

Center for the Philosophy of Freedom (Freedom Center)
University of Arizona

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Committee Members



Site visit

February 13-14, 2019

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Report submitted

March 19, 2019

1. Background and introduction

The Center for the Philosophy of Freedom (hereafter, the Freedom Center or FC) was established at the University of Arizona (UA) in October 2008. The Center's original mission was "to promote the understanding and appreciation of the ideals of freedom and responsibility, through activities along four dimensions: (A) published research, (B), graduate education, (C) undergraduate education, and (D) K-12 education." The FC's self-study report (Appendix A) points out that although the Center's mission has evolved over the ten years of its existence, its original goal to "advance the philosophical understanding of human freedom in all its dimensions" remains an accurate depiction of the Center's purpose.

From the start, the FC has been intimately associated with the UA's Department of Philosophy, a unit in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS). The Center's founding director, Prof. David Schmidtz, who has led the Center throughout its existence, is a tenured Philosophy professor. At its creation, the Center was lodged administratively within SBS, working closely with the Department of Philosophy. As one of about 20 interdisciplinary units (i.e., non-teaching units, as distinct from departments) within the College, the FC has reported to the dean of SBS.

The establishment of the FC was in keeping with a long tradition of interdisciplinarity at the UA. There exist perhaps 150 centers, institutes, bureaus, and other non-departmental units on the campus. Typically, such entities are created as a result of the accumulation of a critical mass of intellectual interest in a particular subject, often at the initiative of one or more highly-motivated faculty members. In this regard, the establishment of the FC was more or less representative of the process, with Director David Schmidtz being the force leading to the establishment of the Center. But two features stand out and are relevant to the review of the Center.

The first such feature can be traced to David Schmidtz's distinctive academic training. In addition to holding a Ph.D. in philosophy, he also obtained an advanced degree in economics and holds a courtesy appointment in the Department of Economics. His economic leanings are libertarian and it is those leanings that have attracted him to the broad concept of freedom, which he studies and writes on from a philosophical perspective. His publications and other contributions on that topic—as well as those of others he has brought to the Center—are prolific and highly respected among his peers.

Second, the writings and associated presentations by Prof. Schmidtz and his associates have been especially appealing to a number of wealthy individuals and organizations who find his work on freedom compatible with their conservative or classically liberal values. This mutual attraction has yielded major funding for the mission that Prof. Schmidtz has advocated and was instrumental in the creation of the Center. The attraction, founded on a personal relationship, was especially instrumental in securing early support from donors Randy and Earl "Ken" Kendrick, prominent political activists and philanthropists in the Phoenix area. Beginning with early support from the Kendricks, the Center has benefited substantially from a number of grants and later, from a series of annual appropriations from the Arizona legislature. That

support has enabled strong hiring, the editorship of two major journals, the publication of a suite of prestigious books, and the creation of a new department (also in SBS) of Political Economy and Moral Science (PEMS).

But the Center's distinctive success has exacted a cost: the FC is perceived by some—on campus and in the community—as politically motivated, and in the extreme, as tainted by the provenance of its funding. Consequently, the Center has been somewhat embattled, even as it has experienced continued fundraising prowess and enjoyed academic prominence. This ongoing controversy has formed a backdrop to the committee's assessment process.

The controversy notwithstanding, the committee's commission was neither to assess the politics of the Center nor to gauge the FC's acceptance within the UA or beyond. Rather, as with all such UA programmatic reviews*, the committee was asked to evaluate the Freedom Center's performance and progress in achieving its mission, based on internal evidence and testimony. To paraphrase the dean's charge, the committee was tasked with making specific, concrete, and feasible recommendations—within the resources currently in place—that would have the greatest impact to advance the Center's mission.

In keeping with the committee's assignment, the present report (1) reviews and characterizes the Freedom Center's accomplishments and evaluates its impact on the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Political Economy and Moral Science, other collaborating units, and the campus at-large, and its outreach impact in the community; (2) identifies key structural, administrative, and strategic weaknesses and challenges faced by the Center; and (3) lists courses of action recommended by the committee to enhance the Center's performance, assure its academic standing and reputation, and strengthen its relationships with colleagues and stakeholders in the greater Tucson area.

