



BENSON CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21



Benson Center for the Study
of Western Civilization

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Center	4
Letter from the Director	5
2020–21 Center Fellows	6
Outreach and Events	14
“The Canceled” Series	16
“Community or Disunity?” Series	19
Other Events and Outreach	23
Benson Center Summer Institute	28
Student and Faculty Grants	30
Student Grants	32
Faculty Grants	34
Course Data and Public Engagement	36
Course Data	38
Media Coverage	39
Social Media Analytics	40
2020–21 Expenses	41
Faculty, Staff and Interns	42

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Western Civilization was founded in 2006 at the University of Colorado Boulder to enhance the study of Western traditions and values. The Conservative Thought and Policy Program began in 2013 to promote intellectual diversity on campus, and a year later, the two programs merged. In 2019, the Center for Western Civilization, Thought and Policy, as it had become known, was renamed the Bruce D. Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization to honor the CU president emeritus for his long championship and support.

The Benson Center promotes study of the intellectual, artistic and political traditions that characterize Western civilization. Central to this mission is a 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 offers students, scholars and residents of Colorado the opportunity to study ideals that have shaped fundamental aspects of the American intellectual heritage.

“Fostering cultural change at CU through the Benson Center has been one of my proudest accomplishments. To hear all points of view, to teach students how to think and not what to think — that’s what education is about.”

**– University of Colorado President
Emeritus Bruce D. Benson**

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The 2020–21 academic year was a challenging time for everyone, including at the Benson Center. Despite the difficulties, thanks to the generosity of our donors, we continued to attract top-notch guest speakers, hosted visiting faculty, CU faculty fellows and doctoral fellows, offered 12 courses to over 300 students, conducted our second summer institute for visiting faculty, provided innovative events, developed a podcast, supported students and faculty with grants and much more.

Although things did not always go as hoped in my first year as director, I'm happy with what we were able to accomplish despite the current political acrimony and distrust — not to mention the global pandemic that forced us to hold events virtually.

But I'm more excited about the prospects for the future.

We've focused our mission statement to better reflect what the Center does and why it's so important right now. You can check it out in the About the Center section of this publication or read more on our website, colorado.edu/center/benson.

We plan to run a speaker series each year on the most important and pressing issues of the moment. This year it was called “The Canceled” and focused on so-called “cancel culture”: the concurrent increase of social coercion as a means of restricting political speech and decrease in the range of opinion deemed socially acceptable.

Our speakers included Bari Weiss, the former *New York Times* opinion editor, hired to increase diversity of opinion at the paper and then forced to resign for doing so. Glenn Loury, professor of economics at Brown University, spoke about the rise of self-censorship surrounding discussions of issues concerning racial inequality. Joshua Katz, professor of classics at Princeton University, described attempts to have him fired and his classes boycotted for his criticism of radical views on these issues that are now treated as unquestionable dogma. Daniel Mahoney, professor of politics at Assumption University, considered cancellation as a pathological phenomenon. And Kevin Williamson, editor and contributor at *National Review*, who was hired and fired from *The Atlantic* over the course of three days at the demand of younger staffers at that magazine, spoke on the recurring tendency of corporations to police employee behavior outside of work. The title of Weiss's talk acutely summed up this phenomenon as “America's Cultural Revolution.” At this moment, we are proud to be counterrevolutionaries.

Next year's series will focus on public health and individual liberty. There has always been a tension between the emergency powers necessary to combat an epidemic and the rights of individuals over their own bodies. Reasonable people disagree about where those limits should be drawn. In the past year, however, public health officials have accelerated efforts to expand their powers. Even genuine public health emergencies, such as the recent pandemic, have seen elected and unelected officials demand new authority, sometimes bypassing democratic procedures. Perhaps even more dangerous to liberty is the increasing tendency for these officials to consider almost everything a matter of public health, subject to their control. What are the limits of the expertise of public health experts? And how much authority do they have to infringe upon the most basic liberties of individuals?

We are also looking forward to the community of scholars who will be visiting next year, including a new Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy, Professor Alan Kahan, and our first sabbatical fellow, David McPherson. Furthermore, we have exciting plans to raise the profile of the Benson Center, both on campus and nationally, and for new programs to further our mission. Stay tuned!

Daniel Jacobson
Director, Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization
Bruce D. Benson Endowed Professor of Philosophy



2020-21

CENTER

“The Benson Center made it possible for me to benefit from [an] interdisciplinary and politically diverse exchange of ideas — to hear a wide range of opinions in rigorous debates on issues outside my field of expertise. It was a refreshing, enlightening and invigorating experience of the sort that ought to be more common in academia. I learned a tremendous amount.”

– Tim Burkhardt, Benson Center Scholar in Residence

FELLOWS

A fundamental aspect of the Center’s mission is to bring a diversity of voices to the University of Colorado Boulder campus by sponsoring annual fellowships for scholars from other institutions, as well as some from CU. Toward this end, each year the Center hosts visiting faculty, scholars in residence, CU faculty fellows and CU doctoral student fellows. These scholars work in fields connected to the study of Western civilization, participate in events and programming, teach courses and contribute to a faculty seminar series. Additionally, a 15-member undergraduate fellows program supported students who desire to learn more about the moral, economic and political questions of our time. All Benson Center faculty and fellows demonstrate an enthusiasm for fostering intellectual diversity and dialogue, both on campus and in the broader community.



2020–21 Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy



John C. Eastman recently retired as the Henry Salvatori Professor of Law & Community Service at Chapman University. Eastman, a scholar of constitutional law, earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Chicago Law School. He holds a PhD in government from Claremont University and a BA, cum laude, in politics and economics from the University of Dallas. He has served as dean of the Chapman University School of Law and clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

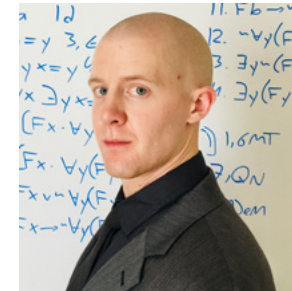
2020–21 Senior Scholar in Residence



Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman holds a PhD in political science from Claremont Graduate School, an MA in liberal education from St. John's Graduate Institute and a BA with honors in modern French civilization. Her teaching focus includes political science and political philosophy, history, liberal studies, great books and philosophy. In fall 2020, Eastman taught “The Age of Lincoln” to 23 students, and in spring 2021 she taught “Development of American Political Institutions” to 20 students. Of the former course, one student commented that her “understanding of Lincoln is truly impressive.”

