

A FUNDING CONFLICT

Benefit trumps anger, worries

Critical responses to the proposal for studies in Western cultures grow in part from a widespread, justifiable anger about the hostile Web site of the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, which posts malicious attacks on UNC professors and courses.

I share this anger, but I believe the faculty should develop this new program; and if a gift is offered, the University should accept a donation from the Pope family to support its implementation.

Although the content of the Western studies program deserves more attention, I will focus on three general criticisms of this proposal:

1. The University should reject this possible donation because the Popes support organizations, such as the Pope Center, that attack core academic values. This argument suggests that UNC

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must consider the criticisms or institutional connections of would-be donors and turn away those who violate our criteria for what is acceptable. In my view, however, the University should not select its students, faculty or donors on the basis of litmus tests for opinions or affiliations.

Universities are now resisting a right-wing campaign that would require departments to consider the political views of potential professors, and this politicizing threat may well grow.

If the monitoring of non-University affiliations becomes part of our own relationship with potential donors, we'll lose much more than the gifts or goodwill of financial supporters. We'll also give up a guiding principle in our opposition to groups that want to bring political assessments into the personnel policies of the University.

2. The process of creating this proposal is "tainted." This criticism implies that an earlier contribution from the Popes skewed the normal procedures for creating new course proposals and academic programs. Yet deans and departments regularly develop academic projects and distinguished professorships that coincide in general ways with the thematic interests of donors.

Private gifts are used to encourage the creation of courses on new subjects, but these funds do not undermine faculty autonomy or shape the specific content of course syllabuses. The faculty planning committee for Western studies did not accept dictates on the program's content, and the donor never intervened in any way.

If faculty review committees approve this new minor, studies in Western cultures would become a program that other donors could also support. I think the program should not remain dependent on a single contributor, but I would also note that donors often re-evaluate academic programs before deciding to renew their financial grants.

3. The concept of Western culture is problematic or celebratory. This criticism raises important intellectual issues that the program seeks to address. The subtitle for the proposed minor, "Exploring the Legacies of Western Traditions," points to a long historical evolution that is far too complex for either blanket condemnation or praise. The curriculum proposal therefore calls for critical engagement with ideas, texts, art and historical events that have shaped diverse societies in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of the world.

Developing a rigorous program to explore these Western legacies would offer new learning opportunities for UNC students, but nobody would be required to participate in this program. Equally important, I believe that neither the faculty nor administrators will compromise the bedrock principles of academic freedom that guide our relations with students, alumni and donors as well as our scholarship and teaching.

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POPE MONEY SPURS COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO TAKE SIDES

A potential donation to UNC-Chapel Hill from the John William Pope Foundation for the development of a Western studies program has ignited controversy in recent weeks.

The foundation might supply \$500,000 a year for five years for a potential minor in Western studies at the University and would decide whether or not to provide another \$12 million after a review of the program, for which a faculty committee has developed a proposal.

But some professors and students have rallied against any such funding. They argue that UNC-CH shouldn't accept the money because of the Pope Foundation's connection to The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a conservative think tank that has criticized University programs.

The Graduate and Professional Student Federation passed a resolution this month condemning Pope funding for numerous reasons, including the Pope Center's contin-

ued criticisms; Student Congress is prepared to review a similar resolution, which might be discussed tonight.

Supporters of the funding proposal have pointed out that the foundation is not synonymous with the center and has been philanthropic toward UNC-CH in the past.

Earlier this year, the foundation donated \$511,500 to N.C. State University's economics department and their political science and public administration departments to develop programs that explore the relationships between economics and politics in free societies.

