

# Dow's Knowledge Factories

## Are Michigan's Universities Defending Dow With Silence?

By Brian McKenna

*"Growth [is] the opiate we're all hooked on ..."*

– Frank Popoff, former CEO of DOW Chemical In *"Growth Company, DOW Chemical's First Century,"* MSU Press (1997)

*"Growth for whom?"*

– In *"Dying for Growth, Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor"* (2000)

When the enterprising Herbert Dow was rummaging in his Midland shed in the 1890s, few locals knew what the Ohio man was up to. Dow was in fact digging a deep water well to mine the salty brine – from an

ancient underwater sea beneath the city – to make bromine.

He was applying the knowledge he'd mastered at Ohio's Case School of Applied Science to make a chemical – potassium bromide – that he would market to pharmaceutical companies for use as a sedative and stomach soother.

The "chemical genius," Herbert Dow, had partnered with the "Canton capitalists" from Ohio to finance their obsessive quest to make cash from chemicals. Midland locals were still not impressed. As reported in Don Whitehead's, *"The Dow Story"* (1968), "In 1903 Midland residents threatened to sue Dow Chemical because of smelly gases," which they claimed induced vomiting. Herbert Dow "hooted down" the protests as he would time and again after explosions, chemicals, and pollution seeped from his plants, disturbing civic life.

But "hooting down" the locals

over environmental contamination could not work forever. And, in fact, Dow's family and his executive staff lived in Midland too and sought its pleasures, what few there were in a moonscaped place made barren after

proceeded with its formula for success – mining the brainpower from local colleges and universities, particularly in science, chemistry, and engineering. Dow money flowed there as well. As early as 1918 educational critic

Thorstein Veblen grew concerned about corporate influence on college life. In his classic, *"The Higher Learning in America,"* Veblen identified college as "a business house dealing in merchantable knowledge, placed under the governing hand of a captain of erudition, whose office it is to turn the means in hand to account in the largest feasible output." Historian Louis Hacker warned in Veblen's 1918 preface that "universities had become ... needlessly competitive in

[their] hunt for endowments ... their purpose was entirely vocational ... [they've become institutions where] scholarship and teaching, as austere disciplines, necessarily went by the board."

Nearly a century later, Dow's influence on Michigan colleges and universities would surely have caught Veblen's eye were he still alive. Several schools tout their Dow connections and use their Dow colleges of engineering, applied science, and chemis-



photo: Mike Garfield

*The Dow name is highly visible on many campuses across the state, including the University of Michigan.*

the 19th-century logging craze. Dow money flowed into the village and soon it seemed like every civic and cultural arena had the Dow name attached to it, from the library and gardens to the Museum of Science and Art and historical museum. Midland became a company town and the locals, dependent on the money and grateful for Dow's largesse, were quieted.

### Formula for Success

Meanwhile Dow Chemical

try to attract students and faculty. Dow has spread its name by funding other university programs in journalism, public relations, and public health as well.

Veblen might note that the state's universities are generally quiet when it comes to producing knowledge and scholarship that is critical of Dow. There has been little published research on recent Dow controversies in areas such as asbestos, vinyl chloride contamination in Louisiana, the purchase of Union Carbide in 2001 – the company responsible for the worst industrial chemical accident in history in Bhopal India – labor decertification campaigns in Texas, union fights in Midland, and dioxin pollution in mid-Michigan.

He might also have noted that it was college students – not the faculty – who were at the forefront of speaking out publicly about Dow's social and environmental record. There is an active "Justice for Bhopal" movement at the University of Michigan, for example. And at Michigan State University, Steve Meador, a graduate student in the environmental journalism program has just completed an excellent documentary about Dow's dioxin scandal in Midland and downriver. But these on-campus efforts by mostly students are dwarfed by the incredible amounts of university resources that go to support Dow.

### **Towards a Company State?**

Midland, Michigan "has more Ph.D.s per acre than you'll find most anywhere else," Don Whitehead reported in "The Dow Story" (1968). That's just as true today. But all that brainpower has not translated into much critical intervention against Dow's practices and policies in Midland, where citizens live under the conditions of a company town. Many are beholden to Dow for their livelihoods, and everyone's property values are held hostage to the idea that dioxin

is not really harmful and the contamination of their yards, parks, playgrounds, and water is really not that significant.

Whitehead provides insight into this mindset. "Those who seek anonymity after working hours and who wish to build a wall between their business lives and their private lives find the small town a very difficult place. Such walls are not easy to build in a small town. The town's life is not different from the life of the company. One impinges on the other in many ways."

