



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

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes September 20, 2023

Present: Daniel Jacobson, Taylor Jaworski, Benjamin Hale, Michael Huemer, Robert Pasnau, Matthew Burgess, Iskra Fileva, Todd Zywicki

Absent: Scott Savage

Staff Present: Alexandra Roberts, AJ Shively

Chair Jacobson called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.

Chair opening remarks: Chair Jacobson thanked members of the committee for their time and service to the Benson Center.

Program Updates: Chair Jacobson presented the overall strategy of the Center this year, which is to provide funding for individuals who want to be partners with the Center; in this way, the Center hopes to increase event participation and student involvement.

Undergraduate fellows program is successful, with 170+ applications to the program. The Center has 22 undergraduate fellows this year, and hopes to grow it next year. We had many qualified, strong candidates and had to turn some away due to funding constraints.

The Center is focused on making events more accessible to undergraduate students. The Center will host student pre-events before the VSCTP lecture series. The idea is to bring in a guest lecturer to provide background information to students before the speaker, providing students with a more thorough understanding of the lecture. This initiative was received very well by members of the committee.

The Center received a \$5 million endowment in June and will receive \$100,000 this year for undergraduate support. The Center plans to grow the undergraduate fellow program with these funds. The donor of these funds has a background in science, and discussion was had around how the Center could explore the natural sciences in addition to the social sciences portion of Western Civilization, which could expand the audience of the Center. The faculty agree there is a desire from students to explore topics of PPE, and the natural science aspect could fold nicely into this. The committee discussed how building out the undergraduate fellow program could result in more students enrolling in VSCTP courses and the certificate program once it's launched.

Faculty fellows have increased from 3 to 6 this year. We hope to continue to grow this program.

Committee Member Updates: Iskra Fileva will serve on the executive committee, though she is on sabbatical this year, so her participation will be limited.

VSCTP 2023/24 updates: The VSCTP application is open, though we do not have many applicants yet due to a lag in central HR. The job posting is now live on various academic job boards, but we may have to push the soft deadline back in order to give qualified candidates time to apply.

Board of Advisors updates: Tina Snider is the new chair of the board of advisors. The board of advisors proposed a new member, who will be introduced in the BOA meeting this October.

Events Update (AJ Shively): AJ Shively gave an event update to the committee, including the launch of an undergraduate lunch series. Matt Burgess shared some updates about the reducing polarization dialogues and encouraged undergraduate fellows to attend. Members of the dialogues include folks from other campuses and universities in Colorado, including in Grand Junction, which will help expand the Center throughout the state.

Discussion was had about what the Center could do better in terms of advertising events. Suggestions included: auditing of email lists (are we missing anyone?); do more event-specific emails and newsletters; and investigate free Google ads.

Budget Update (Alexandra Roberts): Alexandra presented on the budget of the Center. The Center is in great shape in terms of endowments and operating costs. Ideas were shared about other ways to spend donor money in effective ways, including hiring post-docs to teach, expanding the sabbatical scholars program, building out a graduate fellows program, and expanding the undergraduate program.

Other business and discussion: Difficulties operating within the College of A&S was discussed, most notably the slowness of HR to produce job descriptions and offer letters. The Center lost an instructor this year due to the length of time it took HR to generate a job description. The initiative to work on the Western Civilization certificate is pushed back a year due to this.

Chair Jacobson adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.