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August 19, 2008

President Emeritus John McCardell
Middlebury College
The Amethyst Initiative
P.O. Box 507
Middlebury, VT 05753

Dear President Emeritus McCardell:

Thank you for your invitation to join the Amethyst Initiative. I salute your efforts to bring new thinking to this serious problem, but I am respectfully declining to sign the Presidential Statement.

Excessive drinking on our campus continues to have a serious negative effect on the educational experiences of our students. I believe that a significant cultural change is necessary to solve this problem. I understand that this belief is at the heart of the Amethyst Initiative as well, but I do not agree that lowering the drinking age would be effective at this time. Even though Iowa's minimum legal drinking age is 21, Iowa City ordinances allow 19- and 20-year-olds into bars. They are not supposed to drink alcoholic beverages, but, of course, they do. Far too many of them drink to get drunk. As a consequence, one in five of our students reports being assaulted by a drunken peer. One in three reports being the subject of an unwanted sexual advance. This is simply unacceptable, and I do not believe that these statistics would change in the current cultural environment with a lowered drinking age.

Cultural change is a monumental task, but that is the approach we are taking at The University of Iowa. We are starting by focusing on how we can help students reduce the harmful effects of binge drinking through changes in behavior and expectations. For example, all incoming students must take an online *AlcoholEdu* course, we are scheduling more Friday classes to reduce Thursday night drinking, and we are implementing a "Student Success Initiative" that encourages students to study more even as they live an active social life.

I agree with your suggestion that college presidents must play a "vigorous, constructive role" in the national discussion of this problem. However, because I believe there is no single solution to the problem, I am convinced that the discussion must go beyond the question of whether lowering the drinking age will reduce the harmful effects of excessive drinking.

Sincerely,

Sally Mason
President