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Hadia Ahmed  
*Seattle University*

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# Energy Drink Companies Aim for Student Caffeination Control

Hadia Ahmed, Volunteer Reporter

Through the first few weeks of classes at Seattle University, many students have been met with representatives from energy drink brands handing out free products across campus. Monster Energy has been seen parked outside of the Sinegal building in a branded truck, handing out drinks of their newest flavors. Alani Nu has had ambassadors walking around campus with coolers and Guayakí Yerba Mate has given free drinks out during various club meetings. Bang Energy employees were seen handing out free drinks outside of Campion Hall. Rockstar Energy has been promoting their new line of sugar-free drinks by handing them out at Logan Field.

Mattea Skeen, a first-year communication and media major, was approached by a Monster representative just a few weeks ago to try one of their new flavors.

"They are promoting their newer drinks and brands, but it's smart marketing," Skeen said. "You're going to a college campus where the majority of the people here rely on caffeine to survive, so I don't see anything wrong with it."

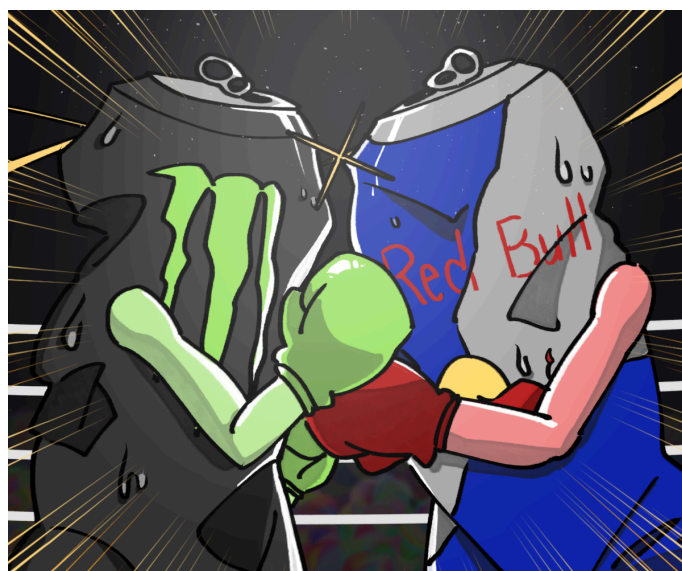
Elizabeth Richey, a fourth-year nursing major, is an ambassador for Yerba Mate, and echoed Skeen's idea that college students are a key market for energy drink companies.

"It is known that college students drink a lot of energy drinks! Whether it be for work, school or personal reasons, I think energy drink companies strive to build that loyalty early on for consumers to continue to purchase their products post-grad," Richey wrote to The Spectator.

So why are ambassadors handing out free energy drinks across campus? As it turns out, in the college world, students use energy drinks for more than just playing sports and attending concerts.

## Energy Drink Companies are Expanding Their Reach

Energy drinks are a rising cultural phenomenon, especially for college students. Companies like Red Bull, Monster and Alani Nu represent products that have always been tied via marketing to themes of high performance, energy boosts and extreme adventure.



Annabelle DeGuzman-Carino

Energy drink ambassadors have been appearing all over campus, offering free drinks in exchange for a photo.

While Red Bull and Monster have traditionally sponsored sports events, the companies have started to branch out. Both companies also sponsor musical festivals such as the Red Bull Turn It Up event, encouraging the image that their respective energy drinks can be incorporated into lifestyles of culture and art just as well as sports and adventure.

Energy drinks are also becoming more than just sports-oriented. Other companies such as Alani Nu, Bloom and Yerba Mate focus their brand in the health and wellness space. Alani Nu is frequently seen sponsoring athletes and fitness influencers who then promote the drinks through the lens of their lifestyle on social media. The brand's Instagram also features larger-than-life celebrities such as Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian posing with Alani drinks, and even a Kim K branded flavor called "Kimade."

These few energy drink brands are just a sample of the widespread amount of brands that exist and are gaining traction. Other notable brands include Celsius, Ghost and Reign.

