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Editor
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Greetings,

Monday's (11/30) Eagle carried a piece by Don Blasi who hails from the Wichita Area Chamber of Commerce's committee on business growth. Mr. Blasi offered some statistics covering the past 13 years. He compared job growth in Wichita with student populations at Kansas State University. He then extrapolates an unrealized potential of about five thousand students at WSU. The thrust of Mr. Blasi's piece was to promote reinstatement of a football program at WSU. His "analysis" suggested that WSU's golden key to the future depended upon bringing football back.

I am skeptical of Mr. Blasi's analysis. I'm not suggesting that football programs do not affect university fortunes. A casual investigation into university participation in the sports-as-entertainment industry will show that few institutions can show a positive cash flow for their exhibition athletic programs. I understand the temptation: universities have a stock of strong, young, mostly healthy males with elevated testosterone levels. The university also has a stadium. Gee, with these ingredients already in place, why not?

I'll suggest that universities are horribly complex institutions with bureaucracies and staffing standards matched only by government. I have personal knowledge and/or experience with WSU instructors who cannot teach, instructors who (in spite of academic skill) cannot speak English clearly enough to be effective teachers, and young, unmentored instructors who dispense erroneous information supported by muddy logic in their classrooms. None-the-less, students come forward in good faith and pay ever increasing tariffs for access to what the university offers. Could it be that WSU's problems run much deeper than a lack of weekend entertainment?

Mr. Blasi, if football is the great investment you suggest, why not rent the stadium, acquire backers, recruit a team and make the program fly or flop on its own merits? If it's a truly good deal, raising risk capital should be easy. A risk investment of time, funds or management talent in a sports-for-entertainment venture should NOT be funded by students or taxpayers. Nor should it be managed by a not-for-profit institution with a mission already diluted by extraneous influences.

Athletics in schools are "extra curricular" activities. It follows that sports are part of a student's social life; an activity with no influence on a university's prime directive. Unfortunately, in an era of multibillion dollar

entertainment industries, it's too easy for people to lose sight of a university's real product and responsibility. Many learning institutions can strive for and achieve top honors for education. In the entertainment business, only one team is revered for their past season achievements. Quality education will have value for the student's lifetime, winning a championship is pure feel-good lasting but one season. I'll ask which is the better investment?

Since my last class at WSU over 30 years ago, I've maintained that universities have almost no accountability to their students. I believe WSU's enrollment should grow based on a track record of academic excellence rather than dependence upon the talents of a few young men who can advance a ball down field for a few weekends every fall. A university is where learning is supposed to happen. If Dr. Beggs can put a dent in what must be a mountain of problems internal to the university, benefits accruing to students and the community will be greater than anything gained by a demonstrably risky athletics program. If Mr. Blasi disagrees with my perceptions of risk, then he and a few deep-pocket investors are welcome to prove me wrong.

A university does not serve a student's best interest by tinkering in the entertainment business. Neither should a university sell used cars or pizza. The Wal-Mart approach to merchandising is inappropriate for universities. Of all merchantable products, education (like the practice of medicine or law) is uniquely demanding. I'll suggest we gage achievement by what heads carry out of the classroom, not by counting heads in the classroom. Be good teachers. Produce learned graduates. Progress is measured by becoming better at both.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob' with a stylized flourish above the 'B'.

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