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## Alumni group pushes right

### New association hopes to air conservative voice in guiding UCLA's direction



JAY TAYLOR/daily bruin senior staff

Andrew Jones, a UCLA alumnus, founded the conservative Bruin Alumni Association to fight what he calls a "cancer of political radicalism" among professors and administrators in Murphy Hall.

– at UCLA by soliciting donations from alumni, then using the money to campaign against activist professors, the UCLA Alumni Association and administrators in Murphy Hall.

Allegations of political bias are nothing new at UCLA, or even in higher education in general. But many prior attempts at addressing it have focused on what can or cannot be said in the classroom.

Jones is taking aim at two areas UCLA is considered strongest: outside fundraising and alumni.

Last year, the university raised \$262 million in donations, the most out of any public university in the nation. In the last week alone, Campaign UCLA, one of the university's main fundraising arms, collected over \$2.3 million in donations.

And the UCLA Alumni Association can tap into a network of over 86,000 members, with chapters that range as far away as Hong Kong and Thailand.

Jones, meanwhile, estimates he has raised about \$1,550 to date, with a mailing network of about 1,750.

But points of comparison have not cooled his ambition.

"I want this to be as broad a voice as the UCLA Alumni Association, and perhaps even UCLA itself," said Jones, who graduated from UCLA in 2003 with a degree in political science and a minor in public policy.

Jones is not alone. In the past 10 years, there has been a growing trend of alumni at colleges nationwide founding unofficial, unsanctioned alumni groups to try to exert influence over policy and curriculum changes at their alma maters.

 By **Charles Proctor**

 DAILY BRUIN SENIOR STAFF  
[cproctor@media.ucla.edu](mailto:cproctor@media.ucla.edu)

Andrew Jones didn't want to be part of the official UCLA Alumni Association. So the recent UCLA graduate started his own.

Enter the Bruin Alumni Association.

The local non-profit organization, founded and run by Jones, wants to tackle what Jones alleges is a strong liberal bias – he calls it a "cancer of political radicalism"

Though not all these groups are overtly political, they are willing to challenge the university administration and the university-affiliated alumni organization when they have concerns over the direction of the campus, said Anne Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

In the past, "the general modus operandi (among alumni) has been put up and shut up, and that's what the administration of university campuses wanted," Neal said. "They wanted their money and operating support, and they wanted them not to raise concerns."

Now there are signs of change.

Jones, who was chairman of Bruin Republicans when he was a student and is a former Daily Bruin columnist, cites a long list of grievances from the time he spent at UCLA.

He alleges, among other things, that liberal professors try to indoctrinate students in the classroom, and that the conservative voice is silenced by professors, administrators and other student leaders.

An open letter that was posted on the Bruin Alumni Association's Web site calls UCLA "a school in deep crisis" and says, "Radicals – students, staff and faculty – have taken over our university and are subverting it to their own ends."

Jones accuses the chancellor and the UCLA Alumni Association of hiding these issues from donors. He is banking on donors who currently support UCLA jumping ship once his campaign gains momentum. "If we really were able to successfully convey the reality of the undergraduate experience to the alumni ... 50 percent would want to join," he predicts.

Both Chancellor Albert Carnesale and the UCLA Alumni Association declined to comment for this story.

The Bruin Alumni Association's achievements so far are something of a mixed bag. It does have an advisory council of over 20 members, consisting of conservative activists, scholars – including four UCLA professors – and state Sen. Bill Morrow, R-San Diego. "It's not just a bunch of outside bomb-throwers," said Jones, who was known as a firebrand conservative activist when he was at UCLA.

And Jones claims his group's first campaign – to get Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to renounce his membership of MeCHA when he was a UCLA student in the 1970s – was a success.

But at the same time, Jones said he hasn't raised enough money to even pay his own salary – though he's quick to point out that his organization has only been around since April.

### **Allegations of bias**

Though neither the UCLA administration or the alumni association has made any official statements regarding Jones' group (campus media representatives weren't even aware it existed when contacted for comment), there has been debate as to whether the Bruin Alumni Association will ultimately help – or harm – the university.

Political science Professor Thomas Schwartz is one of the four UCLA professors who has joined the association's advisory board. Schwartz, a lifelong Republican who taught in Texas before coming to Los Angeles, met Jones when he was a student, and the two had talks about their shared concerns on politics and education.

Schwartz doesn't share Jones' particularly strong views on how political bias impacts UCLA, and he said he can't substantiate all of Jones' allegations against the university. But he does feel at times there is a "skewing of the curriculum in a left-wing

direction."

He says Jones' group might be a good step toward rectifying a perceived political imbalance at the university.

"Insofar as there's any voice that people hear that gets written up ... it's almost entirely a left-leaning voice," Schwartz said. "And (Jones) wants to balance it. He wants to say, 'Here's a conservative and Republican voice, and I support that.'"

"If someone wants to start a contrary voice for Republicans on campus, that's great."

But not all Republicans are as welcome to Jones' group. Thomas Wortham, the chair of the English department and also a registered Republican, declined an invitation to join the advisory board of the Bruin Alumni Association because he disagreed with Jones' mission.

To Wortham, monitoring what professors say in class to catch them out on political bias smacks of crippling academic freedom, to the point where "someone is so afraid to say something in class because it might be considered inflammatory."

