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The Pepperdine Beacon, Volume I

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THE **Pepperdine Beacon**

~ *Truth without fear* ~

Take a Sneak Peek

**AN ISRAELI STUDENT'S JOURNEY OF
PERSEVERANCE AND SUPPORT
AT PEPPERDINE**
by Neta Sade

**CHRIS PRATT REVISITS AMERICAN
PATRIOTISM ON 9/11**
by Abigail Choe

**A CONVERSATION WITH PEGGY GRANDE,
AUTHOR AND FORMER EXECUTIVE
ASSISTANT TO RONALD REAGAN**
by Caden Benedict

FOUNDER'S STATEMENT



A sigh of relief—it has been almost four years since our founding. With over 100 articles published; \$40,000 fundraised; and a legacy of successfully trained student leaders now thriving in careers in policy, business, nonprofits, and graduate schools, I look back at the *Beacon's* progress so far. Our students have been valedictorians. They have served on student government, as Resident Advisors, and in Spiritual Life roles. They lead in

Greek Life, travel in International Programs, and have engaged with some of the most impressive thought leaders nationally in culture, politics, and education today. In every metric possible our students have been *servant leaders* who have gone and impacted every level of our community and beyond.

Our board of nationally recognized scholars and alumni has expanded from the original six professors. Our students have learned valuable lessons from them: lessons of courage, prudence, grace, and strategy. I wish Dr. Ted McAllister was here to see all the work accomplished since his passing in 2023. I hope he would be proud of where we started and how far we have come.

In the chaos of 2020, my partners and I held many concerns—concerns we soon realized many others shared regarding the state of our nation and the state of free and open discourse. As a microcosm, Pepperdine was affected by some of these realities.

Who do we: students, faculty, and alumni want to be as a people? How do we want the world to know us? How do we want the world to know us as individuals? We decided these questions were important—and needed answering.

We began this enterprise very much in the spirit of Edmund Burke, the statesman, who thought prudence was the highest virtue of society. None of us sought to radically restructure our community. We believed in incremental progress, slowly building an institution that could stand the test of time and serve generations of students to come. It has lasted thus far, and the foundations are here for generations to come. It has successfully united together a community of truth—calling our university back to a revival of the good mission and values that make our community distinct.

With “Truth without Fear” as our motto (a reworking of the University Affirmation Statement), we stubbornly pressed forward into the unknown. Years ago, I knew what we could become and we still have far to go. But we have accomplished nearly everything I hoped for in my time here.

I wholeheartedly believe this endeavor would not have succeeded without what seemed like divine intervention. So many circumstances needed to be just right for us to have the right founding team, the right time, the right community support, and the right institutional innovations for this to succeed.

With God, all things are possible. Our community saw what happens

when determined, mission-filled students, faculty, and alumni unite to create something rarely seen in our world today. We planted a flag for the things that matter—for better conversations surrounding the great questions of our past and present, for a unifying body for all five schools...

And for “Truth without Fear.”

It was not easy, but “the good is better when it is harder” as Aristotle said. I have had many sleepless nights, doubts, and fears. At times the obstacles seemed too insurmountable, the risks too high, the journey too long. But when our future seemed unsure, somehow, we received the right support at the right time or a new boost of motivation that kept us moving forward with flags high, trumpets sounding, shields locked, resolutely and unshakably committed to our cause.

Our country is in desperate need of help. But change doesn't happen from the top down. It happens from the bottom up.

How we fix our country can begin at our “city on a hill” in Malibu. It can begin when individuals decide to take personal responsibility for themselves and their community. It requires standing up and taking action when we see the roots of chaos begin to take hold. It requires sacrifice. But it also requires belief. I believe in our community. I believe we can make things better for tomorrow while preserving the good values and institutions of the past. I believe that we can train the next generation of *servant leaders* to go and have an impact, living in “Truth without Fear.”

I believe this because I have seen it. And I see those people going into impact careers. I see a campus discourse dramatically shifted towards viewpoint diversity, empathy, and supportive of our Christian mission. I do not believe the *Beacon* alone accomplished these realities. But I do believe our campus would be quite different without this group. Because this group *is* Pepperdine.

It would be impossible to say thank you to everyone who made the *Beacon* possible. In short, we could not have come this far without the vocal support of all of the professors, administrators, staffers, students, parents, and alumni who care about free speech, our university, and the state of our country today. Thank you especially to the gifted professors who teach us, the dedicated and passionate administrators and staffers who hold our students at the heart of what they do, and the parents and alumni who are supporting the “next generation.”

Those questions we asked in our founding we have answered. We want to be known as a community that pursues “Truth without Fear” in all we do, aspires to excellence in all we do, and seeks to honor God in all we do.

With “Truth without Fear” ringing across our campus and through our halls and into our national community, I once again thank you for nearly four years of support, prayers, and love. And I lastly ask you to “not love in word or deed, but in action and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

With gratitude,

Caden Benedict ('23, MPP '25)
Founder & Editor-in-Chief Emeritus

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Throughout its tenure, The Beacon has shone brightly, illuminating the diverse voices and vibrant stories within our Pepperdine community. We are grateful for the staff's valuable contribution and commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue at our University.

”



Jim Gash (JD '93)
President and CEO
Pepperdine University

President Jim Gash Speaks on Mission, Values, and Core Issues for Pepperdine

This conversation is part 1 of a short series based upon the 2030 Strategic Planning Drafts and the President's Vision Statement.

By: Caden Benedict

Published originally in 2021, this excerpt provides a look at the President's views on timeless concerns of the university. We selected excerpts from this interview because these timeless concerns still guide our community today through the now-adopted Strategic Plan.

Caden Benedict: What is your greatest hope, the thing that most excites you for the university in the next 10 years? If you could only accomplish one thing in the Strategic Plan what would it be?

Jim Gash: I'll talk about one idea and one project. The idea that I hope we can accomplish over the next 10 years is to maximize Pepperdine's potential on the two core foundational reasons for us to exist.

One is the deepening of the Christian faith in our community. And second, the deepening of the academic excellence in our community. And I would not put those in that order, they are tied for first.

Because we're an educational institution. We are not a church. We are not a religious organization. We are an educational institution that has its foundation in a particular view of the world and a particular set of foundational truths—that we are created in God's image, and that we are called upon to serve others because of our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior. This compels us to create and promote a community environment that values everyone and points them toward God, while at the same time, giving them the highest level of academic training and mentoring that we can deliver.

I would like there to be no ambiguity, internally or external, on who we are—and that is an excellent educational institution



that is grounded in Christian faith.

The second thing is a campus culture that is going to be, I believe, greatly enhanced by a particular project. That project we're now calling 'The Mountain,' which is essentially a village built on the Rho parking lot.

It will be a place for gathering that draws our community into a vibrant relationship with each other on a daily basis. It will be the center of the heartbeat of Pepperdine University's campus culture.

Editor's Note: The Mountain would include a new basketball and events arena, parking garage, student exercise facilities, new food and recreation spaces, and the RISE resilience offices and campus recreation spaces. Pepperdine hopes the project will be complete by 2026.

CB: What do you think makes Pepperdine distinctive from other Christian universities?

President Gash said he respects schools like Stanford who excel in academics, and schools like Wheaton and Biola for their focus on their Christian mission. He asks though, which schools are committed to both faith and to academic excellence and have a global focus?

JG: I do not see a whole lot of people in that lane ahead of us. There are schools that would come to mind, Notre Dame, BYU, Baylor. But I do not want to be in any of those schools, I want to be Pepperdine. And so what makes us different, I believe, is that we have figured out who we are, and we are striving to be the best at that. To achieve our potential, we have room to grow. If we thought we were at the highest level of potential, that would be the ultimate in hubris and lack of humility. And so I feel an obligation in getting the baton from Andy, who was sprinting the entire 19 years and moving us forward, to take the baton in the sprint myself. And to sprint towards something that I don't see

Some Topics Covered

- ▶ Two Goals
- ▶ Pepperdine's Distinctness
- ▶ Mission Drift
- ▶ Balancing Belonging with University Values
- ▶ International Programs
- ▶ Convocation Changes
- ▶ Affirmation Statement and the Mission
- ▶ Viewpoint Diversity
- ▶ Ethnic and Identity Diversity
- ▶ Cultural competency and Community Belonging

exists right now, in higher education, at least in the way that we look at the horizon with this academic excellence in Christian faith and global reach.

