



Benson Center for the Study
of Western Civilization
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

Board of Advisors Spring 2024 Agenda

April 18, 2024

10:30 – 1:00 p.m.

Flatirons Room (C4C building) or over Zoom

Board members in attendance: Bruce Benson, Michael Dino, Brian Domitrovic, Jennifer Schubert-Akin, Tina Snider, Ted Trimpa,

Absent: David Grohne, David Hoover, David Pyle, Kevin Reidy

Others in attendance: Marcy Benson, Daniel Jacobson, Cheryl Kisling, Glen Krutz, Alexandra Roberts, AJ Shively, Justin Tosi, Brandon Warmke

10:30 am: BOA Chair begins the meeting with opening remarks.

- Tina thanks the Bensons for their vision and the creation of the Center.
- Tina thanks Daniel Jacobson and supporting staff members for their efforts.
- Tina thanks Cheryl Kisling for her work with donors and ensuring the vision of the Bensons for the Center is fulfilled.
- Tina thanks board members for their time and talents at the Benson Center.
- Tina has been speaking with other centers like the Benson Center and we are a leader in the nation; other Centers are stealing our talent, which speaks volumes about the people who are here at the Center.

Center Director introduces Brandon Warmke, who provides remarks on his experience as the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy (VSCTP).

- Brandon thanks the board and shares he's had a rewarding and fun year at the Center.
- Brandon taught two courses, both cross-listed with the Philosophy Department. One is a graduate seminar on ethics, and the other was an undergraduate class called, "Three Ideologies," which tried to understand liberalism, conservatism, and socialism. The undergraduate class had a waitlist and included three auditors.
- Brandon spent the year researching and working on a book. He gave about ten talks, including a talk at the rotary club and at the Airforce Academy.
- University of Florida Hamilton Center talk turned into a job offer at the University of Florida. Brandon credits his role at the Center with strengthening his application for the new role.
- Brandon organized the Chris Rufo and Yoram Hazony event, which were well attended.

Director Daniel Jacobson provides program updates and new initiatives.

- Daniel introduces Justin Tosi, the Roubos Sabbatical Scholar for spring 2024. Justin is a vet of the Heterodox Academy and was a post-doc under Daniel. Justin accepted a position at Georgetown University of Business School.
- Daniel announces changes in campus leadership: Justin Schwartz is the new Chancellor; Dean Krutz resigned from Dean of A&S; David Carpenter resigned from Advancement; Alex Priou (faculty fellow) will join University of Austin, which is a new College/Institution with an emphasis on classical education; Matt Burgess is leaving to the University of Wyoming, which will be a huge blow for the Center, as Matt is willing to speak his mind civilly and directly.
- Taylor Jaworski was made an offer by Chapman University, but will be staying at CU and remain as Associate Faculty Director.
- Patrick Deneen from Notre Dame will be the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy (VSCTP) next year. He is a champion of common-good conservatism. It's important that the Center not have a party line; the Center is dedicated to heterodox and underrepresented views, and we want individuals with scholarly reputations that we respect.
- Two sabbatical scholars will come for AY 2024-25: Matthew Nagler from CUNY and James Strausser from Hillsdale.
- We have an offer out to an instructor, who will help team teach the survey course with Daniel in AY 2024-25. The role will also help manage the undergraduate fellows program.
- The undergrad fellows program continues to be a huge success; we had close to 600 applications this year. We hope this will help drive enrollment up in VSCTP courses over time. The goal next year is to develop the undergrad community and increase participation in our events and courses.
- The Benson Center was scheduled to be reauthorized this year, but this has not happened. All center reauthorizations have been postponed until next academic year. The Center is not being singled out for delay.
- The Center's focus on events has shifted to fewer events, with a focus on higher profile speakers. The Center wants to expand to include other figures, not just academics. We have had Scott Atlas, Chris Rufo, Yoram Hazony, and Konstantin Kisin tonight. These events have been well attended, and feedback from guests is that the speakers have been relevant and interesting. It also means that we have a higher speaking fee budget.

Daniel Jacobson proposes a new board of advisors member: Kelly Brough.