Among other outreach, Eastman presented a public lecture on Plato's metaphor of liberal education as an ascent to the light, was a panelist for the “Alexander Hamilton: The Man Behind the Musical” event and participated in a colloquium co-sponsored by the Benson Center and the Ryan Center on “Citizenship and Identity: Recovering American National Character.”

Scholars in Residence



Tim Burkhardt, *Snider Scholar*

Tim Burkhardt received his PhD from Duke University in 2020 and his BA at CU Boulder, summa cum laude, in 2012. His areas of specialization are ethics and applied ethics. In fall 2020, Burkhardt taught “Contemporary Social Problems” to 37 students, and in spring 2021, he taught “Bioethics” to 67 students. That course included timely issues traditionally neglected in the field, such as the moral dimensions of pandemics, scarce resource allocation and vaccine distribution plans. Of the spring course, Burkhardt commented, “The remote modality and large class roster presented challenges, but student reviews scored the course significantly higher than the averages in every quantitative category. This success is primarily due to my students, who made up one of the most talented, engaged, and fun groups I have ever had the privilege to teach.”

A paper Burkhardt presented at a Benson Center faculty seminar, entitled “Death's Badness is Greatly Exaggerated! A Short Defense of Epicureanism,” is currently under review at the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. A paper presented to the CU Center for Values and Social Policy is currently under review at *Philosophical Studies*, and a paper published last year was reprinted in *The Philosophical Quarterly*. He also participated in the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress.

Scholars in Residence (continued)



Álvaro Caso Bello

Álvaro Caso Bello was Scholar in Residence at the Benson Center and the Department of History. He holds a PhD in history (2020) from The Johns Hopkins University, an MA in the history of the Hispanic world from Universitat Jaume I (Castelló, Spain) and a BA in humanities and history from the Universidad de Montevideo in Uruguay. Caso Bello is a historian of the Iberian Atlantic with a focus on politics, law, governance and their cultures in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In spring 2021, Caso Bello taught “Introduction to Modern Latin American History since 1800” to 22 students and “The History of Modern Mexico Since 1821” to 33 students. Of his teaching experience, Caso Bello reflected, “Both courses were fully enrolled and students showed consistent engagement despite the pandemic context. I received positive reviews from the students and was happy to see that some considered me a mentor in their undergraduate education.”

His research projects included a monograph proposal and several chapters and articles currently under review. He organized a junior Latin-Americanist scholars workshop, partook in the review of incoming Norlin Scholars and presented at a Benson Center faculty seminar.



Catherine Steidl, *Bradley Scholar*

Catherine (Catie) Steidl received her PhD from Brown University’s Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World in 2018. Her research focuses on the dynamics of community belonging and interaction in the first millennium BCE, particularly Mediterranean migration and the use of material culture to study identity and interaction.

In fall 2020, Steidl taught “Greek Cities and Sanctuaries” to 31 students, and in spring 2021 she taught “Mediterranean Migrations” to 44 students.

During the year Steidl presented her research at a Benson Center faculty seminar, produced a chapter for an edited volume on intra-regional mobility in ancient Iberia and prepared an article for submission to a journal of the German Archaeological Institute. She noted, “My time at CU has allowed me to continue publication, but also develop new courses and make significant progress on my monograph proposal, which is a major component of my future plans. This benefit of a fellowship like this for scholars at the start of their careers really cannot be overstated.”

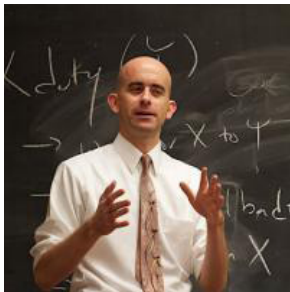
Faculty Fellows



Jillian Porter, Department of German & Slavic Languages & Literatures

Jillian Porter holds a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures from UC Berkeley. Her research explores intersections between Russian economic history and cultural production. Her first book, *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I* (Northwestern UP, 2017), offers new explanations for the fantastical plots of mad or blocked ambition that helped set the 19th-century Russian prose tradition in motion.

Porter is currently working on *The Art of the Queue: From the Revolution to the Putin Era*, which explores standing in line as a paradigmatic experience of Soviet everyday life and a generator of aesthetic forms. She is co-editing a volume called *Red Hot: Russian Energy Culture*, which traces the impact of new ideas about human and motor energy on Russian literature, art and philosophy from the 19th century to the present.



Brian Talbot, Department of Philosophy

Brian Talbot joined the Department of Philosophy in 2018 as an assistant lecturer. He previously taught at Washington University in St. Louis and California State University in Los Angeles. His work is on epistemology, ethics and their intersection. Talbot received his PhD in philosophy from the University of Southern California.

Talbot’s current research involves how false beliefs, irrational beliefs and incomplete information affect what we should do. Relatedly, he is also working on whether and why it matters that we rationally form beliefs, given that most truths are not worth knowing. Talbot presented his research on epistemic norms as social rules at a Benson Center faculty seminar.

Harper Graduate Fellows



Jenna Gersie is a CU Boulder doctoral candidate in English, specializing in American environmental literature from the 19th century to the present. Gersie has a BA in environmental studies, magna cum laude, from Skidmore College and an MS in environmental studies, summa cum laude, from Green Mountain College. She is the graduate student liaison for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, managing editor of *The Hopper*, and copyeditor for *The Goose*. During the summers, Gersie leads high school trips abroad for National Geographic Student Expeditions. Gersie’s fiction and creative nonfiction have been recognized with multiple awards. She presented a work in progress at a Benson Center faculty seminar.