[Someone should be able to go anywhere and ask] 'what are the elite Christian institutions in the world?' And then people say 'Well, you know, there is Pepperdine, there is...' and then finish the list. That's what I aspire for us to be.

CB: What if a significant group of students wanted the university's mission to change?

JG: We will not compromise our Christian mission at all, period. We will not compromise our academic excellence for any reason, period. That is the way it is. Those are non negotiable, regardless of whether a certain number of students want us to do something different. We do not set our mission based upon student feedback, we invite students into our community to experience our mission, to further it. They do not have to agree with it, but we don't change it. We are not taking votes.

Non-Christians are invited and welcome to this hosted table and honored and valued in and accepted at this table. But it is a Christian table. And so that has certain aspects to it. Please come to our table. If you do not like this food, well, we are still going to serve that food. And we would love to have you come. But you do not get to decide which food we are serving. It is our table.

I do not even have the final say at Pepperdine for mission related things, I report to a Board of Regents and one of their main jobs is to guard the mission. I think they know that I am fully committed to that. And they are fully committed to that too.

CB: How does Pepperdine balance belonging and the metaphor of the "Open Table" with staying true to the founding mission and values of the university? I'll give an example. In the Draft Strategic Plan, there is an anti-homophobia statement on page 11. How does the university square this with traditional Christian values which are against same-sex marriage."

Editor's Note: The specific quote is on page eleven of the Strategic Plan Draft which reads "We are committed to building a community where there is no racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia...or any

other perspective or practice that devalues or oppresses another human being."

JG: I think we need to define our terms. Because the traditional Biblical interpretation of sexual relationships within a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman—that is not inconsistent with us not being homophobic.

The word homophobia, as I understand it, as it is commonly used, does not include a disagreement on Biblical principles. [Homophobia is] telling someone they are not allowed to be here, discriminating against them, not allowing them to hold certain offices, etc. It is hatred of and fear of the other. That is not part of Pepperdine. Pepperdine is not homophobic. And if there is homophobia, defined that way in our institution, that is not consistent with who we seek to be.

What we are trying to say, and what we will continue to say is every student, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, fill in the blank, will be loved and respected and honored and cherished at Pepperdine.

We have people in our faculties that have very different views, and our students have very different views on this. But neither of them are unwelcome at Pepperdine. This is a place where we can have respectful civil dialogue on important issues of our day and learn from each other. But we do not label each other based upon a disagreement about important issues.

CB: I think there are two clauses in the University Affirmation Statement that might not get as much attention as some of the others: "That truth, having nothing to fear from investigation should be pursued relentlessly in every discipline" and "that freedom, whether spiritual, intellectual, or economic, is indivisible." How will these clauses inform the university's mission strategy for the next 10 years?

JG: Higher Education, in general, is truth seeking at its best. I do not believe there are multiple versions of truth; there is truth. And we are all seeking that truth. We all see that from a different perspective.

But truth is something that is more than facts. Facts are what we see and what we can ascertain. Truth is what God sees and

what God says. So as I am trying to figure out what is true, what does God say? Because that is definitionally true. What does God see? He sees all of us, as created in his image, and as a result, we are loved by him. That is true. That is truth.

When we say, truth has nothing to fear from investigation, what we are saying is, there are no topics that are off limits. We are going to study scientific theories and principles that heretofore have been off limits in some circles [for fear] that it might lead to something that we believe to be inconsistent with what we've read in the Bible about the nature of creation or whatever. We are committed to seeking that truth, regardless of where it leads, because we know where it leads is going to be to God. And it may change our understanding of God and His truth, but we need to pursue that relentlessly.

We were given reason and we were given the capacity to discover and to co-create by God. He is expecting us, I believe, to use that. And look into every aspect and every component of creation and every aspect of society and community. So we are just not afraid of the pursuit of truth.

For the second statement, I think, like truth, freedom is defined by God. And it is something that we were designed for. We were also called to obedience to God's truth, and God's will. And my source of truth is in God's word. And my belief is God's word is contained in the Bible. And so, am I free to do things that I want to do that are inconsistent with God's truth? I would say I am free to resist my internal, fleshly, imperfect desires that are inconsistent with God's truth. And that is what freedom is. I am free to seek after God's will, in my life, free to seek His truth. Those Affirmation Statements have stood the test of time in ways that very few things written 30 years ago have. And we continue to embrace those.

CB: Many universities have become monolithic in their perspectives. According to the Harvard Crimson, Harvard has only seven faculty members that identified as 'somewhat or very conservative,' compared to 183 faculty who identified as 'somewhat or very liberal.' Some at Pepperdine would say that the university's faculty are becoming more monolithic in their views. Why do you think viewpoint diversity is so important, and how will it be created or preserved?

JG: What we are looking for is the ability to have a conversation from every viewpoint of legitimate thought. We are talking about an educational environment where you are able to be challenged to learn and think because we are trying to teach students how to think, not what to think. And when you get too far to either side of the ideological spectrum, then it can become very difficult for students to separate the professor's desire for them to learn how to think from something that feels like they are being told what to think.

You need that dynamic tension in the classroom [where there is enough disagreement] where students can say 'let's reason together' and better come to an understanding of the truth. [In a classroom with only one student who holds an opinion] it is not often that you can have conversations that advance this search for truth we have been talking about. Because then you start getting into orthodoxy. Well, that is not what we believe, here.

I do not see that we are monolithic. I think there are times when people on both sides think they are less free or "safe" to voice certain perspectives because those viewpoints may not be accepted by the community. Some of them have written things for the Beacon. And some of them have written things for the Graphic, and some of them have written and spoken in the political sphere.

We need to teach each other through conversations that challenge us in our fundamental perceptions about particular topics. And part of the humility we are called to, is to accept that the presuppositions that we come in with are subject to evaluation when we get new

information that challenges those perspectives.

CB: The Draft talks about how Pepperdine will continue to enhance the diversity of the Board of Regents, administration, faculty, staff, and students. What does Pepperdine mean by that? Are there ways in which we're not currently diverse enough? Are there areas of thought and perspectives that this institution is missing?

JG: What we are seeking to do at Pepperdine is ensure that for every open position, including student admissions, including faculty, including administration, that we have a wide pool of applicants. Sometimes when you only fish in a certain pond, you only catch a certain kind of fish. And if you fish in different ponds, you will have different kinds of fish.

And when we fish in different ponds we will end up looking like America. And I do think it is important for Pepperdine to reflect The United States. But that will not be the overriding decision in my hiring. And it will not be the overriding decision in Pepperdine goals and policies. We want a diverse

community because we live in a diverse country. But we are not going to settle. We are not going to diminish our standards for excellence. And we do not have to settle in order to have excellent people who fulfill the Revelation 7 vision that we have and will continue to have.

I will always choose the person who is best fit for that job. And that will be without regard to race, or gender, or ethnicity.

In Revelation 7, the Bible paints this picture of a gathering of people from every nation and tribe and tongue worshiping together in a single voice, praising God together, where there is not only one perspective or background or race or ethnicity or gender or nationality that is represented here.

[People told me I] missed the opportunity to hire a person of color as provost. And I understand why they would say that. But that was not what I was looking to do. I was not trying to meet anybody's expectations. I was trying to hire the person who I thought would be the most effective provost for

Pepperdine University. And that process revealed to me that Jay Brewster was.

CB: Do you think there can be perhaps a danger of a professor bringing his or her own political leanings into the classroom or workplace?

JG: In every aspect for all of us, there's that danger. When you are talking to me, you are going to hear my perspective coming through. I do my best when I teach not to let my perspective come through, but we are all imperfect at that.

