

A Civic Education Crisis

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This essay opens with a review of the literature on declining civic engagement as it has grown out of Putnam's social capital arguments, on the one hand, and Delli Carpini and Keeter's analysis of poor civic literacy in the United States, on the other. This review shows there is a growing scholarly consensus America faces a civic education crisis. The growing concern over civics in America has increasingly brought formalized civic education (FCE) at the primary, secondary and higher education levels under scrutiny. While many scholars, politicians, and the media increasingly point the finger at public education, the country lacks adequate knowledge of the macro state of civic education practices in the 50 states to assess its role in the civics crisis. Such knowledge is essential to a meaningful discussion of civic education reform so this paper investigates the current minimal standards for civic education curriculums. After examining the mandated civic curricular requirements at the secondary and higher education levels for the 50 states, it is concluded America does generally take a minimalist approach to formalized civic education leaving the civic education of U.S. citizens as a whole too much to informal socialization processes and chance.

Introduction

Still, the media's over-sensationalized reporting of one survey is certainly no basis for concluding America faces a civics crisis. It is through a review of the growing literature on the poor civic engagement and knowledge of the United States, however, that such a concern becomes justified. The first section of this essay provides such an overview of the literature. A review of scholarship on the civics crisis will show the problem appears to be systemic in nature—a negative by-product resulting from a combination of developments in informal civic education processes. What is unclear in the literature is the extent to which formal civic education has contributed to the crisis. Essentially, social science research provides substantial information on the levels of civic engagement and civic literacy, as well as what is happening in informal civic education mechanisms like families, political parties, interest groups, etc. Their role in the civics decline is well documented. However, the goal of this paper is to give due weight to

the importance of civic literacy and the crucial role that public education plays in shaping America's civic literacy.

More importantly, this work addresses a gap in the civic education literature. One important piece of information that is lacking is an adequate, macro-level understanding of the state of formalized civic education in this country at the primary, secondary and collegiate levels. Thus, the second section of this essay examines the current state-mandated standards for civic education at the secondary and collegiate levels.¹ The common perception is that the public education provided by the states is complicit in the poor state of civic literacy in the United States. In this essay, an initial investigation of the 50 state-mandated civics curriculums provides empirical backing for the view that civic education requirements in most are minimal. Overall, it is argue America faces a civics crisis and reform of the civics curriculum in public education is a primary way to begin fixing the problem.

Formal and Informal Civic Education Processes

As a preliminary point, it is essential to explain the terminology used in this essay. The focus of this essay is civic education, which Amy Gutmann defines as a "'political education' — the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation" (1999, 287). Although general, this description helps differentiates civic education from other types of education, as well as suggest the different elements that make up a civic education. To give more substance to this general definition, a number of scholars have been more specific about what virtues, knowledge and skills a democratic political education needs. While there is not perfect consensus among scholars (or Americans) on what a U.S. civic education entails, a good overview can be reconstructed from some of the most prominent descriptions of each category.

Starting with desirable democratic virtues, Colby et al. draw on major contributions to the civic education literature to provide a comprehensive list of them. They claim "These [civic] values include, mutual respect and tolerance, concern for both the rights and the welfare of individuals and the community, recognition that each individual is part of the larger social fabric, critical self-reflectiveness, and a commitment to civil and rational discourse and procedural neutrality" (Colby et al. 2003, 13). This list

¹ For an introduction and discussion of primary civic education, see Sandra Stotsky's article "How Common Core's Reading Standards May Improve Civic Literacy in Arkansas" found within this volume of the *Midsouth Political Science Review*.

incorporates and expands nicely on Putnam's call for norms of reciprocity, mutual respect and trust in his seminal work on social capital theory, *Making Democracy Work* (1993). Corresponding nicely with many of these desirable democratic virtues is the second element, the skills a civic education needs to provide. As a taste of what these skills are, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) recently hosted a conference of 75 scholars, civic leaders and federal officials who collectively through pre-conference surveys created a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) list of desirable civic skills. Collectively, they felt a democratic civic education needs to provide citizens "the ability to gather and interpret information, speak and listen, engage in dialogue about differences, resolve conflicts, reach agreements, collaborate with peers, understand formal government, and advocate for change" (Civic Youth).

Finally, there is the issue of political knowledge or literacy. Just as there is no perfect consensus on what a civic education is or should be, Niemi and Junn point out in the area of political knowledge "there is no 'canon' that defines what students (or adults) should know" (Niemi and Junn 1998, 11). Having said that, Delli Carpini and Keeter's seminal investigation of political knowledge argues there are three general types of content knowledge American citizens need. As they explain, "*the rules of the game, the substance of politics, and people and parties* – provide reasonable organizing principles for discussing what citizens should know about politics" (1997, 65; italics in original text). By the first category – the rules of the game, Delli Carpini and Keeter mean the structure of government, the powers of each branch and the different levels of government, etc. For the second category – the substance of politics, they give examples like knowing if the United States has a budget deficit or surplus for understanding domestic policy or knowing what the United Nations is and the U.S. role in it for understanding foreign policy. Thus, the substance of politics is knowledge of current relevant political information. Finally, Delli Carpini and Keeter argue the people and parties category is about knowing who is in office, as well as what are the positions politicians and parties hold on the issues. They argue this type of knowledge is essential to citizens as periodic voters in the American political system (1997, 63-65).

Combined, these scholars give a good sense of what a viable 21st century civic education entails. What is equally important is appreciating the mechanisms by which individuals may receive such a civic instruction. As Robert Heslep argues in *Education in Democracy*, a democratically capable population does not naturally exist but can come into being by one of two

general processes. The two possibilities are that a democratically capable people a) “might receive such preparation through a program instituted for the purpose,” or b) “they might receive the preparation incidentally through programs that were not instituted for the purpose.” While he notes “the former alternative is difficult to organize and rarely has succeeded in history,” he concludes “the latter alternative, which depends upon a lucky confluence of circumstances, is largely beyond anyone’s control” (1989, 220). Given the choice between either civic education through an intentional process or by chance, Heslep emphasizes the importance of an intentional civic education process provided through a public school curriculum. He argues, “[e]ducation’s moral role in the democratic state, which is to prepare members of the society to carry out their institutional duties and to help them learn to participate in morally acceptable activities lying beyond their institutional duties, cannot be performed without the benefit of a curriculum. It is far too complex for its performance to succeed by happenstance” (1989, 123).

Upon reflection, Heslep’s bifurcated process of civic education is generally helpful but needs further theoretical development. The strength of his argument is its identification of civic education as a dual process. However, each process needs further explanation. Consider the first process he describes, what is here labeled the *formal civic education* (FCE) process. Heslep emphasizes the FCE process makes civic education its primary or, at least, one of its essential goals. What he lacks is giving the process substance by adequately connecting it to practice. He does point to the pertinent example of FCE when he refers to a curriculum. In the United States (as in most countries today) the institutionalized civic education found in primary, secondary and higher education curriculums are the epitome of the FCE process. In America, the foundation of this FCE process is laid by federal, state or local (school board) legislation, statutes and mandates. In contrast, the second process described by Heslep is here labeled the *informal civic education* (ICE) process. The ICE process typically involves institutions of civil society that can provide civic education but only do so as a by-product of their primary activities and goals. To give practical substance to ICE, it is institutions like families, groups (political, social or economic), the media, etc., that play just as important a role in the civic political socialization of citizens. Whether it is the social capital building activities of soccer moms or political parties, what needs to be remembered here is that the promotion of civic skills and knowledge is often more a secondary benefit of these socializing mechanisms.

Through Heslep's conceptualization of the dual nature of the civic education process, one learns that it is both public and private forces that shape the civic socialization of a society. The problem with Heslep's presentation is he suggests civic education is purely a bifurcated process. In other words, he presents the civic education process as a one or the other option; it either occurs through formalized public institutions like schools or is informally a result largely of private forces and groups in civil society. This promotes the pursuit of interesting questions like where does a civic education first come from or which process is best or more desirable. In the American context, one is left to ponder if the revolutionaries were a rare example of the informal civic education, a happenstance confluence of practices that produced a democratically viable population. If so, then maybe Heslep is wrong that the ICE process is too rare. Certainly, the Founding becomes fuel for libertarian arguments that civic education is best left to the private forces of the ICE process. In contrast, Heslep endorses the FCE process, justifying through appeals to a moral obligation for society to produce civic-minded and capable citizens.

