



## **Even before Paul Ryan, Ayn Rand was subject of an academic boom**

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Even before GOP presidential hopeful Mitt Romney picked U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan as his running mate, a certain selfish, dead and enduringly controversial novelist already was enjoying an unusual boom in university classes, thanks to tens of millions of dollars in grants from a Winston-Salem, N.C.-based bank.

Now Ayn Rand, heartless arch-villain to some, triumphant free-market oracle to others, is under an even larger national spotlight, thanks to her role as economic muse to Ryan. Dozens of stories, blog items and columns on the Rand-Ryan connection have popped up in the past few days, and Twitter has been awash in Rand tweets.

Her work is a unique stew of fiction, economics and her own brand of philosophy - Objectivism - that includes the belief that the driving moral force in life should be the pursuit of "rational self-interest."

A outspoken atheist, supporter of abortion rights and adulteress, she can seem an unlikely hero for conservatives, at least those most concerned with social issues. Her views on unfettered free markets, limited government and personal responsibility, though - and the way she expressed them - have always been powerful stuff.

Rand has long inspired a dedicated cadre of fans, including John Allison, the former CEO of BB&T. Like Ryan, Allison was known for handing out copies of her popular 1957 polemic novel, "Atlas Shrugged," to his staff and others.

In recent years BB&T's charitable foundation awarded grants to dozens of colleges and universities to support teaching about capitalism, in many cases the moral aspects of free-market economics. The requirements often include teaching "Atlas Shrugged."

In 2008, a spokesman for the bank said it had made 37 grants worth a total of \$38 million, according to the Winston-Salem Journal. A spokeswoman for BB&T declined to update the totals or name the institutions that have received grants.

According to published reports, interviews and news releases from the institutions, they include: Appalachian State University; Winston-Salem State University; UNC-Wilmington; Western Carolina University; UNC-Charlotte;

Guilford College; Queens University of Charlotte; Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte; Wake Forest University and N.C. State University.

At least one grant originated with conversations between Allison and a university administrator. In other cases, institutions simply applied. Typically the gifts range from \$400,000 to \$2 million.

The bank's charitable wing also teamed with the Anthem Foundation, which promotes Rand's work, to make grants to UNC-Chapel Hill's philosophy department and Duke University's Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program.

Allison retired in 2008 and recently was named to lead the libertarian Cato Institute, a think tank partly owned by conservative activists Charles and David Koch. BB&T spokeswoman Maria Lachapelle declined to say whether the bank foundation is still making the grants.

The terms vary, and universities don't always disclose them. One agreement, at Florida State University, mandates teaching Rand and dictates how many students the course would accommodate. The Ayn Rand Institute must be consulted on speakers for a lecture series, and every undergraduate business student gets a free copy of "Atlas Shrugged."

The grants spurred faculty uprisings at some schools. Critics protested that accepting such conditions with gifts opens universities - many of them cash-strapped after budget-cutting - to being bribed to teach material that fits a donor's agenda, but which may be sub-standard or otherwise inappropriate.

Meredith College rejected a \$420,000 grant in 2005 after faculty voted against it, saying that it was crucial not to cede control to donors over what's taught. At UNC-Charlotte and Western Carolina, faculty dissent led administrators to renegotiate the terms with BB&T, according to a 2010 story in the journal of the American Association of University Professors, by Gary H. Jones, an associate professor at Western Carolina. The bank agreed to concessions such as leaving it up to instructors whether to teach "Atlas Shrugged."

Also criticizing the grants in that journal was Guilford philosophy professor Richard Zweigenhaft. The central issue is that developing curricula should be left to faculty, not ceded to donors, Zweigenhaft said in an interview last week.

In the journal, he noted that Guilford's \$500,000 grant mandated teaching all of "Atlas Shrugged," making it the only book required in Guilford's curriculum.

A consistent charge by Rand critics is that her work simply isn't very good, and that it has a reputation for prompting teenage infatuations that quickly wane.

Zweigenhaft said last week that he had one of those teen flings with Rand's fiction. It's fine, he said, for Guilford to teach "Atlas Shrugged" as long as it's the faculty's

decision. But from a practical standpoint, he said, there isn't enough important material in the nearly 1,200-page tome to make teaching all of it worthwhile, and that before the grant it had only been taught at Guilford from synopses of perhaps five or six pages.

Economics professor Douglas Pearce wrote the application that won NCSU a BB&T grant in 2007. The idea, he said, was to bolster instruction in the liberal arts side of economics, something that his department felt it needed.

The money, \$200,000 a year for 10 years, allowed NCSU to create a BB&T Center for the Study of Free Markets and Institutions. Among other things, it supports two classes on capitalism and will eventually endow a professorship.

Exposing students to Rand and providing them with free copies of "Atlas Shrugged" are part of the deal, but teaching the whole book is not. Teaching from the novel rather than a synopsis gives students a more honest feel for what Rand offers, Pearce said, and its daunting length can be handled by teaching sections on key topics.

"What you want for students is to expose them to new ideas so that they can evaluate them, and compare them with competing views, to arguments on both sides, come up with a reasoned judgment and defend it," he said. "We're trying to get students to think."

Rand offers ample material for attacks and spin against a candidate like Ryan, who professes admiration for her views on economics and limited government, which her philosophy binds tightly to a rejection of religion. Also, her dismissal of altruism is easy to portray as harsh.

Then there are her personal failings, including a lengthy affair with an associate 25 years younger and an admiring infatuation with a murderer who had dismembered a 12-year-old girl.

A host of stories, postings and tweets since Ryan's ascension to the GOP ticket link him with all of Rand's views - including some he clearly doesn't hold, such as her firm atheism (religion, she wrote, is "a short-circuit destroying the mind") and support for abortion. Ryan is widely known for being a committed Catholic and staunchly pro-life.

"Rand seems primarily something that will be used in smearing Ryan by saying, well, she was selfish and non-religious, so he must be, too," said Craig M. Newmark, an associate professor who teaches one of the BB&T-supported courses at NCSU, including material from "Atlas Shrugged," but also from more than two dozen other writers.

Newmark said it's easy to distort Rand's work by reducing it all to one word: selfishness. "Atlas Shrugged," he said, could be shorter and better written, but

has significantly more to offer than celebrating self-interest. For example, it graphically conveys the dangers of business and government getting too cozy and fostering crony capitalism.

The point isn't to persuade students to embrace Rand, Newmark said. But teaching her ideas gets at a basic goal of higher education: exposing people to new ideas.

"One thing I try to get my students to do is to at least give the other side the courtesy of considering their views, and try to understand them," Newmark said. "It's OK to have a point of view, but so often these days, it just seems like there is this iron door when someone else has a view that's different from yours. It's like, boom, down it comes and that's it, no listening, no learning."

#### EXCERPTS FROM "ATLAS SHRUGGED" BY AYN RAND

"He knew no weapons but to pay for what he wanted, to give value, to ask nothing of nature without trading his effort in return, to ask nothing of men without trading the product of his effort."

"I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."

" 'Public welfare' is the welfare of those who do not earn it; those who do, are entitled to no welfare."

"So you think that money is the root of all evil? Have you ever asked what is the root of money? Money is a tool of exchange, which can't exist unless there are goods produced and men able to produce them. Money is the material shape of the principle that men who wish to deal with one another must deal by trade and give value for value. Money is not the tool of the moochers, who claim your product by tears or of the looters, who take it from you by force. Money is made possible only by the men who produce. Is this what you consider evil?"

#### HOW DO YOU SAY THAT?

According to the Ayn Rand Institute, Ayn Rand pronounced her first name "ine," as in mine or fine.

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