I think there is a difference between Pepperdine teaching communism and Pepperdine professors who are teaching political science, talking about the theory of communism. I think there is a difference between Pepperdine teaching critical race theory and professors talking about this theory that is part of the academic and political and social landscape. I think our students should know what that is. They should know what capitalism is. They should know what libertarianism is. They do not have to ascribe to it. It is not like part of being a student at Pepperdine means that you're indoctrinated with capitalism or with libertarianism or with progressivism or with critical race theory or with communism. You need to understand what those things are. So when you go out into the world, you are capable of being part of a conversation that adds light, and not just heat.

Progress on the Plan

This draft plan was finalized with minor changes and became university policy in March 2022, informing the mission and direction of the university administration for the remainder of the 2020s.



Being a Beacon of Faith to College Students

Katie Mihalcuka offers advice on how to represent Christ in our daily lives.

By: Katie Mihalcuka

As a student enrolled in a Christian university, a specific question constantly circulates in my mind: How can I represent Jesus to individuals who know the story of Christ like the back of their hand, who attend church services, and who identify themselves as Christians?

In Mark 16:15, Jesus states, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." How does this verse relate to college students, and what practical steps can they take to incorporate this instruction into their lives?

To effectively embody Jesus on a college campus, students must strive to imitate His character. This process begins in the "secret place," or one's private life.

Before venturing out to represent Jesus, it is crucial to establish a genuine connection with Him. This involves exploring His character, studying how He interacted with those around Him, observing His friendships, and understanding how He lived His daily life.

True representation of Christ can only be authentic when it comes from a deep and developed relationship with Him. Immersing yourself in the Word of God will help strengthen and equip you for campus interactions.

I would like to emphasize the importance of building connections. Find a friend or a community within a local church or small group. This will allow you to grow your faith and find like-minded individuals.

As a college student, you inevitably encounter challenges and experience both highs and lows. Having a supportive environment and a safe place where you can openly share your struggles and victories can be uplifting.

Matthew 18:20 states, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." When we intentionally gather at a church service or a small group meeting for the purpose of uplifting



and encouraging others, God is there among us.

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus gathered with His disciples and even people who were considered "sinners" according to Jewish laws. No matter where He was or who He was with, people left transformed, healed, and encouraged to follow Jesus for the rest of their lives.

It is crucial to approach every situation with humility. College presents numerous opportunities to interact with a diverse range of students, teachers, and faculty, each coming from different backgrounds.

In Colossians 3:12, God calls His followers to live with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Throughout your college journey, you will encounter moments where individuals express beliefs and opinions that differ from your own. Our goal as Christians is to react and respond in a Godly manner. While it can be tempting to let a conversation escalate, the most impactful approach is to allow the character of Christ to shine through us in such moments.

Prioritize being a supportive friend, as it embodies a form of serving. God calls us to be servants, remembering that those considered last on earth will be first in heaven (Matthew 20:16). Be a light in the lives of your friends. The 12 Apostles were not only disciples, they were Jesus' friends (John 15:14). Jesus guided,

encouraged, and equipped his disciples. Christians are called to emulate the same attitude towards our friends – offering guidance, support, and empowerment.

When it comes to your relationship with Christ, be bold and courageous. Do not hesitate to openly declare your devotion to Jesus and your commitment to living for Him. Share your testimony, engage in meaningful conversations about faith, and inspire others through the genuine expression of your love for Jesus. Do not let anything stop you from faithfully representing Christ.

Why is it important to represent Jesus on your college campus? College presents students with abundant freedom to live their lives according to their desires. Many individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery, unraveling their true identities and aspirations.

However, it is important to base these decisions on a solid foundation of faith.

When you live your life for God, every aspect of your existence transforms. You are no longer driven by selfish desires but instead are focused on glorifying God in everything you do. Your way of living will radiate a sense of fulfillment that stands out. This will draw people closer to Jesus.

Our objective is not to forcefully impose our beliefs on others but rather to live our lives in alignment with God's will.

An Israeli Student's Journey of Perseverance and Support at Pepperdine

As tensions have escalated in Israel since October 7, Neta Sade found exceptional support from the Pepperdine campus community.

By: Neta Sade

As an international attorney pursuing my LLM degree in Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University Caruso School of Law, I never imagined that my studies would coincide with one of the most challenging periods in Israel's history – the war with Gaza. Amidst the turmoil and uncertainty, I found an unexpected haven of support and understanding at Pepperdine. The Christian university that embraced me, an Israeli student, with open arms.

Initially, my family and mentors had reservations about my choice to study at a Christian institution. They urged me to consider prestigious universities like Berkeley or other Ivy League schools. However, deep within me, I felt an unwavering pull towards Pepperdine. It was as if an inner voice was guiding me to this unique place.

From the moment I stepped onto Pepperdine's campus, I was overwhelmed by the warmth and sense of belonging. Despite its Christian identity, the university exuded a remarkable diversity of religions and cultures, with students representing places from all over the world. This inclusive environment quickly dispelled any lingering doubts I had about my decision.

As the war in Gaza intensified, my heart ached for my family and friends back home. The news of a rocket fragment landing in my parents' house and my brother being called up for reserve duty only amplified my anxiety. During this emotionally taxing time, Pepperdine demonstrated its unwavering commitment to its students' well-being.

The university promptly organized a prayer service led by the Caruso Law



School Rabbi Sholom Eagle acknowledging the hardships faced by Israeli students and offering solace and solidarity. This gesture of empathy and support proved invaluable during those difficult days. I was touched by the rabbi's unwavering presence, ensuring that I never felt alone during those challenging times.

Beyond the prayer service, I received an outpouring of support from various corners of the Pepperdine community. I volunteered for Pepperdine Wave Classic, a Tennis and Golf event at Pepperdine, and found myself surrounded by a group

of genuinely caring individuals.

Faculty members, student bar associations, and organizations like Rise, Student Care Team, *The Pepperdine Beacon*, the Center for the Arts (CFA), and the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution also extended their support, offering words of encouragement, assistance, and prayers.

The outpouring of support extended beyond the Pepperdine community as well. Jewish organizations like the Jewish Graduate Student Initiative (JGSI) and the Leadership Institute (LI) reached out to offer their assistance, reaffirming the

sense of unity and shared experience among the Jewish student population.

The heartfelt prayers from the entire Pepperdine community, including the church, further solidified my belief in the university's genuine values and its commitment to inclusivity and compassion.

Despite being far from home, I felt a profound sense of belonging at Pepperdine. Surrounded by such unwavering support and understanding, I was able to navigate the emotional turmoil of the war while continuing my studies.

Pepperdine's unwavering commitment to its students' well-being, its embrace of diversity, and its embodiment of Christian values have left an indelible mark on my life. I am forever grateful for the support and understanding I received during one of the most challenging periods in my life, and I wholeheartedly recommend Pepperdine to any student seeking an enriching and supportive academic experience.

In the face of adversity, Pepperdine proved to be a beacon of hope and resilience, demonstrating that true compassion and understanding transcend cultural and religious divides. This experience has profoundly shaped my understanding of humanity, reaffirming my belief in the power of empathy and the unwavering support that one can find in unexpected places.

The Pain of Antisemitism and the Hope of Pepperdine

Amidst the turmoil and uncertainty of the war in Gaza, I found an unexpected haven of support and understanding at Pepperdine, a Christian university that embraced me, an Israeli student, with open arms. However, I could not escape the harsh reality of antisemitism that was growing on university campuses across the United States.



The stories of my friends and classmates suffering from antisemitism were deeply disturbing. They spoke of professors celebrating the murder of innocent civilians, of feeling afraid to be on campus, and of even leaving their programs altogether. These experiences were a stark reminder of the enduring legacy of hate and intolerance.

The murder of our neighbor's daughter and her boyfriend in Tel Aviv on October 7, 2023, was a personal tragedy that struck a deep chord within me. Their dreams of a new life together were shattered by senseless violence, leaving behind a trail of grief and despair. My heart ached for them, and I found solace in the unwavering support I received from the Pepperdine community.

