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**Educator Blasts Schools' 'Consumer Culture'**

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A war is being waged against America's schoolchildren.

The weapons are soda and candy machines, in-school TV networks, logo-covered sports uniforms and textbooks filled with brand names, according to Alex Molnar, an education professor at Arizona State University.

Via these seemingly innocuous vehicles, said Molnar, corporations are waging a marketing war, creeping into classrooms and spoon-feeding children a consumer culture. Ultimately, they corrupt schools' curricula and integrity -- not to mention contribute to the erosion of such foundational American values as freedom and democracy.

"Think about marketing and commercialism as the curriculum of our culture. What is it that commercialism teaches?" Molnar, director of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at ASU, asked University of Utah students Tuesday at the U.'s annual Mary G. Lowe Family Policy lecture.

A nationally recognized expert on for-profit and charter schools, Molnar said no matter the medium or the product, advertisers push two messages -- be perpetually dissatisfied with yourself and believe that the only way to resolve this dissatisfaction is to buy our product.

"All those lotions, deodorants and shampoos you wash in and smear on; you need them because you stink," he said. "And that's just your body. I don't even want to talk about your mouth."

Molnar said he isn't categorically opposed to marketing. But there have to be boundaries, and public schools are where he proposes drawing one impenetrable line.

Children have to go to school, which makes them a captive audience for marketers, he said. And they're especially vulnerable because they are told to respect their teachers and believe "what they're being taught is good for them."

The encroachment of a consumer culture on schools starts with exclusive soft-drink contracts but doesn't end there. Some schools' curricula include corporate-sponsored lessons about the environmental benefits of the oil, timber, nuclear and plastics industries, said Molnar, who publishes an annual report on commercialism trends in schools at [www.edpolicylab.org](http://www.edpolicylab.org).

Utah schools, many of which accept corporate donations for academic programs and give space to vending machines with fatty foods, are hardly immune.

But "there's not enough tax money to run the schools as well as administrators and teachers know how to run them," said Kay Laursen, director of the Alpine School District Foundation. "Everyone scratches for additional resources."

He believes the benefits, such as the district's Star Summer Reading Program sponsored by private and corporate donations, far outweigh the risks.

What's Molnar's answer to the funding dilemma? "Raise taxes," he said. "I'm serious. It's shocking to hear a politician say we don't have enough money for schools. You're willing to spend 20 percent on credit card interest rates but complain about taxes. Shame on you."