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A Response to The Perils of Philanthropy

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A letter in response to [The Perils of Philanthropy : The Case of the Munk School](#).

This article was further mentioned by David Naylor, President of the University of Toronto, in [Open Letter on Philanthropy at the University of Toronto](#).

Two faculty members of the University of Toronto published a lengthy article last week entitled "The Perils of Philanthropy: The Case of the Munk School" in The Blue and White in which they argue that philanthropy is a threat to academic freedom. The article contains many broad statements that are unsupported by the facts and require a direct response.

The authors are right that a critical and core value in universities is academic freedom. It is academic freedom that enables scholars to get at the truth, to challenge conventional wisdom, to discover and correct, and to argue the unpopular and defend the disturbing. Without academic freedom, our universities - and our democratic societies - would be at risk. It is for these reasons that we defend academic freedom so fiercely.

Where the authors are wrong is that we live in times in which academic freedom is imperiled in general and in particular by philanthropy. While our universities do indeed currently need much greater support from government, philanthropy has always been important to the creation of great universities and to the fulfillment of their mission. Philanthropy and academic freedom can walk hand in hand, as long as academic priorities are set on the ground - by departments, centres, faculties, and the like. That is certainly the case at the University of Toronto, where our process for fundraising begins with our academic units setting out their aspirations. These aspirations are then approved by the Provost's Office and that triggers a joint effort amongst divisional leaders, the President, the Office of Advancement and faculty members to try to get our projects and plans funded by those who share our interests and ambitions. Without our friends and benefactors, the

education of our students, as well as the research and scholarship in this country, would be imperiled. The danger, that is, lies in losing our friends and benefactors, not in their participation in our university.

The case of the landmark gift by Peter and Melanie Munk to the University's School of Global Affairs is a perfect example of how successful partnerships can work. The creation of a School of Global Affairs was envisioned by our faculty members and a detailed plan was approved by the University's Academic Board effective July 1, 2008. It was this vision and plan that inspired the Munks to provide an unprecedented gift of \$35 million to support the aspirations of the University to become one of the world's leading institutions for research, study and teaching in this critically important field. Yet Professors Hamel and Valteau allege that by accepting this gift the University of Toronto has somehow retreated from asserting its own academic priorities. In fact, the opposite is the case.

The authors allege that this gift is a threat to academic freedom. This is a serious charge and one that demands a close review of the details of the gift agreement which sets out the parameters of the gift. The authors review the specifics of the agreement and acknowledge that it "includes a preamble of 10 so-called "recitals" dealing with the context", yet they fail to spell out in their article that what those recitals actually state is the context for the relationship.

The first recital reads: "International studies is a top academic priority at the University and the University is committed to becoming one of the world's leading institutions for research, study and teaching in this field". In other words, the University has set its own academic priorities and is basing its plans on them as well as the ever-present goal of excellence.

The second recital reads: "In furtherance of the objective described in recital A (the "Objective"), the University approved the establishment of a new School of Global Affairs (the "School") effective July 1, 2008." In other words, the University conducted a full review of the proposed establishment of the School and approved it through the normal governance process.

The eighth recital reads: "The Donor enthusiastically supports the Objective and the University's vision and plans for the School and wishes to contribute funds to assist the University in achieving its vision and plans." In other words, the donor supports the University's academic plans and aspirations, not vice versa.

The final recital reads: "The parties affirm their mutual commitment to the University's Statement of Institutional Purpose, which includes a commitment to foster an academic community in which the learning and scholarship of every member may flourish, with vigilant protection for the rights of freedom of speech, academic freedom and freedom of research as described in the University's Statement on Freedom of Speech and in Article 5 of the Memorandum of Agreement between the University and the University of Toronto Faculty Association." This is the standard clause used in donor agreements to make clear to all that philanthropy at the University is accepted in the context of clear and unequivocal protection of the core value of academic freedom.

