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Back on track

Furman University

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Disciplinary action

Fund boosts Furman's commitment to the humanities

"The first thing I shall do, as soon as I receive the money, is to buy Greek authors; after that, I shall buy clothes."
— Desiderus Erasmus

Erasmus' famous comment from 1500 characterizes the financial straits that have plagued scholars for centuries, but especially scholars in what we commonly call the "humanities," a group of disciplines derived from the old notions of a liberal arts education. These disciplines include classical and modern languages, literature, history and philosophy.

Because economic resources tend to focus on science and technology — and are increasingly diminishing for academia in general — locating funding for projects and research in the humanities has become correspondingly difficult. The Humanities Development Fund (formerly the National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant) is trying to change that for professors and students at Furman.

In December of 1997, Furman received a challenge grant from the NEH. The original intent of the grant, titled "The Humanities and the Digital Age," was to study ways in which the computer revolution would affect traditional teaching and learning in the humanities.

During the lifetime of the grant, humanities faculty members developed new courses and adapted their classroom approaches to incorporate a greater use of digital technology. Three new courses were created under the rubric of Humanities 21, providing upper-level students with a unique opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary study.

English professor Melinda Menzer and religion professor Claude Stulting developed a course titled "The Joy of Texts: The Pursuit of Meaning in Sacred, Secular, and Cyber Space," which they have taught twice. The course contextualizes the computer revolution as one technological development among many, including the book. Menzer recalls how one student was amazed to discover that, through the vagaries of text ownership and publication, multiple versions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* exist — a fact almost inconceivable in a modern world of copyright and editorial control.

The NEH grant also supported the work of Aristide Tessitore of

political science and French professor David Morgan. They teamed for a class titled "Rival Meanings of Freedom in the Western Tradition," which focused on the political philosophy that undergirds democratic thought. This spring, Richard Letteri (communication studies) and Anne Leen (classics) taught "Reading the Rhetorical in Classical Antiquity," a course that, according to Leen, examined "the theory and practice of rhetoric as a means of shaping and communicating cultural values and ideologies through the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome."

In addition, the three-course Humanities sequence, which surveys Western Civilization from ancient Egypt to the collapse of the Soviet Union, has been revised and updated. Some of these changes have involved the use of multimedia technology to enhance the classroom experience, but different subject matter relating to the specifics of the original grant have also been incorporated — such as a new view of the book as an object of technology.

Since the NEH's formal participation in the grant ended in 2001, the committee overseeing the Humanities Development Fund, which I chair and serve on with William Allen (French), Ronald Granieri (history), Richard Prior (classics), Letteri and Stulting, has expanded the abilities of the fund. For the first time, applications for a variety of projects other than course development have been solicited, limited only by the imagination and

enthusiasm of the faculty.

Providing funding for speakers or sponsoring special symposia are only two of many areas the fund could support. In addition, the HDF will provide financial compensation and support for the editorship of the *Furman Humanities Review*, one of the few academic journals devoted exclusively to undergraduate research in the humanities. As Granieri says, "The existence of this fund offers an exciting opportunity to find creative new ways to introduce students to the humanities."

The Humanities Development Fund can solve part of Erasmus' problems. While it won't help with those clothing bills, it will help further Furman's commitment to providing a strong liberal arts education for its students.

— Margaret Oakes
Assistant Professor of English



Back on track

New company steps in to develop retirement community

One year after Furman and The Kendal Corporation agreed to suspend plans for building a continuing care retirement community near the campus, the university's board of trustees voted at its February meeting to begin discussions with a new company that would assume the role of developer and manager of the project.

The university has entered into negotiations with Asbury Services, Inc., of Gaithersburg, Md., a not-for-profit corporation that supports the needs of organizations that provide housing and health-care services for older adults. The company oversees continuing care retirement communities in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Oklahoma.

Furman had announced in June of 2000 that it would work with The Kendal Corporation of Kennett Square, Pa., to build a retirement community on 40 acres of university property near the golf course.

But the relationship was dissolved a short time later and the project was temporarily postponed.

"We continued to believe that having a retirement community near the Furman campus was a great opportunity for everybody involved," says Wendy Libby, Furman's vice president for business affairs. "We started preliminary discussions with Asbury last spring and were impressed with what they have done in the area of continuing care."

Libby says that a marketing study of the Greenville area, completed in late 2001, has proven to be "encouraging." Asbury's next step, she says, will be to garner financial support for the project. If everything progresses smoothly, Asbury could be taking deposits for the retirement community by the fall of this year, and construction could begin by late 2004 or early 2005.

Libby says that the proposed retirement

community would still be located near the Furman Golf Course, where the residents would be close enough to the campus to take full advantage of the university's academic, cultural and recreational offerings. The community would feature 250 independent living residences, including villas, apartments, and assisted living and skilled nursing care facilities.

Working with Furman and Asbury Services in the development of the retirement community will be Cochran, Stephenson & Donkervoet Architects of Baltimore, Md., Craig, Gauden & Davis of Greenville, and Spectrum Marketing of Gastonia, N.C.

For more information or to be placed on the retirement community's mailing list, contact Evelyn Onofrio at (864) 294-2140 or by e-mail at evelyn.onofrio@furman.edu.

Asbury's Web site is accessible at www.asbury.org.