Essentially, Heslep's explanation of the bifurcated process raises thought-provoking philosophical questions and promotes interesting debates but it also turns civic education into a contentious ideological debate. Worse, it does not appear to be logically accurate. Neither practice nor prudence suggest that the civic education process occurs be *either* the FCE *or* ICE process. In practice, the FCE and ICE processes *are not* mutually exclusive. A given individual's civic education may occur through the FCE process, the ICE process, or (more often) a combination of both. Ideally, the two processes – the formal and informal civic education processes – coalesce in "a culture of civic engagement and civic education nationwide" (Stroupe Jr. and Sabato 2004, 15).² It is also conceivable that they could be at odds with one another, as one promotes greater civic knowledge and engagement while the other promotes purely self-interested behavior. The point is that both FCE and ICE processes collectively shape a particular individual's civic make-up.

² While they do not use the terms, the division between the FCE and ICE processes (see particularly Figure 1) is reproduced at the base of Stroupe and Sabato's model in "Politics: The Missing Link of Responsible Civic Education" (2004, 15-16). While less explicit, Robert Putnam's social capital theory as developed in *Making Democracy Work* also contains this division. In particular, see his discussion of formal and informal networks of interpersonal communication (1993, 167-176).

By recognizing that they need not be mutually exclusive processes, the debate shifts from the philosophical question of which is best to a more practical one: What level of civic aptitude is desirable for democratic citizens and collectively are the two processes generally producing citizens who meet that threshold? In other words, if Americans can agree on what is a desirable level of civic aptitude for most citizens, the discussion on civic education can then look at a) are most people achieving this bar and b) what role the FCE and ICE processes are playing in promoting such achievement generally. The issue becomes the practical one of how each process is doing, not the more ideological one of which is best.

In the remainder of this essay, a central task is gaining an understanding of the health of first the ICE and then the FCE process. As the health of each is examined, a couple additional questions become pertinent. If one is weakening can it be supplemented by the other? If both are weakening, how best can they be revitalized? The fundamental point driving these questions is that civic education is about maintenance of the desired civic aptitude for a society through monitoring and maintaining both the FCE and ICE processes of civic socialization.

A Civics Crisis

Heading into the 21st century, Congress enacted the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. Initiated by the elder Bush administration after collaboration with state governors, the act was passed in 1994 under the Clinton administration. The goal was the creation of “‘World class standards’ in core academic subjects” and it included a civics element (Mann 1996, 47). This 1994 legislation was designed to promote a revolution in state public education standards. The federal government offered states monetary incentives “to develop clear and rigorous standards for the material every child is expected to learn” (Stroupe Jr. and Sabato 2004, 29). While this legislation was more about a concern over American public education generally, it clearly had the potential to raise the bar for civic education in American schools as well.

ICE

Ironically, simultaneously with the passage of this legislation a flood of research was being done that has led many scholars to argue American civic engagement and literacy is in dire straits. Foremost among them, Robert Putnam published his findings on the decline of civil society in American in

“Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital” (Putnam June 1995). He also produced a follow up article suggesting some of the causes of the decline in “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of American Social Capital” (Putnam Dec. 1995). Eventually, he would build on these findings to produce an exhaustive empirical analysis of the decline of civic engagement in *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2000). Collectively, Putnam’s works systematically make the case that – from the decline in bowling leagues to the rise of online card playing to the loss of bodies in church pews on Sunday – America is increasingly composed of citizens who forego participation in civil associations and social capital building, favoring instead a withdraw into their individual private homes and lives. All in all, his works combine to provide a persuasive defense of his initial assertion that “America’s stock of social capital has been shrinking for more than a quarter century” (Putnam Dec. 1995, 666). By extension, as America’s social capital shrinks, this undermines its democratic way of life as citizens have less of the skills and abilities needed for *Making Democracy Work*.

Putnam’s work became a watershed in the social sciences, spawning a host of research on civic engagement. Scholars have developed an extensive list of culprits for the decline of civic engagement. For example, arguments about the cause of declining civic engagement include television and (as a distant second) women joining the workforce (Putnam Dec. 1995); the language of authority in media and print (Ostrom 1997); a decline in public trust (from events like Vietnam and Watergate) and confidence (from events like the controversial 2000 election) of government, as well as lack of parental socialization of children into politics (Stroupe Jr. and Sabato 2004). Theda Skocpol even argues interest groups are no longer the civic education arenas they once were, as they increasingly minimize member roles preferring “checkbook membership” (2003). On top of this, the latter twentieth century saw the rise of independents and the weakening at least in the electorate of political parties (Wattenberg 1996). Thus, one must question are parties providing the same civic education for voters they did in the 1800s.

It was also an impetus for the American Political Science Association (APSA) to incorporate civic education officially into its mission and launch a Task Force on Civic Education for the 21st Century (Snyder 2001; Ostrom 1996). Upon reviewing this list of culprits, one is struck by the fact that social scientists have thoroughly analyzed the ICE mechanisms and created a strong case for the conclusion that the ICE process is in decline in America. All in all, one is driven to the conclusion families; political, social and

economic groups; and the media are not providing the civic education they once did in the United States.

One is left to wonder if the FCE process in America is picking up the slack. Yet, FCE in American schools is often another culprit listed for the poor civic levels in America. Political scientists have long collected evidence of the poor civic literacy of Americans but efforts to investigate this have intensified in the last couple decades. Within two years of Putnam's original "Bowling Alone" article in the mid-1990s, Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter published *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. While they find the political knowledge of the American public has been relatively unchanged over the last half century, they conclude it is lower than desirable (1997). In *Civic Literacy*, Henry Milner notes the low civic literacy of the United States has been well known among scholars for some time. He points out the U.S. National Election Survey contains political knowledge questions and that its findings over time have consistently suggested weak civic literacy in America. In fact, he cites Kinder and Sears (1985, 664) less than flattering observation (almost a decade before Delli Carpini and Skeeter) that citizens are "hazy about any of the principal political players, lackadaisical regarding debates on policies that preoccupy Washington, ignorant of facts that experts take for granted, and unsure about the policies advanced by candidates for the highest political offices" as evidence civic literacy was weak in the 1980s (2002, 45).³

While the next section on FCE will provide more on the poor civic literacy of American's today, let it suffice to note here that the last couple of decades has resulted in a bifurcated research into civic education. One set of scholars has focused on political engagement while another set of scholars has focused on political literacy. Some — most notably William Galston (2004, 2001) — have explored the interconnectedness of civic literacy and political participation but most have not adequately recognized both as integral components in the "matrix" (to borrow the term from Stroupe and Sabato (2004)) of civic education process. Certainly, the strength of the social capital theory literature remains the collection of evidence of the decline in civics through ICE as well as the identification of likely culprits. The impression

³ What is particularly discouraging about Milner's findings on civic literacy is he provides a global dimension. He writes, "[w]e do know... that national differences in voter turnout reflect the fact that political knowledge figures for Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, though low, appear to be considerably higher [than] those for similar surveys in the United States" (2002, 44). Counter to the social capital theory, he concludes that this is simply a result of the distribution of resources. "*Democratic societies that more equally distribute intellectual resources attain higher levels of political participation*" (2002, 13; italics in original text).

is — as Macedo et al. (2005) and Stroupe and Sabato (2004) separately argue — the civic problem is systemic in nature. The developing civic crisis seems to be the result of unfavorable civic trends in multiple civic institutions.

FCE Again, the extensive list of culprits social scientists have provided to explain the civic decline in America is decidedly of ICE process. If FCE has adequately supplemented this decline, there is no reason for concern about a civics crisis. Of course, popular opinion certainly suggests this is not the case. The conventional view is that civic education is something schools rhetorically claim to provide to legitimate their activities, but most citizens are skeptical it adequately delivers in practice. The general consensus is that many feel public school curriculums fall short on FCE. The public's cynical view has only fueled by social capital research findings, which tended to find the most pronounced civic decline in the youth of America. As a result, over the last few years the media, politicians, and the American public have increasingly pointed the finger at the civic education curriculum — or lack thereof — in primary, secondary and higher education as another key culprit in the civics crisis.

