

**Creating Accountability in  
University of Wisconsin System  
Education-Business Partnerships**

A White Paper prepared for the  
Wisconsin Economic Summit II,  
November 26-27, 2001

Presented by

Concerned Students of the University of Wisconsin System

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**Abstract:** According to the University of Wisconsin System Mission, “each institution of the University of Wisconsin System shares in the mission of the system.”

The mission of this system is to develop human resources, to discover and disseminate knowledge, to extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses, and to serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and

humane sensitivities; scientific, professional, and technological expertise; and a sense of purpose. Inherent in this mission are methods of instruction, research, extended education, and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition. Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth.

Consequently, the University of Wisconsin System must take appropriate and efficacious measures to ensure that the aforesaid mission statement is both employed effectively and at the very least, not compromised. This white paper addresses those measures that the University of Wisconsin System ought to employ to make certain that its mission and methods are employed effectively through and not compromised by education-business partnerships.

## **1. Paradoxical Missions**

The University of Wisconsin System and for-profit businesses share certain commonalities in structure and operating procedure, but these two institutions are fundamentally opposed in legal status, mission, and goal.

The University of Wisconsin System is a non-profit institution, dedicated to public service and the “sifting and winnowing of truth;” whereas, for-profit business’ foremost mission is to accrue private profit. The assertion made here is not that overlap does not exist between the missions and goals of these two institutions, but instead that the primary purposes of the two institutions exist in opposition. Practically speaking, businesses will sacrifice public service and the “sifting and winnowing of truth” to achieve goals of profit, while theoretically the UW system will sacrifice making profit to achieve the ends of servicing the public and discovering and disseminating truth.

This is not to say that all the missions and goals of the UW System and private businesses are antithetical. Surely, universities and businesses strive for legitimacy and preeminence in the public eye, work to ensure that the state’s economy remains or becomes prosperous, and enact practices that benefit the larger community and society. However, the motivations for these methods and goals differ according to each institution’s primary interest. Businesses pursue the aforementioned goals to increase their profit margin, while universities (at least in mission) pursue the aforementioned goals for the betterment of individuals and society.

According to Jerry Mander, in his book *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of Indian Nations*, corporations exhibit eleven inherent rules of for-profit behavior:

1. The Profit Imperative: Profit is the ultimate measure of success in corporate decisions.
2. The Growth Imperative: Corporations live or die based on whether they can sustain growth.
3. Competition and Aggression: Corporations prosper in the free market according to their competitive advantage, which is furthered through aggressive tactics.
4. Amorality: Not being human, corporations have no altruistic goals.

5. Hierarchy: Corporations are structured like pyramids with decisions made at the top.
6. Quantification: Corporations require that subjective information be put in objective form.
7. Dehumanization: Corporations treat people like workers and consumers.
8. Exploitation: People's resources and natural resources are seen as products to be used.
9. Corporations exist beyond time and space.
10. Opposition to Nature: Corporations need to dominate nature to make money.
11. Homogenization: Corporations desire to make everyone conform as consumers.

“To the extent that these principles apply to our schools [and to business-education partnerships], they contradict the very purpose for colleges and universities in our society” (Burger 2).

## **2. Pursuing Partnerships**

Partnerships between education and business institutions are attractive enterprises for both parties. Through these partnerships, education institutions obtain much needed funding that is not otherwise provided by state and federal governments. On the other hand, businesses obtain research, future employees, and a captive audience for below market costs. It is no surprise then that as federal and state funding for higher education stagnates, university chancellors, administrators, and even professors are increasingly appraised on their fundraising and grant-getting capacity.

The prioritization of economics above all other concerns is a fundamental paradigm shift in universities. Economics is quickly becoming the overriding factor in most, if not all, university administrative decisions. University programs, curricula, courses, and extracurriculars are first and foremost measured against an economic yardstick, and if they pass muster, they are then

assessed by more typical university standards such as educational merit and student preferences.

In the face of economic prioritization at universities, the ramifications for quality liberal education are far-reaching and complex. As business programs such as the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point “Business Education Training Center” receive huge grant donations, multicultural courses that provide students with a diverse array of educational experiences are cut back due to a lack of funding. As the high technology UWSP “Global Environmental Management Project” receives donations that dwarf many other program budgets, students are forced to compete against each other to gain access to a very limited number of social science courses, many of which are necessary to graduate with a social science degree. Programs and courses are increasingly assessed by the amount of revenue that they pull in; those that merely educate are cut back, while those that cajole funds from donors are expanded. Liberal education relies on a diverse array of programs, courses, and experiences, many of which are not fiscally rewarding.

Thus, education-business partnerships must be approached with caution by education institutions. A balance must be struck between the education/public service mission of the university and the economic incentives of high technology and business related partnerships. The latter must not compromise the former, or universities stand to lose objectivity, autonomy, and educational integrity.

### **3. Compromising Educational Integrity**

“Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for *truth*” (University of Wisconsin System Mission).

In education/business partnership, compromises are struck. However, education institutions end up compromising a great deal more than business, primarily because education institutions jeopardize their autonomy when aligning with business. In forming a partnership with a university, a business

stands to lose only profit. But since this enterprise is protected by government through public funding, tax deductible donations, and subsidized costs, the risks for businesses are minimal. Unfortunately for universities, their risk in these partnerships is much greater. Universities compromise their public service orientation by completing research, creating business parks, and developing programs for private business and for-profit. Since the motivation for these projects is private profit and not primarily to disseminate unbiased information and truth, the intellectual integrity of universities is compromised.