In particular, two managers, Christine and Cindy, along with a Pepperdine alumna and parent named Layla, provided constant care and encouragement during this difficult time. Their kindness and compassion were a beacon of hope amidst the darkness, and I am eternally grateful for their presence in my life.

Pepperdine's unwavering commitment to its students' well-being, its embrace of diversity, and its embodiment of Christian values have left an indelible mark on my life. Despite the challenges and heartaches I faced, I found a sense of belonging and support that I never expected.

The university's response to the war in Gaza demonstrated its dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all students. The prayer service organized by the campus rabbi, the outpouring of support from faculty and fellow students, and the unwavering presence of the rabbi himself were all testaments to Pepperdine's commitment to its students' well-being.

While antisemitism continues to cast a shadow over society, Pepperdine stands as a beacon of hope and understanding. The university's commitment to its students, its embrace of diversity, and its embodiment of Christian values provide a powerful antidote to the forces of hatred and intolerance.



Distinguished Public Servant Richard Haass Discusses the Obligations of Citizens

Diplomat guest speaker defines America's most difficult challenge.

By: Connor Merk and Noah Shifter

Dr. Richard Haass, a distinguished public servant and president emeritus of the Council of Foreign Relations, presented "The Future of American Democracy" on November 7 as part of the President's Speaker Series. He also answered questions in a discussion moderated by Professor of Public Policy Luisa Blanco and Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Political Science Dan Caldwell.

In Elkins Auditorium, nearly filled to capacity, Haass centered the discussion around American democracy's resilience, which he sees in decline. He attributed this decline to internal causes such as political polarization, social media, and how much of the country is siloed in disparate echo chambers.

Professional Experience

Having served as the U.S. coordinator for the future of Afghanistan under President George W. Bush and U.S. envoy to both the Cyprus negotiations and the Northern Ireland peace process, Haass drew upon a deep knowledge of foreign affairs to offer perspectives on today's most pressing global issues, from the Israel-Hamas and Ukraine-Russia conflicts to rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

In the context of his federal government and think tank experience, Haass shared with the audience that his biggest concern for the U.S. is not external war but internal decay. Referencing his new book, "The Bill of Obligations," Haass spoke on the duty all citizens must fulfill to maintain a healthy democracy.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport," Haass said. "Ultimately, the quality of American democracy is on us. Rights alone do not make a democracy."

Key aspects of that duty include being informed, involved, civil, and pursuing the common good. He also believes that every American should work as a public servant during their lifetime and that schools need to reintroduce widespread civic education.

The Haass Mindset

A question was posed by Dr. Blanco regarding Haass' view on the importance of strong and stable domestic relations. Haass replied that this mindset grew due to his two stints as the U.S. envoy to Northern Ireland and his involvement in the Irish peace process.

"I saw firsthand the ravages of a society, a modern European society, wracked by political violence. 3,600 people were killed in Northern Ireland over the few decades known as 'The Troubles,'" Haass said. "What it showed me is that modern societies are not immune."

This relates to his concern over the growing acceptance among Americans of politically inspired violence. He mentioned an October 2023 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in partnership with the Brookings Institution poll which found one in five Americans view political violence as acceptable.

"We see the threats that are being made against various public officials and people in the judicial system. So I don't take this for granted," Haass said.

Information Literacy

Haass believes that education can improve information literacy, a skill he identified in an exclusive interview with the Beacon, as crucial to being a citizen in modern society. In this sense, he aligns his view with Thomas Jefferson who said, "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people."

To reach this goal, Haass proposed that middle and high schools should require students to take an information hygiene class to overcome the challenges technology creates in finding accurate information.

"It's kind of one of the great contradictions of this moment. Each of us has more access to more information than human beings have ever had in human history," Haass said. "But a big chunk of it isn't accurate."

A key segment of this strategy is to have consumers of information seek multiple sources and not rely on social media for news about current affairs. Haass remarked that it is aptly named social media rather than factual media, and recommended using social media for social matters rather than news.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport."

Richard Haass

Role of College Education

When asked about what students today can do to prepare for a life of service, in government or otherwise, Haass responded that thinking historically and writing well are crucial skills.

"I think what they can mainly do at this stage of their lives is read history," Haass said. "Because although history is not a cookbook, it does have valuable lessons. I'm really an advocate of what's known as applied history."

Applied history, a discipline that uses insights from historical events to navigate today's world, is valuable for all students whether they go into government or simply live as engaged and informed citizens.

Haass, referencing a quote often attributed to Mark Twain, remarked that although history doesn't repeat itself, it does rhyme. These rhymes help students of applied history find solutions to new problems by studying old ones.

Audience Feedback

President Jim Gash concluded the event with a message of gratitude for Haass' presentation.

"I think we can all agree that what was brought tonight was light to the geopolitical environment and domestic environment," Gash said. "We're grateful for you and for your work on behalf of this country."

Tori Michaelian, a first-year School of Public Policy student attended the event. She agreed with Haass' emphasis on public service and how this prioritization would increase a sense of community and democracy in America.

"He was really optimistic in some senses and that was refreshing," Michaelian said.

However, she differed with his view that the largest threat to America is internal strife rather than external enemies.

"There are people externally whose whole existence is hating America and that's more frightening. Right now, my mind is on international conflict," Michaelian said.

Another student from the School of Public Policy, Noah Jackson, found Haass' proposition that rights imply certain obligations meaningful and helpful for our time.

"I've always thought that we focus so much on our rights as American citizens, but you can't have a democracy without a citizenry who feels obligated to give to the community," Jackson said. "We need a community that does not just take; I've been thinking about that for years."

Jackson emphasized that although staying informed on foreign affairs is helpful and important, citizens can have a much greater impact on their communities through local politics and civic engagement.

"The most valuable thing that you could do is get involved in local politics or get involved in your local community," Jackson said. "If people spent half the time they spend reading the national or global news giving to their local community, investing in nonprofits or church groups or youth sports leagues, our social fabric would be much stronger."



Chris Pratt Revisits American Patriotism on 9/11

"I say this to those who are immersed in their own worlds, who think their country doesn't need them. It is your torch to carry. Your country needs you."

By: Abigail Choe

Eyes of students, faculty, and Pepperdine community members glued upon the celebrity actor and producer, Chris Pratt, as he took his seat in the 16th annual September 11 Remembrance Ceremony. Over the course of the morning, special remarks were shared and the national anthem was sung; each portion of the ceremony operated familiarly to the Pepperdine audience. All except for the keynote address. The speaker's name seemed out of place amongst the other names on the roster. Why Chris Pratt? Did he have a connection to the Sept. 11 event that we did not know about?

As if reading the audience's thoughts, Pratt began his speech by noting these questions. "Many of you might be wondering, 'What is Chris Pratt doing here again? What qualifies him to speak in a ceremony commemorating the lives of the fallen on 9/11? After all, he's not a member of the armed services or a first responder. What's he doing here?' That's a really good question." In a short sentence, Pratt revealed his answer: "I am a deeply patriotic American."

Inviting the audience to step into the past, Pratt revisited the day he learned about the Sept. 11 attacks. "I was actually in New Zealand, of all places, on the exact opposite side of the planet, filming a movie," Pratt explained. The production was his first big break, an opportunity to quit his job as a waiter and pursue his acting career. On Sept. 11, 2001, Pratt woke up, elated to start filming in the mountains. However, when he arrived at work, he was told that the shooting had paused for a moment. While he was asleep, terrorists had attacked the World Trade Center.

Pratt confessed that he was not familiar with the World Trade Center at the time. Thus, the significance of the attacks did not sink in completely. "I'm not saying I was ignorant. I was just focused on what I was focused on, like all human beings. My focus was not as big as the world," Pratt said.