Has the same process occurred at Michigan's colleges and universities? Is Michigan drifting towards becoming a company state? Can we trust Dow-endowed universities and colleges in Michigan to produce good science (science in the public interest, not skewed to corporate profits) when it comes to Dow Chemical? Might these universities be more Dow-friendly out of gratitude for money received or to curry future gifts? Might those institutions not on the Dow dole be inclined to go easy on the chemical giant hoping their campus will get a few million dollars for a new science lab or an endowed chair in the journalism department in the future?

### **Connections & Ironies**

In November 2003, Steve Meador completed a 90-minute documentary titled "The Long Shadow" – a critical investigation of Dow's dioxin dealings with Michigan's state government – alone and on a shoestring budget, as a master's project for his environmental journalism degree. Meanwhile, just down the hall from the environmental journalism offices at MSU's Communication Arts Building, a fledgling undergraduate Public Relations specialization is just getting off the ground. It's in honor of E.N. Brandt, whose 1997 book, "Growth Company, Dow Chemical's First Century," largely sings the praises of "one of the won-

ders of the modern business world." The endowed E.N. Brandt chair was the result of a \$1.3 million gift to MSU from the Carl Gerstacker Foundation in 2000.

And who is Carl Gerstacker? The former CEO of Dow Chemical.

In other words, Dow endowed the \$1.3 million chair in the MSU public relations department.

Doubly troubling is the fact that Brandt's Dow book was published by Michigan State University Press. This means that a book written by a PR professional working for Dow Chemical has the appearance of academic integrity, the assumption of independent scholarship, and the legitimacy of a Big Ten university.

It turns out that Brandt had worked for Dow for 40 years, beginning his career in the public relations department in 1953 and rising to become Dow's company historian. The Dow book – whose research was largely financed by Dow – and an endowed chair in public relations financed by Dow, will have a lasting legacy on MSU culture. In contrast, Meador's documentary – completed in November – is still trying to find a distribution market. He's hoping for a local PBS showing.

It's a good bet that only a handful of MSU faculty and students are aware of these Dow/MSU connections. MSU is not the only university to accept money and endow chairs in Dow's name. Dow Chemical has spread its money widely, and it would seem, with some hope of a return on investment.

### **Defending Dow**

We must first turn to Brandt's book because the thick volume represents Dow's view of the world.

Brandt's book on Dow dismisses dioxin's real-life dangers, citing study after study apparently disproving a health threat. He tells the story of a "60 Minutes" crew who arrived in

Midland, soon after Times Beach, Missouri, was evacuated for dioxin pollution in 1982, “expecting Midland to be the next town evacuated because of dioxin contamination.”

“They came at the busiest weekend of the year,” Brandt quotes a Dow official as saying, “everybody’s laughing and having a big time at the art fair, and the antique show you have to see to believe ... They’re having trouble finding beleaguered folks. To make a long story short, with the exception of a few environmentalists from a local organization, they gave up. That story just went away because they could not find any substance for their story line.”

The 649-page effort (Dow Chemical’s Thayne Hanson served as one of the five members of the Editorial Advisory Committee, along with other chemical professionals like James J. Bohning of the American Chemical Society) spends a great deal of time defending Dow against various interlocutors. In a chapter called “Flower Children,” Brandt dismisses all the “napalm hubbub” of Vietnam War activists claiming that napalm was of little consequence to civilians and was “a great service for the armed forces” (quoting a letter from Secretary of Defense McNamara).

### Half the Story

Brandt defends Dow against the 1941 charge by the U.S. Justice Department that Dow conspired with the Nazi’s I.F. Farben to hold down magnesium production in the United States in the prewar era (Dow later pleaded *nolo contendere*), but fails to mention Dow’s 1951 hiring of Otto Ambros, the Nazi war criminal convicted at Nuremberg for slavery and mass murder in the killing of thousands of Jews with nerve gas (well detailed in the excellent 1991 book, “Secret Agenda,” by Linda Hunt).

Brandt informs us that Dow was

the first company to receive a phone call from Pinochet’s military in 1973 soon after his forces assassinated democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende, toppling his government, asking Dow to come back, which Dow “readily accepted” (a Dow official saluting the economic “miracle” of Pinochet). But Brandt’s book never mentions the thousands tortured and 3,000 killed during

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## Befitting its interdisciplinary goals, does the university present a complete portrait of Dow Chemical to all its students? Is Dow a good corporate “citizen” deserving of an association?

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Pinochet’s brutal dictatorship.

Brandt relays insider knowledge that Presidential candidate Eisenhower was tapped to take over Dow’s Saran Wrap division should his Presidential bid fail but says nothing about Eisenhower’s famous farewell speech in which he rallied against America’s rising military-industrial complex.

Of which Dow is a leading exemplar.

