Dr. Duke Pesta (left) received his M.A. in Renaissance literature from John Carroll University and his Ph.D. in Shakespeare and Renaissance literature from Purdue University.

He has taught at major research institutions and small liberal arts colleges, on a wide variety of subjects at the graduate and undergraduate level, including classes on Shakespeare, Renaissance literature, the Bible, Russian literature, and C.S. Lewis. He has been active in educational reform, and was instrumental in developing and implementing an elective Bible course that is currently available for public high-school students in Texas.

He is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, and the academic director of FreedomProj-ect Education, an online school dedicated to providing students a classical education delivered through state-of-the-art technology. He was interviewed for The New American by Gary Benoit.

The New American: *What are the benefits of homeschooling?*

Dr. Duke Pesta: Besides the obvious advantages of convenience and the comforts and flexibility of the home environment, perhaps the biggest benefit of homeschooling is the ability to manage the message, so to speak. It is impossible to be an informed participant in the culture and not recognize the increasingly volatile politicization of American institutions, especially Hollywood, the media, and of course, academia. Homeschooling provides parents a level playing field, a safe place from which to interact with their children about the proper way to distinguish between important and unimportant information and identify the often one-sided methods by which information is delivered. As an educator who has worked with students from middle school through graduate school, I can attest to the fact that far too often today's public-school students are taught what to think as opposed to learning to think for themselves. Often what they are taught clashes with the values of their parents. Homeschooling reinforces the idea that parents should be the first and most important filter, one that protects their children from ideological indoctrination and the one-sided, politicized spin of the contemporary classroom. An effective homeschool program should not only reinforce the values of parents but also provide a solid education and instill critical-thinking skills.

TNA: *Why, necessarily, would education be better online?*

Dr. Pesta: No one is saying that online education is in all ways better or preferable to traditional methods of education. At FreedomProject Education, we do not view our online educational system as a substitute for the important role parents play in the homeschool experience of their children. Rather, we recognize that in our advanced technological society, students are much more comfortable accessing and capitalizing on the remarkable educational opportunities provided by technology. Further, while most homeschool parents feel capable of overseeing the education of their children, there are inevitably subjects, or blocks of subjects, that fall outside their comfort zones. Some parents may feel very at ease discussing history or literature with their children, but need some outside help teaching calculus or physics. Online education can meet these needs, partnering with parents and providing expert assistance and the intellectual support they need to provide a diverse, well-rounded education for their children. Our teachers and staff interact not just with the students taking their courses, but also with their parents or guardians, undergirding the educational experience, not controlling or hijacking it.

TNA: *Why is a classical education, emphasizing subjects like Latin and logic, relevant to students in today's world?*

Dr. Pesta: The purpose of a classical education is to train the mind to approach all subjects rationally and judiciously, and to recognize the value of reason, not as the only way of arriving at truth, but as one part of a complex human organism that includes body and soul, each of which has its own contributions to make in the development of the person. We reject the contemporary idea that reason alone is sufficient for human progress and fulfillment. If that were true, courses in mathematics and science might constitute the entire curriculum. Rather, we believe subjects like Latin and logic — as well as course work in the Bible, great books, economics, and humanities — all contribute to forming the well-rounded Renaissance ideal of the polymath, the individual conversant in a wide variety of subjects and who is able to properly distinguish those disciplines fit for the mind, those fit for the soul, and those fit for the body,

and how to integrate them. In other words, one important aim of classical education is to create a generation of Renaissance men and women who are able to balance the practical demands of the material world (math and science) with the humanistic requirements of right living and moral development.

TNA: *What differentiates the way FreedomProject Education teaches math that qualifies it — or any course for that matter — as part of a classical education?*

Dr. Pesta: It's not so much the way we teach math that suddenly makes math an appropriate subject for classical education. Instead, it is the emphasis we place on the relationship of math to all other disciplines in the curriculum, the way that our subjects are integrated, linked together, and ultimately subordinated to a higher ideal of what the aim and purpose of education should be. Math is, of course, rational and empirical, and in this sense, a mathematic sensibility is necessary for the mastery of logic, and even Latin, which requires a precision and exactness that might almost be termed "mathematical." By the same token, exercises in Latin declensions or time spent studying classical syllogisms — deductive reasoning — can only reinforce the rigor and flexibility of thought required to succeed at math at the highest levels. The end game is not complete mastery of a particular subject at the expense of all others, a hallmark of the current "scientization" of education, whereby we create endlessly myopic specialists focused on increasingly rarified and arcane bodies of knowledge. Instead, we seek to develop highly intuitive students that can function on multiple levels and are comfortable in multiple disciplines. In other words, a student equally able to appreciate the vastness of forests without losing sight of the uniqueness of trees.

