

# Mystery donors give over \$45M to 9 universities

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By MICHAEL J. CRUMB, Associated Press Writer

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DES MOINES, Iowa – A mystery is unfolding in the world of college fundraising: During the past few weeks, at least nine universities have received gifts totaling more than \$45 million, and the schools had to promise not to try to find out the giver's identity.

One school went so far as to check with the IRS and the Department of Homeland Security just to make sure a \$1.5 million gift didn't come from illegal sources.

"In my last 28 years in fundraising ... this is the first time I've dealt with a gift that the institution didn't know who the donor is," said Phillip D. Adams, vice president for university advancement at Norfolk State University, which received \$3.5 million.

The gifts ranged from \$8 million at Purdue to \$1.5 million donated to the University of North Carolina at Asheville. The University of Iowa received \$7 million; the University of Southern Mississippi, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the University of Maryland University College got \$6 million each; the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs was given \$5.5 million; and Penn State-Harrisburg received \$3 million.

It's not clear whether the gifts came from an individual, an organization or a group of people with similar interests. In every case, the donor or donors dealt with the universities through lawyers or other middlemen. Some of the money came in cashier's checks, while other schools received checks from a law firm or another representative.

All the schools had to agree not to investigate the identity of the giver. Some were required to make such a promise in writing.

"Our chancellor was called to a Denver law office and had to sign a confidentiality agreement that she would not try to find out," said Tom Hutton, spokesman at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. "Once the chancellor signed it, she was emphatic that we don't try to find out."

Each was delivered since March 1 and came with the same stipulation: Most of the money must be used for student scholarships, and the remainder can be spent on various costs such as research, equipment, strategic goals and operating support.

"We have no idea who this generous individual is, but we're extremely grateful," said Lynette Marshall, president and chief executive of the University of Iowa foundation. "This is the first time in my 25-year career that something of this magnitude has happened."

Usually when schools receive anonymous donations, the school knows the identity of the benefactor but agrees to keep it secret. Not knowing who is giving the money can raise thorny problems.

William Massey, vice chancellor for alumni and development at UNC-Asheville, said the school contacted the Department of Homeland Security and the IRS to make sure the money was legal before accepting it.

"There may be an ethical problem if you knowingly accept funds from ill-gotten gains," said Colorado Springs' Hutton. University officials "do due diligence and ask the appropriate questions and receive satisfactory answers."

The \$6 million donated to the University of Southern Mississippi was the largest single gift ever bestowed to the school.

"It was a remarkable gift particularly during these economic times," said David Wolf, vice president of advancement.

"I think somebody is out there, or potentially a group of people, that has a great respect for the value of a college education and the power that it brings," Wolf said. "Gosh, if it's the same person or the same collective group of people, it's an amazing story."

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