



Ian Benton

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I'm normally quite a cheerleader for UW Madison. I can appreciate that there are complex factors at play here and the accusations of a money-grab for student tuition dollars are pretty reductionist. That the Board of Regents under the direction of interim president Tommy Thompson did not present all-online instruction as an option for UW campus administrations to pursue. That there are grave consequences for any state university that makes an enemy of the political establishment that runs the state. That past descent from that political establishment in Wisconsin resulted in vicious economic assaults on the UW System. That those assaults are the reason we have no reserve funds available to support campus operations during a crisis. That there is a sense of needing to play ball or be further undermined and dismantled. I've sucked up those furloughs, marched at the capital, talked to representatives. UW Madison, I've been your guy for a long time. 15 years loyal because you earned it. It's been bad and you (we) have done what we can.

Here's what else is bad. Letting that shit roll down hill instead of taking a stand. Protecting the institution over protecting the people its made of. The decisions UW Madison administrators made regarding COVID were the wrong decisions, regardless of why they were made. They have exposed the people of the institution to unnecessary physical, financial, and mental harm. Intent does not justify action. Learn. Change. Grow. Demonstrate what our students should be learning and shut the ever-loving fuck up about blaming the undergraduate population for the false choice this campus presented them with. COVID-19 is so heavily politicized and so poorly managed as a public health phenomenon nationally that campus administrators were at-best engaging in an act of wishful thinking with the Badger Pledge and Smart Restart. They could not have succeeded with this shit-show as a societal backdrop. Maybe it had to be implemented because it was the best chance at a middle-path solution through the nightmare of Wisconsin state politics and higher education funding ... maybe not. Regardless, it's done. The action that UW Madison must take full responsibility for is the decision to keep evaluation criteria on infection trend lines secret and to mismanage their communication plan so thoroughly as to scapegoat the entire undergraduate student population for failing at a system they could never have won.

It's easy to punch holes. Hard to fix them. This is Ian venting. But I DETEST breakers who can't also build. So, here's a solution-oriented take on what I wish were happening. Keep classes fully online, and make the decision to do so right now. Provide a graceful exit from the semester for any students who need to take it, and a path to return when they're able - including adjustment/extension of drop dates. Finally - step up with a mia culpa. Stop sniveling and passing blame. It's unbecoming. If that means long-term financial damage to the institution for the sake of the well-being of it's members, so be it. No one is getting out of America's version of the pandemic unharmed. Re-calibrate this institution's harm reduction strategy to focus on the humans. Probably furlough me and my colleagues even more to eat the financial loss. Then, invest whatever we have left in innovation so that the world sees UW Madison as a trend setter for a new reality of online higher education instead of clutching an outdated mode of in-person instruction. That last bit will be harder to do because of the resources squandered on the false start, but it's no less the right solution for being harder.



Wayne R. Hayes, Jane Pearlmutter and 50 others

8 Comments

