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## Academic questions

### Corporate aid called needed but nettlesome campus asset

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STAFF WRITERS

To do his job successfully, Curtis Jenkins needs a car — or about four dozen.

He also needs up-to-date service manuals, numerous materials for 31 students and thousands of dollars' worth of shop tools.

"Luckily, Toyota has donated all that to us," said Mr. Jenkins, program director for automotive technologies at Eastfield College in Mesquite. "They have literally put a couple of million dollars into this program since 1997."

As budgets tighten and government funding shrinks, colleges and universities are starting to adopt market-place techniques to succeed.

The practice of accepting corporate donations, alumni gifts and research grants is common on campuses nationwide. In fact, some say donations are needed more today than ever.

But the idea of accepting outside money to fund academic programs is drawing criticism from some education policy advocates. It can jeopardize and even alter the basic nature and purpose of higher education, they say.

"You are talking about institutions who are struggling to make ends meet because the appropriation of money isn't there," said Alex Molnar, director of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University.

"But what's at stake is academic freedom," Dr. Molnar said. "Schools shouldn't be looking to the business world to tell them how to run their affairs."

K-12 schools nationwide get more than \$2.6 billion per year from business partnerships, according to a report issued in



RANDY ELI GROTH/Staff Photographer

The advertising on recycling bins at the University of Texas at Arlington pays off for the school, which receives 10 percent of the ad revenue and 100 percent of the recycling revenue.



PHOTO: CHRIS BROWN/Staff Photographer

Left: Toyota donates cars, parts and tools to help student mechanics learn their trade at Tarrant County College.

Below: Automotive technology students (from left) Michael Hayes, Russell Newton and London Newton remove pistons from a Toyota engine at Tarrant County College's South Campus. Toyota seeks out schools to participate in its Toyota Technical Education Network program.

2002 by the Council for Corporate & School Partnerships in Washington, D.C.

The council doesn't announce annual figures for higher education institutions, but Dr. Molnar is sure that it's much greater.

"Walk onto any college campus, and you will see commercialism," he said. "It's unavoidable."

At the University of Texas at Arlington, advertising on recycling bins blankets high-traffic walkways.

At Southern Methodist Uni-



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verity a \$80,000 gift from Nokia Mobile Phones in Irving enabled the school to set up a wireless networking lab — including a cellular base station — that serves as a resource resource for students.

And at Eastfield College, Tarrant County College and Kilgore College, numerous students learn on donated cars and work at Toyota dealerships throughout North Texas.

Some education advocates believe things are getting out of hand.

"Companies are trying any possible way to push their hands, and schools are letting them," said Pratyab Chatterjee, program director for CorpWatch, a California-based group that opposes corporate involvement. "It's not like it didn't happen before, but now it's being advanced and promoted by the companies themselves, not just the schools."

Toyota seeks out schools to participate in its Toyota Technical Education Network program.

"We will look for an area that significantly has a lot of dealer ships and then conduct a campus-to-campus search," said Don Cole, technical capacity manager for Gulf States Toyota in Houston. "There's no good judgment there folks; it's just permission to work."

Over, though it appears that businesses are pushing their own agendas, the idea of corporations pursuing school programs doesn't bother Robert Agnew, vice chancellor of external affairs for the Dallas County Community College District.

### Getting creative

Because the district is receiving less state funding, programs have to be more creative in finding ways to generate money, Dr. Agnew said.

"It has been an initiative to develop more partnerships in Texas. It's part of our mission now," he said.

At SMU, last year, more than 2,000 businesses and corporations worked with students sponsored activities and provided scholarship money.

Some say these partnerships are needed if students want to keep pace with tomorrow's 21st-century world.

"It isn't higher education needs corporate input. Otherwise we will become stagnant," said Jann Ruterbusch, SMU's director of corporate and foundation relations.

At SMU's Nokia Wireless Networking Laboratory, Nokia doesn't let a class is taught in classes. Instead, students schedule classes and are provided by the company to research and learn

wireless standards, including Bluetooth, wireless LAN and cellular.

The same goes for Toyota. The three alternative programs at area schools teach automotive and mechanics and don't specialize in Toyota vehicles.

From a corporation's point of view, it's advantageous to partner with a school.

The business receives name recognition and has the opportunity to present its products to a captive audience, said Nick C'Espey, editor of *Business Magazine*, a monthly publication on political and culture.

"Both parties get something out of it that they want or need because they can't do it alone," Mr. Gillespie said.

### Effect on students

OutdoorPartner Media Inc. provided UTA with 10 recycling receptacles as a cost.

Local businesses advertise on the bins, and the university receives 10 percent of the advertising revenue and 100 percent of the recycling revenue. Students can earn money by selling the ads on the bins.

"We're hoping keep communications clear," said Art Elliott, president of the Toronto-based company. "We're getting local businesses a venue to promote their businesses, and we're generating revenue for the university and students."

The commercialization doesn't seem to affect many students.

"I think it's a good idea," said Huihong Kongrang, a UTA sophomore who is majoring in manufacturing information systems. "With federal and state funding being cut, the more we privatize — letting private business pay for a good idea — the better could remain in our education."

Others, such as sophomore Erin Meier, are more cautious.

"It would only go to be too much if it starts interfering with education," said Ms. Meier, who is majoring in chemistry and biological science. "Product may be shouldn't take the place of education."

### Building loyalty

But in some cases, product loyalty is unavoidable.

"I would see you probably get more customer loyalty from having these product lines in front of students," said Jeff Parson, coordinator of the applied automation technology program at Tarrant County College's South Campus in Fort Worth. "Having those trainees' products can create some loyalty and affinity."

And that connection can be a positive thing.

It helps students by making it

easier for them to segue from school into the workforce, Mr. Gillespie said.

"At risk education is a whole education thing is an economic advantage," Mr. Gillespie said. "The place will always be seeking in commercialism."

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