For example, at the higher education level Barry Checkoway's observes "Whereas universities once were concerned with 'education for citizenship' and 'knowledge for society,' contemporary institutions have drifted away from their civic mission" (2001, 127). He is actually just reiterating the concerns raised at the 1998 Wingspread Conference. At this conference, college and university presidents, provosts, deans, and faculty members from throughout the United States came together to call for "Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University." Harry Boyte and Elizabeth Hollander reinforce Checkoway's point, claiming that although research universities have grown in many ways "[t]oday, higher education mirrors the democratic discontent of the larger society" (1999, 8).

While this shows the concern of practitioners, the case against higher education is more than anecdotal. A few notable research institutions and think tanks have been conducting research into collegiate civic literacy. Most notably, ISI (Intercollegiate Studies Institute) has been conducting annual investigations of civic literacy, particularly of college students. ISI has been particularly aggressive in highlighting the dysfunctional civic curriculum of colleges and universities. In 2005, ISI conducted a large-N survey of 14,000 college student freshmen and seniors at 50 randomly selected colleges and universities. Some of their conclusions include that "America's colleges and universities fail to increase knowledge about America's history and

institutions” and “Prestige doesn’t payoff” as “a 1% increase in civic learning as measured in our survey corresponded to a decrease of 25 positions in the *U.S. News [and World Report]* ranking” (*The Coming Crisis in Citizenship* 2006). ISI then followed this up with another large-N survey of college and university seniors in 2006 and found most failed a civic literacy test on American history and its institutions, averaging a 54.2% (American Civic Literacy). Combined, ISI argues both surveys point to the conclusion that higher education stalls civic education. They conclude the problem is the inadequacy of the civic curriculums of most colleges and universities.

In their 2008–2009 report, ISI investigated if the American public is any more politically literate than college students by conducting another large-N study of U.S. citizens. The average score was a dismal 49%, as 71% of Americans failed the test. Worse, their findings suggest officeholders know less, as this subset in their survey averaged only 44% on the civic literacy test. Although they found poor civic literacy among those surveyed, ISI also found those same people wanted a civics curriculum in college. In particular, they found “[a] large majority agrees that colleges should prepare citizen leaders by teaching America’s history, key texts, and institutions.” Even those of different ideological positions seem to agree, as over 70% of both liberals and conservatives think it should be a part of the higher education curriculum (*Our Fading Heritage: Americans Fail a Basic Test on Their History and Institutions* 2008–2009).

If one is concerned about the motives and ideological bias of ISI, there is the important work of CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) as a contrast. CIRCLE, founded in 2001 to promote research on both high school and collegiate students ages 15 to 25, has also done extensive research on civic literacy and engagement. In one report from CIRCLE, the researchers optimistically claim “broad engagement” as “[y]oung Americans are involved in many forms of political and civic activity. For example, 26% say they vote regularly (age 20–25 only); 36% have volunteered within the last year; and 30% have boycotted a product because of the conditions under which it was made or the values of the company that made it” (2006, 3). However, this is more of a glass half full type of optimism. If they are trying to suggest youth are experiencing a civic revival, they seem to be overselling their evidence. One cannot be too excited when the same report also concludes “[p]olitical knowledge is generally poor” as “[m]ost young Americans are misinformed about important aspects of politics and current events. For example, 53% are unaware that only citizens can vote in federal elections; only 30% can correctly name at least

one member of the President's Cabinet; and only 34% know that the United States has a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council" (Lopez et al. 2006, 4).

What is particularly frustrating about these findings is that they come over a decade after the congressional initiative *Goal 2000* was passed. Hopefully it encouraged invigorated standards in some categories but youth civic literacy rates suggest this has not occurred for civics. Still, the findings of ISI and CIRCLE only suggest a civics deficiency at the collegiate level. What about primary and secondary education?

Unfortunately, similar concerns are being raised at the primary and secondary educational levels as well. For example, echoing Checkoway's assessment of higher education is Stroupe and Sabato's assessment of primary and secondary schools. They claim:

Today, while many states have adopted new and more rigorous standards in a host of subjects, there remains little tangible evidence that civic education is a priority in public schools. While many federal and state policymakers, as well as many educators, agree that there is a civic mission for schools, in reality state policies and school practices often fail to provide students with quality civic education curriculum. Fewer still devote significant attention to political involvement as a component of their civic instruction (2004, 30).

Similarly, just as the Wingspread Conference represented a movement by collegiate practitioners to revive the civic mission of colleges and universities, there has been an even more pronounced movement at the primary and secondary level. Pioneering this campaign was the 2003 publication by CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of the "The Civic Mission of Schools." It argues schools are uniquely advantaged over other mechanisms at educating young people in civics because "schools are the only institutions with the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every young person in the county." It adds, schools "are best equipped to address the cognitive aspects of good citizenship" as they represent "communities in which young people learn to interact, argue and work together with others" (The Civic Mission of Schools 2003, 12). The report also contains one of the most coherent, comprehensive, and ambitious civic education programs available, emphasizing all three elements – civic knowledge, skills and engagement.

While “[t]he Civic Mission of Schools” report is primarily about what schools can do to promote civics, it has lead a couple states to (re)evaluate their current civic education programs. Both California and Oregon did so and the resulting ancillary reports were not promising. First, the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools claimed “civic education is no longer a priority in California’s overburdened public schools. History and civics have all but disappeared in many elementary grades as educators concentrate on teaching reading and math” (The California Survey of Civic Education 2005, 3). In 2006, the Oregon Coalition for the Civic Mission of Schools followed suit making the same claim about its educational system (Oregon Civics Survey 2006). Both conducted studies of their state civic programs. One of the more notably findings was that each discovered that *after taking a course in U.S. government in the senior year, the sampled students only averaged a “D”* (just over 60% in California and 67% in Oregon) on the civics assessment. Both reports glumly conclude “students’ knowledge of structures and functions of government and of current political issues is modest, at best” (The California Survey of Civic Education 2005, 4; Oregon Civics Survey 2006 2006, 5).⁴

Still, compared to the findings of ISI, maybe the D average is not so bad. While the frustration of the California and Oregon coalitions is understandable, one is left to suspect the average grade would have been failing otherwise. Regardless, it remains to be seen if this civic campaign launched by CIRCLE will become a national movement producing a civic revival in primary and secondary education. What can be concluded is that the findings of California and Oregon give one ample reason to believe that the poor civic literacy at the collegiate level is just an extension of the weak civic knowledge of students at lower levels of education.

Given these findings it is not surprising that one former officeholder finds the civics situation in the America so dire he undertook the writing of a political self-help book. Former U.S. senator and former Florida governor Bob Graham writes with Chris Hand about “another health crisis” in the midst of the numerous medical ones materializing in America. He is, of course, referring to the sorry state of civics in America (2009, xv). Graham is

⁴ In Arkansas, where students take the required one semester of civics typically in 9th grade, one is left to suspect an assessment of most students’ civic knowledge their senior year would likely be failing. This conclusion is strongly supported by the findings of the article by Gooch and Rogers in this work, as their pre-test assessment of primarily college freshmen and sophomores from Arkansas shows a majority failure rate.

not the only former government official raising these concerns. In a recent *New York Times* article, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor reacts to the most recent NAEP exam results. She claims the results "confirm we have a crisis on our hands when it comes to civics education." One also learns what she is doing to combat this decline. She has been active in her retirement, as she has founded icivics.org where students (and teachers) can find Web-based games and other tools for civic education (Dillon 2011).

Overall, a review of the literature on civic education shows some former government officials, nonprofit research institutions, and scholars have collected ample evidence that America faces a civics crisis. There does seem to be a consensus among a number of people that a poor FCE curriculum at the primary, secondary and higher education levels is contributing to the problem. In fact, Graham puts it most starkly claiming:

Since the 1960s citizenship education has withered in the vineyard of American education. Until that time, the average secondary student had taken three courses in civics. Today, a student is lucky to have taken one. The pace of decline has increased as high-stakes tests such as those required by the controversial No Child Left Behind law, have pushed civics, as well as history, geography, and the arts out of the curriculum (2009, 22).

If the typical American civic requirement really has dropped from three semesters of study down to one over the last half century, then Graham is likely right in listing public education as a culprit.