The report relies heavily on information obtained in the course of a field visit by the review committee to the University of Arizona on February 13 and 14, 2019. The visit was supplemented by the Center's ten-year self-study report (Appendix A), and by other materials provided by the Center (e.g., examples of teacher community and feedback) and the SBS dean's office (public comments received by the provost). The two-day field visit included approximately 20 meetings with the FC director, staff and core faculty; affiliated faculty; collaborating faculty; a three-person group representing faculty opposed to the Center's presence on campus; relevant department heads; the SBS dean and associate dean; UA state relations and communications officials; an associate vice president for research; and the interim provost.

A complete listing of the review committee's agenda is included as Appendix B.

* It should be noted that at the UA, all departments, centers, and other units are required to undergo periodic external reviews. It was only two years ago that college-based centers like the FC were included in this university-wide process, and accordingly, SBS has begun to undertake a systematic agenda of such program reviews. The Freedom Center, whose charter specified such periodic reviews, was asked to prepare for the present review in 2018.

2. Strengths of the Freedom Center

The stated mission of the Center for the Philosophy of Freedom at the University of Arizona is “to promote the understanding and appreciation of the ideals of freedom and responsibility along four dimensions: published research, undergraduate education, graduate education, and community outreach.” It has served this mission extremely well in several respects. The Freedom Center has made almost uniformly excellent hires of permanent faculty who contribute notably to the UA philosophy department. While the department has several areas of strength, it is widely regarded as the top department in the subfield of political philosophy. The Freedom Center’s hires have added to several of these areas of strength, not exclusively to political philosophy; but it has especially bolstered the department’s reputation in that area.

The Freedom Center houses two first-rate journals, *Social Philosophy and Policy* and *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, which publish excellent and politically disparate work in areas relevant to its mission. It hosts numerous events centered loosely on the philosophy of freedom but extending to various areas of philosophy and related disciplines. And it helps fund graduate students in philosophy, which is critical to the ability of the department to recruit strong applicants despite its struggle to offer aid and teaching packages competitive with other comparably strong departments.

But the respect in which the Freedom Center is uniquely valuable does not appear explicitly in its mission statement, and at least some of us believe that it should. This suggestion is part of our more general recommendation (see part 3, below) of more transparency in the working of the Center. A great benefit of the Freedom Center lies in its contribution to the intellectual and political diversity of the university and the discipline. It does so by including heterodox political viewpoints, which tend to be underrepresented in the philosophical discussion and, partly for that reason, often misrepresented in it. Partly because its publications, events, and faculty have diverse and sometimes conflicting political views—including those on the left and the right and those impossible to categorize on a simple spectrum—the Center consistently encourages open inquiry and contributes uniquely to the intellectual diversity of the field and the university.

It must be noted that the Center attracts criticism, both external and internal, due to this mostly tacit aspect of its mission. The criticism is ostensibly directed at worries about its funding, which include both private and public (State of Arizona) sources.

The criticism of the Center focuses on its financial support from the Arizona legislature and several private sources. There is more than one legitimate issue here. It can be questioned whether the sources of external support produce ideological bias or control of the Center. And it can be questioned whether lack of political diversity in the discipline, and in academia in general, undermines the mission of the university. In particular, the underrepresentation and denigration of conservative and libertarian ideas might be considered another opportunity for a public university, in particular, to become more diverse.

People will disagree in their answers to these questions, and to some extent we disagree amongst ourselves over them. But the record of the Freedom Center’s events and publications

speaks for itself: Its journals, the talks it sponsors, and its wealth of scholarly publications at the highest levels of the discipline do not reflect bias or one-sidedness but inclusiveness and excellence. The Center supports an especially strong group of scholars who have made the University of Arizona the best place in the world for political philosophy. The journals edited by Freedom Center faculty reflect the entire spectrum of philosophical opinion. Faculty supported by the Center, and its members, are of various political and intellectual persuasions.

We consider the Center's support of philosophy graduate students, with various specializations not limited to political philosophy, let alone any particular political perspective, to be crucial to the continued success of the department. Indeed, some of us wonder whether the department is aware of how deeply its fortunes are bound up with the continued presence of the Center.

One of the four pillars for the FC is their K-12 outreach focus. The Center's efforts have included high-school teacher support, tuition reimbursement, and stipends that have allowed teachers to improve their qualifications. The FC also developed a textbook that allowed teachers to teach a course on Ethics, Economy and Entrepreneurship. Having this course at the high-school level has allowed hundreds of students to qualify for dual enrollment credits. To date, 22 high schools have offered this course and over 400 students have transferred the dual enrollment credit to a college or university. The FC also supports high-school teachers by providing content and staff support focused on teaching students how to develop budgets and develop financial management skills. This program has been well received at the supported high schools.