TNA: *How does a diploma from FreedomProject Education stack up against the traditional high-school credential?*

Dr. Pesta: Keep in mind that we just launched our high-school program in September, but a future diploma from FreedomProject Education will compare quite favorably to he traditional public-school credential, I believe. As it stands now, homeschool students in general more than hold their own against traditional students when it comes to college enrollment. Despite a good deal of scoffing from academic elites, homeschoolers are getting into very good colleges and universities at an impressive rate. My liberal colleagues at the universities where I have taught all disdain the concept of homeschooling, but have to concede that most homeschool students are better prepared, more respectful, less entitled, and generally fare better. One of the dirty little secrets of liberal academe is the tacit recognition, reflected in enrollment numbers, that homeschool kids are much easier to teach and much less likely to tune out or drop out. We are admitting these students even as we gripe about their "social awkwardness" (very often "ed-speak" for their unusual maturity) and voice our contempt for the traditional religious values that go hand-in-hand with their academic success (and which make it that much harder for these students to be co-opted into the morally relative universe of higher education, with all of the anti-Americanism, sexual irresponsibility, and apathy it engenders). I firmly believe the partnership between FreedomProject Education and the typical homeschool family will only reinforce the idea that these students are more prepared academically and psychologically to survive and thrive in the world of higher education.

TNA: *Is it generally expected that students of FreedomProject Education will continue their education beyond high school and into college?*

Dr. Pesta: Generally so. A student trained classically is a student who recognizes that learning is a life-long process, and who values the pleasure of learning for learning's sake. In that sense, our curriculum is rigorously college preparatory, and our students will have a real leg up once they enter the university system. The contemporary university, by the way, is increasingly geared toward remediation. I'm not just being an educational curmudgeon when I note that with each passing year, first-year college students are less prepared to begin their studies at the level we expect, and more and more of them must spend significant time and money on remedial courses just to get up to speed. Not only will our students have no need to spend time in this culture of remediation, they will stand out on the grounds of their rock-solid foundation in core subjects and in their ability to adapt and make important inter-disciplinary connections. Even in those rare instances where an FPE-assisted homeschooler decides to eschew higher education in the short term — to join the armed forces, for instance — we believe that he or she will be better trained to think critically than many of their college-educated peers.

TNA: *Do adults or other non-traditional students take courses at FreedomProject Education?*

Dr. Pesta: Yes. One very exciting development is the number of non-traditional students who have expressed interest in our courses and methodology. Adults from all walks of life and educational backgrounds have contacted us to see about taking classes for intellectual development and stimulation. A key difference is that these students are not seeking a degree, just personal enrichment. We are meeting this demand by developing a series of elective courses geared toward working and retired adults and focusing on topics of general interest to a non-traditional clientele. Courses like Current Events, the Bible as Culture, American Cosmology, and the History of the Mideast Crisis are just a few of the courses in development, and one of the advantages of a system like ours is flexibility and sensitivity to market demand. If a number of current or prospective clients request a course in a particular subject, we can make it available in relatively short order. Look for some of these courses to be available as early as summer 2012.

TNA: *How can non-traditional students avail themselves of what FreedomProject Education has to offer, if their interest has been piqued?*

Dr. Pesta: It's as easy as asking. Whether you prefer e-mail, snail mail, telephone, or text message, contact us, and our staff will do their best to tailor a plan that's right for you. This would be a good time to mention that most courses cost only $90, there is no minimum number of classes you must take, and there are significant discounts available — up to 50 percent in some cases — for taking a full load of courses over the academic year, for example. All of the relevant contact information can be found at our site fpeusa.org, or if you prefer, call us toll free at 800-807-7292, extension 5667.

TNA: *Moving forward, what are your immediate plans to develop and grow the school?*

Dr. Pesta: In the short term, we are diligently working to maximize the benefits and conveniences of the current curriculum — just launched September 2011 — while continuing to develop exciting new electives, like the ones already mentioned. We are also considering ways to include real-time art and music instruction in response to client inquiries. Beyond that, the sky's the limit! Under the guidance of Alan Scholl, our executive director, we have assembled a first-rate staff, a crackerjack tech support team, and an amazing array of teachers and course-developers who can take us anywhere we need to go and everywhere you want to be.

TNA: *Any plans to replicate the success of FreedomProject Education at the college level?*

Dr. Pesta: Interestingly, FreedomProject Education evolved out of an initial plan for a brick-and-mortar college. Given the current state of higher education in America, and the obvious need for the kind of philosophical and pedagogical diversity that FreedomProject Education represents, we hope the future success of our program is such that our initial vision of a first-class university might finally be realized.