The MSU book contract – with a non-academic corporate public relations man penning an apologia for Dow – and the MSU endowed chair in public relations raise questions about the independence, culture, and ideology of higher education, in this instance, MSU’s relationship to Dow Chemical. From the mega-University of Michigan to tiny Albion College, Dow Chemical has established strong financial and political relationships with most of the state’s universities.

### Knowledge into Profit

One might expect Michigan universities located safely outside

Midland’s geographical sphere of influence to be more independent and critical of Dow Chemical. But as Stanley Aronowitz makes clear in “The Knowledge Factory, Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning” (2000), the current business craze in academia “has fudged the distinctions between training, education and learning.” As educational theorist Henry Giroux points out, “educators need to take seriously the importance of defending higher education as an institution of civic culture whose purpose is to educate students for active and critical citizenship ... markets don’t reward moral behavior.”

And markets are what Dow is all about.

Ever since Herbert Dow switched from his first product, bromine – mined from the deep ancient underwater sea of brine beneath Midland – to chlorine (to make bleach), Dow Chemical has been strategically oriented to adjust its product lines to insure profits and prosperity for its shareholders.

In the late nineteenth century the fiercely independent Herbert Dow began his new business afresh after the moneymen on the Board of his first business hemmed him in and challenged his ideas. He was a highly energetic and talented applied scientist desperate to turn new knowledge into profit. So he turned to Case University in Ohio – his alma mater – for brainpower, recruiting scientists in chemistry and engineering for his new firm, named after himself and founded in 1897. Dow Chemical’s involvement in higher education has only expanded through the years.

### Bottom Lines

In March 2000, to cite one example, Dow Chemical made a biotech deal with Michigan State University in which it will pay MSU about \$4 million over several years.

The project focuses on plant oils that might be used in areas like low-cholesterol cooking oil and plastics. No doubt Dow hopes new patents will arise to improve its bottom line.

Tim Martin, a journalist with the *Lansing State Journal*, spoke with Bob Huggett, MSU's vice president of research and graduate studies about the arrangement, in his April 17, 2000 article, "MSU weighs rewards, risks of research." Martin pointed out that "critics worry that universities can get too cozy with corporations that sponsor their research, fearing that competition for money could lead schools like MSU to do research that does not help the public, or worse, skew research test results in favor of those paying the bills." Martin reported that MSU officials said the source of money doesn't influence their quest for truth.

### The State of Knowledge

"Are we selling our soul to the devil by taking industrial money? I don't think so," Huggett told Martin. "Corporations have relied more on universities to help their research efforts in the past decade ... I don't think that's a problem, as long as we protect what the university stands for – the free and open dissemination of data."

But the free and open dissemination of *data* (which is not always so easily accessible), while very important, is not the same as a rigorous search for the truth, or the free and open dissemination of *ideas*, a supposed hallmark of universities. Does education produced for the market undermine education produced for a critical citizenry? Befitting its interdisciplinary goals, does the university present a complete portrait of Dow to all its students? Is Dow a good

corporate "citizen" deserving of an association?

Anthropologist Wesley Shumar argues in "College for Sale, a Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education," (1997) that market forces have had a pernicious impact on faculty, students, the administration and the state of knowledge itself in higher education. "Faculty ... are pressured to become laborers in the factories of knowledge, as education is rationalized into a service-based industry for the benefit of specific markets."

### Growing the Brain Bank

Dow Chemical has established deep-seated connections to everything from biotechnology, engineering, and military research, to public health, public relations, and journalism. In so doing Dow has constructed a benevolent corporate image while mining

## Dow Watchdog Wins Environmental Award

Longtime Midland resident and Dow activist, Diane Hebert, was recently awarded one of the state's highest environmental awards. The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) on Oct. 27 presented Hebert with their Petoskey Prize for Leadership at their 5th Annual Environmental Awards Celebration in Lansing. The prize is given to individuals whose "commitment, creativity, and courage have inspired others to safeguard Michigan's air, land, and water for future generations."

The MEC, a statewide coalition of over 60 organizations (including the Ecology Center), hosted the gathering of environmental, corporate, and political leaders. An MEC press release praised Hebert as "a tireless activist in the fight against contamination from dioxin, a persistent and highly toxic chemical that can increase the likelihood of cancer and have harmful re-



*Diane Hebert (left) receives 2003 Petoskey Prize for Leadership from Michigan Environmental Council President Lana Pollack.*

productive or developmental effects."

### Commitment

Hebert (pronounced AY-bear) first became aware of dioxin in the late 1970s when she moved to Midland with her husband, who had been hired by Dow Chemical Company as a pilot. As a nurs-

ing mother, she became concerned after learning that dioxins can build up in the body and be passed on to infants through breastfeeding. After discovering that Midland had dioxin contamination levels much greater than the rest of the state, Hebert began her 25-year battle with the prime source of that pollution – Midland-based multinational Dow Chemical – the 51st richest company in the world.