T. J. McLemore is a CU Boulder doctoral student in English specializing in contemporary American speculative literature and poetics with an emphasis on ecocritical approaches to science fiction. His research explores the ecological imagination through the lenses of environmental justice and biopolitics, science and technology studies, geographies of dispossession and Afrofuturism.

He holds a BA with honors in English and environmental studies from Baylor University and an MFA in creative writing/poetry from Boston University. He is the author of the chapbook *Circle/Square* (Autumn House, 2020), and his poems, interviews, and reviews appear in *New England Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *32 Poems*, *Poetry Daily*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Adroit Journal* and other publications.

His awards include the Autumn House Chapbook Prize, the Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, nominations for the Pushcart Prizes and inclusion in *Best New Poets*. He has served as a Pinsky Teaching Fellow at Boston University, a Poetry by the Sea Scholar and a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers’ Conference. McLemore presented at a Benson Center faculty seminar.

OUTREACH + EVENTS

“Thank you so much for the lecture series, ‘The Canceled,’ and for opening it up beyond students and faculty. ... I’m thankful to see that CU Boulder is supporting speakers and topics like this. It is so important.”

– Event attendee

Central to the Center’s mission is a commitment to fostering dialogue about fundamental values and controversial questions and providing a forum for free inquiry and open debate. 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.

During the 2020–21 academic year, the Center hosted two lecture series: “The Canceled” and “Community or Disunity?” It also offered programs in partnership with the CU Center for Leadership, Aquinas Institute for Catholic Thought, the CU Engineering Leadership Program and the Ryan Foundation. Special interest programs on Alexander Hamilton, the emergence of religious freedom, Tocqueville, liberal arts and the welcome return of the Center’s visiting scholar summer institute rounded out the offerings.



“The Canceled” Series

A five-part webinar series called “The Canceled” considered the implications of cancel culture, the norms it imposes on thought and expression, and the conformism it attempts to compel, especially in the media and on university campuses. The events attracted a large live, online audience and brought strong defenses of freedom of speech and the value of intellectual diversity to the conversation at CU Boulder. In all, the series attracted 650 remote attendees and 11,651 subsequent views to date on the Center’s YouTube channel.

“As a current Boulder parent, I was truly heartened when I first read about the establishment of the Benson Center. Today I came across Glenn Loury’s *Quillette* article and was pleasantly surprised to see it was from his webinar at the Center. I have forwarded your lecture series page to many of my friends, parents of students at other universities across the country, sharing the wonderful work you are doing to ensure diversity of thought remains part of a CU Boulder education. Thank you for your work — it is truly vital that our students are exposed to what you bring to campus and shown that diversity of thought is a central component of a liberal education.”

– Event attendee



Cancellation and Its Discontents

Nov. 12, 2020 | Attendance: 109 | YouTube views: 1,284

This event explored how a tenured faculty member at a prestigious university with little interest in the spotlight became newsworthy by surviving an attempt at cancellation. His story is a cautionary tale about the tidal wave of illiberalism that is threatening to undermine America’s institutions, educational and otherwise.

Featuring:

Joshua Katz, Cotsen Professor in the Humanities and professor of classics at Princeton University



America’s Cultural Revolution

Nov. 19, 2020 | Attendance: 272 | YouTube views: N/A

Hired as a staff writer and editor for the Opinion section of *The New York Times* in 2017 to broaden its voices to include first-time writers, centrists, conservatives and others, Bari Weiss resigned in 2020 in protest over the paper’s “illiberal environment.” Weiss spoke to the dangers of a U.S. environment in which moral complexity is replaced with moral certainty, ideas are replaced with identity and debate is replaced with deplatforming.

Featuring:

Bari Weiss, journalist and author of *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*



The Problem of Self-Censorship in American Public Discourse

Feb. 8, 2021 | Attendance: 149 | YouTube views: 9,638

Perhaps more insidious than the outright prohibition of expressing contrary opinions are the myriad ways in which, fearing social disapprobation, we elect to censor ourselves. Drawing on classical and contemporary texts, this lecture explored the logic of tacitly coerced conformity, and applied that logic to several currently relevant cases to illuminate the “unspeakable truths about racial inequality in America.”

Featuring:

Glenn C. Loury, Merton P. Stoltz Professor of Economics at Brown University

“The Canceled” Series



From the Culture of Repudiation to the Cancel Culture: How Self-Loathing Gave Way to the Specter of Intellectual Tyranny

April 13, 2021 | Attendance: 60 | YouTube views: 204

The “culture of repudiation” — the willful and indiscriminate rejection of the Western intellectual, moral and civic inheritance, in the form of pathological self-loathing — has led to a “cancel culture,” where the wisdom of the past is dismissed out of hand, where liberal education gives way to censorious repression and where whole groups of people are judged guilty not because of what they have done but because of who they are. Authentic liberals, conservatives and all of good will are asked to reaffirm what is valuable in our civilizational inheritance and to resist efforts to silence the life of the mind and free pursuit of truth.

Featuring:

Daniel J. Mahoney, Augustine Chair in Distinguished Scholarship at Assumption University



The Disciplinary Corporation

April 19, 2021 | Attendance: 60 | YouTube views: 253

For generations, progressives understood their movement to be a check on corporate power. But that has changed as progressives have attained positions of power in American corporate life. Modern progressives seek to create the “disciplinary corporation,” an arrangement in which employment, education and access to technology are made contingent upon political conformism. The template is not George Orwell’s *1984* but the “Lavender Scare,” which sought to exclude homosexuals from economic and cultural life, enforcing cultural, sexual and political homogeneity.

Featuring:

Kevin D. Williamson, author and roving correspondent for *National Review*

“Community or Disunity?” Series

The 2020–21 Conservative Thought and Policy lecture series invited speakers, students, faculty and community members to reflect upon questions related to the communities that we build and the challenges that may contribute to their disintegration, beginning with the original notion of political community as explained by classical thinkers, and concluding with the modern-day, post-Holocaust search for justice. The seven-part series attracted a total remote audience of 262 and subsequent YouTube views of 1,793.



