



Benson Center for the Study
of Western Civilization

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

BENSON CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 26





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Letter from Director

It has been another busy year at the Benson Center!

The Center remains steadfast in its mission to promote the study of Western Civilization and to foster intellectual and ideological diversity on the CU Boulder campus and beyond.

This year we made a concerted effort to reach more undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff, and community members in Boulder and across Colorado. These efforts are paying off. We had record attendance at our public events, a growing number of faculty and students were part of workshops and seminars hosted by the Center, and we reached more people than ever through our newsletter and social media.



A few highlights from this year are worth mentioning. The year began with an interfaith discussion of antisemitism that featured Meir Soloveichik and George Weigel. We hosted a conversation on the Colorado Constitution at 150, a discussion on free speech with Nadine Strossen, and two events that were part of CU Boulder's Conference on World Affairs: one was a debate on American superpower status with John Bolton and Susan Rice (co-sponsored with the Steamboat Institute) and the other was a combination lecture, discussion, and performance on American folk music at Boulder's storied eTown Hall. You can learn about all of the events this year in the pages that follow.

I also want to highlight the growth in undergraduate courses offered through the Center. The cornerstone is a two-semester Great Works sequence offered by Teaching Professor Joseph Porter. In addition, the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy, Joseph Bottum, offered courses on The Rise and Fall of the Novel and Philosophical Mysticism.

Finally, we are looking to the future. The undergraduate fellows program will roughly double in size from this year to next year; Joseph Bottum will return as the Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy and will be joined in that position by political scientist Jeremy Bailey; and we already have events in the works to improve and encourage greater civic knowledge across Colorado and to celebrate the United States Semiquincentennial.

Thank you for your support!

Taylor Jaworski

Center in Numbers

59.8K

**Social Media
Followers**

26

**Undergraduate
Fellows**

632%

**Social Media
Growth**

1.8 Million

**YouTube
Views**

46

**Events
Hosted**

1,000+

**Total Event
Attendees**

Visiting Scholars

The Benson Center welcomed three visiting scholars this year. Joseph Bottum served as the 14th Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy, taught courses on *Philosophical Mysticism* and *The Rise and Fall of the Novel*, and helped organize several public events. George Hall joined the Center as the Fall 2025 Sabbatical Scholar, and Alex Priou spent the full year as the Roubos Sabbatical Scholar. Together, these scholars brought diverse perspectives and areas of expertise to campus, encouraged dialogue across disciplines, and deepened students' engagement with the ideas and traditions that have shaped Western Civilization.





Faculty Fellows

The Benson Center's Faculty Fellowship brings together CU Boulder scholars committed to open inquiry and rigorous scholarship. This year's cohort of 14 Faculty Fellows represented philosophy, political science, economics, environmental studies, Germanic literature, musicology, English, history, classical music performance, education, and engineering.

Throughout the year, Fellows attended public lectures, presented their research in faculty workshops, hosted undergraduate events, mentored undergraduate students, taught courses affiliated with the Center, and helped select the next round of undergraduate fellows.



Student & Faculty Grants

This year, the Center awarded student grants totaling more than \$10,000. Funding supported undergraduate internships, language study opportunities, and individual academic projects.

The Center awarded faculty grants totaling more than \$35,000. Faculty grants fund new research, bring speakers and conferences to the CU Boulder campus, and supports student travel. Faculty in English, history, international affairs, philosophy, political science, and the School of Music received grants this year; projects included work on civic education and artificial intelligence, brought harpist Parker Ramsay and philosophers Thomas Williams and Amir Saemi to campus, and supported a newly launched international research initiative between CU Boulder, the renowned Center for Research on Antisemitism of the Technical University of Berlin, and the Department of History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies of the Open University of Israel.





Courses

Introduction to Western Philosophy

Instructor: Joseph Porter

An introduction to the major philosophical ideas of ancient Greece, including happiness, knowledge, virtue, and democracy, and why they still matter today.

Introduction to Medical Ethics

Instructor: Joseph Porter

An examination of the ethical questions at the heart of modern medicine, from abortion and euthanasia to genetic enhancement.

Modern Social and Political Thought

Instructor: Joseph Porter

A survey of the great political thinkers of the modern era, from Hobbes and Locke through Marx and Nietzsche.

Philosophical Mysticism

Instructor: Joseph Bottum

A study of the mind's effort to explain mystical experience, asking what philosophy can say about revelation that lies beyond its ordinary reach.

The Rise and Fall of the Novel

Instructor: Joseph Bottum

Across three centuries, a history of the novel as the device by which, more than any other, we tried to explain ourselves to ourselves.

Public Events

The Benson Center hosted 10 public lectures during the 2025-26 academic year, along with two special events at CU Boulder's Conference on World Affairs.

