



BENSON CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2023–24



Benson Center for the Study
of Western Civilization

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| About the Center | 5 |
| Letter from the Director | 6 |
| 2023–24 Center Fellows | 8 |
| Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy | 10 |
| Sabbatical Fellows | 12 |
| Faculty Fellows | 14 |
| Harper Graduate Fellow | 18 |
| Outreach and Events | 20 |
| Conservative Thought and Policy Guest Speakers | 22 |
| Benson Center Speaker Series | 25 |
| Western Civilization Dialogue Series | 27 |
| Benson Center Undergraduate Events | 30 |
| Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy | 33 |
| The Free Mind Podcast | 34 |
| Undergraduate Fellows Program | 36 |
| Student & Faculty Grants | 42 |
| Center Data and Public Engagement | 46 |
| Social Media Analytics | 48 |
| Expenses/Course Data | 49 |
| Faculty, Staff, Interns | 50 |



ABOUT THE CENTER

The University of Colorado Boulder established the Center for Western Civilization in 2006 to promote the study of Western values and traditions. In 2013, the University created the Conservative Thought and Policy Visiting Scholar Program to promote intellectual diversity on campus. The two programs were merged in 2014. The center was renamed the Bruce D. Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization in 2019, to honor the University of Colorado President Emeritus for his advocacy and support.

The Benson Center promotes study of the intellectual, artistic and political traditions that characterize Western civilization. Central to this mission is our commitment to fostering dialogue about fundamental values and controversial questions. The Center provides a forum for free inquiry and open debate, and it promotes academic freedom and intellectual diversity on campus in a time of increasing political polarization and homogeneity.

The Center supports research that explores the ideas emerging from historically Western traditions and traces their continued influence. It focuses particularly on their role in establishing the foundational ideals and institutions of the United States. The Center promotes balanced discourse that engages both liberal and conservative viewpoints, in order to maintain a wide range of political, economic and philosophical perspectives at CU Boulder.

The Center is committed to intellectual rigor and the highest academic standards. It seeks to provide a premier academic venue for the study of our nation's political and cultural traditions. Its focus on the values of political and economic freedom, moral and legal equality, and individual liberty and responsibility offers students, scholars, and residents of Colorado the opportunity to study ideals that have shaped fundamental aspects of the American intellectual heritage.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Recent events on college campuses highlight the critical role played by the Benson Center. The lack of intellectual and political diversity among university faculty and administrators, already obvious to those paying attention, has become impossible to ignore. Several states have now launched initiatives designed to combat the politicization and radicalization of academia, especially at public universities. The Benson Center's mission places us at the forefront of the movement to restore trust and accountability to higher education. The Center is rapidly expanding, and we're implementing new programs to take advantage of increased demand for a return to classical education, recovery of the pursuit of knowledge over activism, and respect for the value of diversity of opinion.

This year marked the debut of our undergraduate fellowship program, which has already been extremely successful and promises to become a central part of the Center's mission. The Benson Center fellowships provide \$3000 per year toward tuition for undergraduates interested in our programing and aligned with our mission. Undergraduate fellows are expected to actively engage with the Center by attending our events and enrolling in our courses. Those who meet expectations are eligible to be Benson fellows throughout their undergraduate career at CU.

We planned on a soft launch of the program this year but were surprised and delighted to get 250 applicants for the program—most of whom were extremely well qualified. We awarded 22 fellowships in the fall and added 12 for the spring term. Our second call for the fellowships, at the end of the academic year, received almost 600 applicants, and we awarded 51 fellowships for 2024-25. This is an extremely competitive program, and we've had to turn down many qualified applicants. We hope for an even larger cohort of fellows in the future.

The undergraduate fellowship program has several ambitions. First, this is a way to reach undergraduates directly, without having to circumvent gatekeepers indifferent or hostile to our mission. Our attendance requirements are designed to increase undergraduate attendance by rewarding participation in our events. We hope to increase enrollment in Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy (VSCTP) courses and other Benson Center courses through this program.

Second, this academic year will see the launch of our new survey course in the canon of Western moral and political thought, "The Western Tradition." This is a team-taught, year-long survey of some of the great books and ideas of this tradition, with a special emphasis on the ideas and debates that inspired the Founders' vision of America. The course will be the cornerstone of our revived Certificate in Western Civilization, which has been dormant for years.

We have hired an Associate Teaching Professor, Joseph Porter, to team-teach this course with me. Joseph comes to us from the Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University, where he won awards for his undergraduate teaching and mentorship. I am excited to be working with Joseph on curricular development this summer, and to be debuting the course with him in the upcoming year. There has been a surge of interest in classical education, which focuses on great books and the study of primary texts. The Benson Center is well positioned to develop such a program at CU.

Our long-term ambition is to grow the certificate program into a minor and, ultimately, a major—which would have the additional benefit of allowing us to hire tenure-track faculty at the Center. This will help us address the great challenge posed by the underrepresentation of conservative and libertarian voices in academia, and specifically at CU.

This year was an especially exciting and productive one for the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy. Prof. Todd Zywicki held the VSCTP in the Fall Term 2023, and he was a superb and energetic presence at the Center. Todd is a leading figure in the law and economics movement, an important strand of the broader conservative legal movement. Todd organized a speaker series featuring Nobel laureate economist Vernon Smith; Wall Street Journal editorial editor Kimberly Strassel; ex-Levi's executive turned women's sports advocate Jennifer Sey; and Scott Atlas of the Hoover Institution, scholar of public health and leading COVID policy critic.



Prof. Brandon Warmke was with the Center all year, as sabbatical fellow in the fall and VSCTP in the spring. Brandon spent the year working on an important new book, *Conservatism: The Basics*, for Routledge Press. In his role as VSCTP, Brandon invited several exciting speakers to CU, including Christopher Rufo, leading activist and critic of higher education; and president of the Edmund Burke society, Yoram Hazony. Rufo's critique of DEI policies at public universities and Hazony's defense of Israeli nationalism were especially timely and important. Such events simply would not occur if it weren't for the Benson Center and its commitment to intellectual diversity and academic rigor.

As a Sabbatical Fellow in the fall, Brandon taught two courses in the philosophy department: PHIL 3200: Social and Political Philosophy and PHIL 6100: Seminar in Ethics. In the spring, we were joined by his coauthor, Justin Tosi, who was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center. I'm delighted to report that Brandon has been hired by the Hamilton Center at the University of Florida, and Justin by the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. These are significant positions, and we are proud that our alums are populating other centers of classical education and heterodox thought across the country.