3. Issues and challenges faced by the Freedom Center

In this section, we identify and discuss briefly the key issues, weaknesses, and challenges discovered by the committee in the course of its conversations and, readings, and encounters.

Lack of transparency

The committee heard one critical charge most consistently and loudly: LACK OF TRANSPARENCY.

The committee acknowledges that the Freedom Center owes its existence and much of its success to the vision and efforts of its founding director, Prof. Schmidtz. His reputation and his networking abilities have been instrumental in garnering recognition and very substantial support for the Center.

Notwithstanding this record of achievement, in conversations with the staff of the Freedom Center, one staffer described Director Schmidtz's administrative style as "Ready, fire, aim!" The staff expressed the feeling that they were often the last to know what was going on. They did not know, for example, by what criteria or process graduate student fellowships and jobs were awarded.

We spoke with core faculty of the Center which, at this time, number just two tenured faculty (other than Schmidtz) and two Career Track (non-tenure-eligible) faculty. The Center has other

faculty affiliates whose lines are in other departments. We asked about their input, if any, to the FC's self-study document. It emerged that the core faculty members were informally asked to provide some comments early in the process, but they never saw or approved any drafts of the document in progress, or the completed document. More generally, they appeared to be relatively uninvolved in setting priorities, determining future directions, or other aspects of decisionmaking. They seemed content to let the director deal with those matters while they pursued their research and teaching.

We spoke with graduate students in the Philosophy Department. After a year in the Philosophy graduate program, some such students are offered fellowships and jobs (usually associated with journal editing) sponsored by the Freedom Center. These students did not know by what criteria, or under what formal process (if any) the lucky students were chosen. Nor do they know the source/s of the funds that support them, something we believe they are entitled to know. Those who received these fellowships and jobs were glad to have them, but they expressed the desire that the selection process be formal and transparent.

Ineffective public relations and communications

Hand in hand with insufficient transparency within the Center and in regard to its relationships with colleagues and other units, the Center has lacked a public-relations strategy to convey its mission and accomplishments to the UA community and to the public. An effective approach to this matter would be useful in anticipating and responding to public impressions that can often be off the mark. For example, public comments received by the provost reveal a widespread impression that private donors are being allowed influence over hiring and curricula. The Center and the University possess evidence to refute this contention, but there has been no systematic attempt to do this.

This issue illustrates a major challenge faced by public universities: How to accept outside money (which is badly needed) without allowing the various agendas of the donors to destroy or undermine the academy's traditional and essential commitments to objectivity and balanced, free inquiry. It is undisputed that the Freedom Center has received millions from such sources as Randy and Ken Kendrick, the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, the Sarah Scaife Foundation, and other donors that are widely perceived (whether correctly or incorrectly) as having right-wing ideological agendas. In addition to monies from private sources, the FC has, since 2014, received substantial annual appropriations from the Arizona State Legislature. Those allocations have engendered some resentments among faculty from other departments who view this special funding arrangement as unfair.

As a matter of transparency and good public relations, it needs to be more widely publicized that moneys provided to the Freedom Center are used in an even-handed and ethical way, and that the Freedom Center comprises a remarkably diverse and balanced group of non-biased scholars and teachers.

Director Schmidt, when asked about how to achieve more effective public relations, responded that he preferred to not respond to what he sees as misinformed perceptions and reactions to the Center's efforts.

The committee is troubled that the Freedom Center, has not—with guidance and assistance from the central administration—mounted an organized and proactive public relations campaign aimed not at convincing its most committed critics, but at highlighting the excellence and diversity of its activities.

Centralized, top-down decisionmaking

The lack of transparency of the Center's operations is partly a result of Director Schmidt's top-down administrative style. As noted, decisions about the Center's course and priorities are arrived at more or less unilaterally at the director's discretion.