Returning back to the hotel, Pratt turned on the television and watched as the tragedy unfolded. "I watched in horror as the second plane hit the tower. I watched the smoke of the devastation. I watched people jumping from buildings. I couldn't believe my eyes," Pratt explained. "I stepped out, fell to my knees in the snow, and cried." At that moment, Pratt realized that the world would be forever changed. He could feel the tectonic plates of the earth shifting underneath his feet.

Yet while his heart faced an enormous change, work resumed that day, as if nothing had ever happened. "I remembered thinking to myself, 'This doesn't feel right.' I didn't want to say

anything. After all, this was my big break. I was a kid from a little town. I was scared. So, I did what was asked of me. I went back to work," Pratt confessed. "The world marched on. So did I." When reflecting back, Pratt noted that he was focused on himself, on his career, and on trying to make ends meet. Like the rest of the world, he resumed his life, focusing on the smaller picture.

Ten years later, Pratt worked on a film where he played a Navy Seal. In his training, he met with active duty seals, shadowing them to learn how to best play his role. "Physically, mentally, and spiritually elite," Pratt said to describe these men.

He admired the way they dedicated their lives to service and had a purpose larger than themselves. These men expressed their love for their country, in a way that deeply moved and humbled Pratt. "I wanted to be like them. I wanted to be 'the called.'"

When Pratt reflected upon these men, he recalled the words of Isaiah 6:8, which read: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me.'"

As time progressed and more Americans who had not lived through the Sept. 11 attacks were born, Pratt believed it became increasingly imperative to remember the sacrifice that was and still is offered up for the safety of U.S. citizens.

This remembrance is what “we owe to those on the planes and in the buildings who never made it home that day. It’s what we owe to the firefighters, police officers, and paramedics who responded. It’s what we owe to the families who have carried on,” Pratt stated. “I may have played a guardian in a movie, but they are the true guardians of our communities and of our country. All of these guardians [serve] without reservation, knowing they are in harm’s way. They do it for us– the people who are focused on themselves.”

Reflecting on our current culture, Pratt observed many individuals who were focused solely on their own lives, just as he was twenty years ago. For him, his attitude completely changed when he was met with those who were committed to service and were devoted to their country. Experiencing the change in himself, he longed to see the same transformation in the hearts and minds of young people today. Pratt addressed them with a call: “I say this gently to those who are immersed in their own worlds, who think their country doesn’t need them. I say this to them with urgency. It is your torch to carry. Your country needs you.”

Pratt revisited his initial question. “Still, I’m sure you’re wondering, ‘What is he doing up here talking about 9/11?’ Why me?” Pratt answered, “Why not me? Truth is, we’re going to need all of us to bring our country together for the road ahead. When your country needs you, as it does now, none of us are too old to say, ‘Send me.’ Changing the hearts and minds of young people right now who have either forgotten or maybe never knew just how great our country truly is– that is the work we all need to do.”

On a day when America commemorated sacrifice and honored the lives lost, Pratt spoke of hope and called the current generation to action. 22 years later, when it would be convenient to brush away the Sept. 11 event as past history, Pratt disrupted stagnant water and encouraged response to the fateful event from all U.S. citizens.

“We’re on the same team,” Pratt finished. “We’re the United States of America. When we are one nation under God, we are indivisible. Let us never forget that, lest it be lost.”



You Don't Have to Be an Ideologue

Dr. Ted V. McAllister passed away in 2023 after his long battle with cancer. One part of his broad and impactful legacy is the Pepperdine Beacon. He was the founding Beacon Advisor and a crucial voice in its strategic discussions and in faculty publishing. The following article from September 2022 was one of his final published works. At the end of his career, students were still at the forefront of his priorities. We are honored to include his voice in our first ever print newsletter.

By: Dr. Ted V. McAllister

You can be free—free to ask questions, free to learn truth, free to challenge the ideological pieties of your professors. At Pepperdine, the decision is yours, dear student. You have three choices. You can be an ideologue. You can overtly or covertly buttress a religio-ideological culture without accepting their belief system. Or, you can seek a liberating education grounded in reality.

If you are an ideologue and want to be an evangelist for the woke religion, I encourage you to embrace a social justice curriculum where, it turns out, the grounding human questions are no longer asked, where the point of this training is to prepare you to go forth and transform the world according to your unexamined assertions. Or, if you wish to be free of mind, you can choose to ask the permanent questions, one of which is “what is justice?” The former course is intellectually safe and, in due course, teaches you that inquiry is unnecessary while action, inspired by blind belief, is a moral imperative. This religio-ideological goal is not to understand reality or to find the truth (or even to hunger for truth) but to activate the will of each person—that bit of one’s self that wants reality to conform to her desires. The latter course (pursuing the permanent questions) is intellectually demanding and may not lead to complete or satisfying answers. In the process of searching for answers to questions that are part of the human condition, one learns humility about one’s own beliefs, about one’s own generation’s assertions to truth (each generation is provincial and a foundational goal of education is to break free of this provincialism), and one learns that the life of inquiry is itself formative of character



and of a mind supple enough to solve problems without resorting to ideological certitude.

The Social Justice ideology is a religion outside of Christianity that many use to transform Christian teachings into doctrines that support their will to power. The more philosophical inquiry is possible outside of any religious doctrines, but it takes a specifically Christian form in the famous “faith seeking understanding.” A Christian begins with faith, fully aware that faith is not knowledge. From this foundation of faith, the Christian intellectual pilgrim seeks to understand the reality to which she belongs and so the nature of her faith is in the “seeking”—in the questing to know reality rather than in the libidinous desire to alter reality.

You can choose social justice as a closed religion or you can choose faith seeking understanding as a life-long quest to know reality and the source of that reality, God. The first is easy, as is any slavish belief system that liberates you from the human obligations of asking hard questions.

The second is harder because the freedom to pursue truth comes with the challenging realization that much remains beyond human knowledge, if not awareness and understanding.

The first requires nothing but the righteous indignation of a person who asks no questions because she has all the answers and the latter requires the spiritual stamina required for a human to

realize fully her nature or purpose as God’s creature on a journey to discover and to love God and the Reality that issues from God’s nature.

If you want to be free—and this essay is written only for those who wish to be free—you don’t have to ape the opinions of professors who seek to impose their religious commitments. If a professor suggests that you ought to affirm the doctrine of “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” you are under no obligation to agree and, if you are to be free, you should feel the moral pressure to do what free, questing people do—ask questions. Engage in inquiry about those beliefs. Become informed about them generally and require of your professor explanations and justifications. Hold your professors accountable to evidence, to logic, to history. Ask these questions in earnest, with an openness to where evidence might take you. Indeed, you might be persuaded, but only because you are learning through inquiry rather than by way of indoctrination. If you pay a penalty for your pursuit of truth, it is a small price to be free.

If you have a professor who is devoted to his religion of environmentalism but wishes to use his power to become immune to certain kind of evidence, don’t dismiss his claim but persist on insisting on your right to inquiry, to questioning, to your right not to bow to his god. It is fine to be persuaded by his arguments, but it is much better to be persuaded after the vigorous exchange of evidence and questioning. Here, as elsewhere, you face

a student conundrum. If you have a devout professor of environmentalism you also have someone who has studied it more than you have and who has very real power over you. This would be true of many devout professors of wokeism and it is quite possible (though not necessarily) that you have much to learn from them. But what you learn needs to be through the intellectually rigorous methods of inquiry and the reward of such a class is not simply whether the evangelical professor has persuaded you but whether in the process (no matter where you end up intellectually) you develop better the skills of inquiry that are forming a free mind—skills that, in the long run, will prevent you from becoming an ideologue in the mold of your professor.

The same lessons apply to all manner of doctrinal positions held by the evangelical professors of wokeism. Whether it is a matter of truth-telling about history or about human nature or about the Biblical text, you don't need to shy away from the devout professors, but you do need to develop the courage of a pilgrim (seeking) and the skills of a philosopher (relentless inquiry in pursuit of understanding reality). You don't have to win arguments, you have to introduce questions and you have to refuse to bow to power just because it is power. It is okay to doubt because the nature of faith is not certitude but a faithful doubting in search of understanding.