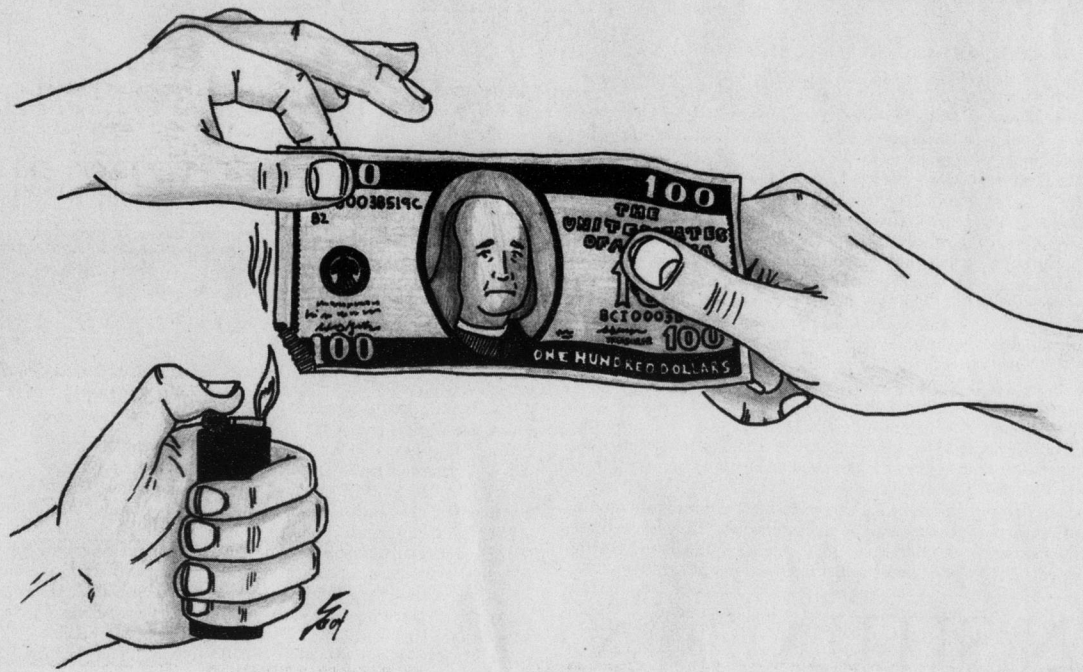
The Popes haven't decided whether or not they'll provide the Western studies funding to UNC-CH.

Is the connection to the Pope Center too much of a conflict? Faculty, students and observers disagree.

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VIEWPOINTS CARTOON



Money drives tainted plan to get Pope funds

The Pope-funded proposal for a Western studies program raises a number of issues that should be discussed widely in the University community. Here I focus on the process involved in this specific proposal, a process that has already put academic freedom at risk.

There is now considerable evidence to show that the idea for this minor is donor-driven rather than faculty-driven. The Pope family made its first installment of the large donation by paying members of the committee to develop the proposal this summer. The first draft of the proposal displayed the Pope family name prominently in the proposal and in some of the named educational activities and opportunities.

Joyce Pope, in her DTH letter to the editor, stated that administrators approached "my father and my grandfather in the hopes of an endowment."

But she goes on to say that her family said they "would consider making a contribution, through our family's charitable foundation, if a proposal for a Western studies program were submitted." The donors were not interested in giving the money outright, but wanted it targeted for a curriculum.

Joyce Pope's words show that the Pope family, not faculty interest or student demand, is the reason behind the choice of a Western studies program.

In fact, the recent curriculum overhaul project recommended no additional courses or programs in Western studies. To the contrary, the report stressed the need to make connections between different parts of the world. The steering committee that coordinated the work of multiple faculty committees recommended only one required course in Western studies for each UNC student due to the large enrollments in existing courses in Western history, culture and society.

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The committee went even further, issuing a caution against promoting a curriculum in such studies. They cited extensive discussion about whether one area of the world should be privileged in this way, given increasing global integration in the 21st century.

The Pope family claims that it has no desire to "gown" and influence a portion of the curriculum. Then why have they chosen to give money tied to an area that faculty have decided needs no funding?

Why have they decided to phase in their donation and make their largest gift contingent on an evaluation of the program four years down the line? Do UNC administrators really believe that an upcoming renewal of such a sizable gift will have no impact on course content, hiring decisions, program activities and the like? Students and faculty are not naive enough to swallow this improbable suggestion.

Art and John William Pope fund the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, which has consistently attacked UNC's courses and professors. Are we really supposed to believe that Art and John William Pope's endowment is not meant as a curricular fix for what the Pope Center mocks?

In sum, UNC administrators are being seduced by the promise of a gift that will expand a program that faculty, after careful study, decided against expanding. It's clear that money, not faculty initiative or student need, is driving this process. If UNC is going to maintain its integrity as an institution of scholarship and higher learning, the curriculum must not be for sale.

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Controversy shows Western ideas at work

The College of Arts and Sciences is putting together a proposal to give students the opportunity to partake in a program on Western civilization. This is welcome news indeed.

Forget the trumped-up concern over any sinister effects of the Pope Foundation potentially funding the program. Most of you, I am confident, realize what a campfire horror story that is. And there, at the end of the grant, was — a hook!

