SUCCESS through a SHARED VISION

A Case Study from the Fund for Academic Renewal

The Tocqueville Program | Furman University
Intelligent College Giving
A series from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni’s Fund for Academic Renewal.

Intelligent college giving has the power to renew our nation’s universities. By sharing the stories of donors who have led the charge to support academic excellence, enrich course offerings, and promote intellectual diversity and academic freedom on campus, we at the Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR) hope to inspire others to follow their lead. The following case study of the Tocqueville Program at Furman University provides an example of transformative philanthropy. Featuring an interview with the founding donors, insight from the program’s managing director, and advice from FAR’s director, we hope that this case study encourages more donors to make targeted gifts to higher education.

To view the rest of the series, including video interviews with philanthropists John Altman and Peter Sulick, please visit www.AcademicRenewal.org.

The Tocqueville Program
“An intellectual community devoted to seeking the truth about the moral and philosophic questions at the heart of political life.”

Named for the great student of democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, the Tocqueville Program sponsors courses and brings prominent scholars and public intellectuals to Furman University’s campus “with the aim of encouraging serious and open engagement with the moral questions at the heart of political life.” Founded in 2006 thanks to the generosity of Virginia “Ginny” and Sandy MacNeil, the program is currently co-directed by professors Benjamin Storey and Aristide Tessitore. Professor Jenna Storey serves as the managing director.

The Tocqueville Program is “supported by individual donors, alumni, and other philanthropic organizations who share in the belief that genuine liberal education encourages students to become more thoughtful citizens and more dignified human beings.”

Since its founding, the program has grown significantly and now includes a postdoctoral fellowship, Engaged Living Program, Political Thought Club, Society of Tocqueville Fellows, and a summer placement program for students.

- **Fellows** in the two-year postdoctoral fellowship teach courses as well as contribute to the running of the Tocqueville Program.

- **First-year students** can choose to integrate academics with their residential life through the Engaged Living Program, a year-long course that introduces questions about human nature, society, and government.

- **Every Friday**, students gather to discuss philosophy or literature as part of the Political Thought Club.

- **The Society of Tocqueville Fellows** meets for evening discussions and weekend retreats to discuss contemporary political problems through the lens of political philosophy. The fellowship requires an application.

- **The Summer Placement Initiative** prepares students for professional success after graduation. Students are connected to internships and study opportunities with organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and the Hertog Foundation.
The Tocqueville Program at Furman University

The Founding Donors
A Conversation with the MacNeils

What drew you to Furman University as the right place to start the Tocqueville Program?

Ginny: Neither of us went to Furman, though we live relatively close to the campus. We lived and worked in Wisconsin before retiring in North Carolina. At church, we met someone who works at Furman, and he connected us to two Furman professors, Ty Tessitore and Ben Storey. When we met with them, we found we had similar concerns about higher education and similar views on what could be done to make things better. We knew that we could trust these professors to carry out our shared vision for a program. Part of that trust came from knowing the character of the person who introduced us to them.

Sandy: Once we decided to start the program at Furman, we raised the initial investment from friends of ours in Wisconsin. They respected us personally and especially our involvement with higher education. Ginny’s background is in education. She worked in development for a small engineering college and then served on the board of regents at the University of Wisconsin. Our friends trusted our insight, and, after all, we’re helping students develop character and leadership. That’s easy for people to get behind.

What inspired your gift, and what do you hope it achieves?

Sandy: Higher education has a problem, and it’s more than just a money problem. We were concerned about what wasn’t being done in higher education and decided to try to initiate some activity. Forming the Tocqueville Program gave people a chance to participate in that mission.

There’s a great deal of talent in this country amongst individuals who can’t afford to go to college. On the other hand, there are people like us with a little more means who want to help higher education without just giving to the old alma mater. We also saw the opportunity to generate support for kids to get an education who otherwise wouldn’t have the means to go to college.

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Ginny and Sandy MacNeil with Dr. Anthony Kronman. Photo by Jeremy Fleming.

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Education, particularly higher education, needs to have two sides to the story. Students need to hear a view and its opposing view in order to make their own decisions. We feel that bigger institutions are stifling this kind of dialogue.
Do you have any advice for people who are thinking about giving to higher education?