On the Classical Idea of Political Community, as Set Forth by Aristotle and Cicero

Sept. 15, 2020 | Attendance: 32 | YouTube views: 158

What we call politics originated in the practice of the ancient Greeks, whose thinkers subjected it to a philosophical analysis. Life in the Greek city (“polis”) was highly competitive, and theoretical proposals naturally sought to address an endemic factionalism. Roman practice and thought in significant ways developed the Greek precedent, and their combination — with some further modifications due to Christianity — eventually produced such modern forms as the American Republic.

Featuring:

Hayden Ausland, retired professor of classics at the University of Montana

“Community or Disunity?” Series



The United States as Independent Community – a Particular Rooted in the Universal

Oct. 6, 2020 | Attendance: 35 | YouTube views: 553

In 1776, 13 English colonies on the Atlantic shore of North America declared their independence from the mother country. They did so as a claim of right under principles that were universal in scope and applicable to all, but also as a particular people seeking to establish a particular government. In the years since, the United States has been a beacon to peoples from every corner of the world. It lacks the usual ties of religion, race or kinship that normally bind a people together, yet there exists what Abraham Lincoln called an “electric cord” that binds us together as Americans. Just what is that “electric cord,” and does it still bind? If not, will it be possible for a country so pluralistic and multicultural to remain united?

Featuring:

John C. Eastman, 2020–21 Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy



The 1619 Project as Missed Opportunity

Oct. 27, 2020 | Attendance: 45 | YouTube views: 272

The 1619 Project, which reinterprets American history in light of the Black American contribution to its development, ultimately falls short in presenting an accurate account of the triumphs and travails of the United States. By emphasizing the contributions of Black people at the expense of white people, the 1619 Project teaches Americans to view their history as a zero-sum game instead of the integrated struggle for freedom it actually was. In doing so, it makes the nation’s progress in securing rights for Black Americans harder to understand and therefore more difficult to discern any lessons that could help address modern problems of social and political strife involving race. In addition, it undermines the trust that Americans of all races need to resolve political differences peacefully and thereby perpetuate their self-governing way of life.

Featuring:

Lucas Morel, John K. Boardman, Jr. Professor of Politics and head of the politics department at Washington and Lee University



From Shadows on the Wall to the Sun: Liberal Education and the Ascent from the Cave

Nov. 17, 2020 | Attendance: 26 | YouTube views: 305

The idea of liberal education as an ascent to the light is from Plato’s *Republic*. The rising and setting of the sun in the natural world, which brings light and darkness, happens with regularity and uniformity. As human beings we share this common, daily experience. Plato’s description of emerging from the darkness to the light as a metaphor for liberal education suggests that we detach ourselves from the familiar and engage in questioning to achieve the ends of education. The speaker explored the role of liberal education in building communities and whether questioning disrupts or strengthens our communities.

Featuring:

Elizabeth C’de Baca Eastman, 2020–21 Senior Scholar in Residence



At Home and Abroad: Forms of Community in American Foreign Relations

Jan. 26, 2021 | Attendance: 43 | YouTube views: 507

National defense is a fundamental and unavoidable responsibility. American foreign relations include both the articulation and formulation of policy to the water’s edge, and the varied interactions — from diplomatic to military, from economic to cultural — between the U.S. and other nation-states and non-states around the world. This lecture explored the multiple meanings of community in American foreign relations at home and abroad in light of first principles, national priorities, historical examples and prospects for the future.

Featuring:

Elizabeth Spalding, senior fellow at the Pepperdine University School of Public Policy

“Community or Disunity?” Series



The Challenge Posed to American Pluralism by Non-Pluralistic Ideologies

March 16, 2021 | Attendance: 23 | YouTube views: 128

What is American pluralism based upon? “E pluribus unum” is our motto, but what makes the many one? Force can attempt to forge one out of many. Whereas the ancient world used tribalism to create unity, the United States chose the exercise of reason and the principle of equality. Only equality allows for voluntary diversity. However, in the 20th century, the very existence of the U.S. was contested by totalitarian ideologies that explicitly denied the principle of equality and the pluralism it allows. Today, American pluralism is threatened by both religious and secular ideologies in the form of neo-tribalism.

Featuring:

Robert R. Reilly, director of the Westminster Institute



Hitler’s Willing Business Partners and the Search for Post-Holocaust Justice in the United States

April 6, 2021 | Attendance: 58 | YouTube views: 175

The Holocaust was both the greatest mass murder and the greatest theft in history. America’s civil justice system provided a measure of long overdue justice to Holocaust victims and heirs, who filed claims for the return of Nazi-looted art, stolen Jewish real property in Europe, Holocaust-era insurance policies, slave labor and bank deposits held by Swiss banks. The speaker discussed both past and ongoing litigation, including two Holocaust restitution cases before the U.S. Supreme Court (Simon v. Hungary; Phillip v. Germany), for which the speaker co-authored amicus briefs.

Featuring:

Michael Bazylar, professor of law and the 1939 Law Scholar in Holocaust and Human Rights Studies at Chapman University

Other Events and Outreach

In addition to themed lecture series, the Benson Center initiated or cosponsored eight remote events of topical importance, including the relationship between religion and state, the value of civil discourse across political and cultural divides, the times of Alexander Hamilton in the context of the hit Broadway musical, and technology’s potential and risks. These events had a total attendance of 1,378 and YouTube views of 5,564. The Center also co-sponsored a colloquium on the American national character with 18 participants.

“Terrific [webinar]. I enjoyed the various, albeit disparate perspectives shared by each panelist. Very enjoyable.”

– Event attendee

“Great talk by Dr. Kahan ... I tried to take notes, but there were so many points spilling over each other that I couldn’t keep up.”

– Event attendee



Tocqueville, Democracy and Religion

Dec. 7, 2020 | Attendance: 70 | YouTube views: 225

What is the ideal relationship between church and state in a democratic society? Is religion a threat to freedom, or is freedom a threat to religion? Should we concentrate on what religion can do to democracy, or what religion can do for democracy? Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), the author of *Democracy in America*, was deeply concerned by these questions, so relevant to us today. Answering them correctly, he thought, was key to whether democratic societies would be able to maintain their freedom.