A mother and wife then, now a grandmother of two, Hebert never meant to be a career activist. "When I first started doing this, I thought it was a little problem, that the community would work on it, that we'd get it fixed, and I could get on with my life," Hebert told the *Detroit Metro Times* in 2002. "That's not the way it turned out."

### Creativity

In 1983, Hebert filed a Toxic Sub-

expertise and drawing patent rewards.

Brandt reports that during WWII top-secret work on a shell fuse that later developed into a “smart bomb” was “aided by University of Michigan physicists, working in an old gravel pit outside of Ann Arbor.” Later, Dow CEO Leland Doan served on the U-M Board of Regents from 1952 to 1959, running as a Republican.

In recent years Dow and its offshoots (like the Gerstacker Foundation noted above) have contributed more than \$10 million in direct contributions to the U-M; including \$5 million in 2000 to fund a new College of Engineering laboratory; \$2.5 million in 2000 for the Dow Chemical Company Professor of Sustainable Science, Technology, and Commerce; and \$1.2 million to the U-M School of Public Health in 1996 for a Dow professorship focusing on “the health effects, risks and benefits of

chemicals in the environment.”

### Tapping the Brain Bank

Dr. Rudy Richardson is the Dow Professor of Toxicology at the U-M School of Public Health. In an interview Dr. Richardson said, “Dioxin is not my area of primary expertise or interest. I have not followed this situation closely.” He added that “it should be borne in mind that reaching or even exceeding [the action level of 1000 parts per trillion set by federal agencies] does not necessarily mean there is an imminent health risk. Ultimately what is of concern is the amount of dioxin actually reaching people, and I have not seen this data.”

The Dow Chair at Saginaw Valley State University is chemistry Professor David H. Swenson. In an April 9, 2002 article in the *Saginaw News* (“Informed decisions needed on dioxin”) he said that when environ-

mental groups clash with alleged polluters, the claims of both groups often are suspect. In a follow-up interview Swenson said that “the [dioxin] data is fuzzy and unclear ... we know it’s [damaging] to mice [at given levels] but it’s hard to see if that translates directly into humans.” He said he knows people on both sides of the issue and that his position was “in the middle.”

### MSU’s Dioxin Man

In May 1999, the British publication *Lancet* – perhaps the most prestigious medical journal in the world – ran a news story reporting the latest dioxin findings from the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. It reported on Dr. Robert N. Hoover’s belief that “based on the current weight of the evidence ... TCDD [the most potent dioxin] should be considered a human carcinogen.”

stances Control Act petition that led to the first series of dioxin testing in the state and nation, and led to the first national dioxin assessment. Herbert was responsible for raising the profile of the issue in Midland, winning numerous concessions from the company. In the late ‘90s, Hebert served on a collaborative pollution prevention initiative with Dow that received national attention and resulted in the reduction of the manufacture and emissions of a range of toxic wastes. Hebert has helped organized high-profile events at Dow stockholder meetings and has worked with Greenpeace, the Ecology Center, and others to stage a dioxin forum in Midland. Most recently, Hebert’s efforts have focused on bringing attention to dioxin hotspots in Midland, and the contamination of more than 20 miles of the Tittabawassee River flood plain, downstream from the Dow plant (due, experts believe, to the overflow of Dow waste ponds in a 1986 flood).

Hebert’s work has been an inspiration to activists in the U.S. and around

the world. She has worked closely with activists around the globe, including Indian community leaders representing the victims of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India (Dow acquired Union Carbide in 2001). Hebert has helped coordinate visits by Bhopal survivors to Midland to bring their message directly to Dow Chemical’s annual shareholders meetings in 2002 and 2003. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Chemical Week*, *Orion*, and *National Geographic* have all published articles about her work.

### Courage

Despite this recognition, much of Hebert’s work has been lonely. Midland is essentially a company town, and most of its residents would prefer not to hear about dioxin hot spots and toxic releases from the plants. Hebert has often been the lone voice telling people what they would rather not hear. Some people have suggested that she should simply move away if she is that concerned about toxic contamination in Midland. But Hebert

is not planning to leave anytime soon. “It used to be that I was a homemaker, a mother,” she told the *Metro Times*. “Now, I’m a watchdog. It’s not even like something you do. It becomes who you are.”

How tough is Diane Hebert? Just ask ex-Governor John Engler. As he was slithering out of office he tried to rush through a plan that would have relieved Dow of the responsibility of cleaning up much of the Midland contamination. Hebert, along with a group of local activists and the Ecology Center – who called it a “sweetheart deal” – helped oppose the administration’s efforts. Grassroots pressure turned into action when then-Attorney General Jennifer Granholm (also Gov.-elect Granholm at the time) called the plan illegal and the administration finally backed off the deal (see “Dow Shalt Not Blight the Earth,” *FTGU*, Jan./Feb. 2003).