Along the way you will want to find professors who support you in your questing—your passionate desire to know that exceeds your desire to be socially correct. Those professors will have many different beliefs. The common denominator is not their belief system but their interest in developing in students a free mind capable of questing for the truth.

In the end, at Pepperdine, those who seek a free mind can pursue it, but it requires that each one take primary responsibility for the formative education necessary to real freedom.

“The Pepperdine Beacon owes its success to the support of Dr. Ted McAllister. We hope his legacy continues to shine through Pepperdine.”

Sheldon Fraley ('23)

“I am forever inspired and grateful for his wisdom and advice in the creation of the Beacon. Dr. McAllister was a force for good and a man of faith, his impact and legacy is paramount at SPP and the Pepperdine community.”

Alexa Borstad ('22)

“Without Dr. McAllister there would be no Pepperdine Beacon. He publicly stood against injustice where he perceived it, opting for the path of courage and conviction.”

Caden Benedict ('23, MPP '25)

“The greatest teachers continue to teach us long after we leave them, or they leave us. As you join the great cloud of witnesses, I know you have been greeted with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Dr. Jason Ross (MPP '01)

Academic Freedom and the Politicized Classroom

A look at the historic development of academic freedom nationally and how to define it at a Christian University.

By: Dr. Ron Highfield

Editor's Note: This article is written as a part of a three-part series about academic freedom on college campuses.

What is academic freedom? To whom does it apply and where? What is its purpose and scope? What are its limits, and who determines its boundaries? Are academic freedom and the First Amendment right of “freedom of speech” identical concepts? If not, how are they related?

These questions are probed by Daniel Gordon, professor of history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in his recent book, *What is Academic Freedom? A Century of Debate—1915 to the Present* (Routledge, 2022.). It is not possible in one short review to do justice to this excellent study. I can present only a very compressed summary of the book and draw attention to a few things I learned from reading it.

It pains me to omit so many fascinating stories, authors, and issues addressed in this book: the case of Angela Davis (1969/70), which turned on the question, “Can the Regents of the University of California fire a professor for *being* a communist?” Or the story of Steven Salaita, which forced the courts to deal with the question, “Can an offer of academic employment be rescinded because of a candidate’s past anti-Israel statements?” What about the work of Stanley Fish on academic freedom, the thought of Alexander Meiklejohn on the absolute nature of freedom of speech, or Edward Said’s study of academic freedom and the politicization of the study of literature? And so many more!

The Current Debate

The current controversies about the presence of Marxism, Critical Race Theory, gender theory, and other forms of “radical indoctrination” in American colleges and universities were initiated in 2003 by David Horowitz. Horowitz began a

campaign to get state legislatures to ban (mainly) Marxist indoctrination from university classrooms by adopting the *Academic Bill of Rights* (ABOR) into state law. Horowitz received support from dozens of state legislators and got huge pushback from such academic societies as the American Association of University Professors. His campaign sought to protect academic freedom for politically conservative professors—a beleaguered minority within higher education—and to protect students from coercion or intimidation by left-leaning, activist professors. In response to Horowitz, defenders of activist professors and politicized classrooms asserted the right to teach their views. Both sides appealed to academic freedom. The debate continues today and promises to intensify as the 2024 campaign season progresses.

The genius of Gordon’s book is its historical explanation of how the concept of academic freedom came to be understood in such dramatically different ways. I will focus on Gordon’s documentation of three historical changes that profoundly affect contemporary discussions of academic freedom.

The American Association of University Professors

In 1915, Arthur Lovejoy and others founded the American Association of University Professors. In view of the continuing push toward the professionalization of the American professoriate, to forestall government interference, and to prevent censorship of teaching and publication, Lovejoy wrote the 1915 *AAUP General Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*. The Declaration asserts the right of professors to explore issues within their disciplinary expertise with great latitude in service to their noble calling. However, it warns against using the classroom to “indoctrinate” (Lovejoy’s word) young students with the opinions of the professor, especially with partisan political views on issues of current social concern. Additionally, the original 1915 Declaration urges professors to exercise care in non-academic settings. Lovejoy cautions, “In their extramural utterances, it is obvious that academic teachers are under a peculiar obligation to avoid hasty or unverified or exaggerated statements, and to refrain from intemperate or sensational modes of expression.”

By 2006, however, the AAUP had renounced its opposition to politicizing

the classroom. Cary Nelson, AAUP president between 2006 to 2012, became the chief opponent of the Horowitz project. However, long before the AAUP got on board, most American universities had already modified their understanding of academic freedom. The shift began in the 1960s with the founding of programs in Black Studies, Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies, and other identity-group studies. These programs were from the very beginning unapologetic advocacy groups. By the 1990s postmodernism, inspired particularly by Michel Foucault, had convinced many academics that all speech is political. According to postmodernism, those who claim scientific neutrality or objectivity merely hide the power structures that favor their class interests. Today, two visions of academic freedom compete for dominance, the postmodern activist and the anti-political professional view.

Freedom of Speech

A second historical transformation I had not fully understood before I read Gordon’s book is the change in the jurisprudence of free speech. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution addresses the right of speech: “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech....” Originally, this restriction applied to the federal government only. States were free to enact their own bills of rights and laws concerning, among other things, speech. After the Civil War, the United States ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1868). It begins, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. **No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States....**”

The bolded lines are taken today as applying to the states all the rights of the citizen listed in the Federal Constitution. I was unaware that it took the Supreme Court until well into the twentieth century to apply “freedom of speech” to the states.

Additionally, I did not understand the evolution in the federal judiciary’s understanding of the conditions that justify imposing restrictions on speech. Until the early twentieth century, the courts agreed that speech that tended to create unrest or might reasonably be thought to do so was not protected by the

First Amendment. In the 1919 case *Schenck v. United States*, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, articulated the “clear and present danger” test for when the government may limit the exercise of speech. In the 1969 *Brandenburg v. Ohio* case, however, the Supreme Court replaced the “clear and present danger” test with the “imminent lawless action” test. As is clear, the conditions under which speech may be limited by a government entity became more restrictive as the century unfolded. Correspondingly, the scope of free speech was expanded exponentially.

The Fusion of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

Before the 1960s, academic freedom was distinguished from the constitutional right to freedom of speech. Academic freedom was considered a special freedom to teach based on the unique calling and qualifications of the professor, the nature of academia, and the special role of the university in society. One can see this distinction clearly in the 1915 AAUP *General Principles of Academic Freedom*

and Academic Tenure. In public spaces, controversies over speech rights were focused on political and commercial issues. In the 1915 statement, those activities were excluded from the classroom as inappropriate to the profession. Moreover, as we saw in the previous section on the history of free speech, until the 1960s, government entities at all levels could restrict speech for a number of reasons. Hence before that time, appealing to the right of free speech in an academic setting would not have helped one’s case. Moreover, appealing to the First Amendment to protect academic speech would in effect surrender the special status of teaching as a profession and place it on the same level as a political rant or an advertisement for soap.

But within the last 50 years, the courts, the professoriate, and the public have come to assimilate academic freedom to freedom of speech. And since the courts now protect even the most outrageous and radical forms of speech, activist professors that wish to use such speech in the classroom increasingly appeal to the First Amendment to protect their right

to say whatever they wish in the classroom: political tirades, recruitment drives, and vitriolic, personal attacks on religious and political leaders.

Academic Freedom in Christian Colleges

Though Gordon’s book deals with state educational institutions only, I believe it can be helpful in grappling with academic freedom in Christian colleges. I hope to address this subject in a follow-up essay, but let me tell you briefly what I mean: (1) Gordon explodes the idea that there is an authoritative definition of academic freedom that must be implemented in every institution that claims to be true to the nature of the academic vocation. Christian colleges, then, should be free to define academic freedom in a way that fits their mission. (2) Debunking the idea that academic freedom must be subsumed under the more general concept of freedom of speech will help Christian colleges resist encroachments by governments, accrediting bodies, and rogue professors that work against the Christian mission of the college.



