

# **M. Richard Zinman Endowed Professorship in Classical Political Philosophy for James Madison College**

This endowment aims (a) to honor the career of M. Richard Zinman, University Distinguished Professor Emeritus, and especially his contributions to James Madison College (“JMC”) and its Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy (“PTCD”) field of concentration, (b) to ensure that his understanding of liberal education, his approach to teaching and scholarship, and his principal intellectual interests have a permanent place in JMC, and (c) to identify, hire, support, and encourage those who are willing, able, and eager to follow his example.

Professor Zinman was a faculty member at MSU and in JMC and PTCD for forty-six years. During that time he was a legendary teacher of undergraduates, won numerous awards for teaching excellence, and had a powerful impact on the lives of generations of students. He was devoted to the College, its mission, and especially to its collective enterprise, which he understood to be, above all, excellence in undergraduate liberal education. His approach to such an education was guided by the following principles: Its aim is the cultivation of free, i.e., self-governing, minds and citizens. Its center is inquiry into the most important, enduring, vexing, and controversial human questions (e.g., Who am I? How should I live my life? What is the best way of life for an individual? What is the best form of government and way of life for a political community?). The best vehicle for the study of such questions is the greatest books (or more broadly, texts) produced by the greatest minds. In selecting books for study, one should range as widely as possible, not limiting oneself to those that are part of some established tradition, fixed canon, or discipline or set of disciplines. The proper approach to such books requires openness to the possibility that they teach the truth; close, searching, and skeptical reading conducted with painstaking care; and special attention to the art of writing, the rhetorical dimensions of writing, and the relationship between form and content. Professor Zinman was a master of employing such books to bring alive for students the highest and most difficult human questions and inducing them to embrace the challenge of discovering, questioning, and clarifying their most deeply held opinions, most intense passions, and most powerful interests. As a result, he led many students to devote themselves to the life of the mind and many more to devote themselves to a life of self-reflective and engaged citizenship.

Over more than four decades, Professor Zinman taught classic texts in the history of political philosophy (from Plato to Heidegger) and in American political thought (such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the works of Frederick Douglass), fundamental religious texts (such as the Hebrew and Christian bibles), great works of literature (such as those by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Dostoyevsky), and even painting and music. He was most devoted to the study of classical political philosophy and especially Socratic political philosophy (he regularly taught the works of Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle). He was also devoted to the study of the most powerful critics of classical political philosophy (for example, Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Nietzsche). His teaching and scholarship were animated by and organized around inquiry into a clearly defined set of themes: the crisis of rationalism, the recovery of classical political rationalism, the quarrel between reason and revelation, the quarrel between philosophy (or science) and poetry, and the origins, nature, strengths and weaknesses, and fate of liberal democracy.

This Endowment aims to honor Professor Zinman and his contributions to JMC and MSU by nurturing, supporting, and perpetuating his understanding of undergraduate liberal education and his principal academic interests, especially the study of classical political philosophy. In implementing the terms of this Endowment, the Dean, JMC, and MSU will be guided by the example of Professor Zinman's career as described in the previous two paragraphs.

We invite you to make your most generous financial contribution to establishing the M. Richard Zinman Endowed Professorship in Classical Political Philosophy for James Madison College. Professor Emeritus Zinman, his students and James Madison College have witnessed and experienced the value of the Political Philosophy program and the teaching style and examples outlined above. This endowment will carry that tradition forward and ensure that future students have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors and beyond. Please consider making your gift and pledge today in support of the M. Richard Zinman Endowed Professorship. We encourage you to consider and make a multi-year pledge to help us build the endowment to the professorship level. For further information please contact Rocky Beckett at JMC.

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