But they found a skeptic in Michigan. Dr. Michael Kamrin, a toxicologist from Michigan State University, was quoted as saying that the dioxin data is “unconvincing and epidemiologically weak. These data don’t suggest to me that there’s any health risk from dioxin [TCDD]. I didn’t think so before, and I don’t think so now.”

Dr. Kamrin later served on Governor Engler’s Michigan Environmental Science Board in 1999-2000 where he voted against raising Michigan’s standards for protecting children’s environmental health.

Dr. Kamrin is on the Board of Scientific and Policy Advisors for the American Council on Science and Health, which PR Watch describes as an industry-funded group “stacked with conservatives.” ACSH has argued that cholesterol is not linked to heart disease, irradiation of food is fine, and saccharin is not carcinogenic. In 1997 an ACSH study concluded that childhood lead poisoning is no longer a widespread public health threat. Dow Chemical has funded the ACSH in the past though their current list of funding sources is secret.

In May 2003, Dr. Kamrin authored an ACSH report titled, “Traces of Environmental Chemicals in the Human Body: Are they a Risk to Health?” One of the report’s reviewers was Daland R. Juberg, Ph.D., with Dow Agrosciences. The report concluded that “current levels of environmental chemicals in the general population are well below those considered to be associated with

adverse effects and thus do not pose a threat to public health.”

Dr. Kamrin is an Emeritus Professor at MSU’s Institute of Environmental Toxicology. According to a recent IET newsletter (Spring 2002), “IET-affiliated faculty will provide scientific expertise to Dow on

fact that Carl Gerstacker, a former CEO of Dow, served on Albion’s Board of Directors from 1960 to 1988. Albion received \$3 million in 1997 from a Dow Foundation to upgrade its science facilities. In 2001 the Gerstacker Foundation awarded it another \$2 million to build the Carl A.

Gerstacker Liberal Arts Institute for Professional Management. Albion also received \$1 million in 2001 from the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation to build the Herbert and Grace Dow Analytical Science Laboratory.

Other small liberal arts colleges have fared well recently. In 2002, Hope College received \$1 million to help construct a new science facility. Also in 2002, Alma received \$500,000 for a recreation center. And

Kalamazoo College received \$1 million in 2002 for a Distinguished Professorship in the Natural Sciences. In addition, in 2003 Kalamazoo received its final installment of a \$3.2 million gift from the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation for its “Enlightened Leadership in the 21st Century Initiative.” In the 1990s Kalamazoo received \$4 million from the foundation for the construction of the Dow Science Center, built in 1992.

Dow has also been very generous to Michigan State University. In addition to what has already been noted, in 1996 Dow gave \$5 million to build the Dow Institute for Materials Research, a 46,000-square-foot addition to the east wing of MSU’s



*Tittabawassee deer*

advisory committees as additional study projects are proposed.” No further information was available.

In 2002 the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality announced that it would conduct an aquatic risk assessment on the threats to wildlife in the dioxin-contaminated ecosystem of the Tittabawassee River flood plain. Dow responded by providing a grant to MSU to conduct a study into the threats to wildlife as well. It is unclear whether Dow will attempt to use the MSU findings to challenge the state’s conclusions.

#### **On the Dow Dole**

Albion College has been a favorite Dow recipient, owing in part to the

Engineering Building. In early 2002 Dow co-sponsored a seminar series at MSU's Detroit College of Law, called, "Creating Sustainable Cities in the 21st Century." On March 19 the talk was titled, "Abandonment of the Cities." Unlike U-M, which has an active Justice for Bhopal student group, at MSU there was no such chapter, and so no one was on hand to ask whether Dow had abandoned the city of Bhopal.

In 1999 Hillsdale College received \$500,000 for the Herbert H. Dow II Program in American Journalism. It is "devoted to the restoration of ethical, high-minded journalism

standards and to the reformation of our cultural, political, and social practices." That year the Dow Program sponsored Richard Lowry, Editor-in-Chief of the *National Review*, as a guest speaker. In his speech, titled "The High Priests of Journalism Truth, Morality, and the Media," Lowry criticized American journalism for "reinforc[ing] the radical side in America's culture wars."

"What do I mean by the 'radical side'?", he continued. "I am referring to those intellectuals on the Left who are attempting to remold American society and the way we view ourselves as human beings in keeping with an extreme feminist and multicultural world view ... [we need to] get more conservatives in journalism, which

means supporting projects such as Hillsdale College's 'Dow Program in American Journalism' ... [and] strengthening institutions that work to change the prevailing culture, from the National Review Institute to conservative institutions in higher education."

