


BEHIND the NEWS

By University Business Staff
June 2009

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MYSTERY DONOR IDENTITY A PUZZLE NOT TO BE SOLVED

Piecing together the why's of anonymous giving.

IN ANY ECONOMIC CLIMATE, A donor secretly giving at least \$90 million to 18 or more higher ed institutions would create a buzz. Headline after headline prove that it is happening now. This secret donor's extreme anonymity is also unexpected.

While there's no hard data on the percentage of donors wanting to remain anonymous, typically the secret is only a public one. "They're anonymous but not truly anonymous," says Rae Goldsmith, vice president for advancement resources at CASE. That is, a few high-level individuals usually know the source of the gift. As for the case of this donor, whose identity is hidden from all, she adds, "I've never seen anything quite like it."

The past two months have brought frequent announcements of new gifts—plus reports that the donor may have started giving earlier than originally thought. For instance, not long after Montclair State University (N.J.) shared news of its \$5 million gift in early April, Binghamton University (N.Y.) announced an earlier \$6 million gift officials had initially planned to keep secret. They reportedly decided to announce it once they realized it was part of a bigger plan.

The pattern generally looks like this: A banker calls and then two checks follow by mail, the larger for scholarships for women and minorities, the other to be used as needed. As of press time, each institution has been headed by a woman president, and many have been public institutions.

Talk of the gifts—including speculation about who the donor or donors may be—is "definitely a water cooler topic," says Goldsmith. Mike Hutchison, associate vice president for development at Hendrix College (Ark.), which is male-led, has called peers in his CASE region to discuss it. But in his own office, he estimates discussing it for maybe 10 minutes—mainly just to affirm the donor, whose gifts show that "whether times are good or bad, we have those individuals out there who understand the impact that they can have with their gift."

The donor recognizes the challenges students working their way through college face, notes Susan Cole, Montclair State's president. "The central purpose of the gift is to ease the way for these students, enabling them to focus more intensively on their studies. It's a simple but elegant concept."

Less than simple: guessing the donor's identity. Some suspect a peer donor group. These groups, which have become more structured in the past decade, involve philanthropists gathering "for mutual learning and in some cases a joint allocation," explains Kat Rosqueta, executive director of the Center for High Impact Philanthropy at the University of Pennsylvania.

Another recent development in the philanthropy world is rankings of donors in publications such as Forbes and The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Thanks to those lists, and the easy availability of information today, "it's becoming increasingly difficult to have a low profile," Rosqueta says.

It's unlikely school officials will be the ones probing for a name. They're curious, but they have a "commitment to donor confidentiality," says Goldsmith, adding that while "it's a hard secret to keep," the donor seems intent on remaining undiscovered.

It's easier to speculate on why the secret is there in the first place. Some donors just want to opt out of the rankings game, Rosqueta notes. They "don't want to see their names in very public lists of donors." The gifts and their impact are then the emphasis, not the givers. They think, "It's not about me. It's about the good in the world that I'm trying to make," she says. And considering the recession, anonymous givers might be "sensitive to the fact that there are people who can't even meet basic needs. It's a way not to call attention to their wealth."



projects at women's colleges such as Cedar Crest (Pa.), Sweet Briar (Va.), Smith (Mass.), and Douglass Residential College (N.J.). In the process, they are becoming effective communicators, interdisciplinary learners, and exemplary scientists.

"The fields of scientific inquiry are better served when women are fully represented," states Cedar Crest President Carmen Twillie Ambar—and she should know. With its cutting edge programs in genetic engineering and forensic science, Cedar Crest is a leading example of the role sciences can play at women's colleges.

At the new frontier of science, women's colleges are now engaging next generation students in forensics, health sciences, nanotechnology, environmental studies, chemistry, and molecular biology. Significantly, women scientists are leading us into the future with cool new adaptive devices, medical breakthroughs, and investigative discoveries. These women's colleges are preparing the leaders of tomorrow and encouraging young scientific minds to blossom in the new millennium.

For more on how institutions can inspire women to succeed in science, see the full version of this column at www.universitybusiness.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1310.

—James Martin and James E. Samels, Future Shock columnists, are authors of *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Martin is a professor of English at Mount Ida College (Mass.), and Samels is president and CEO of The Education Alliance.

FIGURING OUT FIRE

FIRE SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE University of New Haven (Conn.) won't have to wait for actual fires in the area to progress in their studies. Instead they can examine the Fire Science and Arson Investigation Laboratory, housed in a barn on campus. Professor Bruce Varga says the three-room structure is the only one he knows of at a higher ed institution.



Those pursuing jobs in fire departments or insurance companies, and anyone studying criminal justice, could find themselves in the lab, learning about natural, accidental, undetermined, and incendiary fires. After watching a pre-recorded skit leading up to the fire, which can indicate which type it is, students investigate the scene to collect evidence and determine the cause. A change of scenario can change the outcome.

Why use resources to start fires in a lab? "A real fire scene can be hazardous," Varga says—and it might not be available before semester's end. The lab's three rooms were furnished with donations from alumni and discarded items that will be replaced (along with the sheetrock walls in each of the burn rooms) when the lab gets put to the test again. To maintain usability, the structure was outfitted with a system that releases 100 pounds of carbon dioxide to extinguish the flames, which worked as expected when the first batch of fires was set this semester. Using a fire hose would have moved furniture and could have led to mold and mildew growth, Varga points out. Still, the local fire department has been on hand on fire days, just to be safe. —Ann McClure