

# IEG Sponsorship Report

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## UCLA Breaks New Ground In Higher Education Sponsorship

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*Economic pressures could lead more universities to raise revenue through sponsorship of campus programs.*

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**4/12/10:** In the nearly three decades since sponsorship established itself as a full-blown marketing discipline, sponsorship programs at colleges and universities have been almost exclusively the domain of athletic departments.

Although campus-wide pouring and purchasing deals are common, actual sponsorship of anything outside of sports programs is a rare animal, mostly because university development departments are bastions of traditional philanthropy.

That situation may be about to change. Based on the example of the University of California, Los Angeles, a combination of funding imperatives and new professionals bringing sponsorship knowledge and experience is poised to break down old walls and take advantage of the impact and reach that schools can deliver to corporate partners outside of their arenas and stadiums.

UCLA has embarked on a program to sell campus-wide sponsorships spanning such entities as the school's art museum, professional schools, student activities, festivals and other events and programs.

The university launched the program in March '09 to generate non-traditional revenue and offset budget cuts, said Eron Jacobson, who was hired to spearhead the initiative as UCLA's first director of corporate partnerships, working out of the school's Office of Corporate, Foundation and Research Relations.

Prior to joining UCLA, Jacobson served as manager of strategic partnerships and events for the *Los Angeles Times* from '06 to '08 and director of sales for Fairplex and the Los Angeles County Fair from '04 to '06.

He believes other institutions of higher learning that are facing mounting budget shortfalls will adopt similar strategies in the near future.

"In today's economic environment, universities have to look for ways to leverage nontraditional assets," he said, noting that campus-wide sponsorship programs can provide more tangible assets than collegiate athletics.

In just over a year, Jacobson has secured two event-specific sponsorships worth a cash-and-in-kind total in the low six figures and is in negotiations on a seven-figure deal with a financial institution for the first campus-wide partnership.

While creating campus-spanning programs can be tricky given the large number of internal stakeholders, administrative policies and concerns over commercialization, the program has received little pushback, he said. “Everyone is looking for new and incremental ways to drive revenue.”

One of the biggest challenges: Educating stakeholders on the amount of time it takes to secure a partner, said Jacobson, who was given five months to land a sponsor for *Steeped in History, The Art of Tea* exhibition at the university’s Fowler Museum.

Jacobson succeeded, bringing on Int’l Coffee & Tea, LLC’s The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf as presenting sponsor of the exhibition that ran from August to November last year.

The retailer provided \$35,000 cash and \$10,000 worth of in-kind support, some of which the school used to enhance the opening event attended by affluent donors, Jacobson said.

Promotional support that drives interest in and traffic to campus programs is a key piece of the corporate sponsorship initiative, Jacobson noted. For example, The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf touted the *Steeped in History* exhibition through in-store videos at its area stores.

When prospecting potential partners, Jacobsen leverages UCLA’s alumni database to identify corporate decision-makers and those who can make introductions and referrals to the right people.

“I contact them, let them know what we are doing, and ask them if they can recommend anyone within their organization that we should reach out to.”

Jacobson credits that tactic to renewing a major automotive manufacturer’s sponsorship of next month’s JazzReggae Festival at UCLA. (He did not want to identify the company in this article as the deal is still being finalized.)

“It looked like the sponsoring division was not going to come back, so we had an alumni on the corporation’s marketing team leverage his tie to the university,” Jacobson said. “Universities often have alumni who are mid-to-high-ranking executives, and it’s something that sponsorship sellers can really take advantage of.”

In addition to alumni, Jacobson noted he is working with colleagues on the UCLA development staff to leverage corporate donors into becoming marketing partners.

To add value to sponsorship packages, Jacobson has negotiated substantial discounts he is able to offer sponsors for advertising in *The Daily Bruin* student newspaper and *UCLA Magazine*.

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#### Sources

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