Since we believe that the continued flourishing of the Center requires greater separation between its institutional goals and the identity of its leadership (see following section), we find it worrisome that the Center was not able to retain its only other director. This was a difficult period for the Center, a time we think has not been sufficiently analyzed, and one whose potential lessons may not have been imparted. The episode is not mentioned in the self-study report, for instance. Prof. Michael McKenna was one of the successful original hires of the Center, and he continues to contribute to the excellence of the philosophy department. Yet he seems to have been kept in the dark about various aspects of the functioning of the Center during his term as director, not only by Prof. Schmidt, but by the administration as well. This fact—along with the pressure put on him to defend the Center during a period where it was under considerable attack and his (at least perceived) lack of control over the Center's expenditures and activities—led him to resign as director at what he believes was significant personal cost. We believe that greater transparency, power, and support from others at the university would have palliated these problems considerably, and we are puzzled as to why he was not given more support, which any future director will need.

While overall many of the Center's decisions and courses of action have proven successful, the committee believes that greater involvement by others would contribute to greater consensus and more harmony. The FC's highly centralized mode of governance, combined with low degrees of transparency and minimal attention to public opinion can contribute to the appearance of impropriety and to palpable confusion about the various missions of the Freedom Center, the Philosophy Department, and the Political Economy and Moral Science Department.

Leadership succession

Since we are convinced that the continued success of the Freedom Center is important to the welfare of the Philosophy Department and the university at large, we recommend that the Center develop a formal plan for succession in its leadership. Although the Center's history and funding are bound up with the unique fundraising and vision of Prof. Schmidt, we suggest that

it would best serve the current faculty, staff, and director of the Center to have a succession plan in place. This would also aid our broader recommendation that the Center develop a more transparent and articulated set of plans and procedures.

We recognize several challenges for this suggestion. First, the previous attempt to put in place another director went poorly and resulted in the resignation of a core faculty member. We find this episode regrettable and wish that Prof. McKenna's contributions to the Center were better acknowledged, even if it is too late for him to be adequately compensated for his sacrifices to it. There seem to have been failures of communication in this episode from several directions, which we hope would be rectified in any future transition of leadership. Second, though, given Prof. Schmidt's personal connections to several of the donors, we acknowledge that it would be extremely difficult for anyone other than him to be able to fundraise as effectively for the Center. Any future leader would have to be committed to the mission of the Center—and that mission would have to be more fully articulated—so as to give its public and private donors confidence that the Center will continue to function as it currently does. Such confidence is necessary in order for the Center to continue to function without undue interference from its benefactors. We think this should be possible, despite acknowledging the difficulties involved.

The Freedom Center's outreach efforts

The FC has never developed an implementation plan that clearly defines its work, impact, and outcome expectations for its outreach efforts. As part of its early work at the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), the Center began offering a course, "Ethics, Economy and Entrepreneurship." But the lack of clarity of the FC's outreach program led to the course and related activities being criticized by members of the local education community on two accounts: (1) not having followed the process to have the course approved by the district; and (2) basing the course on a textbook that was considered by some to be inadequate and/or inappropriate. Both of these assertions have been challenged, but the controversy resulted in the District not taking action necessary to allow the course to continue to be offered. Despite the TUSD position, other districts *have* approved the course and currently offer it as part of their dual enrollment programs.

Unclear Distinctions Among Entities

We were asked to review the Center for the Philosophy of Freedom—*not* the Department of Philosophy, or the newly-created Department of Political Economy and Moral Science (PEMS), or the Director of the Freedom Center (Professor David Schmidt). However, the distinctions among the foregoing are, to say the least, not always clear. External funds procured from donors by Prof. Schmidt, ostensibly for the Freedom Center, have been used to fund graduate students and faculty in the Department of Philosophy. Since the formation of the PEMS Dept., monies donated or allocated to the Freedom Center are apparently being transferred to PEMS at Prof. Schmidt's direction.

The administrative home of the Freedom Center

Centers and Institutes at the University of Arizona are classified as either “college level” or “university level.” The FC has been a college-level center, housed in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS), which also houses Philosophy and PEMS. As such, it is under the supervision of the SBS dean. University-level centers are under the supervision of either the vice president for research who runs RDI (the office of Research, Development, and Innovation), or potentially, the provost.

In the self-study, Prof. Schmitz expresses a preference for making the FC a university center as opposed to a college center. He believes the new status would facilitate various collaborative initiatives between the FC and units outside SBS. He also notes, “Such a move would also be congruent with the Freedom Center’s status as a unit receiving a direct state allocation of funding, as it would position the Center closer to the central administrative functions responsible for state and federal relations.”

