EXECUTIVE WHITE PAPER ON
UNITED COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY
OF WISCONSIN STUDENTS

September 2012
INTRODUCTION

On April 9, 2012 the 55th Session of the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire Student Senate passed a resolution 55-R-18 in Support of the Reform of United Council of University of Wisconsin Students by a roll call vote of 17-9. As part of the resolution, an evaluation of the existing financials, policies and practices of United Council were reviewed to ensure organizational effectiveness and to identify deficiencies that hinder the objectives of United Council. Based on the resolution, the events which followed it’s passage and further review, this Executive White Paper identifies several recommendations designed address constituent concerns with United Council and to increase the effectiveness of United Council.

This Executive White Paper is a tool of participatory democracy, not an unalterable policy commitment, presenting firm policy recommendations while simultaneously inviting opinions upon them.

United Council’s ability to fulfill their organizational purpose, to represent and advocate for UW-Eau Claire’s students, and remain responsible with student dollars, are significant concerns for our students and, therefore, the 56th Session Administration. This White Paper 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, we executives felt obligated to conduct an Investment Review on our constituents behalf. Following the incoming concerns, a process and investment review report was developed reviewing UW-Eau Claire’s investment in United Council. This White Paper presents policy recommendations addressing the reviewed concerns of UW-Eau Claire students.

As an organization representing all UW-Students, United Council must reevaluate internal governing mechanisms, internal budgets, and personnel conduct to ensure efficient fulfillment of the organization’s mission and purposes. We are aware that members of the Board of Regents, UW-System, and other student government
associations share our goal of improving an organization essential to building connections and congruity between all parties affiliated with student, administrative, and legislative governance of higher education in the state of Wisconsin. We look forward to working with all parties on these efforts and the recommendations contained within this paper in the coming year.

Turning to the specific recommendations, the UW-Eau Claire Student Senate Executives recommend the revision of the University of Wisconsin Student Representatives Constitution to include:

1. Student Representatives oversight of United Council.

The Executives recommend that United Council revises its approach to government relations to include:

1. An improved government relations strategy;

2. The integration of the policy campaign selection process with Student Representatives.

The Executives recommend that United Council revises several budgetary expenditures to include:

1. A pay increase for the United Council Government Relations Director;

2. The expenditure for a non-profit organizational and financial audit;

3. A reevaluation of United Council’s support to United States Student Association.

The Executives finally recommend several institutional and personnel behavior revisions to include:

1. The reevaluation of United Council’s literature, media and general marketing strategy;
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3. The continual documentation and distribution of United Council referendum and electoral results, vote totals and voter turnout.
Revision of Student Reps Constitution

**Student Representative United Council Oversight:** Currently no procedure exists providing Student Representatives the ability to review the policy and actions of United Council or formulate new policy for consideration by the United Council Board. A Student Representative constitution providing United Council oversight procedures is essential to integrate decision making between executive representation from all University of Wisconsin campuses and the United Council Board. Currently United Council Board Members are elected at an event which takes place at a single campus once each spring. While election procedures ensure equal voting between campuses, the electorate is only representative of the attendance of the event. Travel grants are offered to students who choose to attend, yet gaining a representative sample of UW-System Students for the election is improbable given the travel distance and weekend time commitment required to vote. Thus, allowing for Student Representative oversight provides broader student representation from the entire UW-System.