- Kelly Brough is a friend of Ted Trimpa's. She is a democrat, though this is not what defines her.
- Her CV and background are reviewed and discussed. She worked for the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce from 2009 – 2021. She was a fair advocate in the business community.
- Daniel moves to vote to have Kelly on the board of advisors. Tina Snider seconds. A vote is held: 6 yes; 0 no; 0 abstain.
- Daniel will make the suggestion to the Chancellor.

Alexandra Roberts presents fundraising updates and budget overview.

- Alexandra presents the budget, explaining the operational fund and endowment differences. A brief overview of gift funds is provided, including the VSCTP-only funds.
- Discussion around strategy for use of funds is had; for example, incorporating the VSCTP into events so those funds can be expensed.
- Alexandra discusses the social media strategy of the Center over the last year. Focus was to use social media to “tell a story” of the Benson Center. We hired a student intern this year to solely focus on social media and engagement.
- A new social media program was launched – “the Scholar’s Seat.” It includes short videos of visiting scholars to introduce them to the public, explain their affiliation with the Center, and why they became interested in the mission of the Center.
- Tina mentions that she’s talked to a PR firm in NYC, who reviewed the Benson Center social media accounts and complimented the Center on its presence.

AJ Shively presents on Events and social media outreach.

- AJ presented the events from academic year 2023-24, with a special note that the larger speakers (with larger fees) resulted in larger audiences, especially with students.
- A question of if the Center was contacted by folks to complain about the Rufo event; Daniel shared some criticisms the Center received about the Rufo event.
- A question of if the Center can require students to attend Center events was made; Daniel explains the attempted growth in the undergrad fellows program is a way we are trying to increase student participation in events. Faculty can offer extra credit on a case-by-case basis, but it cant be institutionalized by the College or university. A discussion around requiring students to attend potentially controversial events was had.
- AJ presented the social media analytic numbers; social media engagement continues to grow but could be stronger.
- The podcast audience continues to reach a broad range of people, and is the largest to date.
- AJ is working with an intern to create “bite sized” clips of the events to post on social media, to help drive up engagement.
- CU will roll out a new website platform; AJ hopes the change will help make our website more navigable and fresh.

Items not on the agenda are discussed.

- Discussions about how to interact with Advancement now that David is gone is had.
- Discussion around members of the executive committee is had; it is noted we are missing someone from political science and/or public policy. Conversations about faculty participation in Center governance is had. Daniel explains outreach steps affiliates of the Center have taken to try to repair and build relationships across campus.
- Brian Domitrovic discusses his experience as VSCTP before the controversies at the Center over the last few years; Brian had an “excellent” relationship with the History Department. It

seems the momentum we had with building relationships on campus has stopped, and the natural curiosity of those departments seem to be leaning the way of integration.

- Daniel discusses working with Dean Krutz's office to help build inroads in the PSCI department, hiring scholars like Katie and Jennifer with the added benefit that they were both "natural ambassadors" for the Center, and building individual relationships with individual faculty. A suggestion is made to create a "relationship map" to identify "target departments" to help build those relationships strategically.
- Discussion around the Center building relationships with the Presidents Leadership Class is had. Mike Dino has a family member who is part of the department; he will try to help build that relationship.
- Discussions around Colorado politics and how it relates to the Center is had; for example, several approaches to bills this year had almost identical bills presented by Republicans and Democrats. Arguably, the republican bills contain better policy, but the democratic bills are ultimately pushed through – why? Unaffiliated voters are a huge population of the Colorado electorate – why? It seems these can be good basis of discussions and conversations at the Center. The Center has focused on people-oriented events; it would be nice to host topic-oriented issues as well.
- The Center is growing; we need to clearly define the division of labor so we can continue to be successful. We can be stronger in engaging in PR and opportunities for op-eds. When we get good hits on the Center, we need to send them to the greater community, the BOA, etc. We need to engage Regents, Todd Saliman's office, etc. It's a critical time to do this. Dean Krutz and Daniel agree it's not traditional for academics to reach out to Regents specifically; a discussion on how board members can do this for us is had.
- A discussion was had around the fact that the Center does not receive funds from the university; this is a strength for the Center, as we're not publicly funded. This is an essential part of our identity, and we should emphasize that as part of our make-up.