Featuring:

Alan Kahan, Université de Paris-Saclay, 2021–22 Benson Center Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy

Other Events and Outreach



The Liberal Arts in an Illiberal Age
Dec. 9, 2020 | Attendance: 62 | YouTube views: 455

The liberal arts and the ever-expanding Western literary canon are of enduring value to university life and American society. Illiberal ideologies have weakened the free exchange of ideas and other essential elements of a truly inclusive educational community.

Featuring:
Jon Parrish Peede, 2018–21 chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities



Is Civil Discourse Dead? A Conversation with Robert George and Cornel West
Jan. 21, 2021 | Attendance: 737 | YouTube views: 4,447

This event featured an honest conversation about friendship, faith and the state of civil discourse across our nation’s political and cultural divides. The speakers represented monumentally different points of view — politically, culturally and socially — yet they have been a public example of thoughtfulness and a close friendship that is unbound by partisan divides. They have co-taught courses together, written together and traveled the globe speaking together about the importance of liberal education and honest civil dialogue. Sponsored by the Aquinas Institute for Catholic Thought, with help from the Benson Center and the CU Boulder Center for Leadership.

Featuring:
Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University

Cornel West, former professor of the practice of public philosophy at Harvard University and professor emeritus at Princeton University



Alexander Hamilton: The Man Behind the Musical
March 1, 2021 | Attendance: 184 | YouTube views: 165

A multidisciplinary panel of CU faculty were “in the room” for a lively presentation and discussion of American founder Alexander Hamilton in the context of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s hit original Broadway production *Hamilton*. Miranda is said to have been inspired by Ron Chernow’s 2004 biography. The event featured a special taped appearance by *Hamilton* Broadway sound designer Nevin Steinberg.

Featuring:
Taylor Jaworski, associate professor of economics

Markas Henry, associate professor of theatre and dance

Elizabeth C’de Baca Eastman, Benson Center Senior Scholar in Residence



The Church, the State and the Emergence of Religious Freedom
March 11, 2021 | Attendance: 46 | YouTube views: 79

The relationship between religion and state evolved over time in Western Europe. In the Middle Ages, the most common rules were identity rules — rules that treated individuals differently based on their identity. These identity rules facilitated the persecution of Europe’s Jewish communities. One of the unintended consequences of state building during the early-modern period was that rulers gradually abandoned identity rules in favor of more general rules. This shift played a critical role in the development of liberal states, rule of law, and free and flourishing markets. Why were restrictions on religious liberty so pervasive in the past? Why did states persecute religious dissent? And how did religious freedom first emerge? These questions are of seminal importance for understanding the rise of modern states, liberalism and the rule of law.

Featuring:
Noel Johnson, associate professor of economics at George Mason University

Other Events and Outreach



Liberty and Justice for All: A Conversation on Social Justice and Identity Politics

April 26, 2021 | Attendance: 185 | YouTube views: 74

The former Democratic National Committee chair and a *Wall Street Journal* columnist debated the validity of systemic racism, civil rights and personal responsibility as root causes of current issues facing marginalized people, including Black Americans. Presented in collaboration with the Steamboat Institute.

Featuring:

Jason Riley, *Wall Street Journal* columnist

Donna Brazile, Democratic political strategist



American National Character Project Colloquium

Nov. 5–8, 2020 | Attendance: 18

The Benson Center partnered with the Ryan Foundation to offer a colloquium on “Citizenship and Identity: Recovering American National Character” in Philadelphia. The colloquium was part of a four-year project, headed by William B. Allen, which sought to identify and articulate a shared sense of peoplehood among Americans that is consistent with our founding principles and responsive to the conditions of the 21st century.

CU Engineering Leadership Program 2021–22 Lecture Series

The New STEM Enlightenment: Political Promises and Perils of Science and Technology

This lecture series examines how America’s zealous promotion of science, technology and scientific education affects our democracy. Are our prospects for fostering human flourishing, for reclaiming a more nuanced civic discourse and for producing citizen-leaders of prudence and character enriched or diminished by the habits of heart and mind cultivated by science education and technological advancement? Presented by the Engineering Leadership Program, with support by the Jack Miller Center and the Benson Center.



Thermodynamics, Atoms and Citizenship

Feb. 5, 2021 | Attendance: 59 | YouTube views: 119

Pursuing STEM forms the mind in ways that are beneficial to mastering nature but limit understanding nature. Such limits in turn have particular effects on citizenship, which were examined using concepts and equations from thermodynamics and quantum mechanics.

Featuring:

Bernhardt L. Trout, professor of chemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and director of the Novartis-MIT Center for Continuous Manufacturing



Between Certainty and Disbelief: How Different Understandings of Science Influence Expectations

March 22, 2021 | Attendance: 35 | YouTube views: N/A

Scientists and non-scientists are often asked to evaluate scientific information in real time with significant and immediate social and political effects, not only for us as individuals, but also for our families, communities and countries. The COVID-19 global pandemic has brought these concerns to the forefront of public discourse. This talk examined different approaches to and understandings of modern science, what science means, what it promises, how it is practiced and what it can reasonably prove.

Featuring:

Erin Dolgoy, assistant professor in political science at Rhodes College

Benson Center Summer Institute

Following a year’s hiatus due to the pandemic, the Benson Center held its second Summer Institute in July 2021. The Summer Institute is a four-week program for faculty from universities across the country, intended to provide a forum for research and the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas that further the Center’s mission of studying the intellectual traditions of Western civilization, promoting freedom of speech and academic freedom, and increasing intellectual and political diversity. Led by Benson Center Associate Faculty Director Shilo Brooks, the program included collaborative research seminars and reading groups, interactions with CU faculty and other scholarly activities.