However, there is a major weakness in literature on the decline of the FCE process and its civic curriculum. There has not been a systematic analysis of FCE practices over time to show whether this is the case. There is a good reason for this, as American federalism makes this difficult. There are 50 different state and a few thousand local school boards within them, as well as national government, all that influence and lead to great variation in the civic curriculum of schools. Reconstructing civic curricular practices over time throughout the country is a daunting, if not impossible, task. Still, at a minimum a comprehensive macro-level view of current state civic curricular practices is possible and essential.

State-Mandated Secondary and Higher Education Civic Standards

As the previous section explained, central amongst the laundry list of culprits suspected of fueling a civic education crisis has been public education. To gain a better understanding of what role public education may play in the civic crisis, this section provides an overview of the macro-level status of civic curricular practices. The two seminal works on civic literacy – Delli Carpini and Keeter at the collegiate level and Niemi and Junn at the secondary education level – have thoroughly documented the low civic literacy of students through national studies (1996; 1998). Their works help identify today what students know about politics but it is less clear what civics courses students have typically taken to gain that knowledge. Certainly, the rhetoric (particularly in the mission statements) of American schools suggests that the civic instruction of students is extensive. The question raised here is: Do American schools back their rhetoric with a quality civic education curriculum?

Of course, answering this question is difficult for a number of reasons. Given the number of high schools, colleges and universities throughout the country, a systematic analysis that answers this question is difficult. The creation of a school's curriculum is a complicated, multi-layered political process that involves a number of different political actors at the federal, state and local levels of government. Battles over education are fought every day within 50 state legislatures and locally in the thousands of municipalities, townships and local school boards or board of trustee meetings throughout the country, as well as occasionally in Congress. The sheer volume of institutions to investigate, as well as actors involved in the formation of education curriculums makes any complete macro-level perspective of the civic education curriculum in the United States difficult, if not impossible. The decentralized nature of public education means that there is variety in curricular practices not only between the states but also between schools within a state. In addition, civic knowledge and skills can be learned from courses beyond those specifically labeled civics or government. History, geography, and economics courses, to name just a few, all can contribute to a student's civic knowledge. That said, a baseline of current civic education practices can be obtained through a survey of the curricular mandates at the secondary and collegiate levels for the 50 states.

In the late 1990s, the APSA Task Force on Civic Education observed "[t]he American politics and government course is a requirement for high school graduation in 17 states and for college graduation in about half as

many, including California and Texas” (Carter and Elshtain 1997). Almost a decade and a half later, one must wonder if the most basic civic requirement of at least one semester in American government is any more pronounced today. Have the number of states requiring this basic civic course at the high school and collegiate level increase in the more than a decade since the APSA’s investigation? Alternatively, are the claims above that civic education has withered in public schools by Stroupe and Sabato, on the one hand, and Graham, on the other, more accurate?

To fully answer such questions, one would ideally need a time series data set of civic education requirements of the 50 states for both secondary and collegiate education that spans from the 1950s to today. In addition, the ideal study would incorporate any additional requirements created by each state’s department of education, as well as the additional parameters established by local school boards or boards of trustees. This is what it would take to definitively test claims that civic educational is receiving less coverage now than was previously the case. To the best of this author’s knowledge, such a data set does not exist and assembling it would require resources beyond what is available to this author. Therefore, this work provides the most feasible approximation of this ideal study, as it turns to examining current state curricular mandates to provide a glimpse at the civic curricular practices of public education today.

As a preliminary point, it must be stressed that if a state does establish a standard for coverage of a particular subject like American government, its standard represents only a baseline or *minimum* standard school under its jurisdiction must meet. Particular institutions are free to exceed this minimum. That said, any state-mandated minimum seems a reasonable approximation of a state’s general practices. The likelihood that most educational institutions in a state exceed the mandated minimum by much seems low, especially given the *educational trade-offs* schools face. Today, there is often a competition among (what seems like an ever growing list of) worthy subjects demanding mandated or elective coverage in curriculums of schools. However, these demands are often made in the face of a shrinking space for curricular coverage as schools have a finite time by which to cover all subjects, mandated and elective. This means some subjects will be squeezed from the curriculum, others will face declining and/or inadequate coverage as some subjects are granted greater coverage. The question is: Has civics been on the positive side of this competition for curricular coverage, receiving favorable coverage or has its coverage stayed the same or has its coverage been declining and squeezed to a point that is inadequate?

Minimum State High School Curricular Requirements

As Amy Gutmann notes, “[h]igher education cannot succeed unless lower education does” (Guttman 1999, 172). Taking this point to heart, the analysis here looks at the curricular mandates at both the high school and collegiate levels.⁵ First is the examination of secondary education. Table 1 gives an overview of mandated coverage for the 50 states for the following general content areas: English, math, social studies, science, physical education (PE) or health, arts and foreign languages. Based on the data in Table 1, it is possible to assess how the general content area of social studies (which incorporates the particular subject matter of civics) fairs today against other general content areas. Next, a series of maps are provided to assist in examining how the 50 states break down their coverage of the various subjects that make up social studies in the educational curriculum. Provided below are maps and analysis of the civics curriculum (American government and state government courses in particular) for the 50 states. In addition, appendixes A–F contain a table and a series of maps (one each for world history, American history, state history, economics and geography) that further breakdown the subject by subject of social studies for the 50 states.

As a preliminary point, all the information on high school curricular practices is reconstructed from a 2007 investigation conducted by Jennifer Dounay for the Education Commission of the States (ECS). She provides “high school graduation requirements as defined by state statutes and regulations” for the 50 states. Her survey also notes passed legislation that will raise standards as far into the future as 2014 (2007). The presentation of her data here uses each state’s most current (2011) standard. Finally, when possible the state-mandated standards are presented in Carnegie units (CU). One CU is equivalent to approximately 120 hours of instruction typical of one academic year, so .5 of a CU is approximately one semester of instruction for the subject area.

Turning to Table 1, it must first be pointed out that it excludes five states. Dounay reports that four states (Colorado, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania) allow local school boards to determine curriculums, while a fifth (North Dakota) has no state-mandated requirements. Table 1 offers an initial test of Graham’s comment that general subjects like social studies and art have been squeezed out of the public education curriculum by subjects

⁵ This article does not address civic education at the primary education level. For those interested in civic education at this level, see Sandra Stotsky’s article in this collection.

like math and sciences. Again, lacking a multi-decade data set this analysis cannot definitively say whether social studies has lost ground to math and sciences. It does, however, provide a good indication of how the current coverage of social studies compares to the other general subject areas.

Simply put, if social studies requirements have declined in the last half century its CU level of coverage still fairs well. While English receives the most state-mandated support (averaging 3.9 CUs as 41 of the 45 states require four or more CUs of instruction), social studies and math are in a dead heat for second. Both average 2.9, as 35 of the 45 states mandate at least 3 units of each. Science is fourth with 2.6 CUs, as only 28 states require at least 3 units. Thus, the initial reaction to Graham's concern that math and sciences are outstripping social studies today is that the observation is a bit overstated.

While this data cannot show what ground social studies has lost to other general subjects over time, it is irrefutable that it at least receives equitable coverage by most state mandates. More to the point, the view that its coverage is in decline is particularly questionable given that Dounay reports a number of states either have raised (6) or will be raising (2) their social studies requirements while she found *none* are lowering it (2007). Unless this is the latter half of a cyclical patten over time, it seems social studies is actually seeing a growth in mandated coverage as a 16% of states have increased or are increasing its CU coverage. Table 1 shows other categories (like the arts) have certainly not been so fortunate. Another striking finding – one that will likely surprise many in the public given this scientific and technologically driven age, is that the sciences on average receive *less* mandated coverage than social studies in the 50 states. Overall, Dounay's data suggests that Graham's claim about decline in coverage is more appropriate to subjects like art, PE or health, and foreign languages than it is for social studies. If social studies lost ground in the curricular battle, it does not seem to be much. More importantly, now there is some evidence of a growth in its coverage that leads at a minimum to the conclusion that social studies fairs well overall against the other general content areas.

Still, reporting the coverage of social studies by state does not adequately address Graham's more fundamental concern – that civics coverage has declined over the last few decades. To directly evaluated Graham's claim and to gain a better sense of the emphasis States put on civic education, one must dissect state-mandated civics coverage out of the general social studies content area. Figures 1 and 2 map each state's

requirements or lack thereof for civics or American Government and state government.⁶ Again, Dounay reports three states (Delaware, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania) leave the issue of their social studies curriculum purely to local boards to determine and that North Dakota has no state requirements. In addition, she notes three more states (Alabama, Montana, and Vermont) have no state-mandates that breakdown their social studies curriculum (2007).⁷ Thus, seven states fail to establish even a minimal standard of civics coverage at the secondary level.