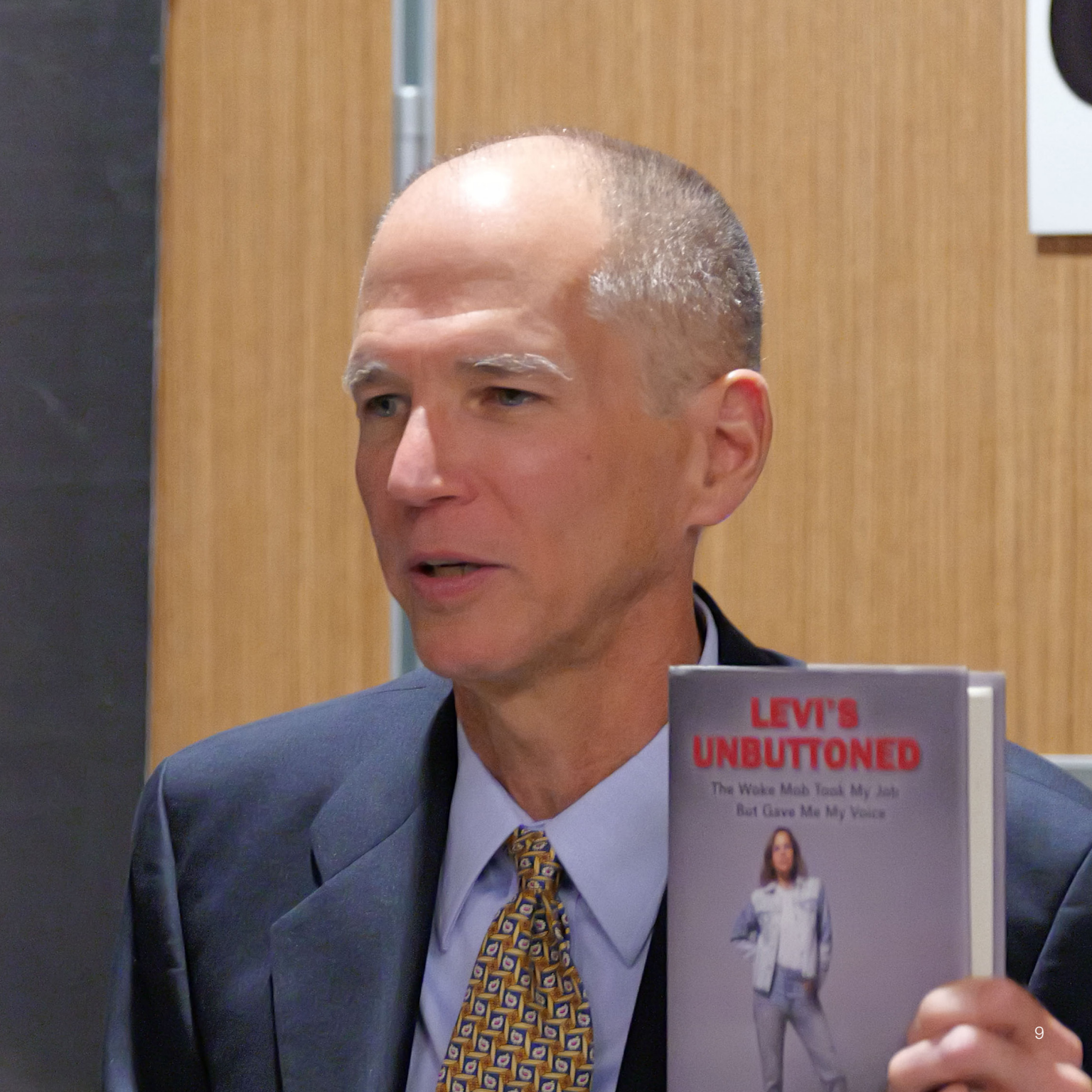
These results are reflected by the successes of participants in the Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy, which now operates under the auspices of the Benson Center. I have organized five annual workshops, most recently this April in Boulder. In addition to Brandon and Justin, several other regular participants have recently found academic positions and promotions. These include Joseph Porter, the Center's new Teaching Professor; and David McPherson, previously a Sabbatical Fellow at the Center who has also been hired into a tenured position at the Hamilton Center. Additionally, Alex Priou, former faculty fellow at the Center, has been hired by the University of Austin.

In the coming years, we are looking to expand this success from philosophy to other fields by running similar programs that promote heterodox thinking and aspire to move junior scholars through the academic ranks. We also aim to expand our undergraduate curriculum into economics and literature. The Benson Center is poised to take advantage of recent developments in higher education that aim to restore classical education and rectify the lack of intellectual and political diversity on campus.

2023–24

Center Fellows

Fundamental to the Benson Center's mission is to bring a diversity of voices to the University of Colorado Boulder campus. Toward this end, this year the Center hosted its eleventh and twelfth Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy, three Visiting Fellows, eight CU Faculty Fellows and one Graduate Fellow. These scholars work in fields connected to the study of Western civilization, originate and participate in events and programming, taught courses, and supported the undergraduate fellows program. Benson Center faculty and fellows demonstrate an enthusiasm for fostering intellectual diversity and dialogue, both on campus and in the broader community.



Fall 2023 Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy

Todd Zywicki

Todd J. Zywicki is George Mason University Foundation Professor of Law at Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University and Research Fellow of the George Mason Law and Economics Center. From 2020-21, he was Chair of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Taskforce on Federal Consumer Financial Law. He served as the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy at the Bruce D. Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization in the fall 2023 semester.

Professor Zywicki is the author of more than 130 articles in leading law reviews and peer-reviewed economics journals. He is one of the Top 10 most-cited law professors in the field of Commercial Law and one of the Top 25 law professors on Twitter as measured by engagement levels. He is one of the Top 50 Most Downloaded Law Authors at the Social Science Research Network. He has testified multiple times before Congress on issues of consumer bankruptcy law and consumer credit and is a frequent commentator on legal issues in the print and broadcast media, including the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, The Washington Post, The Washington Times, Nightline, The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Neil Cavuto Show, Fox & Friends, Smerconish, Fox News @ Night with Shannon Bream, Fox Business, CNN, CNBC, Bloomberg News, BBC, The Diane Rehm Show, Lou Dobbs Show, Jerry Doyle Show, and The Laura Ingraham Show.

In fall 2023, Professor Zywicki taught “Hayek and His Critics” to eight students and “Rule of Law” to ten students. He hosted four events: Vernon Smith, Kimberley Strassel, Jennifer Sey, and Scott Atlas to a total of 426 live attendees.



The Benson Center and the University of Colorado Boulder are distinguishing themselves and staking out a claim as leaders in higher education in terms of how a school, a student body, an administration, and a community can promote intellectual diversity and civil discourse, and have a robust exchange of ideas in a positive way.

– Todd Zywicki

Spring 2024 Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy

Brandon Warmke

Brandon Warmke is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bowling Green State University. He has published widely in moral, social, and political philosophy, including papers on public discourse, forgiveness, free will and moral responsibility, virtue ethics, social morality, and conservatism. With Justin Tosi, he is the author of *Grandstanding: The Use and Abuse of Moral Talk* (Oxford, 2020) and *Why It's OK to Mind Your Own Business* (Routledge, 2023). He also co-edited *Forgiveness and Its Moral Dimensions* (Oxford, 2021). He is currently writing a book on conservative political philosophy. He has written for CNN and MarketWatch, and his work has been featured by The Atlantic, New York Times Magazine, HuffPost, Scientific American, Forbes, Vox, Commentary Magazine, and The Guardian.