**Sandy:** The change in higher education is going to take place, not from the top down, but from the middle and bottom up. There are plenty of schools like Furman around the country where people like us can either contribute to an existing program or develop one. We find that larger institutions are not interested in what the average person has to say, so we are attracted to smaller colleges where a difference can still be made.

Practically speaking, we learned a great deal from Ginny’s background in education about how to structure the gift. You don’t give the money directly to the college. Instead, you identify individual professors within that institution, partner with them, and give the money to a foundation. The foundation can release funds upon request to these individual professors as needed, rather than the college.

What do you look for in the programs you support?

**Sandy:** We focus on leadership and character development. It’s good for students to know something about science and technology since that’s the way the country is going, but that direction could change in 10 or 20 years. Technical skills can become obsolete. But once an individual learns how to think and communicate, that transcends any changes that might take place in a culture.

*The Tocqueville Program seems to have flourished at Furman. Did the growth of the program surprise you?*

**Ginny:** This program has grown far beyond what we ever expected.

**Sandy:** Originally, we started this program as a course and lecture series for undergraduate students. Now, we have postdoctoral fellows who want to learn how to teach through the Tocqueville Fellows. Undergraduate students formed their own discussion groups as well as joined a Political Thought Club. The students took the program and ran with it so that they could keep learning outside of the classroom. We also have a Summer Placement Initiative that connects high-achieving students to internships and programs at places like the American Enterprise Institute, the Hertog Program, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

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What has been the most rewarding part of the Tocqueville Program?

**Ginny:** It’s been very rewarding to be involved with something that is so meaningful to many students, and they’ve just taken off with it. Students have started attending Furman because of the Tocqueville Program. In fact, I was sitting next to an older gentleman at a lecture. While we were waiting for the lecture to start, he turned to me and said, “My grandson decided to come to Furman because of the Tocqueville Program.” He had no idea who I was. Some of the mothers that also attended the lectures have said, “Thank you so much for starting this program.” And I just said, “Their success is our reward.” That’s really what it is.
The Program’s Perspective

Jenna Storey, Managing Director, The Tocqueville Program

The Tocqueville Program started over 10 years ago when our founding donors, Ginny and Sandy Mac-Neil, approached Professors Ben Storey and Ty Tessitore through a mutual acquaintance at Furman. In conversations with the MacNeils, we found that we had a similar passion for improving higher education, and the main outlines of the Tocqueville Program started to take shape. As we began fundraising to make the program a reality, the MacNeils thoughtfully made connections for us with grant-making foundations and gave us advice on the wider world of donor relations. We raised the initial funds to launch the program with their help. After a few years, we were able to demonstrate the success of our work and attract a wider circle of donors, including many Furman alumni. We’re particularly proud of our recent graduates who, as they start careers and begin families, have often chosen to make small but important gifts that indicate how much they would like to see the Tocqueville Program continue to play a growing part in undergraduate life at Furman.

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The Tocqueville Program’s success depends on mutual trust between donors and faculty.

Along with the investment from donors, we credit the growth and longevity of the Tocqueville Program to our focus on finding the right people. Money in education is transformative only when people understand how to use it effectively to benefit students. We’ve been fortunate to find donors who understand that an overly lean staff can hinder the effectiveness of a program. In the course of the last decade, we’ve made three significant expansions to Tocqueville Program staffing.

First, the Jane Gage Hipp family gave us an endowed gift to hire a managing director who would also teach Tocqueville Program classes. After a few years, the university added to this gift to create a permanent tenured line for the position, ensuring longevity for our work. Second, the Jack Miller Center has for several years funded a postdoctoral fellow; this is a young scholar who teaches courses at Furman and has the opportunity to be mentored by senior teachers. Third, Furman Board Member Emeritus Bill Howes and his wife Mary have recently supported the hiring of a student intern and teaching assistant. This has enabled us to begin work with social media so that we can become better connected with our donors and alumni.

The Tocqueville Program’s success depends on mutual trust between donors and faculty. We consider ourselves to be co-workers on the same project who have different but complementary roles to play. Faculty need flexibility to tailor their programs to be pedagogically effective and to meet changing expectations and needs on campus.
This situation can make donors uneasy, as they are understandably anxious about how their money will be used. We’ve been fortunate to work with donors who realize that attaching too many strings to a gift hinders its potential to do good. We’ve also worked hard to build relationships with our donors through cultivating a shared understanding of the program and its goals, and always being willing to talk. We’ve found donors to be delightful interlocutors, eager to have conversations about Furman and the needs of our students.