Table 1. Overview of Minimal State Requirements by General Categories

| State | English | Math | Social Studies | Science | PE or Health | Arts | Foreign Language |
|-------|---------|------|----------------|---------|--------------|------|------------------|
| AK | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| AL | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1.5 | 0.5 | 0 |
| AR | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0.5 | 0 |
| AZ | 4 | 2 | 2.5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| CA | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | E | E |
| CN | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | E | 0 |
| DE | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 |
| FL | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| GA | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| HI | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 |
| IA | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | | |
| ID | 4.5 | 2 | 2.5 | 2 | 0.5 | 1 | 0 |
| IL | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0.5 | 1 | 0 |
| IN | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.5 | 0 | E |
| KS | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| KY | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| LA | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| MD | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | E |
| ME | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.5 | 1 | 0 |
| MI | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MN | 4 | 3 | 3.5 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

⁶ For a breakdown of all subjects (civics/ American government, state government, world history, U.S. history, state history, geography and economics) in the social studies curriculum by state-mandate for all 50 states, see Table III in Appendix A. Also in Appendix A are figures 3–7, which offer maps of the rigor of state mandates on the remaining social studies subjects.

⁷ It is important to mention again that these excluded states likely do have specific standards and curricular requirements in these areas, but they are not governed by state statutes and legislation (Dounay 2007)

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| MO | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| MS | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0.5 | 1 | 0 |
| MT | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| NC | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| NH | 4 | 2 | 2.5 | 2 | 1.25 | 0.5 | 0 |
| NJ | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| NM | 4 | 3 | 3.5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| NV | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.5 | E | 0 |
| NY | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2.5 | 1 | 1 |
| OH | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| OK | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OR | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| RI | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | E | E | E |
| SC | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | E |
| SD | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | E |
| TN | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| TX | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| UT | 4 | 3 | 2.5 | 3 | 2 | 1.5 | 0 |
| VA | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| VT | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1.5 | 1 | 0 |
| WA | 3 | 2 | 2.5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| WI | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| WV | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| WY | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Average | 3.92 | 2.93 | 2.94 | 2.63 | 1.22 | 0.65 | 0.05 |

“E” means meets one possible elective option for graduation.

As a preliminary point, it is necessary to explain the coding of the data. Each state has been coded based on the following range of possibilities: “no state mandate”; “local board determines”; “elective”; “state required, no CU”; “less than .5 CU”, “.5 CU”, “1 CU”. States have been color coded from light to dark blue. As one moves from the lightest colored states to the darkest colored states on each figure, one moves from no state regulation to the most rigorous state-mandated coverage of the subject. Thus, states like North Dakota, Alabama, Montana, and Vermont which have no state-mandated requirements are coded “no state mandate” and are the lightest shade of blue. The states of Delaware, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania are labeled “school board determines” as they leave the curriculum to local school boards. They are only a slightly darker shade of light blue to designate they differ from the first block of states. Still, both these initial categories represent states with no state-mandated coverage of civics.

In contrast to these first two categories with no state-mandated civics rigor, the remaining categorizations all represent increasing levels of state-mandated civics coverage. Thus, proceeding “no state mandate” and “local board determines” is “elective,” which represents the least rigorous state-mandate possible. For example, Mississippi has designated the coverage of state government as an elective option and is coded “elective” on Figure 2. Then, the next level of state-mandated rigor contains states that do mandate coverage of the given subject but fail to designate a CU allotment of time. For example, Dounay reports Massachusetts requires “Students must study American history and civics. However, state law does not specify the number of units students must complete in these subjects” (Dounay 2007). Massachusetts is therefore coded “state required, no CU” on civics. Next are a range of categories based on mandated coverage with specified CU allotments. Where a clear CU is assigned, there is no difficulty in coding. For example, the Arkansas state legislature has mandated .5 CU coverage of civics, so it is coded .5 CU. The one difficulty that arises here is that some states conflate subject categories. For example, New Hampshire mandates “1 unit U.S. and NH history and government” (Dounay 2007). Such states are coded by dividing the CUs required by the number of subjects listed. Thus, in the case of New Hampshire which designates one CU for three subjects, .33 is recorded for each subject (civics, state history, and U.S. history). This likely does not perfectly reflect the exact coverage of the subjects in the state as there is a range of possibilities of how the state’s Board of Education or local school districts will distribute the CU, but it seems a reasonable approximation. It at least gives due weight to the fact the state is requiring some rigor for each subject by designating some time allotment.

As a second preliminary point, it needs to be noted that although any of the seven subjects that make-up the general content area of social studies can potentially contribute to a citizen’s political literacy, Graham’s concern about the decline in coverage of civics speaks specifically to only two – civics or American government and state government. A basic concern that Graham raises which this author shares is that a specifically civic-oriented curriculum can easily get diluted and lost under the diverse umbrella of social studies. Many may not see this as a problem, for Niemi and Junn note “the accepted wisdom in the political science profession is that civics classes have little or no effect on the vast majority of students” (1998, 16). However, while this was the conventional consensus the more recent findings by Niemi and Junn (1998) in their study, as well as those of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and Gooch and Rogers (see this volume) have all called this conclusion into question and provided adequate evidence to disprove it. In fact, a key aspect

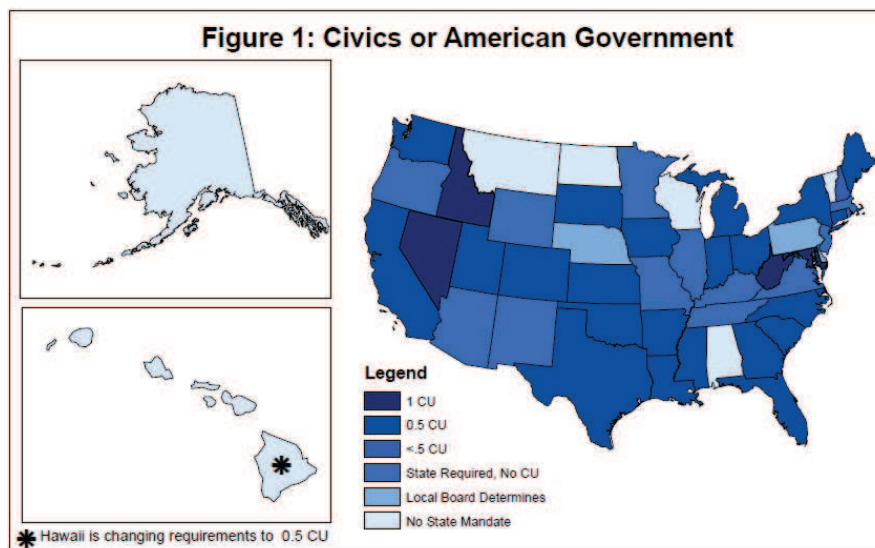
of education is repetition so it seems reasonable to expect the greater the time given to coverage of a particular subject the greater the civic literacy. Yet, what one finds is that almost no states mandate more than one CU to any one of the seven subjects that makeup the social studies curriculums of the states. In fact, only one state (West Virginia) mandates two CUs of study to any one subject in social studies and that is world history. World history, U.S. history, state history, geography and economics all may promote civic literacy but they also can displace civics when a state mandates an increase in coverage of one of these other subjects or when a state adds a new subject (as many have been adding economics) to its social studies curriculum. Ironically, what this may result in is the dilution of all these subjects in a way that none is adequately covered.