A Conversation with Peggy Grande, Author and Former Executive Assistant to Ronald Reagan

Peggy Grande discusses memories at Pepperdine, lessons learned from her time as Ronald Reagan's Executive Assistant, and the important of intellectual diversity in education.

By: Caden Benedict

Peggy Grande was Executive Assistant to U.S. President Ronald Reagan from 1989 to 1999, after he left the White House. She is the author of the book "The President Will See You Now: My Stories and Lessons from Ronald Reagan's Final Years," which details her decade serving this iconic figure.

She is an international keynote speaker, TV and radio commentator, and widely published opinion writer. She was Chair of World for Brexit, a global coalition which stood in support of democracy worldwide, and was national spokesperson for a California ballot initiative.

Most recently, Peggy lived and worked in Washington, D.C. as a Presidential appointee, serving in two roles, as Executive Secretariat for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the Deputy Director for the President's Commission on White House Fellowships.

Peggy considers it the honor of a lifetime to have worked for two Presidents of the

United States in both supportive and strategic roles.

She currently serves on the Board of Advisors for Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy and is on the National Board for the Royal Commonwealth Society of the U.S.A. She is a graduate of Pepperdine University with a degree in Organizational Communications and Business and the mother of four children.

Caden Benedict: Can you start by telling us about your time at Pepperdine?

Peggy Grande: Back in the day, we didn't send out a hundred applications like students do now these days. I sent one application and thought if I don't go to Pepperdine, I'm not going to college. Thankfully, I got in. And I wanted to stay in Southern California. The thought of going to the East Coast and being in snow terrified me.

I had such a good experience at Pepperdine. I was involved in campus ministry, at the university church, and student government. I spent a summer in Heidelberg, Germany, which was an unbelievable experience. I graduated a semester early. I just plowed through my classes. And in my last semester, I only had one class.

CB: How do you think that your time at Pepperdine prepared you for your career after graduation?

PG: One of the ladies, an adjunct professor, was so influential, though I didn't realize it at the time. She taught a business writing class. I thought I was a really good writer until I turned in my first paper.

I got it back from her and it was like a red pen massacre. As horrified as I was, I

really took to heart everything she said. I probably learned more in that class that I use to this day than in any other. I didn't know that I would spend so much of my career writing. I never, I never thought of myself as a writer, but I wound up writing a book, I'm a regular opinion writer, and I work in broadcast journalism.

CB: How did you end up working for President Reagan right out of college?

PG: Even as a kid, I was always interested in politics and government like some kids are into cars, dinosaurs, or animals. I studied presidents and first ladies; I'd go to my elementary school library and check out every book I could about Washington, DC, and the presidents.

When I came to Pepperdine, I didn't study political science, probably because I lacked confidence that there was a place for me in the political arena. Back in the day, there weren't that many women in politics, and I just never thought that would be something that I would do.

Ronald Reagan was president when I was in junior high, high school, and college. He resonated with me because I had studied the presidency and history. I was a communications major and he was "The Great Communicator." And so I followed him very closely at the end of his presidency.

The second post-presidency speech he made was at Pepperdine University. I overslept my alarm, so I wound up with bad seats in the Firestone Fieldhouse. I came across the pictures from the event not too long ago, and it's like one of those Where's Waldo? books: I'm up in the rafters and there's little tiny Ronald Reagan down on the stage. But I was the happiest person in the world. I never imagined that one day I would work for him.





In the summer of 1989, I wrote a letter to the office of Ronald Reagan and asked for an opportunity to do my internship there in the fall. I never expected to hear back, but I remember standing in my Pepperdine dorm room when the phone rings, and it's a woman calling from the office of Ronald Reagan. I was shocked, scared, and surprised. But I was thrilled. I knew that even if I only interviewed, it would be that happiest, most exciting day in my life.

After the interview, it's a little bit embarrassing, but I was sitting in the lobby, waiting for parking validation. And suddenly Ronald Reagan was walking toward me through the lobby. And I panicked. It never dawned on me that Ronald Reagan might actually work in the office of Ronald Reagan.

He was flanked by the Secret Service. I was very scared they were going to arrest me or shoot me. And so I just thought about what I would do if the flag was passing by. I stood up, put my hand over my heart, and didn't even look at him, just kind of stared off in a non-threatening way. But Ronald Reagan walked right over to me, stuck out his hand, and introduced himself to me. I will always remember that moment of looking into those beautiful, sparkling, twinkling blue eyes and knowing that Ronald Reagan had seen me. What a powerful, wonderful moment that I will cherish forever.

CB: What lessons did you take from your time working there?

PG: First, you'll never get a job you don't apply for. You will never accomplish anything that you don't intend to set out and pursue. And so I would encourage people to realize that, as my Dad told me, "somebody's got to have the job you want, and [that] might as well be you."

I encourage people to dream big, and to lean in to opportunity. I never even dreamed of working with Reagan because I didn't think it was possible. But I guess I did dream just enough to put the paper in the typewriter and type a letter and send it off.

I would especially encourage young women to pursue opportunities. I didn't really have models of what a working mom looks like. I questioned if a career was something that a woman of faith was supposed to have. But in the end, I vowed that I was going to lean into my career. Because of that, I got so interconnected with the Reagans. I'd like to think that I become such an asset to them that when I needed time off to have a baby, they wanted me to come back. This was before the days of laws that have protected my job. That made it possible for me to continue with a career while also being a wife and a mother.

Ronald Reagan also showed me so much about leadership. I appreciated the fact that even though he was the oldest president that had ever served, he always connected with young people. I appreciated that even though I was so young, he was very supportive of me, and

we found new ways to do things together.

He gave me his trust and loyalty, maybe even before I had earned it or deserved it. When you feel like somebody is counting on you, it empowers you, it inspires you. That inspired a feeling of loyalty. I worked really hard for him, not because I was afraid of him getting mad at me, but because I never wanted to let him down.

CB: Reagan was involved in Pepperdine's development. Do you think his faith was one of the reasons he wanted to see Pepperdine succeed?

PG: You know, we always think that everything is new today, but back in the '60s and '70s we saw the unrest on college campuses, we saw the pushback against traditional values. So much of what we see is very cyclical. And those were things that Ronald Reagan, as a person of faith, as a person who embraced the values of the heartland and of his Midwest roots, was concerned about.

A place like Pepperdine, that was planting a flag and saying, "We are going to be a people of faith, a people of service, and people that see the world around us and choose to give back to it in positive and generous ways" – I think he couldn't help but be aligned with that.

He loved California, so I'm sure he saw Pepperdine as a place in beautiful, sunny Southern California that would pass on faith and good values.

CB: So, moving on to political conversations. Do you think that part of the reason people take conflict so personally is that we have lost, perhaps, an understanding that people are acting out of good faith when they are talking about politics?

PG: I work in the political arena and do a lot of media. It's not always the most warm and welcoming place, especially because I'm a conservative and a person of faith. But I always try to respond to hostility with civility, and to be prepared to defend the things that I value. I can't expect anybody to listen or to embrace the things that I'm talking about if I can't articulate them myself.

When it comes to social media, I think a lot of people are threatened because beyond the thin veneer of their talking points, there's not a fundamental belief in anything, or belief in even what they're saying.

When people are just repeating talking points, they haven't done the deep dive in the research or the historical context of an issue. There's this arrogance of thinking that what we're facing now is the most critical, the most sensational, the most exceptional time in history. It's very arrogant, because it belittles all the struggles of the past. It's better to realize that the conversations we're engaged in now are the same questions that have been asked for centuries, although maybe they hadn't been asked on Twitter before.

CB: How do you think that universities, especially Christian universities, play into that understanding of why we believe what we believe? What do you think is or should be the role for Christian universities today, in largely a post-religious world?

PG: I think people who attend Christian universities know exactly what they want to find there, and that's why they choose to go. If they want to go to a secular university, they know exactly what they will find on those campuses.

I think that it is so important for Christian universities to unapologetically adhere to the values on which they were founded. Because otherwise they are no longer a Christian university.

