UNITED COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN STUDENTS
INVESTMENT REVIEW

August 2012
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## DETAILED REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Review Conclusion:

The results of our investment review verified a number of our students concerns as legitimate and suggest that certain United Council policies and procedures be reevaluated. Additional data is also necessary to make full reviews of certain submitted concerns. Much data is currently not available or not being documented by United Council, in which case it is recommended that those figures be documented in the future.

Key Facts and Findings:

The review findings warrant reevaluations of several United Council policies and practices:

- Lack of UW-Eau Claire direct representation in United Council
- Use of Student Dollars for Illegal Actions
- United Council tracking electoral and referendum turnout, vote totals and outcomes
- Partisan literature, pictures and marketing materials
- Overall Government Relations strategy, in addition to providing benchmarks, goals and deliverables for specific campaigns

Summary of Review Objectives and Scope:

To accurately and responsibly evaluate incoming concerns directed toward United Council, it was necessary to develop review objectives to direct our inquiries. The
concerns, submitted by students to their Student Senate representatives, have directed our review objectives. Review objectives include evaluating concerns over representation, use of student dollars, appropriateness of marketing materials, event efficiency, electoral transparency issues, and overall government relations inefficiencies. The review objectives were to evaluate submitted student concerns.

To achieve our review objectives, our scope included reviewing past and present United Council governance documents, referendum and election outcomes, turnout and vote totals, event and workshop descriptions, and conversations with United Council staff.
BACKGROUND

This Investment Review is a direct result of a number of incoming concerns from our student body directed toward United Council. Given the number of constituent contacts and concerns, President Fish and Vice President Martin felt obligated to conduct an evaluation of our students' concerns and an overall investment review on our constituents behalf. Following the incoming concerns, review objectives were developed to evaluate our students' concerns with United Council. Following the creation of review objectives, President Fish and Vice President Martin tasked Chief of Staff/Treasurer Tyrel Zich with conducting the concern evaluation and investment review.

This Investment Review document is intended to make-known to decision-makers in the UW-Eau Claire Student Senate the facts surrounding the concerns our students have expressed with United Council.

Review Objectives:

To accurately and responsibly evaluate incoming concerns directed toward United Council, it was necessary to develop review objectives to direct further inquiries. These concerns, submitted by students to their Student Senate representatives, have directed our review objectives and are listed in order of submission prevalence.

- To determine whether United Council provides adequate representation to UW-Eau Claire in return for a $70,000 annual investment in United Council.

- To ascertain whether United Council has an electoral bias to elect like-minded individuals, whether organizational resistance to change forces the removal of individuals who questions United Council’s status quo, and whether this leads to a loss of the organizations ability to adapt to change because of a loss of innovative individuals.
• To determine whether United Council’s use of student dollars in conducting minor illegal actions is acceptable; primarily surrounding the USSA sit-in action and arrests of United Council representatives in the Spring of 2012.

• To determine the effectiveness level of United Council grassroots and organizing approach to advocacy.

• Consider the appropriateness of partisan literature and marketing materials distributed and displayed by United Council.

• Evaluate general transparency concerns, primarily surrounding election of United Council Board Members and Officers.

• To determine what portion of United Council’s budget is being utilized for costs associated with conferences and conventions and to what extent each event is attended by the same students and whether each event has similar workshops and discussions.

**Review Scope:**

To achieve our review objectives, our scope included:

• Review of past and present United Council governance documents including boards and committee meeting minutes and agendas, approved legislation, staff, officer, committee chair and board reports, corporate bylaws, policy platforms, and budget overviews and narratives.

• Review of United Council referendum and board and officer election outcomes, turnout and vote totals.

• Review of United Council event and workshop descriptions.

• Conversations with United Council staff.
OVERVIEW

The below evaluations of the review objectives, based on the submitted student concerns, are solely constructed utilizing the documents and discussions as outlined in the review scope.

Review Findings:

**UW-Eau Claire Representation in United Council:** Currently UW-Eau Claire has no direct representative on the Board of Directors, the primary decision-making body of United Council. The Board of Directors and Officers (President, Vice President and the Secretary) are elected at the April United Council convention. This event is held at a different campus each year and travel grants are provided for students who require assistance with travel and hotel costs. Student Government Associations also commonly reimburse costs for their students’ attendance. The election is held over a weekend.

A alternative avenue of representation United Council provides its members is the ability to run referendum to fund, via the Mandatory Refundable Fee (MRF), or withhold funding to United Council. These referendum are held on each member campus if enough student government members vote to hold a referendum or enough student signatures are gathered. The referendum votes are held on campus and accessible to all students at that campus. The referendum wording, which plays a significant role in any referendum outcome, is dictated by Regent Policy 30-4. Individual students may also request United Council return their $3 MRF payment at any time.

A third avenue of representation is through our comprehensive caucus representatives. Each of the three UC caucuses gets guaranteed representatives and are elected by only their respective caucus members. United Council actions and
concerns could be directed to one of UW-Eau Claire’s representatives who would convey our concerns to the Board of Directors.

Electoral Turnout is a significant indicator of representation. United Council currently does not track electoral or referendum turnout, vote totals or outcomes which would be key information to form opinions as to whether student participation in United Council elections or referendum are adequate.

