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# The Washington Times

## U. of Chicago rejects efforts to dumb down

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Andrea Billups THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Friends and **alumni** of the University of Chicago are calling the resignation of President Hugo Sonnenschein on Thursday a victory for traditional academic standards that sends a clear signal across America against the dumbing down of higher education.

Mr. Sonnenschein, whose attempts to diminish the school's strict undergraduate core curriculum to increase enrollment and better market the university to a wider, less academically inclined group of students, had come under fire in the past year. Veteran professors, concerned **alumni** and current students joined to protest his efforts, seen by many as an affront to the culture and mission of a revered liberal arts institution that boasts 70 Nobel Prize winners - more than any other school in the world.

"The victory at the University of Chicago has national implications," Jerry L. Martin, president of the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni**, said yesterday. "Every college administration has been put on notice: **alumni**, faculty and trustees will challenge any attempt to undermine academic standards. Compromising academic excellence in the name of marketing simply cannot withstand public scrutiny."

Mr. Martin's organization helped coordinate a protest on behalf of a scholarly group that included Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow, an alumnus. The academics, from a broad array of disciplines, jointly signed a letter calling upon the school's board of trustees to reconsider its decision to cut the highly touted and rigorous core curriculum.

Students, also outraged over Mr. Sonnenschein's policies, staged a mocking campus protest labeled the "Fun-In," where many donned T-shirts that read "Hugo or I go," - a direct plea for the president's ouster.

Mr. Sonnenschein, 58, a well-known economist and former provost at Princeton University, joined the University of Chicago as president in 1993. His resignation was his own decision and not influenced by any public outcry, he said. "It is time for another president, one who is less a symbol of change, to carry the momentum forward," he wrote in a letter to faculty.

His departure was unexpected. Three months ago he told a weekly newspaper in Chicago that he planned on staying as president for four more years. He will remain at the university as president until June 2000, when he becomes a professor in the economics department.

One alumnus who was outspoken against Mr. Sonnenschein says that's the best place for him.

"This is what he should be doing," said Robert Stone, who received his doctorate and a law degree from the school.

Mr. Stone organized a Web site to inform concerned **alumni** about developments at the school, located in the city's Hyde Park area. He called Mr. Sonnenschein's six-year tenure at the university "a loveless marriage that was damaging to the university."

"There was no **alumni** group that supported him, no faculty group who supported him, no student group who supported him," he said. "This is a victory for every single group involved."

Mr. Stone said he is pleased the school's trustees listened to the outcry of those who wanted to protect its educational integrity. Now, he said, the school can open a constructive debate about who should be Mr. Sonnenschein's successor.

"It gives the university an opportunity to relearn what its mission is," he said. "The basic problem is that they have hired too many young professors who do not know the culture and tradition of the university. Now everyone understands that's a problem, and the university has a chance to renew the understanding here."

Stephen H. Balch of the National Association of Scholars also called for strong leadership at the university in the wake of Mr. Sonnenschein's resignation. He said a survey done by his group demonstrated "the decline and politicization which had overtaken Chicago's core curriculum."

"It's now possible for the university to take the lead in re-emphasizing the civilizing mission of a broad, intellectually rigorous undergraduate education for which Chicago once set the standard," he said.

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