The concern itself, after all, is rooted in values developed within the unfolding evolution of the subject of the proposed program, Western civilization. The study of Western civilization is history making the case for liberty, often through the process of elimination.

Central to this study is conflict — of ideas rather than armies, in battles that continue over generations. Early Greek philosophy, for example, abounds with the struggle to define the nature of the world and what it means to be a person, to live morally, to be a citizen. Christian philosophers such as Aquinas and Augustine entered, asking what it means to be a Christian, who is God, what is the nature of God, et cetera — which all expand dramatically after the Protestant Reformation.

Then Hume, Darwin, Nietzsche and others question the existence of God and explore what life, humanity and the world mean without a deity. And so it continues. For every generation the questions might seem as though answered by consensus, but history shows that seeking and uncertainty persists.

"Western Civilizations" features dramatic debates over the role of the state — in the lives of men, in the lives of rulers and politicians, and within, without, or in comparison to the role of the church. Arguments abound throughout Western history: whether the king is appointed by

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God or beholden to the people; whether the church should be subservient, superior, separate or even protected against any other churches; whether the people have the right to set up their own government (not to mention what form it should take) — when and whether revolution is necessary — whether revolutionary leaders of the people are beholden to the people.

How should society operate? Who has a say? Only the king? Only the church? Only the aristocracy? Some combination? How so? Men? Free men? Landowners? What about women?

Conflicting ideas emerge over the nature and purpose of science and the arts, too — rich histories in their own rights, often commingled with those other debates. The discipline is not, as some fear, the stamp of approval on all things done by dead white males — rather, it is the study of the crucible of ideas that tested and approved our own society's cherished values of democracy, individual liberty (even from the interference of one elite clique or another), the freedoms of speech and belief, and plurality (that is, diversity).

They are the same values from which the Western civilization proposal's critics argue today, apparently without any recognition of their heritage. But in doing so, they demonstrate how compelling those values are, and how they are, indeed, not the sole purview of the dead white men. If the ideas fostered within the Western tradition are aspects of the hope left to Pandora, they have proven as irresistible and irrepressible as the chaos that preceded it. They belong to all.

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Deal would cripple values

For those of you following the debate over whether or not the University should take money from Art and John Pope, you have probably read a lot about the issue of whether or not this collaboration will violate the University's principles of academic freedom.

While I too believe there is potential for this money to act to tie the hands of academic freedom, I also believe that there is another argument underlying this one that needs our attention.

The real issue here is: Do we want to align ourselves with the politics of the Popes and their organizations?

I thought it was funny that the Pope Center referred to the people pushing for the academic freedom argument as campus "radicals."

To me, these "radicals" seem rather civil, and their arguments

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far more subdued than what "radicals" might normally do or say in such a situation.

So, to both the radicals and the Popes, along with the rest of our University community, I would like to push this debate to the next level.

In the past, the Popes have not exactly given our University stellar reviews.

For those of you involved in Latino Studies, you may be interested to know that the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy finds your interests illegitimate, as evidenced by their questioning "is it even true that there is a 'Latina/o' culture to understand?"

Women's Studies classes have also been scoffed at, both here at UNC and at Duke University.

In fact, the whole UNC campus is really not doing so hot in the Popes' eyes.

The cultural diversity requirement has been dismissed as a collection of "evangelistic" courses with "overt political content, rabid infatuation with pop culture or sexuality, and abject silliness."

I'm not sure how the rest of you feel, but I certainly don't appreciate having my fellow students' programs and affiliations degraded in such a way.

Before we invite the Popes to sponsor potential changes to our school, we might want to think a little deeper about why they want to make these changes.

For example, what does it indicate when an organization pooh-poohs classes dedicated to exploring racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism?

What politics do the people who run these organizations hold dear if they believe a cultural sensitivity component is unnecessary, or detrimental to, the development of our students?

If you were a student of color, a woman or a member of the LGBT community, what do you think these people would think of you if they met you on the street?

Think about your answers to these questions, and then answer this:

Are these organizations and these people the type you want to be involved in your development?

The Popes make the argument that this grant will not affect academic freedom at this school in terms of outside control over curriculum.

That might, indeed, turn out to be true, depending on the details of the grant.

However, for the Popes and their organizations to claim that their politics will not influence our school or how we are perceived by the outside world is a seriously misinformed view.

Politics are not divorced from education, nor will they be in the near future.

Should our University be married to the politics of the Pope family?

In my opinion, absolutely not.

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