**Recommendation:** The Executives recommend that UW-Student Representatives adopt a new constitution including United Council oversight; that the new constitution be ratified, and that United Council amend their corporate bylaws to comply with the new Student Representative Constitution.
**Improved Government Relations Strategy:** The primary mission of United Council is to represent UW-Students in matters of higher education in the state of Wisconsin. The strategies utilized to advocate for favorable policy vary greatly within United Council from targeted lobbying and legislative days to protests and sit-ins. While both strategy types produce results, strategic planning, client-sponsored initiatives, legislative advocacy, monitoring and analysis, and grassroots support are the types of advocacy which should be utilized as the most effective tools, especially given that United Council is funded by a finite amount of student dollars. Strategic planning based on a sound, pragmatic political strategy, allows United Council to develop issue-specific strategies and government relations plans. Creating influential alliances and innovative policy alternatives coupled with well-connected staff, is essential to success. Client-Sponsored Initiatives or the drafting, introduction and passage of initiatives, in addition to countering harmful policy initiatives, are essential to solving concerns for UW-Students. Creating influential alliances with legislators and groups is key to garner support for a bill’s introduction and to gain favorable committee, legislative and executive action on a bill. Legislative Advocacy including frequent contacts with key legislators and their staff coupled with supporting materials or research, testimony and written comments in legislative committees and agencies is indispensable to implementing an advocacy plan. Monitoring and Analyzing potential legislative actions and providing timely updates on relevant bills and rules is key to assess potential impacts and develop an effective response. In addition, adequate monitoring and analysis of United Council's Government Relations Plan or various state-wide campaigns, allows for the creation and evaluation of specific goals, benchmarks and deliverables helping quantify United Council’s value proposition to both member and non-member campuses. Grassroots Support, including student education and organization during legislative days surrounding the introduction of a legislative action, is essential to show general constituency support for an action.
Integration of Policy Campaign Selection with Student Representatives:
Student Representatives consists of the top two representatives from each UW-Institution. These representatives work closely with students, faculty and administration on their respective campuses giving them invaluable insight into the problems facing students. This knowledge should be actively consulted by United Council in the campaign selection process and general Government Relations Plan.

Recommendation: The Executives recommend that United Council develops a new Government Relations Plan including strategic planning, client-sponsored initiatives, legislative advocacy, monitoring and analysis, and grassroots support. Furthermore, United Council should create, monitor and evaluate specific goals, benchmarks, and deliverables for the general Government Relations Plan and for individual campaigns.

Recommendation: The Executives recommend that Student Representatives and United Council include a mechanism in the new Student Representative Constitution and amended United Council corporate bylaws giving Student Representatives the ability to propose campaign items as well as actively review United Council campaign items.
Pay Increase for United Council Government Relations Director: United Council’s Government Relations Director is currently paid $26,800 (take-home-pay) per year with the responsibility “for managing interaction with any government agency or elected office, as well as research related to legislative and policy priorities.” Given these responsibilities it is necessary for the Government Relations Director position to have a salary comparable to the work experience and skills required to complete the necessary tasks on behalf of United Council. Many Government Relations Directors are former aides or staffers for elected legislators recruited from the capitol as individuals in these positions develop an unique understanding of the legislative process, necessary internal connections, and analytical skills required to research and communicate policy implications. Top legislative staff, such as a Chief of Staff, are commonly paid between $30,000 and $55,000 per year. These individuals often take positions as Government Relations Directors in outside organizations, like United Council, for salaries between $80,000 and $160,000 per year (total compensation package). If United Council is going to attract the highest quality staff, competitive salaries must be provided. Note: United Council already has a generous benefits package. The valuation of this benefits package should be included in the calculation of this pay increase as part of the total compensation package and more generally included in the compensations of current and prospective staff.

Recommendation: The Executives recommend that United Council pay the Government Relations Director to at least $80,000 (total compensation package) per year. Furthermore, United Council should seek to place a total value on their staff benefits package and advertise these incentives when recruiting and hiring staff.
Expenditure for Non-Profit Organizational and Financial Audit: The UW-Eau Claire Executives understand that a number of these recommendations will be perceived as controversial with the leadership of United Council. In order to provide an external perspective, non-profits periodically undergo scrutiny from an independent organizational and financial auditing firm. These audits provide an opportunity for an independent consultant to suggest improvements to organizational and financial efficiency in an organization like United Council and may serve as a valuable arbiter in future discussions about the contents of this White Paper.

Recommendation: The Executives recommend that United Council make an expenditure to provide an independent perspective on this document's organizational, financial, and personnel concerns and to provide an unbiased, value-added audit for United Council.