"We have a new body of rulers whose names you don't know and whose faces you don't recognize, but who control your life," said Fonda on campus. "The firms have learned to manipulate the tax laws, to get away from paying their fair share, and the middle class must pay the burden."

One of these "economic giants," monopolizing the American economy, said Fonda, was Dow Chemical.

According to Brandt, an incensed Paul Oreffice, then president of Dow Chemical, immediately wrote to Dr. Harold Abel, president of CMU: "While inviting Ms. Fonda to your campus is your prerogative, I consider it our

## NOTICE NOTICE

### CERTAIN AREAS OF THIS PARK HAVE ELEVATED LEVELS OF DIOXINS IN THE SOIL.

Children may be especially sensitive to dioxins.  
Take precautions to avoid direct contact with soil.  
Wash skin that comes into contact with soil.  
Long term exposure may lead to health problems.

For more information, please:

Read the brochure  
provided on this  
subject

and / or

Contact the Saginaw  
County Department of  
Public Health  
ph. 989-758-3686

*Sign in public park in Saginaw County, downstream from Dow Chemical's Midland facilities.*

### Truth & Consequences

Does corporate money affect criticism of the benefactors? Michelle Hurd Riddick, with the Lone Tree Council, a Saginaw area environmental group, believes that "all that Dow money to universities reflects Dow's ability to buy complacency."

In 1977 Dow demonstrated to Central Michigan University what it's capable of doing when faculty do not remain complacent. A university group invited Jane Fonda to speak on the CMU campus, located just 30 miles from Midland. Fonda was doing a national tour to raise funds for an organization called "Campaign for Economic Democracy." Fonda was paid \$3,500, which she donated to the campaign.

prerogative and obligation to make certain our funds are never again used to support people intent upon the destruction of freedom. Therefore, effective immediately, support of any kind from the Dow Chemical Company to Central Michigan University has been stopped, and will not be resumed until we are convinced our dollars are not expended in supporting those who would destroy us."

Brandt approvingly quotes columnist George Will on Dow Chemical's decision at the time. "Capitalism inevitably nourishes a hostile class," said Will. "American business has been generous with gifts to universities ... but too indiscriminate. Dow has given the business community a timely sample of appro-

priate discrimination.”

In 2000 – the rift with Dow long since mended – Central Michigan University was the recipient of the largest gift ever given to it from the private sector: a \$5 million contribution from the Dow Foundation to assist in the construction of its new health professions college building. So grateful were CMU officials that they named the facility The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions.

It turns out that the \$5 million was just 10% of the cost of building construction. In fact, Michigan taxpayers paid \$37.5 million towards the new building, estimated at \$50 million. Would the \$5 million prove to be a good example of “appropriate discrimination?” Would CMU officials help insure that “[Dow’s] dollars are not expended in supporting those who would destroy us?”

### **Not Just a Chemistry Story**

Dow Chemical is the 51st richest company in the world. With revenues of \$27.6 billion in 2002, Dow Chemical is worth more than 68% of the world’s countries (124 nations), according to World Bank statistics. That’s more revenue than Ecuador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Haiti, El Salvador, Uruguay, Panama, Bolivia and Jamaica, among others.

It’s like having a foreign country in your own backyard!

Were that Dow could be studied like a foreign country, like it deserves. Many universities boast area studies programs that critically investigate the political economy and culture of specific regions of the world, like Africa, Latin America, or Asia. It’s very common for these programs to house perspectives that are very critical of capitalism. But usually the only sector of the university that studies corporations in an in-depth manner is the Business College, though that’s rarely critical.

But foreign countries rarely sponsor research at U.S. universities, and if they do it’s usually not advertised. Dow, on the other hand, is a big presence at most Michigan universities, its name plastered on buildings and endowed chairs and its officials well known to university administrators. So to criticize Dow Chemical, as a professional academic at a Dow-endowed institution, has a different implication.

### **Inside/Outside the Box**

To understand Michigan’s dioxin crisis, you must dig into history, gain a fuller appreciation of the stakes involved, study the politics, and follow the money. Universities have a name for this: interdisciplinary research. But many academic professionals are reluctant to venture publicly into this issue.

When Ryan Bodanyi, Campus Organizer for the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, was collecting signatures at the University of Michigan for a “Resolution in Support of University Disassociation from the Dow Corporation,” he was surprised at how few of the faculty signed his petition. “We approached the Women’s Studies Department and one person said, ‘my colleagues might say it’s outside our discipline.’”

In the public health and health professions fields, there seems to be little excuse not to study the links between the environment and human health.