The SBS dean’s office has indicated that it supports a move away from the college, to the central administration. At least one faculty member expressed the worry that changing the FC from a college center to a university center might have a negative impact on the Philosophy Department, which so far has benefited from the FC.

4. Recommendations

- Transparency. The committee believes that the decisionmaking procedures of the Center should be more transparent and codified.
- Public relations and communications. We believe that the Center and the University would benefit from an organized and proactive public relations campaign, mounted by the Center and the University. A well-thought-out communications strategy also would help clarify such points of confusion as the differences between what appear to be similar units.
- Decisionmaking and managerial style. The only director the Center has had, other than its founder and current director, resigned from the role at personal cost. The committee recommends that the Center adopt a more democratic and decentralized decisionmaking process.
- Creation of an advisory or governing board. Until now the only guidance the Center has received has been from its home college and from the UA central administration. The committee believes that the FC would benefit greatly by establishing a diverse board comprising faculty members drawn from multiple disciplines, other UA personnel, members of the community at large (including public- and private-sector representatives), and K-12 educators. Such a group could vet new initiatives, provide useful advice, and play an important role in the Center’s public-relations efforts.

- Leadership succession. Closely related to Center’s unilateral managerial approach is the question of the vision of the Center’s continued role independent of its current director—we see this as perhaps the greatest challenge for the Freedom Center moving forward.
- Outreach efforts. To avoid continuing controversies with local school districts, we recommend that the Center develop a thoughtful, coherent, and comprehensive outreach plan that anticipates problems and responds to community concerns.
- Administrative home for the Center. In the course of the evaluation, the issue of moving the Center from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to the central administration arose on multiple occasions. All concerned parties—the Center director, the SBS dean, and the two likely central administrative homes (the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research)—agreed that such a move would be appropriate and desirable. The committee concurs with this proposed move.
- Naming of Center. One member of the review team cautiously suggests that the University of Arizona look into the possibility of renaming the Center for the Philosophy of Freedom. A suitable possibility would be to name it in honor of the late Professor Joel Feinberg: ‘The Joel Feinberg Center for the Philosophy of Freedom.’ Any name change would require approval from the Arizona Board of Regents and this particular change would of course need permission from the Feinberg family.
- Equity compensation. The staff members who work at the Freedom Center are mostly female, and they expressed dissatisfaction with the level of their compensation. We recommend a compensation review for each member of the support staff.

FREEDOM CENTER PERIODIC REVIEW SITE VISIT AGENDA

Wednesday, February 13

8am-9am	Orientation breakfast with SBS Deans (Marriott)	Jane Zavisca, JP Jones
9am-9:15	Walk to Admin building	
9:15-10:00	Joint meeting of Freedom Center core members: director, faculty, staff	
10:00-10:30	FC staff	
10:30-11:00	FC core faculty	
11:00-11:30	Break	
11:30-12:00	Graduate students supported by FC	
12:00-12:30	Collaborators beyond SBS	Tauhidar Rahman (CALs), Dan Asia (CFA)
12:30-1:30	FC director (over lunch)	David Schmitz
1:30-2:00	Collaborators beyond SBS	Chris Robertson (Law)
2-2:30	Economics faculty	Andreas Blume, Price Fishback (Eller)
2:30-3:15	Philosophy faculty & former FC Head	Michael McKenna
3:15-3:30	Break	
3:30-4:00	PEMS Head	Jerry Gaus
4:00-4:30	Philosophy Head	Jason Turner
4:30-5:00	Other SBS faculty	David Gibbs (History), Jeremy Vetter (History), Leila Hudson (MENAS)
5:00-6:30	Break	
6:30-8:00	Dinner off campus	Jane Zavisca to escort

Thursday, February 14

8:30am-8:45am	Assemble in Marriott Lobby, walk to social sciences	David Schmitz, Jane Zavisca
8:45am-9:45am	Continental breakfast and facilities walkthrough (in FC conference room, Social Sciences building)	David Schmitz, FC staff
9:45am-10:00am	Walk to Admin building	Jane Zavisca
10am-11:00am	State relations	Sabrina Vasquez, Chris Sigurdson
11am-12pm	Prep for exit interviews / break	
12pm-1pm	SBS exit interviews (over lunch)	JP Jones, Jane Zavisca
1pm-2pm	Senior leadership exit interview	Jeff Goldberg, Brooks Jeffery
2pm-5pm	Begin drafting report	