It's tough. You take a lot of darts. But if you're not taking fire, you're not over the target. If we're hiding that aspect of faith on our campus or any other campus, then we've lost the whole mission for existing.

CB: What role or responsibility do you think universities have for the situation in our country? Do you think that the leftist monoculture of American universities plays into the division that's occurring right now?

PG: Well, I would love to see teachers who cultivate curiosity. And I actually feel bad for students who are graduating from some of these very liberal institutions, because have they really learned anything? Have they been challenged in their thinking? Have they ever heard any diversity in what they've been taught?

Some of the brightest minds I see coming out of some of these universities are conservative students, Christian students, who have gone through these very liberal places and had to defend what they believe in.

I remember a teacher I had in high school who was very overtly left-leaning. I appreciated him so much, because he would say, "Tell me why you believe that. Well, don't just give me a talking point. Tell me why do you believe that? Defend your idea." He would egg me on to get me to think through it. At the end he would say "You just made a great point. Learn to articulate your ideas."

But students that go to school in a political monoculture are graduating after just kind of floating downstream with the current, and I don't know what they're prepared to do at the end. So, for a Christian university, I think that it's important that they have a diversity of viewpoints without hiding their Christian worldview.

CB: What are your plans for the future? Where can our readers find your book and your social media?

PG: My book is called "The President Will See You Now: My Stories and Lessons from Ronald Reagan's Final Years." I always love hearing from people if you've read the book and there's something that stuck out to you! Plus I'm on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and my website, Peggygrande.com.

As for what's next, I'm still looking for my next big full-time job. In the meantime, I will continue to be engaged in advocating for the things that I believe are important for America. I believe this is the greatest country in the world. I love this nation, and I am a red-white-and-blue bleeding patriot. And I will continue to stand in defense of her, in defense of freedom.

Editor's Note: Peggy Grande continues to appear weekly on Australian television with a U.S. Report, she writes a weekly column for the U.K. Express print and online newspaper, and speaks regularly to corporate, political, student, and executive assistant groups.

She also is beginning to work on a second book about Ronald Reagan's mother, Nelle, called "Raising Reagan: How Nelle Reagan Shaped the Man Who Changed the World." Peggy is also working in support of Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 which is bringing together a broad coalition of conservative organizations and think tanks to unite around shared policy goals, and recruiting and training personnel for the next conservative administration.



What I Remember From East Germany Under Communism

Sonserae Leese is a Seaver graduate ('84) and spent over 20 years working on feature films and television shows as an artist at Disney and other major studios.

By: Sonserae Leese

It was late Fall, November 1981, I sat inside a place called the Reichstag. The rooms were filled with gold-leafed objects, expensive artwork and we drank champagne out of beautiful crystal goblets. We were the only university asked by the East German government to participate in an education program on Communism, Fascism, Socialism, and Marxism taught by the East German government. We studied everything from their perspective, six hours a day for weeks. They spoke of redistribution of wealth and a Utopian society where everyone is equal. They boasted how they had no crime, drug addiction, or unemployment like America did. Everyone was given a job...by the government. It all sounded so perfect, yet, something was very wrong. As I walked around the room to notice all the beautiful and expensive furnishings, I made my way to the window. I looked out at the drab surroundings towards East Berlin, the gray weather, the world reminiscent of trends from 40 years before, and something that I could not ignore. I saw the sad, blank stares of the people starving, waiting in the 2-hour bread lines.

As a nineteen-year-old filled with curiosities, I had always tried to observe my world around me and question if things don't make sense. The instructor boasted of this system being the best in the world...but I raised my hand. I had never been one to keep my mouth shut when I needed some concrete answers. I asked her, "If this system is so great, why is there a wall up that no one can escape?" She replied, "It is to keep the evil out" I then asked, "Well, then, why is the barbed wire on this side of the wall and not on the other side? If this is such a great system, why do you have to force people to do what you say?" Needless to say, she didn't have a response and the room went silent for a while.

We were only allowed to stay in hotels called "Inter-Hotels" for all those who were visiting from the West. These hotels that were dilapidated and drab by America's standards, were beautiful by the rest of the country's Eastern poverty-stricken way of life. It became clear that they wanted to give the impression to those visiting that all was well.

Yet, walking around the streets, the evidence told the real truth. As a person who had the privilege to see inside the government's environment and at the same time, eat and converse with the common people, it was clear to me that some people thought they were more equal than others and that was the government. The redistribution of wealth stole from the people and their hard work and gave the money to the gold-lined pockets of the corrupt leaders.

The people could not see that they were controlled because they had been brainwashed for so long. All the shops were run by the government. There was no merchandise out that you could handle or touch. Everything was behind glass. You had to submit your passport in order to enter a store. If you wanted to try on something, you were escorted behind a curtain where a number of shop workers watched as you changed your clothes. You were monitored and controlled everywhere you went.

Capitalism isn't evil. Corruption of Capitalism is. Capitalism is free enterprise and independence and being allowed, no matter who you are, to create, sell products and provide jobs. Ironically, many who say they hate Capitalism are actually working for a big corporation.

Without Capitalism, you have all jobs owned and run by the government. They will provide a job for you, they will determine what you get paid, and what you do. There is no room for creativity, independence, or promotion, as everyone is treated equally. Hard work doesn't matter anymore because the individual never personally benefits from their hard work. So, it creates a society of unmotivated and minimalistic behavior. The low pay makes you a slave to poverty and the government.

My first experience with a collective working system in America was after I graduated from college and was working in Computer Graphics. At 24, I accepted a new job and was hired by a large

corporation in the Midwest to set up their computer graphics division. They told me that I was required to join their union.

I had always worked 12-14 hours a day. During my first few months there, I stayed focused on building and training the department, buying and setting up the peripherals and protocols, creating policies and procedures, and developing a work pipeline that was efficient and easy to implement.

I started to observe things that would not be accepted or tolerated in non-union jobs. A number of employees came in very late to work, took 2-hour lunches, were unproductive, did personal business at work, and left work early. One woman read the newspaper all day. There was no motivation to do well. Everyone got the same pay, the same rewards. It was almost impossible to get fired because of the union and no one wanted to blow a whistle on anyone else because everyone was guilty of cheating the system.

I was surrounded by people who were not doing their jobs and getting the same benefits and pay as I was. Any human with normal emotions would start resenting the situation. Everyone wants equality but at the same time, everyone expects that all people will equally put forth the same effort for the common good...but that RARELY happens.

I found my motivation to work hard started to diminish. If there was no personal benefit or reward for my hard work and there was no punishment for me not adhering to the rules, then, why not play the same game as everyone else? There's no punishment if everyone is doing it. This mentality, however, creates destruction in someone's moral compass. Do what everyone else is doing, not what is right.

We all want freedom but having the government constantly controlling what you do is not freedom. When you allow leaders to hold people prisoner in their own homes and mandating everyone comply with their demands, not permitting them to work to feed their family, you are agreeing to give up your ability to make decisions for your own life and are putting those decisions in the government's hands. And let me tell you, they don't care about your well-being. They care about money and control. Be careful what you wish for. There is always a cost. Once you give up your freedoms, there is no getting them back.

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Using operational funding raised over the past two years, we made significant strides in achieving our goals. This year, we hired nearly two dozen new students to join our staff, a testament to the impact of your support. We aim to further expand to a student staff of 50 students with your continued generosity. The Beacon also aspires to create additional print publications and establish a podcast centered on student life. These signs of continuous growth demonstrate the Beacon's long-term commitment to being a voice for students, alumni, and the entire Pepperdine community.

As college campuses become increasingly divided over international and domestic politics, it is integral that the Beacon remains an institution where diverse perspectives are welcomed. Navigating conversations about contemporary issues is challenging, making the Beacon's open space for civil and thoughtful discourse all the more crucial.

The combination of your support and our team's leadership will continue to foster understanding and unity within the Pepperdine community. We thank you for your dedication to the pursuit of truth in a time characterized by division and for your commitment to creating an environment where rigorous debate can thrive.





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