#### Pressure to Consume

College life has a culturally glamourized image—"the best four years of your life," they tell you. But it's not until you actually enter campus on your own, get settled into dorm life and navigate how to get to classes that you find out that the college experience does not mirror the movies. Many students are not prepared for the level of academic rigor demanded in college, and turn to caffeine as a way to keep up with the workload.

Jenia Viles, a second-year business management major, said that in her high school years, she used to drink energy drinks recreationally.

"Sometimes I wouldn't even need it, [I drank them] just because it was good and my friends were drinking it," Viles said.

In her first year of college, Viles explained that she would drink Celsius to stay awake through late work nights.

After a while, Viles realized she didn't actually need to consume an energy drink to be more successful with her studying, it was just the norm around her to buy an energy drink for late nights. Viles acknowledged that there was pressure to consume energy drinks because many students associate consuming energy drinks with academic success, something that has been disproven by scientists.

While energy drink brands are constantly promoting themselves as a product to boost energy and performance, the National Library of Medicine says heavily caffeinated drinks can lead to higher levels of anxiety. Some students have noticed impacts on their physical health following the intake of these drinks.

"I found that... after I would drink Celsius, my body would just get really jittery and it was really uncomfortable," Viles said. "It wasn't really helpful that much in my study process."

Many students believe this highlights the need for clearer communication on the effects of energy drinks and for more examination of the social pressures that push students to make certain choices. As college life intensifies socially and academically, many students feel that there needs to be more cognizant efforts to help students make more informed choices.

#### Campus as an Advertising Target

Zarah Khan, a category manager at Amazon with experience in product management, believes it is smart for energy drink companies to target college campuses for advertisement.

"I think it's a great strategy to introduce a product to a new customer market. It's a low-risk method for students who are generally very price [and] cost conscious to try a new product to see if it's a good fit for them without the risk of spending on it."

Seattle U students have had mixed reactions to the presence of energy drinks on campus. Even students like Viles who don't frequently consume energy drinks still acknowledge the appeal of being handed a free drink.

"Of course [companies giving drinks] away for free is a big thing," Viles said. "People are all over free stuff, if it's for free, of course I'll take it."

Mia De Luca, a freshman and swimmer on Seattle U's women's swim team, says that as a student athlete, her relationship with energy drinks is more rigid.

"I think energy drinks are a really useful tool, but I try to avoid them because I do get drug tested as part of the swim team," De Luca said. "Celsius is actually banned from our league, I guess because it has too much caffeine."

De Luca explains that within the college athlete world, working with brands to promote products is not unusual. Name, image and likeness is a concept that describes the relationship between an athlete and a product they are given to promote. The athlete may never even consume the product, but audiences never know that.

De Luca herself was approached by Alani Nu representatives at the beginning of the fall quarter, holding ice chests and promoting their newest flavors, Pineapple Guava and Strawberry Mango.

"I was walking to my Spanish class with two of my friends, we were just hanging out and then these two, really cheerful, over-energized reps ran up to us with ice chests going 'Do you want to try an Alani?'" De Luca said. "They gave two to us each, and were like, 'Pose for the Instagram!' and I was like, 'Uh okay?' So we posed and then went on our way."

#### To Drink or Not to Drink

While we can reflect that the culture of energy drinks is a large, growing phenomenon, student perspectives on energy drinks are also constantly changing. The constant presence of energy drink brands on campus definitely keeps students in the circle of drinking the products more often.

The culture of energy drink brands and campus culture intertwine in many ways. One study found that 51% of college students reported consuming at least one energy drink in a month, and 29% of energy drink consumers reported experiencing weekly jolt and crash episodes.

The caffeinated buzz of an energy drink may seem like a light at the end of the tunnel for students working long hours on assignments. However, the aggressive marketing strategies of drink companies on campus may betray their true aim: getting students hooked. Next time a shiny can of a fruit-flavored beverage is shoved in your face, take a moment to consider why it is being given to you for no charge.