

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Bill Schlotter

UCSB'S CAPPS CENTER AWARDED \$500,000 NEH GRANT

The Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life has been awarded a \$500,000 National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant to support the center's mission. The grant funds will be distributed over three years and must be matched by \$1.5 million in private funds.

Established at the University of California, Santa Barbara in January 2002, the Capps Center is dedicated to promoting study and civil discussion of issues related to religion, values and public life through a variety of ways, including conferences, guest speakers, curricula, student internships, and fellowships. The Center encourages civic participation in a non-partisan, non-sectarian manner. And it emphasizes maintaining strong links between the university and the Santa Barbara community, such as joint programming undertaken with La Casa de Maria, a Roman Catholic retreat and conference center in Montecito.

"This grant is truly an endorsement of the academic vision of the Capps Center and an expression of confidence in its potential to bring about important dialogue on the timely subject of religion and public life in this country," said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "We are extremely pleased that our proposal was selected by a panel of scholars in this very competitive NEH program, and we will work diligently to raise the required matching funds."

Wade Clark Roof, center director and chair of UCSB's Department of Religious Studies, said that community programming is the centerpiece of the Capps Center.

"The NEH is funding us primarily to extend the classroom to the community, which, of course, was Walter Capps's vision," Roof said.

The Center honors the legacy of Capps, a popular professor of religious studies for 33 years at UCSB who was elected to the House of Representatives from California's 22nd Congressional District in 1996. An advocate of ardent but polite discourse who showed an uncommon commitment to civility and duty, Capps suffered a fatal heart attack in October of 1997, just 10 months after taking office. His widow, Lois, who continues to represent California's 22nd Congressional District, succeeded him in Congress.

In April 2001, a group of 52 members of the House of Representatives wrote to Congressional leaders seeking support for a request that funds be included in the U.S. Department of Education budget to help establish the Capps Center. In December 2001, Congress approved the appropriation -- also \$500,000 -- for that purpose.

This fall, the Center brought Pulitzer Prize-winning author Garry Wills to Santa Barbara for a public lecture on "Citizen Believers."

In the spring, the Center will bring Boston University professor Stephen Prothero, an expert on Asian religions in the United States, to UCSB as the first Capps Distinguished Visiting Professor. And in May, it will sponsor a conference on "Religious Pluralism in Southern California."

UCSB officials say the NEH funds and their matching contributions will make even more programming possible. David Marshall, dean of humanities and fine arts, said, "The NEH grant presents the campus and the community with a wonderful opportunity to establish a strong foundation for the Walter H. Capps Center, so it can stimulate research and discussion about the role of religion in public life for decades to come."

Rep. Lois Capps said the grant "will help the Capps Center carry out its goal of advancing the public dialogue about the many issues binding religious and civic life.

"I am thrilled that the Capps Center is receiving such a significant grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities," she added.

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