In fall 2023, Professor Warmke was a Benson Center Sabbatical Fellow. In spring 2024, Professor Warmke taught “Social and Political Philosophy” to 29 students, and “Seminar in Ethics” to six students. He hosted two events: Christopher Rufo and Yoram Hazony to a total of 552 live attendees.



My advice to students is this: Read.
Read widely. Read lots of things that
you disagree with. Read those things
not to evaluate them, not to criticize
them, but to understand them

– **Brandon Warmke**

2023–24 Sabbatical Fellows

Kathryn E. Davis

Kathryn E. Davis was the Roubos Sabbatical Fellow for the 2023 calendar year.

Kathryn E. Davis (PhD, University of Dallas) is an Associate Professor of English and Co-Director of the Classical Education in Rome Summer Program at the University of Dallas (UD). She was named the 2022 Haggar Fellow, an honor awarded annually to a junior faculty member nominated by faculty colleagues for excellence in teaching. She is a member of the editorial board for *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, and several of her articles have been published in *Persuasions* and *Persuasions On-Line*. Her monograph, *Liberty in Jane Austen's Persuasion*, was published by Lehigh University Press in 2017. She has a secondary area of interest in Dante studies; her recent article, "'Stupor non meno': What Virgil Saw" appears in *Renascence*. In the summertime she can often be found teaching high school, university, and graduate students on the UD Rome Campus.



Sometimes putting a lens on a text is an excuse for making it into something that you can approve of or find acceptable, 'maybe there is something about a text is something that I don't want to be true.' Then you are going to find a way to excuse it, or find a work around, or a different way to interpret it so that it fits you, and how you think, and how you identify, and I think that is a wasted opportunity. That approach to literature means that you are not letting yourself be challenged by a text

– Kathryn Davis

Justin Tosi

Justin Tosi was the Roubos Sabbatical Fellow for the spring 2024 calendar year.

Justin Tosi is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Texas Tech University. He specializes in social, political, moral, and legal philosophy, and writes mainly about the ethics of public discourse, state legitimacy, special obligations, and social morality. His work has appeared in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, *Legal Theory*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, and other venues. With Brandon Warmke, he is the author of *Grandstanding: The Use and Abuse of Moral Talk* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and *Why It's OK to Mind Your Own Business* (Routledge, 2023).



**The Benson Center is doing something
that should not be special at a university,
but is: providing a home for truly open
inquiry, where everyone from senior
scholars to students to community
members can seek the truth together. It is
a credit to CU Boulder that it allows the
Center to do its work, and it was an honor
for me to be a part of it even for an all too
brief semester.**

– Justin Tosi

2023-24 Faculty Fellows



Eric Alston

Eric Alston is a Scholar in Residence in the Finance Division and the Faculty Director of the Hernando de Soto Capital Markets Program in the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado Boulder. He also serves as a Research Associate with the Comparative Constitutions Project. Alston received his MA in Economics from the University of Maryland and his JD from the University of Chicago. His research and teaching is centered in the fields of law and economics and institutional and organizational analysis, the conceptual and methodological toolkits of which he applies to questions in the development of rights along frontiers, the design and implementation of constitutions, and digital governance challenges with an emphasis on cryptocurrencies and blockchain networks.



Matthew Burgess

Matthew Burgess is an assistant professor in the Environmental Studies Program, a faculty affiliate in Economics, a fellow at the Cooperative Institute in Environmental Sciences (CIRES), where he directs the Center for Social and Environmental Futures. His research interests are economic growth futures and their environmental impacts, natural resource management and conservation, mathematical modeling of human-environment systems, and political polarization of environmental issues. Burgess has worked extensively on promoting intellectual diversity and dialog on campus, including organizing the CU Reducing Polarization Dialog series, co-chairing CU Boulder's Heterodox Academy Campus Community, serving as a CU Boulder Faculty Fellow for Higher Education and Democracy, and developing a course (ENVS 3555) that centers these ideals in an environmental context. He received a 2020 Heterodox Academy Open Inquiry Award for teaching. Burgess has a BSc from the University of Toronto and a PhD from the University of Minnesota. As a faculty fellow, Burgess hosts the Free Mind podcast and programs around reducing polarization of climate change and environmental issues.



Paul Diduch

Paul Diduch is an instructor in the Herbst Program for Engineering, Ethics & Society and directs the Herbst Certificate for Engineering, Ethics & Society and the Herbst “Culture Wars in Rome” study abroad program at CU Boulder. Diduch considers himself first and primarily a scholar of ancient philosophy, mainly Platonic philosophy, and secondarily a student, teacher, and researcher of the history and philosophy of science, with special emphasis on the cultural and political implications of technology. Diduch has an MA in Political Science/Political Theory from the University of Alberta and a PhD from the Institute of Philosophic Studies at the University of Dallas. Diduch commented, “I think it is especially important for students to see the virtues of liberal debate, intellectual charity, and genuine freedom of thought reflected in [Benson Center] public forums.”



Iskra Fileva

Iskra Fileva is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and an Associate Director of the Center for Values and Social Policy at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Fileva specializes on issues in moral psychology, aesthetics, and epistemology. She has written on a variety of topics including character, free will, moral disgust, and moral testimony.

Fileva also does work for a broad audience. She is the author of two prize-winning essays published in The New York Times, and she regularly writes for Psychology Today.

2023-24 Faculty Fellows



Alex Priou

Alex Priou is Teaching Assistant Professor in the Herbst Program for Engineering, Ethics, and Society at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interests are in the history of political philosophy, with a specialization in Plato and the Pre-Socratic poets and philosophers. He's the author of three books: *Becoming Socrates: Political Philosophy in Plato's Parmenides* (2018), *Defending Socrates: Political Philosophy Before the Tribunal of Science* (2023), and *Musings on Plato's Symposium* (2023). In addition, he has published a wide range of essays in academic journals and edited volumes, in addition to editing a volume of essays by his former teacher, Laurence Berns, under the title *Politics, Nature, and Piety: On the Natural Basis of Political Life* (2022). Lastly, he writes occasionally for a broader audience and is the co-host of a podcast, *The New Thinkery*, with his two close friends, Greg McBrayer and David Bahr.



Zachary Herz

Zach Herz is an Imperial historian whose work explores the intersections of law, politics, and culture in Roman thought. As a trained attorney and Classicist (J.D. Yale, 2014; Ph.D. Columbia, 2018), Prof. Herz is particularly interested in how Romans used the intellectual structures of law or of the 'rule of law' to better understand their own world. He has written on the role of law in imperial representation of the third century C.E., and on the reception of Classical antiquity in contemporary American litigation. Prof. Herz also writes regularly on queer theory and queer history, especially on how gender informs the Principate; he has published on *cinaedi* in Juvenal and in biographies of the emperor Elagabalus. His first monograph, *The God and the Bureaucrat: Roman Law, Imperial Sovereignty, and Other Stories*, is currently under review and considers how 'Roman Law' came to be understood as bureaucratic and impersonal despite the very different political circumstances under which it was produced.



