

Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility: Focus on career-related ethics is consistent with Obama's focus on civic engagement

Waltham, MA, USA – May 13, 2009 (contact information at bottom) – For over twenty years, the Graduation Pledge Alliance (GPA) has been spreading its message of social and environmental responsibility in the workforce at schools across the globe. Nearly 150 colleges and universities are participating in the Pledge this spring, where thousands of students are expected to sign on to this values-based commitment.

Students taking the Graduation Pledge affirm the following: "I pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work." The Pledge is signed by students at small liberal arts colleges (like Macalester and Grinnell), as well as at larger public and private universities, including Northwestern, Notre Dame, and the Universities of Florida and Michigan.

Do graduates "walk the talk"? Pledge signers have turned down jobs for ethical reasons, promoted recycling at their organizations, removed racist language from training manuals, and worked for gender parity in high school athletics. One graduate helped to convince an employer to refuse a chemical weapons-related contract.

Reflecting on her experience with the Pledge program, Lindsay Callahan, a member of Bentley University class of 2009, stated "When it came time to decide on a career path, I wanted to explore options that would allow me to combine the skills of my business education with my sense of purpose. I wanted my career success to be measured in lives that I change, rather than how much money I earn. Through my development as a civic leader, I have found that I want work that is going to fill me with purpose and meaning, work that will reward my soul and not just my wallet, work that will allow me to *make* things right in my community and not just *do* things right. It is for this reason that I turned down two job offers for the chance to join Teach For America, an AmeriCorps program that places top college graduates in some of the country's worst public schools with the belief that all children deserve the opportunity to attain excellent education."

Margaret Tiedemann, a recent graduate of Harvard, feels the Pledge is "a great reminder that no matter where my career path takes me, I can always give back to society and lead an involved life." For 2006 Pledge signer and

Manchester College graduate Ben Leiter, "the Pledge holds me accountable to my values even when I am not part of a community that shares and reinforces those values. So the pledge has been a formal commitment to pause and assess whether a job is not just good for me or my resume, but good for the world. In this sense, the pledge broadens my commitment beyond myself."

The GPA has established a strong international presence as well. Schools on four different continents, including Europe, Asia, and both North and South America, are giving their students an opportunity to pledge to work in a socially and environmentally responsible way. 2005-2006 Senior Class President at Taipei American School, Alex Cho, remarked, "By giving people such a virtue to believe in, they begin to think what careers in life should be taken up, what careers are most important to the cause, or how they should go about making the career fit the statement."

According to co-founder Matt Nicodemus, "We started the Pledge to help create an environment on campuses in which students could think and act about how their personal life choices could help bring about the world they wanted to be living in." Current Pledge organizers are optimistic about the potential for growth, given the Obama Administration's commitment to public service and civic engagement. Hopes are that the recent Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act is only the beginning of a country-wide shift toward a more engaged, community-minded citizenry.

The GPA is housed at Bentley University as part of Bentley's Alliance for Ethics and Social Responsibility (BAESR). BAESR's mission is to "...amplify and extend the work of the autonomous centers and initiatives on campus, supporting and encouraging greater awareness of, respect for and commitment to ethics, service and social responsibility in the institution's research, curricula and campus culture." *Bentley has long been known for its leadership in the area of corporate social responsibility.*

For further details, see www.GraduationPledge.org and contact Pledge Coordinator Heidi Gross, 260-901-4244, HGross@Bentley.edu or Neil Wollman; Ph. D.; Senior Fellow, Bentley Alliance for Ethics and Social Responsibility; Bentley University; NWollman@Bentley.edu; 260-568-0116.

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