As another primer for this investigation, it needs to be pointed out that there is some disagreement with Graham that civics coverage is in decline. In her 2006 "ECS Policy Brief: Citizenship Education," Tiffani Lennon (a CIRCLE policy analyst) claimed citizenship education "has made improvements especially in the area of course and teaching requirements." She adds, "[a]ll 50 states and the District of Columbia have a civics and/or government teaching or course requirement." While the reconstruction of state standards here, which is based on the ECS (Education Commission of

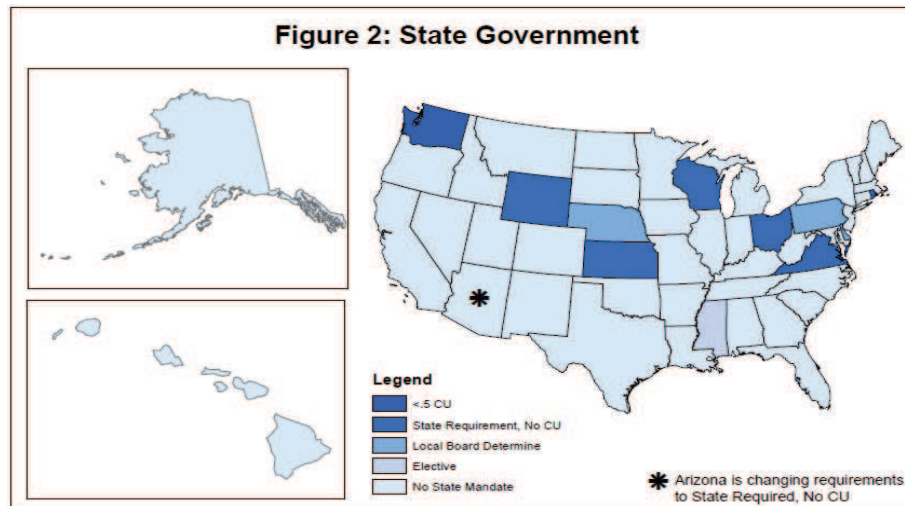
the States) data set constructed a year later does not show all 50 states having civic mandates, it does generally support her conclusion that there have been improvements. As Figure 1 demonstrates, most states require either through their constitution or state statutes some coverage of civic education through the social studies curriculum. More importantly, a couple states (Arizona and Hawaii) have increased or are increasing their civics curriculum by adding coverage and/or specifying some CU coverage of American or state government.

As a final point in advance of analysis of the data, it needs to be established what an ideal civics curriculum would be. Recall that Graham romanticizes his own public education where he claims to have had three semesters or about 1.5 CUs of civics coverage. While this would be more than ideal, a reasonably rigorous state mandate given the diversity of subjects that need to be covered through the social studies curriculum would be at least .5 CUs of American national government and .5 CUs of state government for a total of one CU of civics. A semester of coverage of each subject, ideally right in the junior or senior year of high school, would be a nice preparation for our coming of age citizens.

However, an analysis of Figures 1 and 2 demonstrates that the norm for most states generally fails to meet the reasonably rigorous standard of 1 CU of coverage divided between national and state government. In fact, most state-mandates do not exceed .5 CUs of national government. Twenty-two (soon to be 24) states require one semester of civics/American government. Four states (Idaho, Maryland, Nevada, and West Virginia) exceed this requiring a full year. However, that still leaves 14 states that require less than .5 of a CU and 10 others with no state-mandate for civics. Even with two states bolstering their current civics requirements, more than half the states fail to require at least .5 CU of civics/American government.



While not included in this examination of the 50 states, the District of Columbia is worthy of honorable mention for its civics curriculum. The District of Columbia requires 4 (up from 3.5 prior to 2011) social studies units that includes .5 units of both DC history/government and U.S. government. DC highlights the possibility that a civics curriculum can be bolstered by not just covering American government. By emphasizing state government – what is arguably just as pertinent to citizens, States can increase or even double their civics coverage though a mandate of a .5 CU of their own government. Given that DC splits its .5 CU between DC history and government, it is not clear that it doubles its coverage but it clearly exceeds most other states in its total CU coverage of civics.



In fact, to see how exceptional DC's civic curriculum really is one need only examine Figure 2. States that mandate coverage of their own government are rare, as only one state (Washington) mandates any CU (less than .5) coverage. Five (soon to be six) other states require some coverage of their own government but fail to designate a CU amount and an seventh state makes it an elective. So only eight states have any mandates some coverage of their state government, while 84% of states have failed to mandate any coverage of it in secondary education.

Combined, the civic story told by figures 1 and 2 is not very satisfying. While it may be desirable that states mandate .5 CU of American government and .5 CU of state government, at best most states mandate .5 CU of the former and nothing of the latter. In fact, besides the District of Columbia there is only one state (Washington) that comes close by requiring .5 CUs of American government and less than .5 CUs of state government. Overall, only 16% of states have mandate coverage of both American and state government and only 10% approach the mark of 1 CU of state-mandated civics at the high school level. Of course, this is just an approximation of the baseline practices of the states. One can hope that the actual civics coverage is more rigorous in most schools. For example, it is likely many high schools follow the norm for colleges and make state government a part of the content of the required American government course. However, when this occurs it has the negative consequence of displacing a more thorough coverage of the federal government while

cramming state government into a couple of weeks of the semester. One must fear the coverage of both civics subjects is less than desirable.

Alternatively, one may hope local boards enhance the minimal state mandates on civics, requiring more CU coverage of American and/or state government. This was the case in Arkansas, where the norm was for schools to exceed the .5 CUs required by the state and offer a full CU. However, when the Arkansas state legislature recently added a .5 CU requirement of economics, it was civics that suffered. Many school districts reduced their coverage of American government to the state-mandated minimum of .5 CU to make room for economics. Again, given the scarcity of space for the coverage of additional subjects and the need for some space for electives, the economies at play in education mean school boards can bolster the civics coverage in their schools but most likely find it difficult to do so.

Still, the optimist would emphasize that most states do mandate civics. Collectively, within the next few years over four out of every five states will require at least .5 CUs of civics education. Also, state legislators among others would likely argue that civics receives more coverage through mandated coverage of the other social studies subjects like U.S. and/or state history. While there is some merit to this argument, there are a couple reasons why this argument should be advanced with great caution. For one, while U.S. and state histories inevitably do cover some politics and government, it is a supplemental coverage at best. A lot of history is not civics. Secondly, one must suspect coverage of U.S. (and state) history at the high school level faces the same problem as civics, that it is overburdened with the breadth of content to be covered given the mandated space of time. For example, the norm based on 23 states for mandated coverage of U.S. history is one Carnegie unit. One must wonder how much civics is supplemented by a course that is trying to cover U.S. history from first contact to today in one year.

Regardless, a review of the state-mandated standards as uncovered in Dounay's survey leaves one with the impression that the only way any states meet former Floridian Senator Robert Graham's three semesters of instruction in civics is through elective choices by students. In fact, to the extent that retention of knowledge requires repetition one must be concerned that most students are not getting much repetition through their FCE. For example, in Arkansas my college students typically have not had any civics or government instruction since 9th grade, and that now is typically only one semester. Should we be surprised that many national

studies of American civic literacy find American youth failing civics exams? Americans perform poorly on civics exams because there is minimal coverage of it in the curriculum at the secondary level and (as will be shown below) then there is no guarantee they will be exposed to it again in college.

Minimal State Higher Education Curricular Requirements

When former APSA president Elinor Ostrom explained why she thought the APSA needed a task force (which existed from 1996 to 2002) on civic education and engagement for the 21st century, she wrote:

When I took American Government in college, it was a two-semester course with the second semester devoted to state and local government. Not the required course that most school teachers and political science majors take is one semester long. One week – at most – is devoted to state and local government. Not only is their little attention to state and local government, there is scant attention to most forms of political and social association other than political parties... The logic of the federal system is given short attention as is the importance of the jury system... A cardboard model of citizenship is presented that focuses primarily on voting with little emphasis on the importance of an open public realm, a culture of inquiry, and the essential role of citizens to organize for many purposes and to challenge authority. (*Civic Education for the Next Century: A Task Force to Initiate Professional Activity*, 1996, 755)

Ostrom clearly felt civic education needed revitalization. Much like Graham's critique of higher education, she suggests a decline in collegiate civic curriculum from when she took her government courses. Thus, just as Graham's comments became the standard by which this paper evaluated secondary education, Ostrom's will be used as the standard for evaluating the collegiate level. Again, ideally one would evaluate Ostrom's claim that there has been a decline in civics coverage through a time series analysis of collegiate curriculums. While such a study for a particular college or university would be a reasonable undertaking, do so for colleges and universities across the nation would be a logistically demanding task that is again beyond the resources of this author. Again, instead a more reasonable approach is to get rough estimate of the general practices nationally by reviewing current state statutes on civic education at the collegiate level for

public colleges and universities. In “Civic Education by Mandate: A State-by-State Analysis” (2003), Karen Kedrowski provides just such an analysis. Table 3 below is a summary of her findings.