Núria Silleras-Fernández

Núria Silleras-Fernández is Associate Professor at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese of the University of Colorado Boulder and affiliated faculty in the Humanities program. Her research focuses on Medieval and Early Modern Iberian, Mediterranean, and European Studies, cultural and intellectual history, gender, literature, religion, power, emotions, and translation. She is the author of three scholarly books: *Power, Piety, and Patronage in Late Medieval Queenship. Maria de Luna* (Palgrave: 2008), and the award-winning *Chariots of Ladies: Francesc Eiximenis and the Court Culture of Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Cornell: 2015), and *The Politics of Emotion: Love, Grief, and Madness in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Cornell: 2024).



Benjamin Teitelbaum

Benjamin Teitelbaum is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and International Affairs. For over a decade, he has worked as an ethnographer of European reactionary intellectualism and rightwing expressive culture. Teitelbaum says, “Having long rejected standard imperatives to research these topics as an activist, I have come to value with heightened urgency principles for which the Benson Center is a primary ambassador on campus, namely, free speech and free inquiry.”

Harper Graduate Fellow



Idowu Odeyemi

Idowu Odeyemi is a philosophy Ph.D. student and an alumnus of the Open Student Workshop on Global Priorities Research at Oxford University. His research centers on social and political philosophy, moral philosophy, and applied epistemology. As a June Harper Ph.D. Fellow, Idowu's research would seek to investigate two topics: First, whether effectiveness conflicts with reparation or if the former overrides the latter and vice versa. This topic bites into a deeper question that his intended research would try to answer: Are there reasons other than efficiency to prioritize some issues rather than others? Secondly, does reparative justice, in fact, require paying reparations to people who have never actually been slaves?




One of the things I learned as a Fellow in the Benson Center is to approach dialogues in a more open-minded way, in such a way that we don't neglect some voices just because we disagree with them.

– Idowu Odeyemi



In Defense of Israeli Nationalism
February 28, 2024



Yoram Hazony

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



In Defense of Israeli Nationalism
February 28, 2024



Yoram Hazony

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



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

COLORADO LAW
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Outreach & Events

Central to the Benson Center's mission is a commitment to fostering dialogue about fundamental values, asking controversial questions, and providing a forum for free inquiry and open debate. The Center promotes balanced discourse that engages both liberal and conservative viewpoints to provide access to a wide range of political, economic and philosophical perspectives at CU Boulder.

During the 2023–24 academic year, the Center hosted 32 events including one panel discussion, one live podcast featured at the Conference on World Affairs (CWA), 13 student focused conversations, and seven guest lectures. Events explored topics like trust after COVID, Israeli Nationalism, Jane Austen, Patriotism, and AI. In total, 1,751 people participated either in-person or virtually, including 288 students. Recordings of the events continue to be posted on the Center's YouTube channel, which encourages outreach to expand beyond the CU and Colorado communities.



Center for the
Eastern Civ
SITY OF COLOR



Conservative Thought and Policy Guest Speakers

The Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy (VSCTP) invites guests throughout the academic year to give public lectures on campus with the goal of increasing intellectual diversity on campus. In 2023-24, the Center sponsored six VSCTP guest speakers and attracted an audience of 978 individuals



Vernon L. Smith: Adam Smith's Theory of Society
Sept. 6, 2023 | *Attendance: 99*

In this lecture, Smith presented Adam Smith's theory of society, which summarized many predictive propositions. Society is the emergent creation of ordinary people who make, follow, and adapt to changing circumstances, and bottom-up fair-play rules based on self-command.

Featuring:

Vernon L. Smith, Noble memorial prize in economic sciences recipient



Kimberley A. Strassel: The Biden Malaise
Oct. 4, 2023 | *Attendance: 124*

In this lecture, Strassel discussed the question: Can America come back from Joe Biden's repeat of the Jimmy Carter years?

Featuring:

Kimberly Strassel, member of the editorial board for The Wall Street Journal, Bradley Prize recipient



Jennifer Sey: Courageous Corporate Leadership
Oct. 18, 2023 | Attendance: 65

In this lecture, Sey explored leadership in corporate America. Sey believes it's long past time for true leaders to take the helm in corporate America, and get back to business with a focus on product excellence, financial discipline and actual inclusion.

Featuring:

Jennifer Sey, American author, filmmaker, ex-CMO of Levi's, and retired artistic gymnast



Scott Atlas: Restoring Trust After COVID
Nov. 15, 2023 | Attendance: 138

In this lecture, Atlas reviewed what was known since the early days of the pandemic, the results of the failed management under two administrations, and the lessons learned to prevent this from happening again. Science, academia, and public health are now in Crisis. They have been exposed during the pandemic as lacking critical thinking, overtly blocking the free exchange of ideas on campus, and eroding our moral and ethical compass. These failures are so pervasive that we have rightfully lost trust in most of our institutions and leaders, which is essential to the function of any diverse, heterogeneous society. And today, the free exchange of ideas, essential to finding truth and fundamental to any democracy and truly free society, is increasingly under threat.

Featuring:

Scott Atlas, MD Robert Wesson Senior Fellow in health policy at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University



Christopher Rufo: Laying Siege to the Institutions
Jan. 17, 2024 | *Attendance: 379*

In this lecture, Rufo explored how the long march through our institutions, beginning a half-century ago, has now proved largely successful. Over the past three years, Rufo looked at the federal bureaucracy, the universities, K-12 schools, and big corporations. What he's found is that the revolutionary ideas of the '60s have been repackaged, repurposed, and injected into American life at the institutional level. Even those of us who are temperamentally predisposed to defense must recognize that offense—laying siege to the institutions—is what is now demanded.

Featuring:

Christopher Rufo, senior fellow and director of the initiative on critical race theory at the Manhattan Institute, contributing editor of City Journal, filmmaker



Yoram Hazony: In Defense of Israeli Nationalism
Feb. 28, 2024 | *Attendance: 173*

With all eyes on Israel as it battles Hamas in the aftermath of the horrific October 7th massacres on its southern border, political theorist and Bible scholar Dr. Yoram Hazony offered a defense of Israeli nationalism, discussing its historical origins and philosophical underpinnings and what it can contribute to a better political order.

Featuring:

Yoram Hazony, Israeli philosopher, political theorist, author

Benson Center Speaker Series

The Center's Speaker Series hosted a wide array of events this year, including a debate on AI with the Steamboat Institute, a discussion on patriotism with Konstantin Kissin, and a live podcast on bridging divides featured at the Conference on World Affairs (CWA). In 2023-24, the Benson Center Speaker Series sponsored or co-sponsored three events and attracted an audience of 280 individuals.



Does AI pose a threat to our democracy?
April. 9, 2024 | *Attendance: 145*

The Steamboat Institute, in partnership with the Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization, is proud to present a compelling debate on the following resolution: Be it resolved, AI poses a threat to our democracy.

Featuring:

Katie Pavlich, Editor, Townhall.com

Brent Orrell, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
Hadley Heath Manning, Moderator



Bridging Divides while Challenging Narratives
April. 12, 2024 | *Attendance: 51*

A live podcast discussion of the controversial issues Americans don't know how to talk about, and why we don't know how to talk about them.

The Politically Correcting podcast hosts Jose Peo and Lavelle Lewis joined CU Boulder's Free Mind podcast host Matt Burgess in a unique platform highlighting the importance of civil discourse.

