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"I believe that educating young people and providing them with opportunities to think for themselves is pretty good leverage for your money if you want to help society"

- Randy Kendrick, major donor for the new Center.



Professor David Schmitz at lecture. Photo by Christine Scheer.

Philosophy of Freedom: Creating a World-Class Center at the UA

An exam in Professor David Schmitz's "Philosophy of Freedom" course consists of a blank sheet of paper with one question: What's the most important question you can think of and how would you begin to answer it?

Some students complain. But Schmitz explains that his class is an exercise in freedom, not just the study of it.

"Occasionally students will say, 'It's not fair. You're the professor. Your job is to come up with the questions,'" says Schmitz. "I respond, 'It's not a course on fairness. It's a course on freedom. If you want to turn it into a course on fairness, we can. In which case, my exam question would be: Prove that asking you to formulate your own question isn't fair.'"

Reflecting on his approach, Schmitz says, "My students go on to live in the real world, where it isn't good enough to be able to answer someone else's questions. Part of the key to a free and successful life is to take responsibility for asking the questions."

David Schmitz's approach to teaching makes him a popular teacher and mentor. It has also impressed donors — from individuals to foundations — whose outpouring of support will

allow Schmidtz's growing Philosophy of Freedom Program to become a full-fledged Center.

Schmidtz, the Kendrick Professor of Philosophy, is a big name in the world of political philosophy. Because of Schmidtz' international prominence and the stellar reputations of fellow UA philosophers, such as Gerald Gaus and Tom Christiano, the UA political philosophy program has recently been ranked #1 in the world (tied with Harvard and Oxford) by the Philosophical Gourmet Report.

But with the creation of the new Philosophy of Freedom Center, The University of Arizona is poised to shake those other two reputable institutions loose. Schmidtz plans to hire four new political philosophers and create the leading center in the world dedicated to research on human freedom.



Above: Ken and Randy Kendrick.

A Dramatic Meeting

Ken and Randy Kendrick were the first and remain the largest donors to the Center, having given or pledged more than \$2.5 million.

The Kendricks met Schmidtz in 2003 when he was receiving an award from the Institute for Humane Studies. Randy was so impressed with his ideas and intellect that she called the following week to invite him to dinner.

Schmidtz declined the invitation; he had just found out he had a brain tumor. The tumor was wrapped around the major blood vessels in his brain, so even if doctors could operate, he would most likely suffer brain damage.

Well, as luck or fate would have it, Ken was on the board of the Barrow Neurological Institute, and Randy had made it her business to observe several surgeries and study the field; she knew the neurosurgeon Schmidtz should talk to: Dr. Robert Spetzler. By both Schmidtz's and Randy's accounts, she was insistent.

Dr. Spetzler did perform the surgery, which required such a virtuoso performance that surgeons came from eight countries to watch.

"She arranged for my surgery to be done by the best brain surgeon in the world," says Schmidtz. "It is very likely that the reason I am sitting here is that Randy found the one person who could save my life...There isn't a day that goes by that I'm not grateful."

As Schmidtz recalls, "Afterwards, Randy said, 'So...we could send each other Christmas cards for the rest of our lives. But something tells me that we weren't brought together just for that — we were meant to do more.'"

So began the Kendricks' generosity to the Philosophy of Freedom Program. Randy says they've continued to increase their financial commitment to the Program because they've been impressed with Schmidtz and his colleagues.

But it's the student comments from course evaluations that excite her the most.

"These students would say how this class taught them to think for themselves and what a profound impact it had on their lives," says Randy. "David teaches them to question. Isn't that the purpose of everything you are trying to get kids to do in college?"

Randy speaks about this topic with a passion born from having an education that was more about indoctrination than independent thinking.

"When I went to college in the late 60s, my professors ridiculed anyone who disagreed with them. I was livid at being browbeaten," says Randy.

Randy and Ken Kendrick have been very successful and extremely generous with the results of that success. Randy was a practicing lawyer, and Ken founded Datatel, a software company. He is now managing general partner of the Arizona Diamondbacks baseball team. The Kendricks' philanthropic activities are vast and include the Datatel Scholars Foundation — which provides college scholarships to students — West Virginia University (Ken's alma mater), the Barrow Neurological Institute, TGen, the Foundation for Blind Children, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Childhelp USA, and Helping Hands Housing. They own the Bumble Bee Ranch, which includes more than 74,000 acres and is used by children's charities.

“Our interest has always been children and their education — giving to a university is just an extension of this,” says Randy. “I think the modern philanthropist wants to see how they can leverage their dollar. How can they do the most good with the dollars that they give? I do believe that educating young people and providing them with opportunities to think for themselves is pretty good leverage for your money if you want to help society.”