Access to the polls are also significant in elections and referendum. Since referendum are held on each campus, issues of access may vary greatly between campuses, however, usually all students have the ability to readily vote en route to their classes. Issues of access do exist in the UC Board and Officer elections at the April election event. As previously mentioned this events rotates between campuses which vary greatly in distance between Eau Claire, the closest of which is Steven’s Point and, potentially, Stout and the furthest Milwaukee and Parkside. Therefore, minimum travel distance would be approximately 1 hour and maximum approximate 5 hours. These events are also held on weekends. United Council has attempted to address these concerns by arranging carpooling and even chartering busses in addition to offering travel grants and encouraging student governments to provide financial and physical transportation assistance. These assistance mechanisms still do not allow voting access to students who cannot afford the weekend time commitment because of work or other commitments.

What the impact of these access limitations are on United Council’s election process are unknown without specific turnout, vote total and outcome data. Currently no changes are proposed to address these concerns within United Council. Past proposals have included giving United Council oversight authority to Student Representatives which consists of the top two elected representatives of each UW-Campus. In this proposal, which was part of a proposed Student Representatives Constitution, UC non-member campuses would not have the ability to influence oversight authority. Student Representatives currently does not have a constitution, the proposed constitution was voted down in Spring 2012. This constitution was also supported in a resolutions (55-R-18 and 55-R-13) by the UW-Eau Claire Student Senate in 2011-2012.
Organizational Resistance to Change: Evaluation of this concern would generally be similar to the first. No specific information or data directly lead to the conclusion that United Council has a bias toward elected like-minded individuals. Issues of access as presented in the previous response may influence who turns out to vote, who runs for office and who gets elected, which in turn, may lead to abnormal organizational participation and representation. In evaluation five, a student is concerned that United Councils marketing materials may alienate politically conservative students from participating in the organization.

Illegal Student Dollar Use: United State Student Association (USSA) is a student advocacy group promoting student interests at the national level. United Council is a member of USSA paying in dues and receiving representation. In the Spring of 2012, a few elected student leaders from across Wisconsin, including a United Council Board-member and Officer traveled to Washington, D.C. for USSA’s annual lobby days to have conversations with national representatives about issues of higher education. At one point on the trip a sit-in of Sallie Mae was organized surrounding the issue of the corporation’s student loan debt holdings. The two United Council representatives and other participants were arrested after being asked to vacate the premises by the police. The trip was funded by United Council for the purpose of discussing issues of higher education with Federal Representatives at USSA’s lobby days.

United Council personnel behavior is governed by the organization’s Personnel Policies and Procedures document. This document prohibits members of staff from committing criminal acts directed towards other staff but does not prohibit elected staff, representatives or volunteers from committing minor criminal acts like sit-ins. It was amended into the resolution passed in the Spring of 2012 (55-R-18) by the UW-Eau Claire Student Senate that United Council should revise this policy to prohibit any criminal action by anyone throughout the organization.

United Council’s Advocacy Approach: Evaluating success and failure in policy advocacy is difficult especially when a general philosophical difference exists between those in the organizational or grassroots advocacy school and other subscribers of the professional or business lobbying. A significant portion of United Council’s budget is allocated to staff costs and events. The mean staff
salary is $34,909, with the executive director having the top at $44,980 and the Finance and Operations Director having the lowest at $31,884. Based on United Council’s staff and event expenditures, United Council’s organizational style advocacy philosophy preference is apparent. The government Relations Director is paid at $33,718, below organizational average yet is tasked with “managing interaction with any government agency or elected office, as well as research related to legislative and policy priorities.” The second highest paid staff, the Field Director at $39,346, five Regional Field Organizer (RFO) positions at around $33,000 each, and a Development and Events Director at $34,552 comprise a bulk of United Council’s staffing costs. The Field Director assists students in the creation and implementation of field strategies and statewide campaigns. Hires and manage field organizers. Field Organizers: Actively organize to involve students in running United Council campaigns on 3-6 UW campuses and develop student leaders by providing trainings. Development and Events Director: Responsible for the creation, coordination, and logistics of an organizational fundraising strategy as well organizational events; as well as to perform duties with regard to organizational branding. Ultimately a philosophical difference on policy advocacy best practices exists between this concerned student and United Council of which the merits are unquantifiable. It may be beneficial for United Council to provide benchmarks, goals and deliverables for their campaigns so that ‘success and failure’ can be more easily measured and weakness in the organization’s policy advocacy strategy could be addressed.

**Partisan Marketing Materials:** This concern seems to be referring to several photos on the United Council website of the Scott Walker Budget protests from Spring 2011 which they feel are alienate the current republican majority which impedes United Council’s ability to influence legislative actions. This student more generally is concerned that these materials alienates conservative students from participating in United Council. In addition, this student is expressing concern over United Council’s slogan “student’s fighting for students since 1960.” Concern seems to be over the word ‘fighting’ which is viewed as combative.

**Transparency Concerns in United Council Elections:** Concern addressed in first evaluation.
Conferences and Conventions: Similarly to United Council electoral data, no quantifiable way to measure student attendance, which students are from which campus or which students are new versus repeat attendees as United Council does not currently track this data.
REVIEW CONCLUSION

The above review warrants reevaluations of several United Council policies and practices:

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