2021 Benson Center Summer Institute participants

Owen Anderson, Arizona State University

Kody Cooper, University of Tennessee

Jeremy Fortier, City College of New York

Lisa Gilson, Bates College

Laura Jenkins, Syracuse University

Allison Levy, St. John’s College

David Levy, St. John’s College

Christie Maloyed, University of Louisiana

Paul Ulrich, Carthage College

“Academic work is often solitary — we don’t get to discuss our work with other scholars often, especially not in person. So having the opportunity to spend a month talking with a whole group of scholars — representing a broad range of interests and expertise — is an exceptionally unique and valuable opportunity. More generally, the Benson Center’s work accommodations have been first-class.”
– **Summer Institute participant**

“The 2021 Benson Center Summer Institute featured robust and lively inquiry into some of the most pressing questions in the history of Western civilization. Visiting faculty explored the American founding and the nature of Constitutional government, the future of higher education and civic education, the civic role of democratic critics and activists, and the writings of seminal thinkers like Plato, Thucydides, Jefferson, Madison, Emerson, Montaigne and Nietzsche. The Summer Institute is a testament to the enduring importance of research and teaching on the texts and traditions that sustain ideals of free thought and free government.”
– **Shilo Brooks, associate faculty director, Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization**



Left to right: Allison Levy, Laura Jenkins, Lisa Gilson, Christie Maloyed, Kody Cooper, Owen Anderson, David Levy, Shilo Brooks, Paul Ulrich, Jeremy Fortier

STUDENT + FACULTY GRANTS



Student Grants

The Benson Center provides financial support to students interested in studying one of the many languages connected to the development of Western civilization. This year’s language scholarship recipients included three graduate students of philosophy studying German and an undergraduate studying Italian in preparation for a semester abroad in Florence, Italy.

The Center also partners with the CU in D.C. program to support experiential learning via student internships in areas related to Western civilization such as law, government, public policy and education. Among this year’s internship placements were a senator’s office, a media company and think tanks related to advancing liberty and international diplomacy.

Through a generous donation by the John J. Wehman Trust, the Benson Center initiated a new scholarship program in 2020–21. Each year, two outstanding undergraduate students working in the areas of philosophy, politics and economics will receive a \$1,500 renewable scholarship to support their education.

During the 2020–21 academic year, the Benson Center awarded \$11,000 in grant funding to nine CU Boulder undergraduate and graduate students.

Student Grantee	Grant Type
Amirhossein Ajalloeian	Language study: German
Megan Dietz	CU in D.C. internship: Sunwater Institute
Dawn Jacob	Language study: German
Amanda Loeffelholz	Language study: German
London Lyle	CU in D.C. internship: Real Clear Politics
Belinda Nicholas	CU in D.C. internship: U.S. Senator for Colorado John Hickenlooper
AJ Shively	Language study: Italian
Dylan Yachyshen	Internship: Gulf State Analytics and Wehman Scholar
Inés Benavides	Wehman Scholar

“During my time in Washington, D.C. this summer, I will be working for Real Clear Politics. I am a journalism major and a political science minor, and political journalism is my passion. I’m so excited to be able to have this opportunity. ... I hope to grow as a journalist and to learn the ins and outs of political journalism in our country’s capital. Access to this scholarship allows me to live in the city and have great networking opportunities. ... Thank you so much for helping this dream of mine become a reality!

– London Lyle, CU in D.C. internship scholarship recipient



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 2020–21 academic year, public health and safety regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited the activities normally supported by Benson Center faculty grants. The Benson Center awarded two faculty grants totaling \$6,000.

The Center for Values and Social Policy, a campus-wide resource for research, teaching and outreach, received a grant to support the ethics bowl to promote Colorado secondary school student engagement. The CU Mediterranean Studies Group was awarded funding to support a diverse set of programs that cross disciplinary lines to foster intellectual creativity, dynamism and collaboration, including faculty workshops, colloquia with external scholars, symposiums and other activities, several in partnership with the Mediterranean Seminar.

Granteee	Amount	In support of	Date
CU Center for Values and Social Policy	\$1,000	2021 Colorado High School Ethics Bowl Tournament	Jan. 30, 2021
CU Mediterranean Studies Group	\$5,000	Diverse set of multidisciplinary programs	2020–21 academic year

“

We strive deliberately to include scholars of diverse backgrounds, gender, rank and perspectives [in Mediterranean Studies Group programming]. The [Mediterranean Studies Group] and the Mediterranean Seminar considerably enhance the standing of the humanities at CU Boulder and our contributing programs among the Front Range Community, across the country and around the world.

– **Brian A. Catlos**, director, CU Mediterranean Studies Group, co-director, Mediterranean Seminar, and professor of religious studies

COURSE DATA + PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

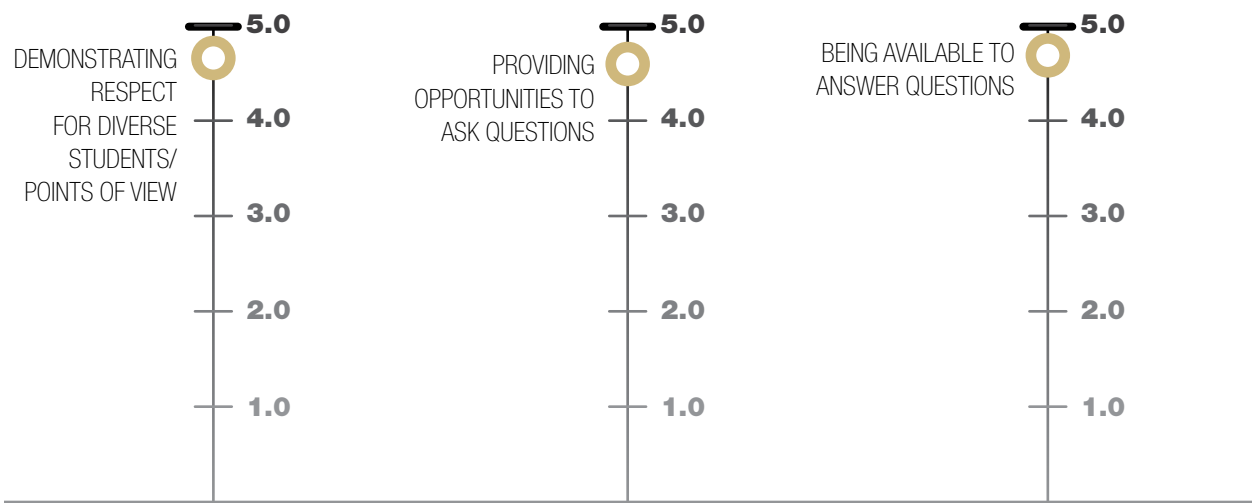


Course Data

During the 2020–21 academic year, 336 students were enrolled in 12 Benson Center-offered courses taught by five visiting scholars and the Center director. Courses ranged from “Greek Cities and Sanctuaries” to “The Age of Lincoln” and “Philosophy and the 2020 Election.”

