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Donors' Dilemma

I was fascinated by Genevieve Smith's article ["What's in a Business School's Name," March] about the University of Wisconsin Business School's decision to abandon naming opportunities and the financial benefits they've realized since doing so.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Dean's assessment that locking into naming rights, particularly in perpetuity, is not a good idea for universities. It's also not a good idea for donors.

By focusing narrowly on naming rights, donors are distracted from more important matters. They end up focusing on the wrong thing: style instead of substance.

If all a donor wants is his or her name plastered across a building, so be it. There are plenty of "For Sale" signs out there. But many donors have a serious educational mission in mind when they make a donation to a college or university. Donors need to stick to their guns and shouldn't be deterred by college fundraisers whose full-time job it is to play the name game.

Until other colleges realize they can increase donations by focusing on substance, rather than feeding egos, donors need to understand that a "Buyer Beware" sticker should be affixed to any and every naming "opportunity" presented to them. What they may get may not be what they want.

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