Turning a Program into a Center

The Philosophy of Freedom Program began with the course, “Conceptions of Freedom.” When the Kendricks began donating to the Program, additional components were added, such as the course “The Ethics and Economics of Wealth Creation,” a Kendrick fellowship for graduate students, guest lecturers, and a research workshop to showcase the work of alumni. Other donors also began contributing, committing more than \$2.5 million.

Schmidtz approached the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation for additional funds to turn the Program into a Center. The Foundation primarily supports research and education programs that analyze the impact of free societies, in particular how they advance the well-being of mankind. They have pledged a \$1 million match following a pledge of \$1.5 million from the Kendricks.

The Koch Foundation has been impressed with Schmidtz’ research and work with students for years. “We became aware of David through his affiliation with the Institute for Humane Studies,” says Ryan Stowers, a program officer for higher education at the Foundation. In 2003, Schmidtz was the Institute’s Charles G. Koch alumnus of the year.

“We think this type of Center is important to the University’s mission to advance learning and create new opportunities for students,” says Stowers. “The Center will enable David to hire researchers whose work will complement his own. In addition, it will house a cluster of like-minded researchers who can collaborate more effectively and attract graduate students interested in this discipline. The University of Arizona has shown the ability to think innovatively and put together what we think is a great opportunity.”

Garland and Carolyn Cox are a local couple who met Schmidtz through the Mercatus Center, which applies research to the problems facing policy makers. One of the reasons the Coxes support the Philosophy of Freedom Center is they believe many political and social issues — from welfare to social security to education — can benefit from a critical look. “I think you have to look at programs that currently exist and ask yourself — are they working?” says Carolyn Cox.



Professors Gerald Gaus and David Schmitz.

Now that the Center has been formally approved, Schmitz has plenty of work to do. He will direct the Center, and fellow UA philosopher Gerald Gaus will be a founding faculty member. Schmitz will hire four new professors and work to implement the goals of the Center, which are:

- Undergraduate education – The Center will dramatically expand the UA's course offerings on the philosophy of freedom.
- Graduate training – The Center will fund teaching and research assistants; it aims to put three to four students a year in faculty positions in top graduate programs.
- Expand reach of materials – Schmitz wants the books of Freedom Center faculty to be referenced on 1,000 syllabi worldwide and to appear on 10,000 library holdings.
- K-12 outreach – The Center will provide workshops for high school teachers on the basic principles of ethics and economics.

Political Philosophy at the UA

David Schmitz was this close to being a mailman. In fact, he was a full-time mailman for five years when, in an attempt to finish his biology degree at the University of Calgary, he took a night course on David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Even though Schmitz didn't like the teacher, he loved the material.

"I thought, I'm too young to be hanging on for retirement from the postal service," says Schmitz. "I've got to try something that I don't know for sure that I'm any good at."

Schmitz went on to earn a Ph.D. in philosophy. He also obtained an M.A. in economics, a background which influences his philosophical approach. A sample of his book titles gives a glimpse of his areas of passion: *Elements of Justice*; *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility*; and *Rational Choice and Moral Agency*.

Schmidtz's colleagues in political philosophy are also highly influential thinkers. Tom Christiano studies democratic theory, distributive justice and moral philosophy. He has published *The Rule of the Many* and, most recently, *The Constitution of Equality*.

Gerald Gaus is the James E. Rogers Professor of Philosophy. His hire in 2006, made possible by the generosity of Jim Rogers, deepened the department's expertise in political philosophy, taking it to #1 from its previous ranking of #2. Gaus is co-editor of the journal *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*. He studies public reason and social evolutionary accounts of morality. Gaus has also published many books, including *Justificatory Liberalism*, and, most recently, *On Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*.

Schmidtz says it's hard to compare the three without oversimplifying. "If you had to boil it down to a cartoon, you could say Christiano does Rousseau, Gaus does Kant, and Schmidtz does Adam Smith."

Christopher Maloney, head of the UA philosophy department, feels that the differences between Schmidtz, Gaus and Christiano make the program vibrant.

"They are wonderfully complementary," says Maloney. "While they don't always agree with each other, their constant interactions are mutually inspirational. This is such a productive environment for exploring the range of philosophical answers to what is individual freedom, and, as a result, it's simply the very best place on the planet to be an aspiring graduate student determined to understand the intersection of morality, politics, economics and law."

Maloney is thrilled with the creation of the Philosophy of Freedom Center. "This is a defining moment in the history of the department and the philosophical profession. We are establishing how political and moral philosophy develops in the next 20 years."

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