Another important aspect of our relationships with donors is that we encourage them to be involved in the program’s activities so that they can see the impact their gifts are having on Furman students first-hand. The MacNeils have come to almost every lecture since the series started in 2008. By meeting the fellows and speakers, our donors gain a very well-developed sense of the program and its influence. We also encourage the students and donors to get to know each other, sometimes over lunch or coffee.

Students are best situated to explain how the program is making a difference in their lives and on campus. And they can also take those opportunities to ask donors to share their valuable expertise and experience.

Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, we think it is important that students recognize the activities the program provides are not free. If we go on a retreat, we let them know that someone is paying for our wonderful weekend of study and fellowship. Students frequently write or sign letters of thanks, which both make the donors feel appreciated and help students to be aware of the value of the experiences that they are profiting from.

By approaching the effort to meet the financial needs of our program as an opportunity to involve donors and students in an extended community, we have found fundraising to be enjoyable, rewarding, and instructive work. It has become an integral part of the way that we seek to care for the intellectual and moral education of our students.
The Keys to Intelligent College Giving

Emily Koons Jae, Director, Fund for Academic Renewal

The Tocqueville Program at Furman University has flourished in the past decade. Conversations with the MacNeils and Jenna Storey show that this success is, in large part, due to a shared vision and mutual trust between donors and campus leaders.

Shared Vision

Before approaching Furman University, the MacNeils had clear objectives for their gift. They wanted to encourage academic dialogue, leadership, and character development, and it was important to the MacNeils that their gift have a tangible impact on students. Professors Benjamin Storey and Aristide Tessitore had the same goals of promoting academic excellence and providing leadership training for their students at Furman University.

The Tocqueville Program began as a course accompanied by an endowed lecture series. A shared vision between donors and professors that was broad enough to make room for the program to expand over the years, while narrow enough to remain true to its original purpose, has allowed the Tocqueville Program to grow in impact and size in the decade since its founding.

Mutual Trust

For many donors, their trust in an institution is based on their own four years as a student at the university. Neither of the MacNeils attended Furman University, but they had confidence in Professors Storey and Tessitore because they were introduced to one another by a trusted, mutual acquaintance and because they shared a vision for what could be achieved at Furman. A well-crafted gift agreement and on-campus relationships are mutually reinforcing.

A strong gift agreement should clearly articulate a vision for the gift. But even the most iron-clad gift agreement will fail to implement a donor’s vision without the grounding of a trusted relationship. Together, they serve as the foundation for gifts that transform our nation’s colleges and universities.

The story of the Tocqueville Program is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished when donors and university leaders have a common understanding. However, it can be difficult to find the right on-campus partner to steward a major gift. The Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR) exists to give potential donors confidence in their gifts to higher education. We help donors communicate their vision and ensure that their intent will be respected.

With access to a network of on-campus contacts, FAR helps donors maximize the impact of their investments by helping craft gift agreements that are carefully tailored to achieve their goals. Because every gift is different, FAR provides personalized guidance for individual donors. The Fund for Academic Renewal helps higher education donors to:

• Clarify a statement of intent
• Identify high-quality programs to support
• Craft a robust gift agreement
• Ensure campus officials fully understand their goals
• Evaluate the impact of their gifts

Thanks to a generous grant from the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, we provide these services, including legal consultation from Arnold & Porter LLC, at no cost to donors.
“In its dedication to investigating questions that cross the boundaries of our partisan divisions, this program exemplifies Furman’s commitment as a liberal arts institution to following the truth wherever it leads. In its dedication to fostering intellectual community and to mentoring our students, it also exemplifies the promise of The Furman Advantage to help young people discover how they might craft lives of fulfillment and purpose.”

—Dr. Elizabeth Davis, President, Furman University

“Now that I have become a research assistant at the American Enterprise Institute, I can see that my Tocqueville experience has equipped me to be successful . . . Nothing in my Furman experience developed my intellectual muscles better than my time in Tocqueville classes, the Political Thought Club, and in the Society of Tocqueville Fellows.”

—Andrew Smith, Class of 2015