

## **\$500,000 grant establishes institute for ‘human flourishing’**

**By Susan Welte/Herald Staff Writer**

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Dr. Russ McCullough has been intrigued most of his life by the overlap of faith and economics.

And thanks to a \$500,000 grant announced Monday from the Charles Koch Foundation, McCullough, the Wayne Angell chair of economics at Ottawa University, can start to bring that interest more into the public eye.

“Economic freedom has a lot of evidence throughout the world that leads it to helping people, pulling them out of poverty,” McCullough said. “It’s been the number one ingredient, if you will, to pulling people out of poverty. Because that has some overlap with the Christian mission, as well and the alleviation of poverty, that’s where part of my interest was in pulling these things together in academic, scholarly type of format to bring to the masses the good word of how we can make the world a better place. ”

With the half-million dollar grant from the Koch Foundation, McCullough has founded the Gwartney Institute for Freedom, Justice and Human Flourishing. The institute, an “educational and research arm” for the Angell Snyder School of Business, will open officially in August 2018.

McCullough said the institute will be pulling “sophisticated data and information” and presenting it in a way that the general public can “understand and appreciate” the importance of it. The word “institute,” he added, just means it’s an organization within OU that has its own, separate mission. Next fall, it will most likely be housed within the School of Business on OU’s local residential campus, 1001 S. Cedar St., Ottawa.

“It’s a gathering of the minds,” McCullough said. “We call it an ‘institute,’ it could be a ‘center,’ too. It’s more than a physical place.”

The process for receiving the grant from the Koch Foundation started several years ago. McCullough said he felt as though OU's mission and the foundation's mission fit well together in terms of "getting educational items out to the public and to students."

That's what put his application in place.

After contacting representatives from the foundation, they helped him put together a proposal for the project. Then, he said, the foundation decides whether to accept the project and what they will give in terms of funds.

"This grant from the Charles Koch Foundation is a major step forward in strengthening the intellectual life of our institution, providing exactly the type of forum inferred in our mission statement related to 'building on our foundation as a Christ-inspired community of grace and open inquiry,'" Kevin Eichner, president of OU, said in a news release. "The creation of the Gwartney Institute enhances the prestigious offerings of the Angell Snyder School of Business and will further prepare our students to become outstanding economists and graduates in other programs of study to better appreciate the pervasive impact that economic freedom has on the quality of life of human beings around the world."

The Gwartney Institute will conduct its own research and is looking for a full-time faculty member to serve as its director of outreach, education and research.

e seeking a colleague that's preferably an experienced researcher already in this area, that kind of understands where things are in terms of the research, and [who is] also gifted in writing and public speaking that can speak to regular people, not just in economic jargon, but in good old fashioned English."

Three different roles for students — two graduate and one undergraduate — will be available within the institute.

“The two graduate students — they would be there as kind of research assistants, as well as teaching assistants in a sense,” McCullough said. “Not so much in the classroom, but in helping set up events where we might be speaking to the general public and working with preparation for that. Also helping establish, let’s say, social media platforms and contributing to those things as well.”

An undergraduate scholarship is available that will pay 75 percent of the student’s tuition.

“That person, we want to be more ‘boots on the ground’ to keep the connection with the students and to help us fulfill that part of making sure this information is getting out in a fun and educational way to our undergrads,” McCullough said.

Although it will not officially open until next fall, McCullough said the institute will host some activities during the coming spring semester via its funding, including a student-based reading group on religious freedom, hosting a national speaker, and having a screening of the documentary “Poverty, Inc.”

He said he wants people to understand the “human flourishing” portion of the Gwartney Institute’s name.

“With faith and economics, I think that’s something that will draw the larger community in to think about those issues and what that means from a Biblical worldview, perhaps of how capitalism and markets fit into that,” McCullough said. “I think that’s a commonly misunderstand thing, and I think there’s a lot of neat information that’ll be eye-opening for people of all faiths on what that does for bringing people better prosperity in a number of ways, and that’s in health and wellness, not only income.”

The Gwartney Institute for Freedom, Justice and Human Flourishing is named after Dr. Jim Gwartney, a 1962 OU graduate who “has spent his career in economic education in a variety of ways, including the development of the Economic Freedom Index, which has been published annually since the 1980s, cataloging and ranking in objective terms the level of economic freedom that exists in many of the world’s nation states.” Gwartney now serves as the Gus A. Stavros Eminent Scholar Chair at Florida State University. At FSU, he also currently directs the Stavros Center for the Advancement of Free Enterprise and Economic Education.

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