The reason we enter into donation agreements is so that there is clarity and transparency of the relationships with our donors. Donor agreements are in essence a contract whereby our donors generously pledge their own resources to fund our academic ambitions and in return the University commits to spend the money in the way intended by the agreement. The agreement is also made for the protection of both the University of Toronto and its very generous donors against spurious and unfounded allegations of improper influence. The Hamel and Valteau article is an example of why this is necessary and wise. Indeed Professors Hamel and Valteau offer no actual evidence that there has been any breach or threat to academic freedom in the Munk case. Why? Because there is none. Rather they offer the following: "It is very important to stress that this "chill" on academic freedom is to be expected quite independently of the actual, or any stated, position of the Donor about appropriate fields of study or about freedom of inquiry."

The donor has not asserted anything, nor taken any position for that matter, on what the appropriate fields of study are. The donor agreement, which sets out what are the actual areas that the \$35 million gift from the Munks is being used to support, leaves these decisions to the University under the following broad categories:

- A prestigious endowed directorship for the School, which will be competitive with equivalent positions at the major international studies schools of Europe and the United States.

- Six high profile endowed Chairs
- Visiting Senior and Junior Fellows from top international universities to be resident at the School and to work with faculty and graduate students. These funds will also help attract outstanding diplomats at home and abroad, journalists, public servants and corporate leaders as resident Fellows.
- An expendable fund which will be used to support programming (for example, conferences, research projects, etc.) as well as assist the School to collaborate with major print media, governments and international universities to enhance its profile and its work.

These are the areas of priority identified by the University in order to achieve our goal of excellence for both our faculty and our students.

The University in return commits to provide to the Donor an annual written report indicating the progress of the School, a financial report of the use of their gift and a description of the program, initiatives and activities of the School. The Director of the School will also offer to meet with the Board of The Peter and Melanie Munk Charitable Foundation once a year to discuss those programs, activities and initiatives of the School which their donations have enabled. This reporting mechanism fulfils our accountability obligations. We need to use the funds in the way we agreed upon and this accountability should not be confused with any threat to academic freedom.

The authors also take issue with the fact that the expanded School of Global Affairs may share space with the Canadian International Council, a think-tank on global issues. First, the proposal by the University to share space with the CIC predated the Munk gift and the only reason that it is referenced in the donor agreement was the University's desire to be transparent with our donor that the new space for the Munk School could be shared. Second, the authors suggest that this is sinister because it is the responsibility of the University to ensure a certain isolation for its scholars from all outside parties and preserve the "ivory tower". But while the University must of course protect the academic freedom of its scholars, it also encourages the engagement with individuals and organizations where their knowledge, expertise and experience add something to education and research.

There is one sentence from the Agreement which has been taken out of context by both the authors and others to suggest that only certain faculty members and staff would be allowed to use the front door while others would be forced to use a back entrance. This is patently absurd and an indication of the ways the donor agreement has been misinterpreted to support various conspiracy theories. This sentence was taken from the section dealing with the plan for moving the Munk School for Global Affairs to the heritage mansion at 315 Bloor Street. There is also a possible second phase construction at a later date of a very large building linked to the heritage building at 315 Bloor Street which could house further expansion of the Munk School and other academic units of the University. For traffic flow purposes, it made no sense that all the occupants of or visitors to the large adjacent building would use the front door of the heritage building as an entrance. There would be a separate entrance on Devonshire Place for all traffic to the new building. The agreement tried to make this clear. Since it appears to have failed in its quest for clarity, I wish to make doubly clear that students, faculty, staff, and visitors to the Munk School are of course free to enter by the front door.

Lastly, the authors repeat the ill-founded theory that philanthropy is a negative influence on the University of Toronto because it supports only business-related faculties at the cost of other areas of the university. The authors ignore the transformative effects that our major benefactors have had across the full span of the university including Humanities (Chancellor Emeritus Henry N.R. Jackman), Social Work (Lynn Factor-Sheldon Inwentash), Nursing (Lawrence Bloomberg) and Medical Research (Terrence Donnelly), to name just a few. These donors have enabled the University to achieve its aspirations for greatness in a financially constricted time, the prime beneficiaries of which are our faculty and students. Our donors deserve our thanks, not innuendo and baseless criticism.

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