A Democrat, a Republican, and a Canadian walk into a bar... we'll let you guess who is who.

Featuring:

Jose Peo and Lavelle Lewis, hosts of the Politically Correcting podcast

Matt Burgess, host of CU Boulder's Free Mind podcast



Konstantin Kisin: Importance of Patriotism and Western Self-Belief

April 18, 2024 | *Attendance: 84*

In this event Konstantin Kisin participated in a panel discussion on the topic: What is the role of patriotism in solving society's big problems? Panelists included Konstantin Kisin and Chris Barnard (President of the American Conservation Coalition), and was moderated by Benson Center Faculty Fellow Matthew Burgess.

Featuring:

Konstantin Kisin, writer, social commentator, co-host of TRIGGERnometry and comedian

Western Civilization Dialogue Series

In 2023-24, the Western Civilization Dialogue Series sponsored or co-sponsored six events and attracted an audience of 378 individuals



Carol M. Swain: What my life has taught me about the unintended consequences of identity politics
Nov. 28, 2023 | *Attendance: 42*

This presentation included an overview of Dr. Swain's major publications. It started with her early life and ended with where she is today intellectually and spiritually. It did not proselytize.

Featuring:

Carol M. Swain, cable news contributor, prominent national speaker, and best-selling author



Patrick Deneen: Forbidden Knowledge: Technology, the Liberal Arts, and the Future of Humanity
Dec. 11, 2023 | *Attendance: 43*

In this lecture, Patrick Deneen will explore the question of whether one of humanity's oldest "technologies" - the liberal arts - have anything new to teach and even guide us as we enter a new and potential imperiling era of technological development.

Featuring:

Patrick Deneen, Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame



Stan Husi: The Ill Humor of the Humor Guard

Jan. 23, 2024 | *Attendance: 32*

Stan Husi wishes to understand what went wrong with the recent moral panic we witnessed: Particularly, what is the role, if any, deeper moral dynamics play in generating what he calls Puritan excesses. Husi's core thesis is that those excesses are not entirely a fluke, not entirely exogenous, but somewhat endogenous, to more common moral dynamics. To make it concrete, Husi focused on moralizing humor as a case study. There are plenty of data plus tantalizing examples. Finally, why is the excessive moral encroachment into the world of levity a good example for the more general problem of Puritan excesses? Husi concluded by venturing an answer that goes beyond simply listing the various benefits humor bestows on maintaining social relations, and speaks to the heart of our nature.

Featuring:

Stan Husi, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee



Mark Lilla: Conversion and Revolution: On Getting a New Life

April. 2, 2024 | *Attendance: 52*

In this event, Lilla discussed conversion as an experience but also a metaphor. In Christian and post-Christian societies it affects the way we think about the self and how we might want to change; it also affects how we imagine society changing, in particular through the notion of revolution. But is sudden, radical change really possible in human life? And even if it is, should we desire it?

Featuring:

Mark Lilla, Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University, regular contributor to the New York Review of Books and other domestic and foreign publications



Eugene Volokh: Free Speech Law, Civil Rights, Social Progress, and Minority Groups

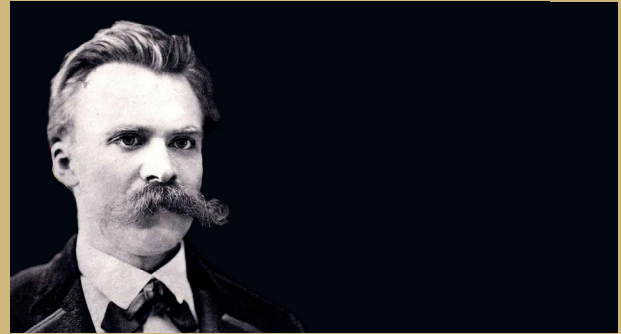
Mar. 12, 2024 | *Attendance: 58*

Todd Zywicki moderated a conversation with Eugene Volokh. Participants were invited to hear them discuss how civil rights movements and minority groups more generally benefit from free speech. This event is co-sponsored by Voices for Liberty.

Voices of Liberty supports campus events that engage undergraduate students in discussion about free speech and civil rights. Voices for Liberty speakers and campus partners ask students to consider historic and contemporary ways in which free speech has, or can, drive civil and social progress in critical areas like censorship, marginalization, and racial conflict. They also run occasional public symposia and webinars on emerging research in this area.

Featuring:

Eugene Volokh, Professor at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law



Friedrich Nietzsche and the Future of Western Civilization

April. 16, 2024 | *Attendance: 151*

In this lecture, a panel of experts explored the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Moderated by Faculty Fellows Paul Diduch and Alex Priou

Featuring:

Ronald Beeiner, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Toronto and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada

Shilo Brooks, Executive Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions and Lecturer in the Department of Politics

Steven Pittz, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Government and the Individual

Michael W. Grenke, member of the senior faculty at St. John's College

Benson Center Undergraduate Events

During the 2023-24 academic year, the Benson Center focused on hosting events tailored to our relaunched Undergraduate Fellows Program. With 17 events ranging from the question of liberty and education, reducing polarization.



Rhetoric, Politics, and Narrative Art?: Learning how to read Jane Austen's Persuasion

Oct. 10, 2023 | Attendance: 8

Students joined Professor Kathryn Davis for a lunchtime seminar during which she helped them unpack the opening chapters of one of the greatest novels by arguably the greatest English narrative artist of the 19th century!



Reducing Polarization Dialogues with Matt Burgess

8 events in 2023-24

Political polarization has become a threat to our democracy and our universities. To address this, we hosted a regular series of events, aimed at creating meeting spaces for folks on campus (students, staff, faculty, administrators and community members) who are interested in building bridges across ideological and other types of differences. This event was hosted at multiple universities including The University of Colorado Denver, University of Denver, and Colorado Mesa University.



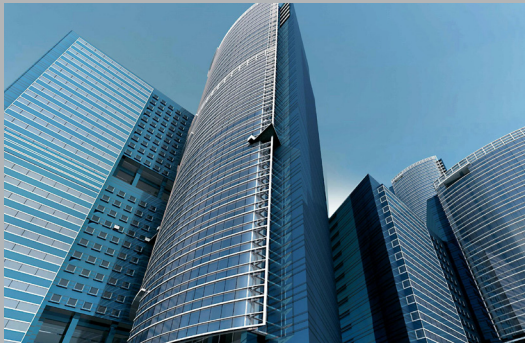
Lunchtime Discussion Series: Readings on Liberty and Education
4 events in fall 2023 | Total

Attendance: 27

In this lunchtime discussion series, Paul Diduch and Alex Priou co-lead discussions on excerpts from great works on the question of liberty and education.

