

Center for the Study of American Democracy
Executive Summary
January 2007

Kenyon College proposes to establish a permanent Center for the Study of American Democracy to promote the historical, political, and cultural study of our country's fundamental principles and historical practices. With goals to improve public debate on contemporary and historical issues, transcend conventional liberal or conservative positions, and put genuine deliberative inquiry in the forefront, the Center will provide the environment for the civil and probing conversation that the College regards as one of its most precious assets, and a key responsibility of academic institutions in the future. With undergraduate education at its core, the Center, through its public programs, will reach out to include among its participants eminent scholars, public policy and political experts, and civic and business leaders in a rare and nationally significant extended dialogue about these fundamental issues.

The Center is to be welcoming to interdisciplinary study, and to be guided by principles of toleration and civility. We are seeking to honor diversity of opinion, serious investigation, and open debate, and would seek to avoid the ubiquitous media-driven view of intellectual balance, namely, the juxtaposition of polar opposites. We seek to promote scholarship which, by addressing fundamental political questions for liberal democracy is of enduring significance.

As one of the nation's foremost liberal arts colleges, Kenyon has embarked on a renewed campaign for excellence under our recently appointed president, S. Georgia Nugent. In keeping with the College's mission, the campaign promises to devote new resources to advance our core values and strengths, which include the proposal to establish an academic center at the college.

We will seek a *We the People* Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide four million dollars; when matched three to one with campaign endowment funds, the Center's operations will be sustainable for years to come.

An NEH Challenge Grant for endowment and bridge funding will establish 1) a new faculty position in Political Science for a Director of the Center; 2) a post-doctoral Fellowship to assist the Director and allow Kenyon to help train future college teacher-scholars in the field of American democracy; 3) a biennial conference on topics that advance our understanding of American democracy and contribute to the participants' and our students' political and civic education; 4) public symposia on conference themes; 5) competitive summer research grants for faculty and students; and 6) a biennial interdisciplinary two-week summer seminar for Kenyon faculty. Annual fundraising will support additional activities carried out by the Center, for example, dissemination of conference materials on a Center website or in book format. An established Center will enable the College to enhance contacts for students who undertake summer internships in public affairs.

While the campus home for the Center would be in the Department of Political Science, broad oversight of the Center and its full integration into College life would be served by the Provost's appointment of an advisory board comprising Kenyon faculty, administrators, and outside experts.

The establishment of a permanent, endowed Center is a priority for Kenyon College, from oversight to financial underpinnings. To ensure success, the College has planned for the infrastructure of the Center. An NEH *We the People* Challenge Grant would seed the initial operations until endowment dollars from alumni contributions and foundation grants begin to contribute to the budget.

Given the particular and new challenges facing liberal democracy, we think establishing a Center for the study of American Democracy in a broader and more historical way is especially timely. Examining the principles of the American founding, our point of departure, and the most important thinking on liberal democracy is essential to the future stability of the American regime.

Building on Experience

The Center for the Study of American Democracy will honor its prototype, the Public Affairs Conference Center (PACC), and build on Kenyon's experience with this sort of enterprise. For more than two decades, from 1967 through 1987, the PACC brought together at a private annual conference political figures, journalists, and academics to discuss papers written on selected and significant public affairs topics. Ensuing discussions over a two day period permitted the participants to exchange ideas about the issues themselves, whether the topic was federalism, the Civil Rights movement, foreign policy, or religion and politics. In the first iteration of the PACC, conference papers, combined with readings from great figures in American political thought and institutions, were published in the enduring Rand McNally Public Affairs Series; the books were the chief method by means of which the PACC reached out to the broader public, both students and scholars. Political figures such as James Farmer, journalists such as Robert Novak and George Will; and scholars such as Martin Diamond, Walter Berns, and Herbert Storing attended the conferences. Participants included Gerald Ford, Thurgood Marshall, Donald Rumsfeld, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Jeane Kirkpatrick, Edmund Muskie, Adlai Stevenson, Wayne C. Booth, James Baldwin, and David S. Broder. The national media took a consistent interest in the PACC's activities. Under the direction of Professor Robert Horwitz, and subsequently Professors Robert Bauer and Fred Baumann, the PACC evolved. A seminar for students on the conference themes was added, along with public appearances by some conferees, affording students opportunities for formal and informal contacts with participants.