The fall opened with "The Fire This Time: America and the Boulder Attacks," in which Rabbi Meir Soloveichik and Catholic theologian George Weigel examined the rise of antisemitism, and continued with Christopher Scalia on "Why Truth Needs Fiction," Marie Newhouse on civility in campus culture, Jeremy Bailey on Jeffersonian constitutionalism, and Wilfred McClay on remembrance and forgiveness. The spring series included Brad Wilcox on marriage, family, and the "Closing of the American Heart," Patty Limerick on Colorado historian Colin Goodykoontz and the lessons for the American West, Josh Vandiver on the "150th anniversary of the Colorado Constitution," Diana Schaub on Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, and former American Civil Liberties Union president Nadine Strossen on free speech.

This spring, the Center partnered with CU Boulder's Conference on World Affairs to bring two public events to campus. The first event was presented in partnership with the Steamboat Institute; it featured a debate between former National Security Advisors John Bolton and Susan Rice and addressed America's superpower status. The debate drew more than 1,500 in-person and online attendees. The second event featured Princeton University's Robert P. George, Lauren Weiner, and Joseph Bottum at Boulder's eTown Hall, and explored the roots of American folk music.



Faculty Workshops

The Rocky Mountain Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) Workshop met every other Wednesday during the academic year, bringing together faculty and graduate students from across disciplines.

The fall featured Zachary Herz of CU Boulder on Roman law and the legal architecture of Nazi Germany, George Hall of Brandeis University on U.S. federal debt and deficits, Hannah Rubin of the University of Missouri on agent-based models of equity and inclusion, Arne Höcker of CU Boulder on totalitarianism, and Tamar Malloy of CU Boulder on respect versus respectability in public life.

In the spring, Visiting Scholar Joseph Bottum discussed metaphysics, Steve Pittz of the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, argued against atomism as a framework for society, Liz Sperber of the University of Denver examined youth political engagement in Africa, Erik Kimbrough of Chapman University presented on polarization and partisan norms after the 2024 election, and Simone Gubler of Brown University closed the year with a session on the philosophy of the New Deal.

Summer Programs

This year, the Center hosted two summer programs made possible through the generous support of the Institute for Humane Studies.

In May, the Center hosted "New Directions in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics," a conference featuring nine papers by junior scholars, organized with the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at The Ohio State University and the Hamilton School for Classical and Civic Education at the University of Florida. In June, the Center hosted the PPE Graduate Summer Workshop, a week of instruction in the methods of philosophy, politics, and economics for current and incoming graduate students.



Benson Undergraduate Fellows

The Benson Undergraduate Fellows Program brought together 26 students from across CU Boulder in a community dedicated to curiosity, civility, and flourishing. Each Fellow enrolled in a Center-approved course, attended Center events, and joined a yearlong reading group, discussing *Confessions* by Saint Augustine of Hippo. The program also hosted more than 20 student events, including trivia nights, film screenings, poetry evenings, and dinner discussions. Fellows also attended CU Presents productions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Oklahoma!*

A highlight of the year was a spring break trip to Tennessee, where seven Fellows joined an undergraduate civics symposium at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, participated in a Braver Angels debate on patriotism, and attended a fireside conversation with former Vice President Mike Pence.



"I loved the Benson community, and I had a great time this year. I loved the wide range of speakers, and I'm excited for next year."

- *Leila Keyes*



"I would not be where I am without the fellowship program. The Benson Center is incredible and changed my life for the better."

- *Jamison Barcelona*

"[The Benson Center staff] are great mentors so thank you so much for being who you are."

- *Morgan Farmer*



BUF Participants

Jamison Barcelona
Lucas Bellomo
Derek Boyd
Bailey Briggs
CJ Brown
Jamie Buckjune
Diyora Daminova
Tia Egan
Morgan Farmer
Spencer Hays
Vanessa Hernandez
Aliana Justus
Michael Kakkar

Amelia Kelly
Leila Keyes
Ariana Kozlowski
Eyal Lahat
Emily Madden
James Madden
Ella McGregor
Aubrie Nixon
Andrew O'Brien
Emeline Smith
Jake Stone
Gabe Warkentin
Fred Zorgdrager



Faculty & Staff

Taylor Jaworski
Interim Director

Alexandra Roberts
Assistant Director

Joseph Porter
Associate Teaching
Professor

AJ Shively
External Relations
Manager

Student Interns

Sophie Allaway

Olivia Gewanter

Michael Kakkar

Amelia Kelly

Jackson Martin

Aubrie Nixon

Expenses

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
SALARY & BENEFITS	\$919,082	\$885,896	\$1,324,267	\$1,402,372	\$1,347,957
STUDENT AID & GRANTS	\$8,600	\$17,682	\$105,774	\$138,836	\$88,402
FACULTY GRANTS	\$4,500	\$34,215	\$12,907	\$15,500	\$34,337
OPERATING EXPENSES	\$217,726	\$195,032	\$280,473	\$231,233	\$264,898
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,149,908	\$1,132,825	\$1,723,421	\$1,787,941	\$1,735,594





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.