The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions at CMU is already committed to “fostering an understanding of health in its varied dimensions through relevant, community-based experiences.” In the Midland dioxin case, community-based experiences could include rotations with environmentalists from Tittabawassee River Watch, MDEQ fieldworkers, public health nurses, local journalists, and citizens living in

the polluted areas. Students could also be encouraged to pursue real research projects on Dow and dioxin.

### **True Higher Learning**

Let’s suppose academics from various disciplines got together to pursue research around Dow Chemical’s dioxin scandal, as the basis for a book. Communications professionals could diagnose Dow’s media manipulation techniques, studying its PR strategies, deceptions, and omissions (environmental groups and the MDEQ could also be evaluated). Political Scientists could look at the “crisis of democracy,” exploring the politics surrounding Dow’s influence with governments. Sociologists might focus on the dynamics that make Midland a “company town,” and ask whether or not Dow’s influence could make Michigan into a “company state.” Area Studies – in Africa, Latin America, and Asia – could study the emergent international student movement against Dow, focused on Bhopal. Labor and industrial relations professors could look at outsourcing, deskilling, and new modes of workplace control. Medical anthropologists could conduct ethnographies that unearthed the “culture, resources, and power” dynamics of all involved.

Philosophers and political economists might question former Dow CEO Frank Popoff’s assertion that, “Growth [is] the opiate we’re all hooked on.” They could begin by asking simply, “What is growth?” and unpack it. Economic growth implies a developmental teleology, like the physical growth of your child, from puberty to marriage to parent to wise old man to the grave. Growth connotes goodness, like the bounty from the farm during the fall harvest. Growth suggests progress, but the postmodernists can easily refute the idea that things are following a path of improvement along some predetermined schedule. In fact the philoso-

phers could point out that what Popoff and Brandt call economic “growth” has a dark side of oppression, pollution and danger. Others might argue a more accurate description is “capital accumulation” – the real opiate Dow is hooked on.

### **In My Imagination University**

Historians could write an independent appraisal of Dow’s first century, documenting its labor, environmental, political, and economic record and describing communities of resistance. This would necessarily serve as a counter-history to E.N. Brandt’s corporate version. They could investigate the history and current status of Dow Chemicals’ dioxin experiments on prisoners at Holmesburg State Prison in Philadelphia in 1965, something not mentioned in Brandt’s book.

The men were not informed that they would later be studied for the development of cancer, breaking Nuremberg protocols. In October 2000, 298 former inmates filed suit against Dow Chemical, Johnson & Johnson, and others for injuries, lingering physical illnesses, and psychological trauma suffered as a result of the experimental research. “Acres of Skin,” a 1998 book that explored the issue by Temple University Professor Allen Hornblum, aided the case. But a federal judge ruled in 2002 that the statute of limitations had long ago expired. On May 8, 2002, Dow Chemical Co. spokesman Scott Wheeler told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that the suit was a result of “applying what was common practice in the 1960s to 2002 eyes. All this is something that happened 40 years ago.”

Environmentalists could study Dow’s century-old pollution record and Dow’s combative relationships with regulators. For example, in the 1980s Dow sued the EPA for taking aerial photography of its Midland

plant after it was denied an inspection visit – a case that went to the Supreme Court. Brandt quotes Keith McKennon, Dow research director from 1985-1990: “During that period Dow transmogrified from the company that sets up antiaircraft guns to shoot down EPA flyover planes to the company that exists today.” McKennon doesn’t say if he’s kidding or not about the guns.

### **Laboring in the Knowledge Factory**

Educators could study the timidity of academics to speak out and investigate the issues above. For an excellent critique of academics and salaried professionals they might turn to Jeff Schmidt’s “Disciplined Minds, A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the soul-battering system that shapes their lives” (2000).

Schmidt describes the socialization process in universities as a process of fostering political and intellectual subordination. The process “ultimately produces obedient thinkers – highly educated employees who do their assigned work without questioning its goals. Professional education is a battle for the very identity of the individual.”

The experience can be brutal. Schmidt argues that graduate schools attempt to break individuals into politically subordinate roles to prepare them for employment, undermining independent thinking. That’s one of the reasons, he argues, that there is a high attrition rate from the country’s graduate schools (over 50%).

Schmidt notes that there is an enormous gap between the opinions of professionals and their professional opinions. The engineer, for example, who believes that corruption is common among politicians will freely offer that opinion, but the political scientist fears saying any such thing. Schmidt provides a great deal of support for this assertion, beginning with the point that Gallup Polls during the Vietnam War consistently

showed that those with the higher levels of formal education were those most likely to support the government’s position about the war. He argues that while there are plenty of liberal professors on campus, they are generally “very conservative on work issues,” especially issues like democratizing the workplace which might question their professional authority.

