

### Hamilton, alumni weigh center's loss

Friday, Dec 1, 2006

By Stephanie Veale  
Observer-Dispatch  
sveale@utica.gannett.com

CLINTON — As some alumni criticized Hamilton College's decision to suspend plans for the Alexander Hamilton Center Thursday, administrators said they made the decision to maintain the college's standards.

Hunter Brown, who graduated from Hamilton in 1976, said the incident has damaged the college's credibility.

"A lot of people have fallen in love with the charter of the Alexander Hamilton Center, and through the course of this process, a lot of people have fallen out of love with Hamilton College," said Brown, who moderates the Web site, "Hamilton College Alumni for Governance Reform."

The center, backed by a \$3.6 million alumnus donation, would have sponsored programming on topics central to Alexander Hamilton's work, such as freedom, democracy and capitalism.

The college revoked support for the center's charter when President Joan Hinde Stewart and Dean of Faculty Joe Urgo realized this fall their visions differed from those of the center's founders, Urgo said. Stewart and Urgo were listed as co-founders of the center on the charter, which was made public in September.

Small liberal arts schools such as Hamilton College value deliberation and inclusion, and the center's founders wanted to insulate the center from faculty influence, Urgo said.

"I've never had a conversation with anyone who was against goals or the programming of the center," Urgo said. "It's never been about the politics."

The administration's support in August was based on the spirit of the center's programming, but they hadn't yet discussed the details of day-to-day governance, Urgo said.

They decided to suspend the center after faculty members and the Board of Trustees raised concerns.

But Brown said the charter outlined the center's structure of governance.

"Direct intervention by the trustees to supersede and override a decision by the president and the dean of faculty — on a scholarly, programmatic initiative — is simply extraordinary," Brown said.

Center founder Robert Paquette said he and fellow founders built trustee oversight into the charter: If the board disagreed with the center's direction, it could pull its funding and shut it down. But Urgo said this isn't the kind of authority the college wanted; rather, the administration and faculty preferred a more hands-on role so they could discuss problems as they arose.

Other developments Thursday included:

•The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a Washington, D.C.-based education nonprofit group, criticized the college's decision and called it politically motivated.

"I think it's a pity when squabbling over structures and various other agendas get in the way of giving students more intellectual opportunities," said the organization's president, Anne Neal.

•Stewart remained silent, despite multiple phone requests made since Wednesday for interviews through the school's communications department. She is in New York City for business, spokeswoman Vige Barrie said.

In October, alumnus Carl Menges (Class of 1951) donated \$3.6 million to the center. With that donation hanging in the balance, the college did not take the decision regarding the center lightly, Urgo said.

"The funding has been a major factor, and it's what made us try so hard to make this work," Urgo said. "(But) we wouldn't accept money if it meant we were potentially weakening our community."

Menges could not be reached for comment this week. Neither administrators nor the center's founders could confirm what would happen to the donation.

Urgo said the college may implement some of the center's ideas for programming in the future, but Paquette said he would not enact such programming without the backing of a cohesive center.