Simply put, most states have no mandated civics requirements at the higher education level. As Kedrowski notes, “[n]ine states require some study of American Government, the Constitution, or civics for students enrolled in public institutions of higher education.” Her presentation of the data is intentionally put in an overly positive light, due to her desire to defend state-mandated civic education at the collegiate level. Thus, she concludes “[t]his study demonstrates that nearly one of every five states has a state-level mandate to study the American Constitution or a related topic” (2003, 226). The problem is presenting the data in this way really oversells it. What should be noted is that Utah is the *only* state that actually requires American Government. Given that America is a federal system of

Table 2. State Mandated Higher Education Civics Standards

Block I Study of U.S. Government

Utah (R465-3.3.3 General Education Policy Statement)

Block II Study of either U.S. Government or U.S. History

Arkansas (Arkansas Core Curriculum)

Block III Study of State Government

Missouri State Government (Missouri Revised Statutes 170.11)

Oklahoma (“Political Statement on Undergraduate Degree Requirements and Articulation,” 11-2-150)

Block IV Study of the U.S. Constitution

Illinois (Illinois Community College Board Rules, Section K)

Missouri (Missouri Revised Statutes 170.11)

South Carolina (South Carolina Code 59-29-120-150)

Texas (Texas State Code: Subchapter F. 51-301)

Wyoming (Wyoming State Code 21-9-102)

Block V Study of State Constitution

Illinois (Illinois Community College Board Rules, Section K)

Missouri (Missouri Revised Statutes 170.11)

Texas (Texas State Code: Subchapter F. §51-301)

Wyoming (Wyoming State Code 21-9-102)

Block VI Study of U.S. History

Oklahoma (“Political Statement on Undergraduate Degree Requirements

and Articulation," 11-2-150)

Block VII Study of either U.S. or State History

Tennessee (Tennessee Code, 49-7-110)

Block VII Miscellaneous State Practices

West Virginia–Citizenship Requirement (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission 1996)

Block VIII Honorable Mention

State University of New York (SUNY) System–American Government required for its core general education curriculum

California State University (CSU) System–Requires study of the U.S. Constitution, American history and its ideals (California State Regulations 2002, §40404)

government, states are more likely to require college students in public institutions to study their own state governments (2/50) than the U.S. government (1/50) and almost as likely to require they study their state constitutions (4/50) as the U.S. Constitution (5/50). Ironically, this is the opposite from high school curriculums where national government is mandated more than state government. More importantly, as Kedrowski notes, states often broadly word the legislation so that the “civics” requirement can be met without taking a course on government. In fact, she cites Arkansas as an example, as it allows its civics requirement to be met by either U.S. history or American government (2003, 226). Again, not all history is civics. While a U.S. history course can be structured in a way to produce competent future citizens, it seems unlikely that most historians structure their courses this way (especially given that many political scientists do not structure their American government courses as civic education courses). Overall, even for those few states that have any type of civics requirement, the standards truly are minimal when compared to

Given that most states (over four out of five) do not have a civics requirement, it should not be so surprising that ISI found in 2007–2008 that “[c]olleges stall student learning about America’s history and institutions, advancing students at a slower annual rate than primary and secondary schools” (American Civic Literacy)! Again, if repetition in coverage of information is essential to civic literacy, then colleges and universities more so than high schools are failing to adequately promote civic literacy. America must be relying primarily on ICE processes, personal elective interests of students or hoping local school boards or colleges and universities are enhancing their civics curriculums to provide future American citizens a

rigorous civic education as minimal state mandates are not doing it. Yet, the various studies of civic literacy of students specifically and Americans generally suggest these mechanisms have done little to complement FCE in producing a viable civic education that produces competent citizens for the 21st century.

Conclusion

All in all, when it comes to civics in the United States today America seems to be stuck in one on-going embarrassing episode of *Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader*? If the questions were all about American national and state government, most fourth graders would likely do as well as most American citizens. Too many citizens struggle to even answer the easiest questions for the lowest dollar amounts. The widespread poor civic literacy of Americans should not come as a surprise given the findings of this analysis of high school and collegiate civic mandates. Given that in eight years or more of education secondary and collegiate education most American youth are unlikely to have more than a semester or two at most of government, it seems inevitable that most will not have the repetition necessary to have a viable political literacy and understanding of a political system as complicated as that of the U.S. State legislators and administrators, as well as local school boards, college and university curriculum regulators and Americans need to realize this country faces a civic education crisis. The crisis does seem to be systemic as both informal (families, voluntary associations, political parties, media, etc.) and formal (public schools) mechanisms have not been up to the task of producing viable 21st century citizens. America may have relied primarily in the past on a voluntary and largely ICE process, today an invigorated FCE process certainly would go a long way in bringing America out of its civic crisis. While ideally formal and informal mechanisms will complement each other in producing once again a vibrant political civil society, at a minimum the government can send the message that civic education matters. What better way can government officials begin to regain the trust and confidence of the American people than by taking the initiative to ensure Americans have the prerequisite skills and knowledge necessary to its democratic republic?

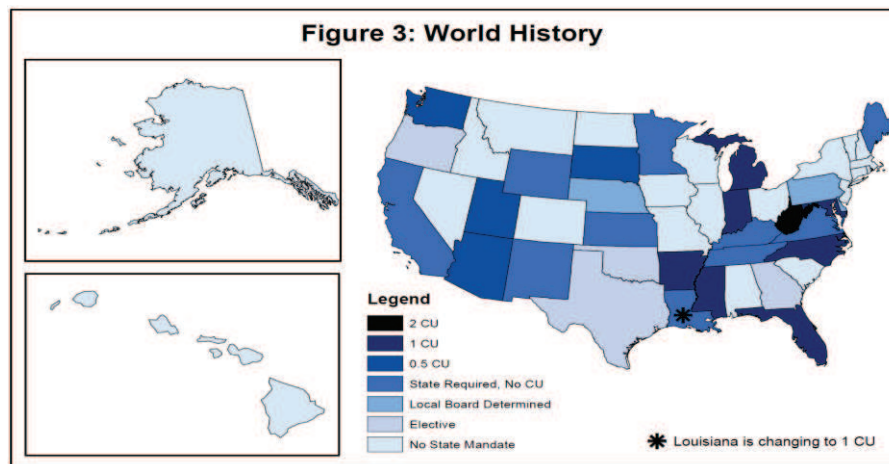
Appendix A

Appendix A. Table 3. Breakdown of Social Studies Curricular Requirements

| State | Social Studies | Civics Govt. | State Govt. | Econ. | World Hist. | U.S. Hist. | State Hist. | Geog. |
|-------|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| AK | 3 | | | | | | 0.5 | |
| AR | 3 | 0.5 | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| AZ | 2.5 (3*) | X (0.5*) | (X*) | (0.5*) | 0.5 | X (1*) | | 0.5 |
| CA | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | X | X | | X |
| CN | 3 | 0.5 | | | | | | |
| CO | 0.5 | 0.5 | | | | | | |
| FL | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | | |
| GA | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | E | 1 | | E |
| HI | 4 | (0.5*) | | | | | (0.5*) | |
| IA | 3 | 0.5 | | | | 1 | | |
| ID | 2.5 | 1 | | 0.5 | | 1 | | |
| IL | 2 | X | | | | 1 | | |
| IN | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | | X |
| KS | 3 | 0.5 | X | | X | 1 | X | X |
| KY | 3 | X | | X | X | X | | X |
| LA | 3 (4*) | 0.5 | | 0.5 | X (1*) | X (1*) | | X |
| MA | | X | | | | X | | |
| MD | 3 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | |
| ME | 2 | 0.5 | | X | | 0.5 | | |
| MI | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | | X |
| MN | 3.5 | X | | X | X | X | | X |
| MO | 3 | X | | | | 1 | | |
| MS | 3 | 0.5 | E | | 1 | 1 | E | |
| NC | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | | |
| NH | 2.5 | 0.33 | | 0.5 | | 0.33 | 0.33 | |
| NJ | 3 | X | | | | 1 | 1 | |
| NM | 3.5 | X | | X | X | X | 0.5 | X |
| NV | 2 | 1 | | | | 1 | | |