"If you don't question things in a university, where are you supposed to question them?" Wortham asks. "At a university, you have independent thinkers."

Jones emphasizes that his fight is not with the majority of the university. And he insists he is not looking to infringe on anyone's freedom of expression.

But Jones cites some specific instances in his allegations of bias. For example, in an open letter he refers to a 2003 vote by the academic senate in which the faculty passed a resolution to oppose the war in Iraq. Jones points to the vote as evidence of liberal bias, and critics say the vote was superfluous because professors had no control over whether the country went to war or not.

But Maurice Zeitlin, a sociology professor who co-authored the resolution, feels not only did the professors have a right to pass the resolution, they also had a responsibility.

"We're talking about sending Americans on false pretenses into a unilateral invasion of a sovereign country. That is an exceptional circumstance that I thought – we thought – members of the academy should have spoken on," he said.

Though Zeitlin acknowledges conservative voices tend to get lost in academia, he does not agree that political biases inappropriately seeps into the classroom. He also said people like Jones don't have a "shred of evidence anywhere about the suppression" of the conservative voice.

Schwartz said he has never seen political bias influence faculty hiring decisions, and that he does not know whether professor's political views affect students.

Wortham said, given the sheer size of UCLA, statistically speaking there have probably been professors or TAs who have graded a student based on factors other than academic performance. But he said he is not aware of any specific cases.

### **A national trend**

When Chris Gillot graduated from Pennsylvania State University in 2000, he was concerned with the policies of the university's administration, which he thought leaned too far to the left.

So Gillot and his brother, who graduated in 1995, founded the Nittany Freedom Foundation, a non-profit group of conservative Penn State alumni geared toward providing support for the minority conservative voice on campus.

The Nittany foundation (named after the Penn State mascot) is an indication of what a

conservative group of alumni – like the Bruin Alumni Association – can do. Though the foundation is significantly smaller than the Penn State-affiliated alumni organization, it raised about \$10,000 last year, and Gillot said they managed to tap into a couple donors who have given significant sums of money to Penn State.

"We found out there's a lot of people who give to the university who are not completely satisfied with the way the university is operating," said Gillot, who is a legislative aid to Rep. Bobby Jindal, R-LA. "And this provides a forum for them to give back to Penn State in a way they agree with."

With the creation of the Bruin Alumni Foundation, UCLA joins a small but growing number of universities that have a group of alumni who are dissatisfied with what is happening at their alma maters, and who join together and form unsanctioned alumni groups to take action.

"They're organizations concerned about the direction of their institutions, the academic quality, the academic freedom, and they're banding together to address those issues," said Neal, the president of the ACTA, which tracks trends among alumni and trustees.

Recently, at Hamilton College in upstate New York, alumni concern with the direction of the college led to the first contested election for Hamilton's Board of Trustees in 30 years.

The group of alumni cited among their concerns a Hamilton speaking invitation to Ward Churchill, a University of Colorado professor who made controversial remarks about the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

So a group of four alumni successfully petitioned to appear on the trustee's ballot, alongside three candidates who were nominated by the college's Alumni Council. Usually the candidates who come out of the Alumni Council run for election uncontested.

Neal said she wouldn't define the group of alumni at Hamilton as conservative, or even political. "What they are saying is if students are going to see Ward Churchill, they should hear from other people," she said. "That's a focus on academic freedom and diversity, which is really the essence of a liberal education."

Neal said outside groups of alumni at Amherst and Dartmouth have also appeared to address issues with their universities' curriculum, with some success.

At Penn State, Gillot said his foundation is more focused on supporting the conservative student group on campus than attempting to bring about reform, as the Bruin Alumni Association is.

But Gillot said the foundation is still making its presence felt among alumni. In fact, the Nittany foundation caused enough concern among some alumni that they contacted Penn State, causing the Penn State alumni association to send out a letter to reassure its donors and refute the Nittany foundation's claims.

Such incidents are small victories for outside alumni groups and a sign that their influence might be starting to take hold. And Gillot said he has been contacted by alumni at other colleges, among them Texas Tech, who are interested in starting similar groups.

"We envision it continuing well into the future," Gillot said, referring to the Nittany foundation. "That's one of the advantages of creating such a foundation: to allow for longevity and stability."

So far, outside alumni groups have been mostly at private colleges, though there is room for them at public colleges, Neal said.

"There's some increasing concerns from taxpayers and parents about what they're paying for at public schools, and whether students are being educated," she said.

**"I'd take it in a second."**

Jones seeks to distinguish the Bruin Alumni Association from groups like the Nittany Freedom Foundation, saying their approach to reform is "too simplistic." To Jones, his group is an opportunity to continue the conservative activism he espoused as a student, but never had the time to pursue.

"All these things, if only we had the time to dig into it, I could turn these things inside out," he said. "But I had to be a student. That's what I want the BAA to do, to be the opposition voice to the administration and the fundraising line at UCLA."

But Jones also said he does not regret his decision to attend UCLA. In addition to running his non-profit, Jones is also considering applying to law school. And one familiar college made it to the top of his list – UCLA School of Law.

Would he accept, if UCLA admitted him?

"Oh, I'd take it in a second," Jones said.

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