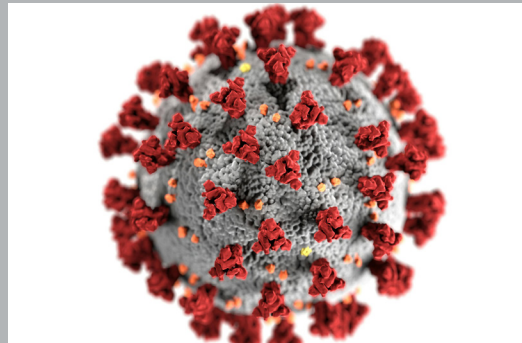
In a Nutshell

In a Nutshell event series was designed to provide context to students about the public lectures the Center hosted. It aimed to explain why students should care about the speakers the Center invited. Students had an opportunity to meet with the speakers before the event for a private Q&A session. The Center also added the speakers' books to the Benson Center Library, which is available to the undergraduate fellows.



Courageous Corporate Leadership
Oct. 8, 2023 | *Attendance: 6*

Faculty Fellow Eric Alston provided a preview of Jennifer Sey's lecture and led a discussion around her experience at Levi Strauss & CO. as it related to her freedom of speech around the COVID-19 pandemic.



Restoring Trust After COVID
Nov. 15, 2023 | *Attendance: 6*

Benson Center Director Daniel Jacobson gave a preview of the Scott Atlas lecture. During the pandemic, Dr. Scott Atlas was a dissenting voice on president Trump's COVID advisory task force, famously led by Drs. Fauci and Birx.



Johanna Jauernig: The Importance of Vernon Smith and Adam Smith

Sep. 6, 2023 | Attendance: 11

Dr. Johanna Jauernig gave a preview of the Vernon L. Smith: “Adam Smith’s Theory of Society” lecture with a general introduction to experimental economics and learning about Vernon Smith’s Nobel laureate speech.



The Biden Malaise

Oct. 4, 2023 | Attendance: 7

Dr. Brandon Warmke gave a preview of journalist Kimberley Strassel’s lecture “The Biden Malaise,” a talk based on her recent book *The Biden Malaise: How America Bounces Back from Joe Biden’s Dismal Repeat of the Jimmy Carter Years*.

Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy

The national Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy was held for the third time at the University of Colorado Boulder under the auspices of the Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization from April 19-21, 2024. This is the fifth iteration of the workshop, which was founded and organized by Daniel Jacobson, Director of the Benson Center. The workshop takes as its purpose to give sympathetic but not uncritical attention to work in progress from younger (primarily not yet tenured) philosophers who work on ideas at odds with the prevailing orthodoxies of the discipline. A group of senior philosophers open to heterodox viewpoints comment on the papers and serve as mentors.

This year's workshop saw 23 scholars attend the invitation-only workshop, which is the only one of its kind in the country. In addition to providing feedback for works in progress, it also serves to establish a network of open-minded philosophers who support academic freedom and the open exchange of ideas on controversial topics. The workshop endorses no particular ideology, and civil disagreement is expected and encouraged.

Workshops have featured papers on such topics as censorship, patriotism, tribalism, free speech, moral dysfunction in policy discourse, natural sociability, and other important topics on which professional philosophy imposes pressure to conform to a narrow range of views. The Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy is made possible by a generous grant from the Tina Snider Foundation.

“What I've most enjoyed about the Heterodoxy Workshop is that it's not just built around another orthodoxy that differs from the prevailing one. There's a real range of views and, even more importantly, a shared willingness to consider ideas just on their merits. The atmosphere is friendly and congenial and the papers are interesting. Overall, a very worthwhile and enjoyable experience. - **George Sher**

I have been a regular participant at the Heterodoxy Workshop sponsored by the Benson Center. The Workshop is invaluable in two key respects – it provides constructive and rigorous feedback on work in progress from emerging scholars and it creates and sustains a network of support and community for those with unorthodox views on a range of issues. As universities and the cultures of which they are a part become increasingly intolerant of dissenting voices, the importance of the Workshop has only increased. - **Steven Wall**

”



The Free Mind Podcast

Created and produced by the Benson Center, the Free Mind Podcast premiered Sept. 14, 2021 and explores topics in Western philosophy, politics, literature, and history with adventurous disregard for academic fashions and intellectual trends. Shilo Brooks was the originator and host for seasons 1 – 4. Starting in season 5, Benson Center faculty fellow Matthew Burgess took over hosting duties. The host, Matthew Burgess, invites listeners to pull up a chair in an intellectual laboratory where great questions and great books are explored in the spirit of truth-seeking, and conversations are had in a candid style free of scholarly jargon. Support for the podcast is made possible by the generous support of the David A. Pyle Operational Fund.

Episodes have been listened to more than 17,691 times as of April 2024, an increase of 7,391 listeners from last year.

The podcast is available on Apple Podcast, Spotify, SoundCloud, Stitcher, Amazon Music and YouTube. For more information, please visit <https://www.colorado.edu/center/benson/free-mind-podcast>.

Episodes Released 2023-24 Academic Year

| | | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------|---|
| S6E1 | May. 9, 2023 | Alice Evans | <i>“Gender Inequality in History”</i> |
| S6E2 | June. 3, 2023 | Jennifer Smith | <i>“Cancellation in the Fifteenth Century”</i> |
| S6E3 | July. 11, 2023 | Smriti Mehta | <i>“Why Start a Heterodox Campus Community?”</i> |
| S6E4 | Aug. 8, 2023 | Brad Wilcox | <i>“The Role of Family in Social Progress and Challenges”</i> |
| S7E1 | Sep. 12, 2023 | Alexandra Coțofană | <i>“Magic and the Occult in Elite Politics”</i> |
| S7E2 | Oct. 10, 2023 | Roger Pielke Jr. | <i>“When Science Gets Political”</i> |
| S7E3 | Nov. 14, 2023 | Sasha Breger Bush | <i>“Is there a Global Debt Crisis?”</i> |
| S7E4 | Dec. 12, 2023 | Todd Zywicki | <i>“The Rule of Law and Threats to it”</i> |
| S8E1 | Jan. 9, 2024 | Cory Clark | <i>“Adversarial Collaboration and Rebuilding Trust in Academia”</i> |
| S8E2 | Feb. 13, 2024 | Brandon Warmke | <i>“Why It’s OK To Mind Your Own Business”</i> |
| S8E3 | Mar. 14, 2024 | Sam Abrams | <i>“Political Diversity and Antisemitism on Campus”</i> |
| S8E4 | Apr. 16, 2024 | Benji Backer | <i>“The Conservative Environmentalist”</i> |

Underg Fellows



graduate Program



Undergraduate Fellows

The Benson Center Undergraduate Fellowship Program aims to build a community of undergraduate students interested in participating in good-faith dialogs about various timely topics and who desire to learn more about the moral, economic, and political questions of our time. \$81,000 was generously provided to the fellows from the John J. Wehman Scholarship Fund and the Bill Freytag Conservative Fund.



Cody Campos, sophomore, is majoring in biomedical engineering.

Lindsey Harriman, junior, is majoring in philosophy and classics.



Rachael Kim, sophomore, is majoring in French and psychology.

Taylor Hannon, senior, is majoring in political science with a sociology minor.



Rayan Flat, senior, is majoring in geology and music composition.

Kaliyah Saunders, junior, is majoring in sociology and philosophy.



Lucas Gauthier, sophomore, is majoring in economics and environmental studies with minors in philosophy and leadership studies.

Jeffrey Kelly, junior, is majoring in aerospace engineering.



