidents, etc.
- Determine the ideal timing for your campaign, listing 2-3 key peg dates, events, or other milestones during the duration of the campaign

Target Audience Identification

- Choose 1 primary and at least 1 secondary audience and the reasons they are ideal targets for your campaign
- Identify target audience key demographics: age, role, geographic location, political affiliation, education level, etc.
- Share target audience psychographics: values, attitudes, motivations, concerns, behaviors, etc.
- Identify target audience market size and their general media consumption behaviors (channel and platform affinity)

Budget Justification and ROI Framework

- **Investment Rationale:** Explain why responsibility.org's board should approve a \$300,000 investment in this campaign. What makes South Carolina and this moment strategically important?
- **Expected Outcomes:** What specific, measurable outcomes would justify this expenditure? (e.g., policy adoption, student reach, media impressions, stakeholder engagement, replicability for future state campaigns)
- **Comparative Analysis:** How does this investment compare to alternative approaches? What would happen with no campaign, or a significantly smaller investment?
- **Long-term Value:** Beyond the immediate campaign, what lasting value does this create for responsibility.org's mission and future work?
- **Success Metrics:** How will you measure return on investment? What metrics will demonstrate the campaign's effectiveness?

Note: Finalist teams will receive the confirmed budget and develop detailed media plans showing specific budget allocation across channels and tactics in the final round.

Briefing Specs

Deadline: March 23, 2026 by 11:59 PM EST

Submission: <https://www.mediascholars.org/submit-your-semifinal-case/>

Format Requirements:

- All documents must include team agency name, individual team member names, academic advisor, and college/university name
- Briefs may be shared in the format of each team's choosing (PDF, PowerPoint, etc.)
- All sources must be cited, APA style. Consult the Purdue OWL link for guidance
- Teams should work closely with academic advisors and are encouraged to utilize rigorous academic and industry content
- Significant reliance on AI for entries is discouraged, but should your team use AI, cite your source(s), your AI query/ies and include screenshots of the AI-generated response

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