Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Selling nothing [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Saturday 15 March 2008

This is good work if you can get it. Selling nothing for $85 million.

No, seriously, this is what the University of Wisconsin has just managed [3] to do. You'll be aware of the practice of various schools within universities, or stadia outside them and the like selling off naming rights: Arsenal plays in the Emirates Stadium, MIT has the Sloane School of Management. There are various ways one can look at the practice, honouring a generous donation or a way to play to vainglory to shake down rich men. But money does flow from those rich to those educational institutions to the perceived benefit of both.

But what the Wisconsin School of Business has managed to do is to rent out (yes, rent out, rather than in perpetuity as most of these deals are) the naming rights to the school for $85 million: on the basis that the school will be called the Wisconsin School of Business for the next 20 years.

The Dean, Michael Knetter, has been so taken with this idea that he's extending it, as the Freakonomics blog tells us [4]:

> *For $50,000, you can have a classroom not named after you. For $5,000, you can not have your name on a plaque in the entryway to the building. For those of you with a little less to give, $50 will guarantee that the urinal of your choice will go unnamed. But only for the next 20 years.*

I think it's a quite wonderful idea. However, there is one sadness. Traditionally Deans are academics who have moved into management: they do no teaching of their own any more. Think of it this way: how much of a premium would you pay on already steep US business school fees to be taught directly by a man who could come up with an idea like this? Could the business school make even more money by demoting Knetter and sending him back to the classroom?

(*I am accepting contributions to the Tim Worstall No Deed Poll Fund if anyone is interested*)

blog comments powered by Disqus [6]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/miscellaneous/selling-nothing

Links:

[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/miscellaneous/selling-nothing
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778
[3] http://www.bus.wisc.edu/wng/about.asp
[4] http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/85-million-will-buy-you-nothing-at-the-university-of-wisconsin/
[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[6] http://disqus.com