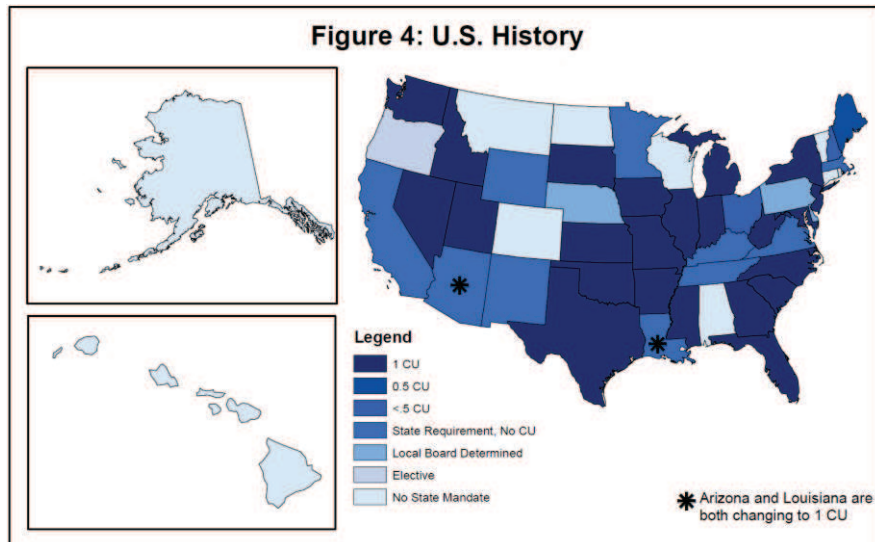
Appendix A. Table 3. Breakdown of Social Studies Curricular Requirements, continued

| State | Social Studies | Civics Govt. | State Govt. | Econ. | World Hist. | U.S. Hist. | State Hist. | Geog. |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| NY | 4 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | | 1 | | |
| OH | 3 | 0.5 | X | | | 0.5 | | |
| OK | 3 | 0.5 | | E | E | 1 | 0.5 | |
| OR | 3 | X | | X | E | E | | X |
| RI | 3 | X | X | | | | | |
| SC | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | | 1 | | |
| SD | 3 | 0.5 | | | 0.5 | 1 | | 0.5 |
| TN | 3 | X | | X | X | X | | X |
| TX | 3 | 0.5 | | 0.5 | E | 1 | | E |
| UT | 20.5 | 0.5 | | | 0.5 | 1 | | 0.5 |
| VA | 3 | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| WA | 2.5 | 0.5 | 0.25 | | 0.5 | 1 | 0.25 | 0.5 |
| WI | 3 | | X | | | | | |
| WV | 4 | 1 | | | 2 | 1 | | |
| WY | 3 | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Avg. | 3.39 | 0.56 | 0.25 | 0.5 | 0.91 | 0.93 | 0.51 | 0.5 |

Appendix B

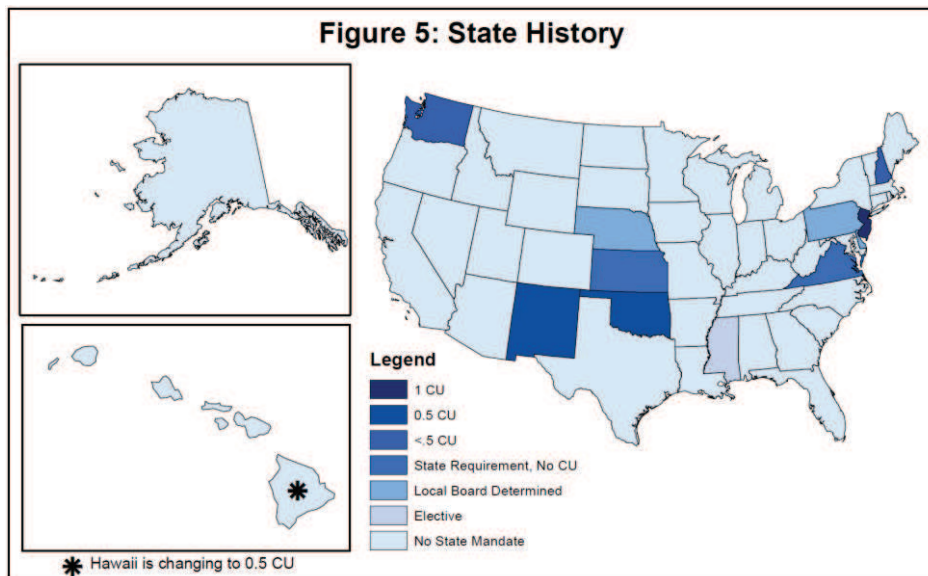
Map created by Joseph Swain and Michael T. Rogers.

Appendix C



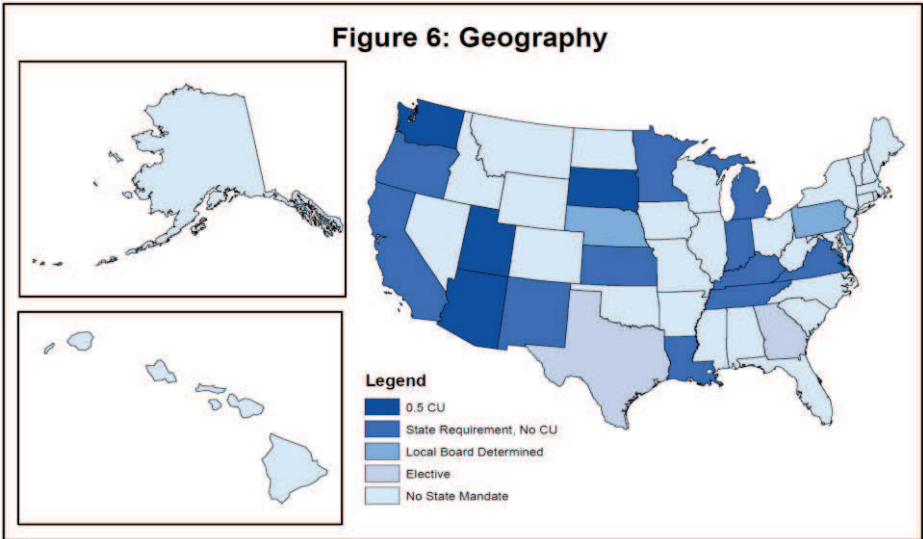
Map created by Joseph Swain and Michael T. Rogers.

Appendix D



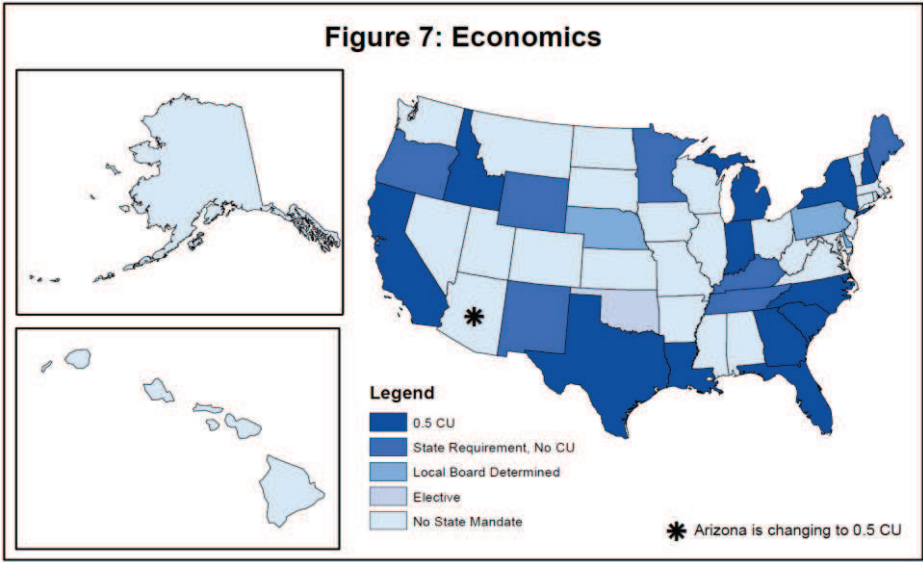
Map created by Joseph Swain and Michael T. Rogers.

Appendix E



Map created by Joseph Swain and Michael T. Rogers.

Appendix F



Map created by Joseph Swain and Michael T. Rogers.

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