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “hardly ever” and 5 being “almost always,” on average students gave Benson Center instructors top marks in demonstrating respect for diverse students/points of view (4.78), providing opportunities to ask questions/initiate discussion (4.71) and being available to answer questions or provide assistance (4.82). They gave the courses top marks in encouraging them to interact with students in a respectful way (4.72), to evaluate arguments, evidence, assumptions and conclusions (4.54) and to reflect on what they were learning (4.56).

By offering courses in five disciplines (philosophy, political science, anthropology, classics and history) and under its own Foundations of Western Civilization listing, the Benson Center reached CU Boulder students across multiple majors and interests.



“It’s been a wonderful opportunity to teach a course of my own design at CU. My current course, ‘Mediterranean Migrations,’ deals directly with the topics and themes of my research, and student engagement has been quite high despite the need to teach virtually.”
– Scholar in Residence
Catie Steidl

Media Coverage

In the 2020–21 academic year, the Benson Center earned **522% more coverage** than it did the prior academic year. The Center earned **255 news mentions** across **64 outlets**. Most news mentions were within Colorado (198 mentions), while there were some high profile national mentions in outlets such as *Forbes* and *The Washington Post*. The large increase in coverage was driven primarily by the 2020 election and related matters.

Articles and news clips mentioning the Center appeared in print and broadcast outlets with a combined possible audience of **348.8 million people**.

News coverage of Benson Center events and scholarship was down 49% from the 2019–20 academic year. The decline is likely due to a number of factors, including the pandemic, virtual event fatigue and the 2020 election.



Social Media Analytics

The Benson Center runs five social media platforms: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Overall, the platforms have seen a steady increase in activity and viewership in the 2020–21 academic year over past years.

YouTube: In 2020–21, the Benson Center posted 13 public videos of remote lectures, attracting 14,670 new views and 3,000 new subscribers.

As of July 1, 2021, the Center’s YouTube page has had almost 850,000 views across all videos and a subscriber base of almost 4,800 individuals.

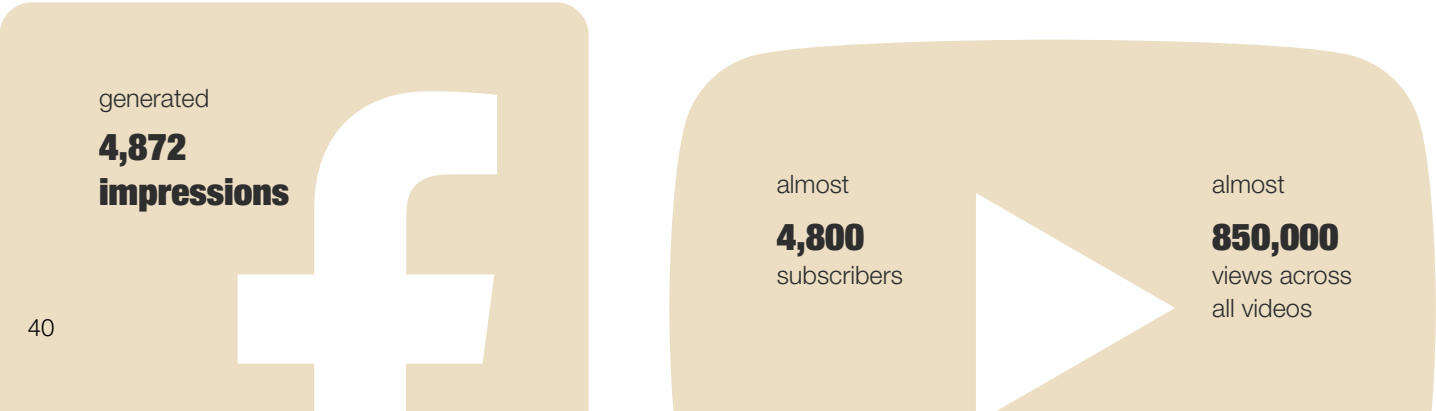
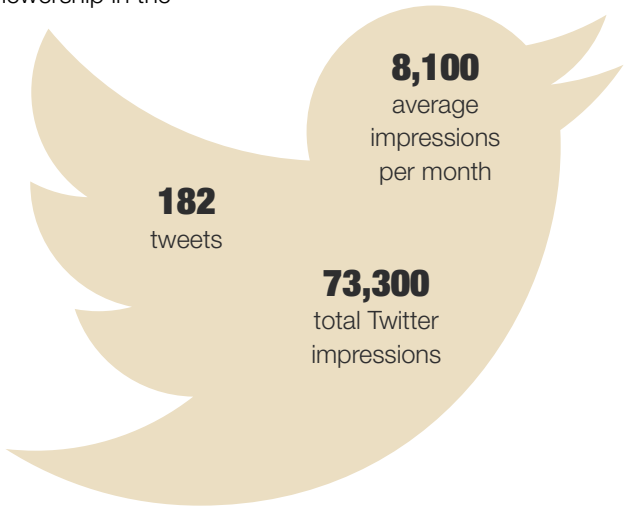
Notably, the Center’s most-watched video, “Victor Davis Hanson: World War Two – Then and Now” (lecture date May 2, 2018) has received 441,299 all-time views and 200,375 views during this past year. Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Jan. 31, 2020 lecture, “The Market for Victimhood,” has received almost 175,000 views.