Schmidt says salaried professionals tend to be “liberal on distant social issues, issues over which they have no authority at work and no influence outside of work.” For many professors at Michigan universities, Dow Chemical is not a distant social issue. Dow is a big benefactor, well known with its name visible throughout the campus. During these difficult times in higher education funding, university administrators actively court Dow. The end effect is that Dow becomes a workplace issue for many academics. To cross Dow under these circumstances is to risk cultivating the animosity of your superiors in the hierarchy.

### **The Importance of Critical Inquiry & Action**

On the 30th anniversary of a Dow recruiting sit-in at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, two veterans reflected on the event in an article published in Madison’s *Capital Times*. Recalling the 5,000 students who were gassed, and 63 who were taken to the hospital, they credited the civil disobedience with “pushing the anti-war movement beyond the campus and into the community.” One of the writers, Paul Soglin would six years later (1973) be elected mayor of Madison. He served six two-year terms, three in the 1970s and another three in the 1990s.

Whereas Brandt argues the Dow sit-ins of the 1960s were misdirected and a failure because corporate recruitment didn’t suffer, Soglin’s reflections are different. The sit-ins

galvanized wider opposition to the war and helped to nourish future political leaders, like himself.

Dissent is fundamental part of the American project. Just as importantly, active dissent is a fundamental part of identity formation against the forces that would socialize citizens to conform and keep quiet. In a 1967 article about the Dow protests, historian Howard Zinn directed some criticism at the universities. "The University's acceptance of Dow Chemical recruiting as just another business transaction is especially disheartening, because it is the University which tells students repeatedly on ceremonial occasions that it hopes students will be more than fact-absorbing automatons, that they will choose humane values, and stand up for them courageously."

### Listening to the Students

A new generation has rediscovered this fundamental truth, and again a focus of dissent is Dow Chemical. On December 3, 2003 Dow faced its first nationwide student protests since the Vietnam War. Students from 25 colleges, universities, and high schools organized protests around the country against Dow Chemical as a part of the first-annual Global Day of Action Against Corporate Crime. Organizers included Students for Bhopal, Association for India's Development chapters, and the Environmental Justice Program of the Sierra Student Coalition (SSC).

Students delivered contaminated water samples from Bhopal to the homes of 11 of Dow's 14 Board members, including the CEO, William Stavropoulos, and former U-M and Princeton President Harold Shapiro. They asked Dow to accept its moral and legal responsibility for the world's worst industrial disaster.

According to Justice for Bhopal, "actions took place in 16 cities across India, including Bhopal, as well as in the Netherlands, UK, Lebanon, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines, China, Denmark, Switzerland, Spain, Bangladesh, Canada, and Italy."

It's time for faculty and salaried professionals at Michigan universities to respond to the lead of these students – and of those citizens struggling

in the Tittabawassee River flood plain – and get involved in studying Dow Chemical's dioxin scandal, as professionals and as citizens. The process will help awaken a broader social awareness of the corporatization of the university and the crisis of democracy.

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## FURTHER LINKS

### Tittabawassee River Flood Plain Contamination, The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

The MDEQ website contains a wealth of straightforward scientific and technical information on the controversy. It is carefully constructed and well presented. Includes maps, photos, and up-to-date information on Dow's compliance with MDEQ regulations as well as advisories, assessments, and community involvement information.

[http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3308\\_21234-43808--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3308_21234-43808--,00.html)

### Tittabawassee River Watch

Developments in mid-Michigan's dioxin story occur almost daily and can be viewed on this excellent site constructed by community activists. The site is a virtual library of archived news, editorials, newspaper articles, court documents, an audio presentation by Dr. Linda Birnbaum, the EPA's world-renowned dioxin expert, and hundreds of other documents, from all points of view.

<http://www.trwnews.net>

### Business & Human Rights Resource Center

This is an independent organization in partnership with Amnesty International Business Groups and some environmentally responsive academic institutions. The site contains up-to-date monitoring information on 1,000 companies and many trade, business, and green publications. The Dow Chemical page details 48 recent Dow stories from across the world.

<http://www.business-humanrights.org/Categories/Companies/Individualcompanies/D/Dow>

### Dow's Union Workers – "The Forgotten Stakeholders"

A Publication of the Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO. 10 pp. April 2003. This well-written study chronicles the 30-year history of Dow's anti-union tactics against craft unions as well as Steelworkers, PACE, Teamsters, and the Canadian Paperworkers.

[http://www.metaltrades.org/Dow\\_Whitepaper.pdf](http://www.metaltrades.org/Dow_Whitepaper.pdf)

### Review of Jeff Schmidt's "Disciplined Minds"

"A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System that Shapes their Lives," published in *Radical Teacher*, No. 62, 2001, pp. 40-43. Reviewed by Brian Martin, internationally respected scholar on whistleblowing.

<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/pubs/01BRrt.html>