Reevaluation of United Council’s Support to United States Student Association: United States Student Association (USSA) is a student advocacy group promoting student interests at the national level. United Council should hold USSA to the same standards which this Executive White Paper proposes United Council be held. USSA should continue to provide adequate representation for United Council so that Wisconsin Student issues are continually addressed. Furthermore, USSA’s Government Relations Plan or specific campaigns should be conducted in an efficient and effective manner whereby set goals, benchmarks and deliverables are being monitored, evaluated and reported to United Council so that USSA’s value proposition is comparable to United Council’s financial contribution.

Recommendation: United Council should reevaluate United States Student Association’s value proposition to University of Wisconsin System Students and periodically audit USSA’s activities and make recommendations to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.
Institutional and Personnel Behavior

Reevaluation of Marketing Strategy: Interactions with external parties are essential to promoting United Council and supporting issue campaigns. Partisan photos contained in marketing materials alienate over half of the current state legislature yielding a lower probability that a Government Relations Strategy will succeed. Combative marketing language also detracts from Government Relations Strategies. If external parties have a negatively biased opinion of United Council before having the opportunity to speak with a representative, United Council will not be viewed as a legitimate group leading to a lower probability of implementing a successful Government Relations Strategy.

Recommendation: The Executives recommend that United Council reevaluates its approach to marketing and outreach and remove alienating photos and literature from organizational materials to ensure that external parties are comfortable in their dealings with United Council.

Reevaluation of Personnel Policies and Procedures Document: The United Council Personnel Policies and Procedures document indicates in section 4.00 that United Council has a zero-tolerance of discrimination, harassment, and criminal acts, continuing in section 4.40 indicating any criminal acts committed by a member of staff to another member of staff will not be tolerated. The Executives feel that this is an inadequate policy dictating that only illegal acts by staff are intolerable, not providing a policy covering illegal acts by volunteers and elected representatives. With a history of volunteers and elected representatives committing minor illegal acts, primarily associated with protesting and sit-ins, we feel that a policy prohibiting any illegal action by staff and non-staff members, including volunteers and elected representatives, should be amended into United Council’s Personnel Policies and Procedures.
**Recommendation:** The Executives recommend that the United Council Personnel Policies and Procedures document include a policy prohibiting any illegal action by volunteers and elected representatives acting on behalf of United Council.

**Documentation and Distribution Referendum and Electoral Results, Vote Totals and Voter Turnout:** United Council currently does not regularly document or distribute referendum or internal board-member and officer electoral information to members. In order to be transparent in their electoral and funding processes, United Council should document outcomes, vote totals and voter turnout for elections and referendum which should be readily available.

**Recommendation:** The Executives recommend that the United Council allocate staff time to tracking, documenting and distributing referendum and internal election results, vote totals and voter turnout information.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Consequences to Not Adopting Recommendations: The Executives feel that the implementation of these recommendations is necessary to continue supporting a dues payment of $70,000 from University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire students. Without Student Representative oversight, United Council actions will not be adequately representative of UW-Eau Claire students nor of all UW-System students. Without the implementation of improved government relations and marketing strategies major United Council issue campaigns and the organization’s overall mission will falter which, in the opinion of the Executives, diminishes United Council’s value proposition. The past several attempts to implement a number of these revisions have been deemed controversial by United Council leadership. An independent organizational and financial auditing firm may be an effective arbitration tool to suggest organizational and financial efficiency improvements and address the concerns contained within this White Paper.

Note to other University of Wisconsin Student Government Executives: We would like to encourage other United Council member campus Executives to formulate a similar report outlining their concerns with United Council and their recommended solutions. Furthermore, we would also encourage non-member campus Executives to formulate a report with the recommendations they believe would be necessary to justify their campus becoming a United Council member campus. We would like to encourage these Executive Reports on United Council to be approved, in the form of a resolution, by each campuses respective student governance body and sent to United Council Board Members, United Council Executives, United Council Staff, the Board of Regents, relevant UW-System Administration, and their own administration and student body.