Facebook: The Benson Center Facebook page generated a total reach of 4,872 impressions during the 2020–21 academic year. “Likes” increased by 3%, from 297 to 306. The Center made 156 posts throughout the academic year, generating 28,126 organic and paid post views.

Twitter: The Benson Center received a total of 62,950 impressions on 169 tweets. The Center’s Twitter page followers increased by 59% this year, from 130 to 207. The Center’s tweets averaged 6,259 impressions per month, a 29% decrease from the 2019–20 average of 8,100 impressions per month.

Instagram: The Center reactivated its Instagram page this year, which has 116 followers.

LinkedIn: The Benson Center LinkedIn page had 114 visits in the past year, seven new followers (a 41% increase from 10 followers last year) and 739 impressions.



2020–21 Expenses

	2020–21 Expenses	2019–20 Expenses	2018–19 Expenses	2017–18 Expenses	2016–17 Expenses
Salary Expense Total (Wages + Benefits)	\$1,026,469	\$918,595	\$773,496	\$521,453	\$367,552
Faculty	\$627,422	\$588,810	\$508,413	\$336,808	\$218,530
Officer/Exempt	\$141,976	\$115,387	\$72,447	\$61,067	\$53,981
Classified Staff	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,181
Student Wages	\$23,502	\$14,581	\$12,804	\$9,544	\$6,051
Benefits	\$233,569	\$199,817	\$179,832	\$114,034	\$87,808
Operating Costs Total	\$102,753	\$259,484	\$173,537	\$191,264	\$157,665
Operating Expenses	\$74,925	\$178,348	\$125,894	\$94,546	\$92,692
Travel	\$2,037	\$21,116	\$27,748	\$40,124	\$25,545
Transfers Out (Faculty & Student Grants)	\$25,4791	\$60,020	\$19,895	\$56,594	\$39,428
Total Expense	\$1,129,222	\$1,178,079	\$947,033	\$712,717	\$525,217

Photo Credits

Outreach & Events photo credit: Li Zhensheng/Contact Press Images

Liber Fudorum Maior illuminated manuscript: This is a photograph of a two-dimensional work of art in the public domain. The official position of the Wikimedia Foundation is that “faithful reproductions of two-dimensional works of art in the public domain are in the public domain.” Therefore, this photographic reproduction is also considered in the public domain in the United States.

Summer Institute photo credit: Alisa Johnson

Staff and Interns



Daniel Jacobson, Director

Professor Daniel Jacobson began work as the first endowed director of the Bruce D. Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization in August 2020, following a national search. Jacobson came to CU Boulder from the University of Michigan, where he was professor of philosophy. In addition to serving as the Benson Center director, Jacobson is the newly appointed Bruce D. Benson Endowed Professor of Philosophy.

Jacobson, who earned a PhD from the University of Michigan and a BA from Yale University, works on a range of topics in ethics, moral psychology, aesthetics and the moral and political philosophy of John Stuart Mill. His paper “Utilitarianism Without Consequentialism: The Case of John Stuart Mill” was selected by *The Philosopher’s Annual* as one of the 10 best papers published in 2008. At the University of Michigan, he founded and headed the Freedom and Flourishing Project, which is dedicated to exploring the classical liberal tradition, defending freedom of speech and increasing political diversity in academia.

Jacobson has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, American Council of Learned Societies, the John Templeton Foundation and the Princeton University Center for Human Values. He was recently invited to join the Academic Freedom Alliance, a select group of nationally influential faculty dedicated to upholding open inquiry in pursuit of knowledge at institutions of higher learning.



Shilo Brooks, Associate Faculty Director

Shilo Brooks, whose scholarship explores the relationship between politics, leadership and liberal education, became the Benson Center’s associate faculty director in 2020.

Brooks is faculty director of the Engineering Leadership Program in CU Boulder’s College of Engineering and Applied Science, which puts science and technology in conversation with the liberal arts to cultivate engineering leaders of curiosity and character. He holds a teaching appointment in the Lockheed Martin Engineering Management Program and a courtesy appointment in the Herbst Program for Engineering, Ethics and Society. He is a member of the CU Boulder Faculty Assembly and the Center for Leadership’s executive committee. Brooks was recently named a member of the Academic Freedom Alliance, a diverse coalition of distinguished faculty members committed to the protection of academic freedom and free speech rights of American university professors.

Brooks supports the academic work of the Benson Center and helps further the establishment of the Center’s intellectual community, with a particular focus on Western civilization and its broadly humanistic study. Brooks serves as faculty coordinator of the Benson Center’s Summer Institute, which attracts to the CU Boulder campus each year an international pool of scholars conducting research related to the Center’s mission, and is a member of the Benson Center’s executive committee. He hosts the Center’s *Free Mind* podcast, leads an undergraduate reading group, and develops and moderates lecture series and other outreach.



Betty Kilsdonk, Associate Director

Betty Kilsdonk joined the Benson Center in 2019 following a career in service to Colorado Front Range municipal governments. As the Center’s associate director, Betty oversees outward-looking operations: strategic partnerships, events management, community relations, student and public engagement, and outreach. She works with the management team to strategize priorities and the creative development of Center initiatives to execute them. She oversees external marketing and communication strategy, promotional materials, web and social media content and works with university communications to effectively highlight the Benson Center program. Kilsdonk received her MA in public historical studies from the University of California-Santa Barbara and her BA in history and English, magna cum laude, from Carroll University.



Lily Welch, Program Manager

Program manager Lily Welch joined the Benson Center in 2019. She oversees the Center’s operating budget and finances and is the primary liaison with the CU Foundation for donor stewardship and fundraising. Lily also manages faculty recruitment, onboarding and course placements, as well as all internal-facing projects, programs and operations.



Adelle Poyton, Intern



AJ Shively, Intern



Since its founding, the Center has received philanthropic support from over 270 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 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

Fostering Intellectual Diversity

CU president emeritus and former first lady Bruce and Marcy Benson