

Kochs Off Campus!

UA's Freedom Center: Champion of Inequality

The Center for the Philosophy of Freedom is a right-wing libertarian think tank at the University of Arizona [UA]. It was founded in 2008 with grant money from the Charles Koch Foundation and Koch allies. Since 2014, the Arizona legislature has given it more than \$22 million to push a right-wing agenda. The "Freedom Center" distorts education to fit its ideology and recruits students to advance its agenda – all under the auspices of UA's good name.

It appears the Freedom Center's specific role in Charles Koch's grand plan is to create a global network of academic programs – in both high schools and universities -- focused on what the Freedom Center calls the philosophy, politics & economics of "freedom."

Koch Agenda in UA's PPEL Program

The Freedom Center controls the Philosophy, Politics, Economics & Law (PPEL) program at UA and has designed the core PPEL curriculum to emphasize libertarian philosophy.

For the Freedom Center, "philosophy of freedom" means a strong emphasis on the individual and a relative disregard for the ethical concepts of community, mutual aid and mutual responsibility.

For the Freedom Center, "politics of freedom" does not mean a democracy of the people, by the people and for the people, but rather freedom for a few from what they see as the "tyranny" of the majority.

For the Freedom Center, "economics of freedom" does not mean a well-ordered economy. Instead, it means freedom from taxation and protective regulation, plus privatization of government services such as Social Security, Medicare, veterans' benefits, public schools, prisons, and roads and highways. This could be summarized as the "freedom" to keep all your money and not help your fellow human beings.

The Freedom Center advocates a justice system that furthers private profits and power. Justice would emphasize the economic efficiency of laws rather than safety, environmental preservation, or human rights and fairness; limit legal penalties for owners and management of companies; and minimally enforce anti-trust laws under the mistaken assumption that mergers and acquisitions leading to monopolies increase efficiency.

Freedom Center's High School Course

The Freedom Center offers a dual enrollment course for which high school students can get credit for "PPEL 101" at UA. The textbook for this course (formerly *Ethics, Economy & Entrepreneurship [EEAE]*, now *Commercial Society*) and many of its videos are very ideological in nature.

Nine high schools in Arizona offered EEAE in 2017-18. Thanks to Kochs Off Campus!, the course was canceled in the Tucson Unified School District and the Amphitheater School District. The course is still being taught in two other states, Mexico, and private schools in Arizona.

Take Charge Today

The Freedom Center has acquired Take Charge Today [TCT], including its database of 15,000 teachers around the country, in order “to further build a program in EEAE.” TCT offers free financial literacy lesson plans, but the Freedom Center could offer its EEAE course to those teachers as well.

Freedom Center Misconduct

Agreements that UA signed with the Charles Koch Foundation and two other donors to the Freedom Center require UA to show the donors the resumes of faculty candidates for hire. This was improper interference with academic freedom.

Documents released by UA in response to our public records request indicate UA tried to cover up how much money the Freedom Center received from the Charles Koch Foundation.

Another document shows the Freedom Center Director yanked funding for the Department of Political Economy and Moral Science [PEMS] because the donor would not like the candidate chosen by the PEMS faculty search committee.

The Sordid History of PEMS

UA centers cannot oversee academic programs. Therefore, PEMS was created to offer undergraduate and graduate programs on behalf of the Freedom Center, and also to hire faculty without oversight from UA’s bona fide Philosophy Department, Economics Department, and School of Government and Public Policy.

In August 2017, the UA Faculty Senate voted yes on the Freedom Center’s proposal to create a new Department of Moral Sciences. The Freedom Center appears to have ignored the following UA Shared Governance rules before the vote: 1) avoid a summer decision, 2) conduct straw polls to assess the level of support for, or resistance to, the plan, 3) distribute progress reports to potentially impacted individuals, and 4) broadly release the “final” proposal for comment during a 30-day window.

One month after the Faculty Senate vote, the UA Provost, on behalf of the Freedom Center, asked the Arizona Board of Regents to change the name of the new department to the “Department of Political Economy and Moral Science.” That was an end run around the UA Economics Department and the School of Government and Public Policy, whose Faculty Senators otherwise might have voted no when asked to create the new department.

In 2020, PEMS received a \$415,000 grant from the Charles Koch Foundation. In 2021, in order to get approval for a PPEL Masters Degree program, PEMS (falsely) told the Faculty Senate that the Koch Foundation had retracted its grant. Faculty in Kochs Off Campus! have asked the Faculty Senate to investigate all these improprieties and adopt policies to prevent undue donor influence in the future.

Review and “Elevation” of the Freedom Center

Although the 2008 founding document for the Freedom Center called for a “sunset review” after five to ten years, UA did not do a review for *eleven* years. After public prompting, the review was finally completed in Spring 2019, but the public had to file public records requests to obtain UA’s report on the review!

After the review, the UA administration “elevated” the Freedom Center to University Center status. The administration did not act in good faith when it proceeded with this elevation before letting the public see the report.

Freedom Center Attacks Democracy

Charles Koch and the wealthy donors he recruits have weaponized their vast wealth to attack public services and people power. One of their tactics is to establish academic centers that produce biased studies and other literature supporting privatization and attacking their targets, which include:

- Public education
 - Labor unions
 - Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid
 - Unemployment Insurance and Workers' Compensation
 - Public lands
 - Mass transit
 - Environmental and other regulations
 - Science that interferes with profits
 - Public streets and highways
 - Voters
 - The judiciary
 - Government agencies
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Written and distributed by Kochs Off Campus! - a nonpartisan group of Tucson residents, UA faculty and students concerned about the undue influence of "big money" on public education, and public subsidies for ideological institutions.

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6/18/22