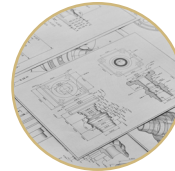
Victoria Kubacki, junior, is majoring in economics, philosophy, and political science.

Nathan Bosen, senior, is majoring in international relations with a minor in Mandarin.



Chris Hardee, sophomore, is majoring in political science.

Griffin McKay, freshman, is majoring in engineering leadership.





Callie Noar, senior, is majoring in Integrative physiology, biochemistry, and Chinese.

Alexandra Mueller, sophomore, is majoring in international affairs.



Jacqueline, junior, is majoring in biochemistry with minors in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology with a certificate in neuroscience.

Bailey Briggs, freshman, is majoring in ecology and evolutionary biology with a minor in political science.



Declan Wittkamp, sophomore, is majoring in economics and political science.

Ian Horswill, senior, is majoring in biochemistry.



The Benson Center has been the most exceptional component of my University of Colorado Boulder experience. The opportunities and experiences I have been afforded through the Benson Center, both on and off campus, are many. – Undergraduate Fellow



Miriam Perelson, senior, is majoring in History, Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies.

Lily Shipman, senior, is majoring in economics and ecology with a minor in philosophy.



Aria Lambert, sophomore, is majoring in international affairs with a minor in music.

Rachael Cunningham, senior, is majoring in psychology and art practices.



Chloe Els, sophomore, is majoring in neuroscience with a certificate in public health.

Arjun Novotny-Shandas, senior, is majoring in political science.





Ryan Slocum, senior, is majoring in computer science and leadership.

Naomi Morrison, sophomore, is majoring in linguistics.



Rebecca Rodriguez, senior, is majoring in art history with a minor in business.

Ruby Kass, sophomore, is majoring in environmental studies.



Trent Gruber, sophomore, is majoring in philosophy with an emphasis on law and society.

Alma Venta, senior, is majoring in international affairs with a minor in business and a certificate in entrepreneurial studies.



Charlotte Gorgemans, junior, is majoring in computer science with minors in business and leadership studies.

Jamison Barcelona, junior, is majoring in chemical engineering with a minor in multicultural leadership studies.



Edyn Webber, sophomore, is majoring in international affairs.

William Godsil, junior, is majoring in finance with a minor in political science.



The Benson Center has been the most enriching, rewarding, and engaging part of my University of Colorado experience. Without the Benson Center my university experience would not be nearly so noteworthy.

– Undergraduate Fellow





Student & Faculty Grants





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



Student Grants

Each year, the Benson Center funds a number of student scholarships and grants. Students may apply for grant funding to participate in programs related to the mission of the Center. The Benson Center also provides financial support to students interested in studying one of the many languages connected to the field of Western Civilization.

| Student Grantee | Grant Type |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Yahir Loya | Weham Scholar |
| Andrew Schwartz | Grant |
| Ashley Dancer | Research Assistant Position |
| Ellie McDonald | Language Grant |
| Kaeli Waggnner | Language Grant |
| Katie McCabe | Language Grant |
| Zelda Kieser | Language Grant |
| Kira Dorst | Language Grant |

Faculty Grants

The Benson Center supports research and educational initiatives by CU Boulder faculty in multiple disciplines that contribute to critical reflection on the development of Western Civilization. These include public lectures by renowned experts, innovative conferences and academic endeavors, and community outreach. During the 2023–24 academic year, the Benson Center awarded eight faculty grants totaling \$12,907.

| Grantee | Department | Amount | In support of | Event date |
|------------------------|------------|---------|---|---------------|
| Peter Hunt | Classics | \$973 | Public lecture by Professor Marek Wecowski, University of Warsaw, "Patronage and clientelism in archaic and early classical Greece: a hypothesis | Oct. 16, 2023 |
| Brian Catlos | RLST | \$1,000 | Funding to support the CU Mediterranean Studies Groups infrastructure costs for AY23-24. | Ongoing |
| Zachary Herz | Classics | \$4,000 | Book workshop for manuscript of "The God and the Bureaucrat: A Story of Roman Law." | Ongoing |
| Jakie Elliot | Classics | \$1,200 | Public lecture by Professor Hunter Garder, University of South Carolina, "Art will get us through it": plague and poetry from Vergil's bees to Emily St. John Mandel's Station Eleven." | Jan. 19, 2024 |
| Carole Newlands | Classics | \$1,000 | Public lecture by Professor V. Panoussi, College of William and Mary, "The Goddess Isis in Roman Literature: Gender, Ethnicity, and Identity" | Mar. 23, 2024 |
| Mitzi Lee | Philosophy | \$1,400 | Visit and lecture by Professor Malissa Lane, Princeton University | Apr. 24, 2024 |
| Dom Bailey | Philosophy | \$1,048 | Visit and lecture by Professor Jessica Gelber | Oct. 16, 2023 |
| Robert Pasnau | Philosophy | \$2,286 | Visit and lecture from Professor Russell Jones, University of Oklahoma | Ongoing |

Center Data & Public Engagement



Social Media Analytics

The Benson Center runs five social media platforms: YouTube, Facebook, X, Instagram, and LinkedIn, as well as our email newsletter. All platforms have seen a steady increase in activity and viewership in the 2023–24 academic year, due to an increase in activity from the Center.

YouTube: In 2023–24, the Benson Center posted 22 public videos of lectures hosted by the Center, attracting 133,150 views, a 154% increase from last year and a total subscriber count of 6,520. To date, the Center’s YouTube page has 1.3 million views across all videos.

This year, the Benson Center launched a video series called, “The Scholar’s Seat.” The series introduces visiting scholars, faculty fellows, and Benson Center affiliates to viewers.

Facebook: The Benson Center Facebook page generated a total reach of 1,183 impressions during the 2023–24 academic year.

X: The Benson Center X account followers have increased by 31% this year, from 246 to 323.

Instagram: The Benson Center Instagram page has 182 followers, with an engagement of 238. This was the first year the Center focused on posting on Instagram.

LinkedIn: The Benson Center LinkedIn page has 44 followers, a 91% increase from last year with a reach of 1,183 and an engagement of 226.

31%
Increase in followers

6,520
Total
subscribers

1.3 Million
Views across
all videos

2,368
Total number
of newsletter
subscribers

2023-24 Expenses

| Benson Center Expenses | 2018–19 Expenses | 2019–20 Expenses | 2020–21 Expenses | 2021-22 Expenses | 2022-23 Expenses | 2023-24 Expenses |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Salary & Benefits | \$781,496 | \$926,090 | \$1,026,479 | \$919,082 | \$885,896 | \$1,324,267 |
| Operating Expenses | \$230,019 | \$274,827 | \$228,574 | \$217,726 | \$195,032 | \$280,473 |
| Student Aid & Grants | \$12,000 | \$13,942 | \$20,000 | \$8,600 | \$17,682 | \$105,774 |
| Faculty Grants | \$30,553 | \$33,521 | \$5,000 | \$4,500 | \$34,215 | \$12,907 |
| Total Expenses | \$1,144,140 | \$1,325,306 | \$1,322,718 | \$1,261,469 | \$1,216,102 | \$1,889,870 |

Course Data

During the 2023-24 academic year, a total of 736 students were enrolled in one of 25 Benson Center-affiliated courses. This is a 67% increase in the number of courses offered (due to the increase in faculty fellow participation), and a 70% increase in enrollment from last academic year.