“Inherent in this mission are methods of instruction, research, extended education, and public service designed to *educate people and improve the human condition*” (University of Wisconsin System Mission).

The University of Wisconsin System has its share of corporate partnerships that have explicitly undermined the mission statement of the System. In 1996 the University of Wisconsin signed a contract with Reebok, awarding Reebok exclusive rights to produce apparel bearing the UW emblem. But in the contract, a clause undermining the UW mission stated, “The university will not issue any official statement that disparages Reebok [...and] will promptly take all reasonable steps to address any remark by any university employee, including a coach, that disparages Reebok.” Coincidentally enough, at the time this contract was signed, a brewing anti-sweatshop campaign was investigating and pressuring Reebok to examine and rectify inhumane working conditions in some of their factories. The anti-sweatshop campaign promulgated by students and faculty fulfilled the mission of the UW system by taking action to “improve the human condition,” but the signed contract with Reebok explicitly undermined the UW mission statement by ensuring that university employees would not “educate people” (Soley Phi Beta Capitalism).

#### **4. Developing Standards For Partnering**

To ensure education-business partnerships are created and remain in the best interests of the University of Wisconsin System, a system of accountability

and protocol for implementing it must be devised. The first step is to create social standards for businesses desiring to form partnerships with the University of Wisconsin. If the University of Wisconsin System exists to “improve the human condition,” then forming partnerships with businesses that weaken the human condition is internally and externally inconsistent. Defining business principles that weaken the human condition is beyond the scope of this paper, but defining business principles that improve the human condition is more pertinent to this argument and is summed up well in the Global Sullivan Principles:

“The objectives of the Global Sullivan Principles are to support economic, social and political justice by companies where they do business; to support human rights and to encourage equal opportunity at all levels of employment, including racial and gender diversity on decision making committees and boards; to train and advance disadvantaged workers for technical, supervisory and management opportunities; and to assist with greater tolerance and understanding among peoples; thereby, helping to improve the quality of life for communities, workers and children with dignity and equality” (Reverend Leon Sullivan).

By adopting and applying the subsequent Global Sullivan Principles to education-business partnerships, the University of Wisconsin System will uphold its mission statement, advance the human condition, and curtail the jeopardization of academic freedom, educational integrity, and not-for-profit orientation.

### The Global Sullivan Principles of Social Responsibility

As a company which endorses the Global Sullivan Principles, we will respect the law, and as a responsible member of society we will apply these Principles with integrity consistent with the legitimate role of business. We will develop and implement company policies, procedures, training and

internal reporting structures to ensure commitment to these Principles throughout our organization. We believe the application of these Principles will achieve greater tolerance and better understanding among peoples, and advance the culture of peace.

Accordingly, we will:

- Express our support for universal human rights and, particularly, those of our employees, the communities within which we operate, and parties with whom we do business.
- Promote equal opportunity for our employees at all levels of the company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs, and operate without unacceptable worker treatment such as the exploitation of children, physical punishment, female abuse, involuntary servitude, or other forms of abuse.
- Respect our employees' voluntary freedom of association.
- Compensate our employees to enable them to meet at least their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability in order to raise their social and economic opportunities.
- Provide a safe and healthy workplace; protect human health and the environment; and promote sustainable development.
- Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights, and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
- Work with governments and communities in which we do business to improve the quality of life in those communities—their educational,

cultural, economic and social well being—and seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Promote the application of these Principles by those with whom we do business.

We will be transparent in our implementation of these Principles and provide information which demonstrates publicly our commitment to them.

## **5. Creating Accountability in Education-Business Partnerships**

The application of the Global Sullivan Principles to education-business partnerships is no trivial task. Business desiring partnerships with the University of Wisconsin System will not likely appreciate the social constraints of the aforementioned principles. This may affect the likelihood of businesses partnering with the University of Wisconsin in the future. But this begs the question as to whether the UW System should be partnering with businesses that refuse to be held accountable to social standards in the first place. A balance between social responsibility and economic incentive must be struck, and the responsibility for striking this balance rests with the University of Wisconsin System. It is time for the UW System to set the fulcrum or risk losing its educational integrity.

Protocol that ensures partnering businesses agree to and uphold the Sullivan principles must be established system wide. UW System administrators must develop standard social provisions that will be included in every contractual agreement between the UW System and businesses. Shared governance committees are necessary to ensure that partnered businesses are upholding the social provisions they contractually agreed to. Over time, the shared governance committees must progress from merely monitoring partnered business' compliance to actualized enforcement of the Principles. Without impending enforcement by universities, businesses may shrug off their

commitment to the Sullivan Principles, leaving the UW System with a token and shallow mechanism for ensuring the “improv[ement] of the human condition” and the dissemination of objective and unbiased “truth.”

“Insofar as a society is dominated by the attitudes of competitive business enterprise, freedom in its proper American meaning can not be known, and hence, can not be taught. That is the basic reason why the schools and colleges, which are, presumably, commissioned to study and promote the ways of freedom are so weak, so confused, so ineffectual.”

-Alexander Meiklejohn, former Amherst President

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