Professor Robert Horwitz, who is responsible, along with Robert A. Goldwin, for the PACC being at Kenyon, also shaped the entire curriculum of the Political Science Department to reflect the integration of political theory and political practice crucial to the education of citizens and to the deepest understanding of politics. Horwitz sought to make the question of the American regime—"can a nation so conceived and so dedicated

long survive”—the center of his department’s being. For him this also meant prioritizing political philosophy and political history. His leadership of the department sought to show students the inter-relationship of the subfields of the discipline and to make each segment of the department curriculum mutually supporting of every other.

The Center will enable us to move civic or citizenship education to a new level in a most exciting way. Recent studies, such as the Intercollegiate Study Institute Report, “The Coming Crisis in Citizenship,” and Derek Bok’s *Our Underachieving Colleges*, document the sometimes woeful level of civic knowledge characteristic of current college students. Although we have sought to address this concern by a curriculum that integrates political theory and practice and by sponsoring public affairs programming, the Center will enable us to bring the great world in to our students and faculty, vastly increasing opportunities for life-transforming education. In short, while we have not had the resources of the old PACC, carrying on its traditions to the extent possible, and exemplifying its spirit, has characterized the outlook and the activities of the Kenyon Political Science Department.

We envision a new pursuit that will complement the curriculum of the Department of Political Science as originally shaped by Robert Horwitz, and expand the reach of democratic study on campus and beyond.

The Center for the Study of Democracy

By integrating curriculum and public programs under the auspices of an endowed Center at Kenyon, we believe we will achieve our goal to promote critical thinking about America’s identity and its future by placing American democracy in its proper historical and comparative context. We will sponsor events that enrich the study of American political and cultural history, American founding principles, and constitutionalism and the rule of law to augment student learning and to provide a forum for professional and academic exchange unavailable within undergraduate consortia in our region, and, in a broader sense, among academic and public and political figures in Ohio. We also aim with the Center to make a significant contribution to democratic theory and understanding democratic practices.

A biennial conference held at Kenyon College will bring to life salient issues to increase our understanding of American liberal democracy, its founding principles and their contemporary relevance. Because the idea of integrating theory and practice is central to the Center as envisioned, conferences are designed to capture the perspectives of a broad and diverse representation of reputed scholars, journalists, scientists, ethicists, and public and political figures, who will come to campus to explore key issues in democracy alongside their academic counterparts. We envision a three-day conference that will include ten to twelve conferees. Some potential conference topics:

- Realism and Idealism in American Foreign Policy
- America and Islam
- What It Means to Be an American: Confronting Issues of Immigration

- Bio-Ethics and American Politics
- The Artist Reflects on the American Polity
- Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law
- America and Islam

Additional fundraising would enable the Center to collect and edit conference papers into a book. For immediate and far-reaching access to conference papers, the Center will develop a website with a blogsite and issue electronic newsletters.

Public Lectures by eminent visiting scholars on aspects of American Democracy and its history will be delivered in non-conference years.

The Center and Kenyon's Mission as a Liberal Arts College

Our proposal to establish a Center for the Study of American Democracy is eminently in keeping with Kenyon's mission as a liberal arts college, concerned to immerse students in serious study of fundamentally important questions in ways that will enhance their critical faculties and prepare them for post-graduate life, enabling them in particular to make independent and informed judgments about the world around them. Commitment to civil and informed political involvement has always been a key part of the "Kenyon Experience," that combination of rigorous formal academics, out-of-class learning opportunities, and hands-on activity that gives the College its special character. The intersection of theory and world-class debate, brought to the classroom and facilitated by existing faculty and the Center's Director, promises to deliver the environment for deeper comprehension for students and faculty alike. The Center's events and lectures will be interactive and plastic, engaging real-time debate on global issues affecting American democracy. By participating in, and bearing witness to, conversations among renowned scholars and pundits, students cultivate the capacities to speak and write clearly so as to advance thoughts and arguments cogently; to discriminate between the essential and the trivial; to arrive at well-informed judgments—whether aesthetic, scientific, or moral-political—and to work independently and with others. We believe that the Center for the Study of American Democracy will aid us significantly in carrying out the College's mission, and help us to clarify that mission to the larger world.