Courses included PHIL 1100: Ethics, taught by Center Director Daniel Jacobson (74 enrolled), CWCV 4000: Social and Political Philosophy, taught by VSCTP Brandon Warmke (29 enrolled), and ENVS 3555: Sustainable Economies, taught by Faculty Fellow Matthew Burgess (50 enrolled).

2023-24 Faculty, Staff, and Interns



Daniel Jacobson, Director

Daniel Jacobson is the Bruce D. Benson Professor of Philosophy at the University of Colorado Boulder and Director of the Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization. He was previously a professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, where he founded and directed the Freedom and Flourishing Project. He directs an annual Workshop in Heterodox Moral and Political Philosophy which began at Michigan and is now under the auspices of the Benson Center.

Jacobson's coauthored book, *Rational Sentimentalism*, written with Justin D'Arms, was recently published by Oxford University Press.



William Godsil
Project Management
Intern



**Rachael
Cunningham**
Graphic Design Intern



Alisa Johnson
Project Management
Intern



Rebecca Rodriguez
Social Media
Management Intern



George Weber
Podcast
Intern

Interns

Taylor Jaworski, Associate Faculty Director

Taylor Jaworski is an economist and economic historian. His research focuses on regional economic growth and structural change in the United States. He has written on the impact of World War II and transportation infrastructure on the development of the American economy. At CU, he teaches courses in economic history at the graduate and undergraduate level. In his work for the Benson Center, Professor Jaworski aims to increase the interaction between faculty, undergraduates at CU, and the broader community in Colorado, and to support the Center's mission to promote a better understanding of the intellectual traditions within Western Civilization as well as greater ideological diversity at CU.



Alexandra Roberts, Assistant Director

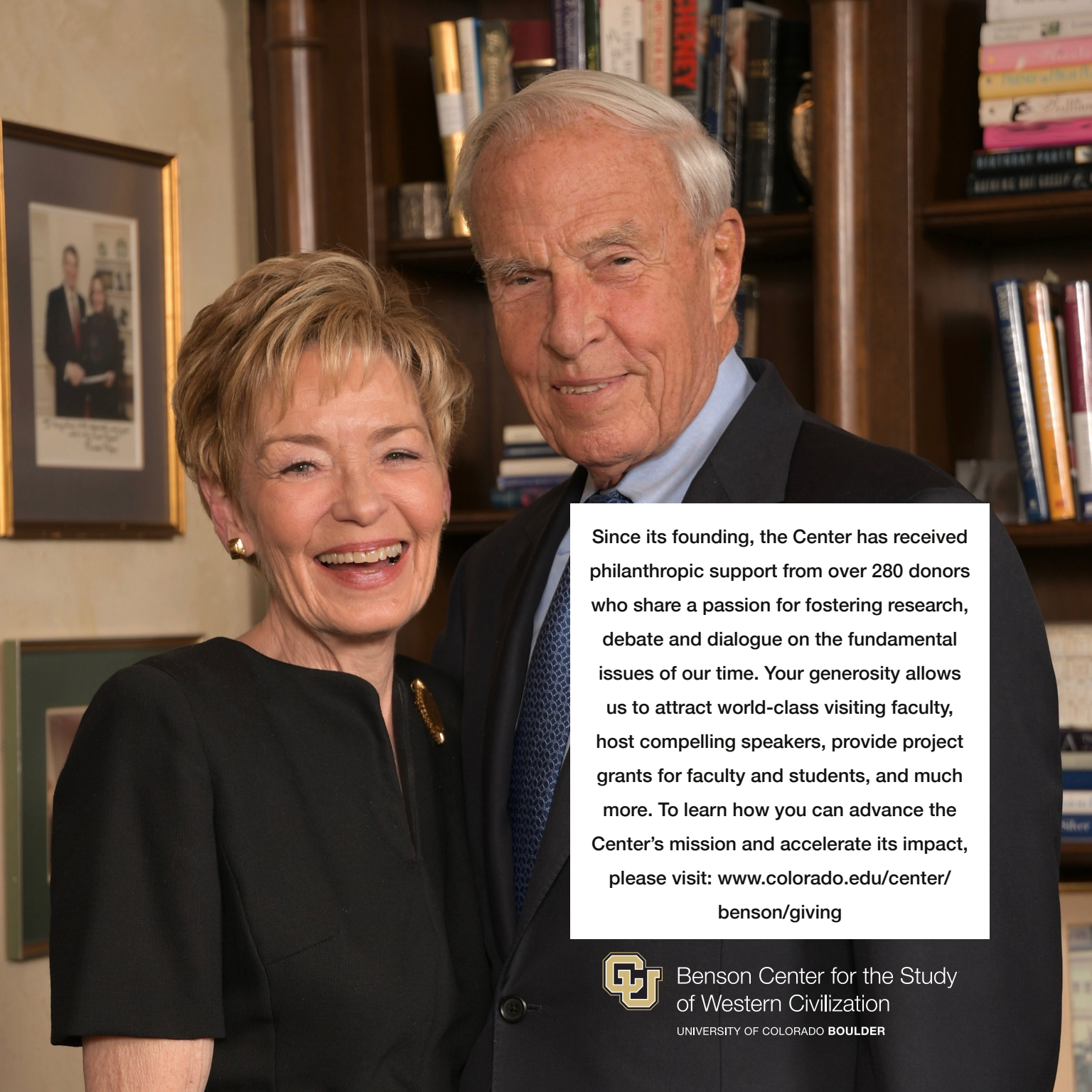
Alexandra Roberts joined the Benson Center in April 2022. She is responsible for managing the Center's operations, budget and finance, and faculty recruitment, including onboarding and academic scheduling. Alexandra serves as the primary liaison with the CU Foundation for donor stewardship and fundraising. A CU Boulder alum with a B.A. in International Affairs, she is particularly passionate about student engagement with the Center and its mission. Alexandra has been a staff member with the university since 2014, and her relationships across campus have helped raise the Center's profile in the College of Arts and Sciences.



Alexander (AJ) Shively, External Relations Manager

AJ Shively joined the Benson Center in 2020 as a student intern where he helped launch the Free Mind podcast. He became the Center's External Media Relations Manager in 2023, where he is now responsible for event management. A CU Boulder alum with a B.S. in Strategic Communication with a focus on strategic advertising and is currently pursuing a M.S. in Business Analytics. Shively has worked at the university since 2018.





Since its founding, the Center has received philanthropic support from over 280 donors who share a passion for fostering research, debate and dialogue on the fundamental issues of our time. Your generosity allows us to attract world-class visiting faculty, host compelling speakers, provide project grants for faculty and students, and much more. To learn how you can advance the Center's mission and accelerate its impact, please visit: www.colorado.edu/center/benson/giving



Benson Center for the Study
of Western Civilization

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER