

How Common Core's Reading Standards May Improve Civic Literacy in Arkansas

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There are many possible causes of the low state of civic literacy in the United States. Among them are: (1) what is taught in college-level history or political science courses to undergraduates; (2) what is or is not taught in high school history and government courses; (3) what is taught in professional development for K-12 teachers; (4) where the Founding period is apt to be taught in K-12 and why; and (5) what those licensed to teach history may know about American political principles and institutions. Unfortunately, there has been no systematic research on these questions. The purpose of this essay is to indicate what information can be brought to bear on these possible sources of civic illiteracy in the United States and in Arkansas. It then suggests how Common Core's literacy standards, just adopted by the vast majority of states, can help to increase our students' civic literacy. I conclude by suggesting why the most productive implementation of these new standards requires the involvement of Political Science Departments in teacher preparation and professional development programs and what that involvement might look like.

The Problem

It is not hard to document the sorry state of civic literacy in our public schools. Age, grade level, and source of information do not matter. The results and trends are consistent. For example, on the 2006 civics test given by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), grade 12 scores (and grade 8 scores) were stagnant from 1998 to 2006 (NAEP, 2006). What did that mean with respect to basic civic literacy? For example, just 43% of the grade 12 test-takers could describe the meaning of federalism in American government, or the sharing of power between the federal and state governments. This percentage alone suggests that the K-12 curriculum does not have a strong impact on pre-college students' understanding of our basic political institutions and principles.

The 2010 civics results released by NAEP in April 2011 were more depressing (NAEP 2011). Although the average score in 2010 for twelfth graders was not significantly different from their average score in 1998, the NAEP survey of what students are studying revealed serious and growing

deficiencies in the high school curriculum. The percentage of students who said they studied the president and cabinet during the school year fell significantly from 63% in 1998 to 59% in 2010, and the percentage of students who said they studied the U.S. Constitution during the school year fell significantly from 72% in 2006 to 67% in 2010. It is not clear why a smaller percentage of our students are studying these topics as seniors. The score on the following open-ended question alone suggests that the majority of grade 12 students have a limited or poor understanding of this country. Students were asked first to read a quotation from Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot*, and then to define the meaning of the term and comment on whether "melting pot" is appropriate to describe the United States. Only 35% of students received a "complete" rating on the two-part question.

Moving up the education ladder, it seems that little more is learned at the college level. Tests of college students' civic literacy find little impact from their undergraduate college experience. In three successive years, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) conducted surveys to determine the impact a college education has on civic knowledge (ISI 2011). In 2006, ISI gave approximately 14,000 college freshmen and seniors at 50 colleges nationwide a 60-question multiple-choice exam on fundamental knowledge of America's history and institutions. The average freshman scored 51.7% and the average senior scored 53.2%.

In 2007, ISI tested another set of over 14,000 college freshmen and seniors. Similarly, the average freshman scored 50.4% and the average senior scored 54.2%. The ISI concluded that American colleges generally fail to significantly increase civic knowledge among their students.

In 2008, ISI widened the field of respondents to adults to measure the independent impact of college on the acquisition of civic knowledge, and how a college education and civic knowledge independently influence a person's views. A random, representative sample of 2,508 American adults was given a 33-question basic civics test. The average college graduate in this sample scored 57%, correctly answering only four questions more than the average high school graduate.

The ISI was also interested in finding out what impact, if any, earning a college degree has if it does not significantly increase a student's knowledge of America's history and institutions. Its 2008 survey also asked respondents 41 demographic questions, as well as whether they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, were neutral, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed

with each of 39 propositions that covered a broad range of subjects including American ideals and institutions, higher education, immigration and diversity, culture and society, religion and faith, and market economy and public policy. Multivariate regression analyses were used to determine whether earning a bachelor's degree in and of itself had a statistically significant influence on a respondent's opinions on any of the 39 propositions. It turned out that college independently influenced a person's opinion on only five of the 39 – four of the five involving highly polarizing issues.

The results of a 2010 survey of Virginians by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier suggest a deeper problem than lack of knowledge about the Constitution (Center for the Constitution 2010). This survey found a growing disdain for as well as lack of knowledge about the principles embedded in the U.S. Constitution. Only 27% of younger Virginians think the American constitutional system limits the power of government, and a strong majority (68%), when asked whether government is empowered to act for the common good, said they disagreed. Nearly one in five of young Virginians (19%) thinks the rule of law is only a somewhat important constitutional principle, and about 15% think limited government and separation of church and state are only somewhat important constitutional principles. In contrast, older Virginians were much better informed, or had more faith in the system. In addition, while those with vocational training generally reported they do not understand the Constitution, they had a better grasp of constitutional concepts or more faith in the functioning of the constitutional system than those with higher education.

Long-term voting trends in national elections for young adults suggest that a low level of civic literacy goes hand in glove with a low level of civic participation. Voter turnout among young American citizens (18 to 24) in the 2010 midterm election was 21.3%, almost steadily declining from 25.4% in 1974, according to CIRCLE's estimates from the recently released 2010 U.S. Census Current Population Survey, November Supplement (Circle 2011).

Purpose and Sources of Information

There are many possible causes of the low state of civic literacy in the United States. Among them are: (1) what is taught in college-level history or political science courses to undergraduates; (2) what is or is not taught in high school history or government courses; (3) what is taught in professional development for K-12 teachers; (4) where the Founding period is apt to be

taught in K-12 and why; and (5) what those licensed to teach history may know about American political principles and institutions. Unfortunately, there has been no systematic research on these questions. The purpose of this essay is first to indicate what information can be brought to bear on these possible sources of civic illiteracy in the United States and then to suggest how Common Core's literacy standards, just adopted by the vast majority of states, can help to increase our students' civic literacy. To offer insights into whether and how these sources of influence contribute to the low state of civic literacy in the United States, I draw on whatever relevant research can be located and my experience as a reviewer of applications for Teaching American History (TAH) grants in 2002, 2003, and 2004, as the administrator at the Massachusetts Department of Education in 1999-2003 in charge of revising the state's regulations for teacher preparation programs and the teacher licensure tests based on these regulations, and as the director of a We the People summer institute for history and government teachers for eight years, co-sponsored by the Lincoln and Therese Filene Foundation and the Center for Civic Education in California.

Sources of Civic Illiteracy

What Is Taught in College Courses and Professional Development

We have no surveys of what is actually taught in college history or political science courses. Nor do we have any comprehensive research on what pre-college teachers of history or U.S. government teach in their own courses or are taught in professional development workshops. Nevertheless, to judge from what was in seven of the ten applications for a TAH grant the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) assigned for review to the three-person team it placed me on in April 2004, a major reason for the growth of civic illiteracy in the United States may be a decline at both the college and high school level in coursework on Western political history – the evolution of the political principles and institutions characteristic of Western civilizations – and, in particular, the Founding, its philosophical and historical antecedents, its basic political principles, and the form of government it established. (Indeed, the very existence of these TAH grant programs is based on concerns that pre-college teachers of U.S. history and government know much less than they should.) In those seven randomly assigned applications, no political principle was ever mentioned. Indeed, the word itself never appeared in the applicants' own texts, which was what initially caught my attention. Nor were any seminal documents listed for study in these seven applications. Before I comment on the content in these

seven randomly assigned applications to my review team, let me remind readers that a basic criterion for receiving a TAH grant was (and remains) a school district's affiliation with outside experts in universities, museums, or other cultural institutions or organizations that address the aspects of American history the applicants choose to concentrate on (Stotsky 2004).

Political principles and founding documents were clearly mentioned in the Federal Register. It asked for

projects that address traditional American history, meaning for example, projects that teach the significant issues, episodes, and turning points in the history of the United States, and how the words and deeds of individual Americans have determined the course of our Nation. This history teaches how the principles of freedom and democracy, articulated in our founding documents, have shaped – and continue to shape – America's struggles and achievements, as well as its social, political, and legal institutions and relations. Applicants are invited to propose projects that enable students to gain an understanding of these principles and of the historical events and people that best illustrate them.

Given this definition, it was reasonable to expect applicants to spell out a few of these principles and founding documents, especially since the USDE had admitted that the participants would likely be teachers who had had little or no coursework in U.S. history.

Instead, circumlocutions abounded. In three applications, teachers were going to learn the "values of American history," whatever this mysterious phrase means. In one of them, "traditional facts" would also be taught. (One wonders what non-traditional facts might be.) Another found a different way to avoid using the key words when it listed its criteria for selecting topics: "application to a local-regional-national continuum, impact on American citizens, contribution to an understanding of contemporary issues, judgment of relevance by the profession, some aspect of historical significance, and issues related to the development of American democracy." "Issues," not political principles or founding documents, it seems, would help guide the choice of topics.

In two more applications, use of the word "principles" was avoided by the claim that they would "focus on the ideals that unify us as a nation."

Drawing on very prestigious partners, one of them went on to say that it would give participating teachers an opportunity to “share the founding challenges, events, and beliefs of U.S. history” with a “new generation of Americans.” What were the founding challenges or events it planned to share about the Revolutionary War period? The Boston Massacre, changes in clothing production, and Revolutionary War currency. The day devoted to the U.S. Constitution would stress the role of the president and Washington’s *Farewell Address*, with a follow-up meeting titled “Creating a Foreign Policy.” No details were provided on the time period this last lecture would cover. Only Washington’s *Farewell Address* was highlighted for study, not the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

Several other applications simply listed the names of traditional historical periods to be addressed as if this took care of the task of spelling out content. They would teach about Colonization and Settlement, Revolution and the New Nation, Expansion and Reform, and the Civil War and Reconstruction. But not a word about principles or founding documents.

Yet another planned to teach about the Colonial Period, the Civil War, and the Twentieth Century but from the perspective of a particular mid-western state. It would thus emphasize the “French, who [according to the applicants] settled the interior of North America and the Mississippi Valley at the time that the British were colonizing the east coast,” helping teachers understand how “each of these colonies” interacted with “the Native American and African American populations.” Needless to say, no principles or founding documents were mentioned in this application, either.

In another application, the Founding had simply vanished from its historical period. The titles of the three thematic eras it planned to address were: “Contact, Colonialism, and the Meeting of Cultures, 1492 to 1676,” “Slavery, Revolution, and Civil War in America, 1676 to 1877,” and “Race, Civil Rights, and the National Security State, 1877 to 2007.” The applicants indicated that they would “emphasize the historical importance of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other leading Virginians, as we simultaneously discuss the growth and importance of the slave family in African American life.” Runaway slaves would be the major focus of study during the Revolutionary Period, with slave oral histories as the primary documents to be read. The applicants also promised to discuss the “role of Indians in pushing the founding fathers to Revolution.” They would then move from the “intersection of slavery and the American

Revolution” directly to the “early national period and the market revolution.”

If it weren't for three applications that set forth what the Federal Register requested, we might have been tempted to conclude that its definition of “traditional” American history wasn't clear enough. One planned to emphasize “the framing documents of American government and their relevance today,” with the “foundation and organization of representative democracy in the United States” as its primary focus. Finally, a clear political principle – representative government. The application also listed ten clearly seminal documents it would include for study. A second planned to emphasize the “Foundations of American Democracy,” listing the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights as the primary documents for study. (Interestingly, it was the only one of the ten applications to mention the Bill of Rights.) A third openly confessed to taking “an overall positive view of Western Civilization in general and American History in particular” after assuring its readers that it would “by no means ignore the negative aspects of History.” It also promised to discuss two Post-World War II topics that never appeared in the other applications: “The Challenge to Liberal Democracy” and “The Place of the United States in a World of Terror.”

I cannot know how generalizable the proportion is. But by the third annual TAH competition, it was not a healthy sign if only three of the ten applications randomly assigned to my review team showed an explicit interest in teaching current or prospective history teachers what the Federal Register was explicitly asking for. To this day the USDE has provided no overall evaluation of the results of these TAH grants with respect to what teachers and their students have learned about our founding principles or documents. This is not to say there are no evaluations of individual projects. Each recipient of a TAH grant must figure out how to evaluate teacher and student gains in a project that typically lasts three years. But there is no independently created assessment instrument that measures across all projects what has been learned about the “principles of freedom and democracy, articulated in our founding documents,” never mind the “significant issues, episodes, and turning points” in our history as they relate to these principles and documents. If there have been gains in students' knowledge of our basic principles and documents, as some claim, it is so miniscule that it is not apparent in the results of national tests and surveys.

My essay from which the above write-up of the material on the 2004 applications was taken appeared in the Summer 2004 issue of *Academic Questions*. I have not been asked to serve as a reviewer since 2004.

Curriculum Placement Problems

Whether or not the history of the Founding or the Constitutional Period is disappearing from many undergraduate and graduate history curricula and from many professional development activities (except those funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Center for Civic Education, and TAH grants), its historical and philosophical background may now be taught chiefly at grade levels where in-depth understanding is not possible for most students and, a cynic might observe, not necessary for the teacher. It may also be taught in ways that are unlikely to lead to an in-depth understanding.

In the 2006 version of Arkansas' social studies curriculum framework for K-8, it seems that students may study different aspects of American history, government, and citizenship, along with topics in economics, environmental studies, and geography, at every single grade level. No one grade is set aside for a chronological course in U.S. history covering many centuries, and bits and pieces of the period leading to the Founding and the Constitutional Period itself (roughly from the American Revolution to about 1800), the philosophical antecedents to the Constitution, and its distinctive features appear at different grade levels. This fragmented approach to the study of U.S. history (quite common) is a result of using a framework titled "social studies." Such documents in other states often include standards from all the social sciences (plus history): psychology, sociology, and anthropology, as well as economics, civics (government), and geography. Fortunately, Arkansas' social studies document is divided into only four broad strands (geography, civics, history, and economics). Unfortunately, these four strands are further divided into nine broad sub-strands, and specific content standards are generated from these strands and sub-strands for study at every single grade level. As a result, many standards about the Constitutional Period appear in grade 6, a grade level at which the history and meaning of our basic political principles may not be readily grasped.

In many other states (e.g., Massachusetts), grade 5 usually provides students with their first course in U.S. history covering the Constitutional Period. The course may stop at about 1800 or go as far as the Civil War if the teacher is eager to spend a lot of time on slavery, thus treating the Constitutional Period quite skimpily. Whatever the coverage, though, the average fifth grader is incapable of bringing much depth of understanding to our basic political principles (Stotsky 2004). Moreover, most fifth graders are not able to read our seminal documents.

Traditionally, many students have studied U.S. history and the Founding Period in grade 8, and many still do. The placement in grade 8 is due to more than the fact that grade 8 was once the stable of that dull warhorse, civics. It is also due to the theory behind the “spiral curriculum,” a way of designing a K–12 curriculum that when applied to the study of history made some sense at the time it was proposed decades ago. Educators believed that it made little sense to teach U.S. history from 1492 to the present in grades 5, 8, and 11, the three years that might be devoted to national history. Students never got very far into the 20th century in grade 11. So, proponents of the spiral curriculum suggested that grade 5 go from 1492 to the War of 1812, grade 8 from the Founding Period to Reconstruction after a review of the Revolutionary War, and grade 11 from Reconstruction to the present after a review of the Founding Period. The problem is that grade 8 by default may be where the most intensive study of the Founding in a historical context takes place unless the high school provides a U.S. history survey course in grade 11 that begins with the discovery of the New World or 1620. Needless to say, if the grade at which students study the Founding Period is grade 8, it is unlikely that they will learn much if anything about the Enlightenment, John Locke, or Montesquieu, and read the *Federalist Papers*.

However, there may be one bright star in the heavens. The Founding Period may be taught in a U.S. government course. According to the Center for Civic Education, 45 states now require a civics or citizenship course in grades 9–12 (Molli, personal communication). However, it can be a one-semester course in grade 12 or a civics course in grade 9, a grade level that is not suitable for the intellectual level of the readings it should require and that leaves room for undermining the very goal of a citizenship requirement. If taught in grade 12 with an appropriate textbook, a U.S. government course can serve the intentions of the civics requirement. I was told in 2004 that the most popular textbook for the U.S. government course, far exceeding the old best seller, Magruder’s *American Government*, was Richard Remy’s *United States Government: Democracy in Action*, published by Glencoe McGraw-Hill. (It is not possible to obtain precise sales figures on a specific school textbook from an educational publisher.) It includes chapters on the Founding Period, the Constitutional Convention, the English legal tradition, the Enlightenment era, and American colonial era antecedents to the Founding.

In Arkansas, it is not clear where the Constitutional Period receives its most in-depth treatment. The state requires a one-semester Civics for Core Curriculum course that can be taught in grades 9 to 12 but does not provide the historical context for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The state

also requires a year of American history, with standards that fully address the Constitutional Period. However, these standards go from the exploration of the New World and the earliest settlements of North America to the present, thus leaving little time in just a year-long course for reading and discussing basic political principles and documents. Also required is a one-semester course on American government; it can also be taught in grades 9 to 12. If taught in grade 12 with a good textbook, it can provide students with an adequate knowledge of our basic political principles and documents but it is not readily apparent from the Department of Education's website how many high schools in Arkansas teach this course in grade 12.

Other Reasons Why the Roots of our Civic Culture Is Shrinking in K-12.

Although placement of the study of the Constitution in grade 8 (or grade 9) or in a one-year U.S. history course means that most students cannot easily read and discuss our seminal political documents or understand in-depth our basic political principles and their philosophical and historical origins, study of the origins of our civic culture is shrinking in K-12 for other reasons as well. The history or evolution of Western political thought is diminishing in part because of the comparative socio-cultural approach now frequently used for the study of history.

The roots of Western civilization may be rendered invisible in the elementary and middle school by the addition of many other topics to the curriculum: e.g., study of early Neolithic communities, and a cross-cultural comparison of the River Valley Civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China. (Mesopotamia and Egypt have always been in the elementary curriculum, but their comparisons to Ancient China and India have not.) The new topics can't be criticized on the grounds that they are not intellectually challenging. But the curricular effect of adding a comparison of the River Valley Civilizations to the study of ancient and classical civilizations is to leave no rationale for studying two significant culture-specific phenomena that helped to shape Western civilization – the development of monotheism and the alphabet – and to reduce drastically the amount of time students used to devote to Ancient Greece and Rome. The Phoenicians, Israelites, Romans, and Greeks didn't live in river valleys.

Students today may also study in detail the highly developed indigenous cultures in the Americas – the Aztec, Mayan, and Incan civilizations. The addition of these cultures to the curriculum also means less attention to the political, legal, and educational institutions the English

created in this country because they are culture-specific. In effect, socio-cultural approaches tend to reduce attention to the origins and development of our civic culture and to those earlier civilizations that advanced the concepts of individual rights and responsibilities.

What Those Licensed to Teach U.S. Government Know

One long-known source of the problem is who teaches history and/or government at the high school level. According to information compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics for an August 2006 Issue Brief (NCES, 2006), using data drawn from the NCES 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) teacher and school questionnaires, “Fewer than half (45%) of history students at the secondary level in 1999–2000 were taught by teachers who had a postsecondary major or minor in history. In 73% of the cases in which students’ teachers lacked a history major or minor, however, the teacher had a major or minor in another social science.” Overall, most secondary-level history students are taught by a teacher who has a state certification in social studies (including history). But by not making it clear what state certification, or a license, in social studies means with respect to knowledge about American political principles and institutions and by lumping all secondary teachers of history together (middle school and high school), these statistics make the situation look far better than the academic reality they camouflage (Ravitch 1998).

In states with many rural schools, students in grade 8 are often taught by a teacher holding a middle school generalist license or a K–8 license. The jack-of-all-trades classroom teacher in grades 7 and 8 has often taken no more academic coursework in any one subject than the teacher of grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 holding the same license. This means that students in grade 8 in rural schools may be taught about the Founding period by a teacher whose last (and minimal) coursework on that period was when she was in middle school herself.

The Academic Meaning of a Social Studies License and what Massachusetts Did in 2000. A basic question is what a license in social studies means with respect to academic substance. Few colleges have departments of social studies in the arts and sciences. Most have departments of history, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and sometimes geography. A social studies license does not necessarily guarantee that the teacher has studied the Constitutional Period in depth. Nor does it necessarily mean that that the teacher has a strong background in political science or comparative government.

So, who teaches U.S. government courses, in grades 9–12 in particular? According to one source, “U.S. government teachers are social studies teachers who may teach a variety of courses such as government, history, and economics” (Ehow 2010). A license that provides such flexibility means a jack-of-all-trades, master of none, unless a college has had the good sense to insist on a strong background in U.S. history or government for the preparation program. But there is no systematic research on what specific academic content is required by a license in the “social studies.”

Although Massachusetts provided for a license in history as well as in social studies before 2000, it found that most teachers teaching history in the state until the early 2000s were licensed as social studies, not history, teachers. To address the limitations in the academic background of those teaching history at the middle and high school level, the 2000 revision of the Massachusetts teacher licensure regulations (and the licensure tests based on them) did several things. First, it abolished the K–8 license, the middle school generalist license, and the social studies license.

No one shed public tears about the elimination of the K–8 license. Only the association for middle schools protested the elimination of the generalist license even though a number of school systems in the state (e.g., Boston) had already established a policy of not hiring any teacher for grades 6, 7, and 8 with a middle school generalist license. The elimination of the social studies license did meet with many howls from the field because it was not clear what social studies teachers’ continuing professional development should consist of, but no complaints were received from the state’s colleges. As a consequence, since 2000, the history or U.S. government teacher has had to be licensed as a history or government teacher for grades 5–8 or 8–12.¹

¹ As of this writing, teachers licensed to teach history at the high school level in Massachusetts must have passed the history test for grades 8–12 (and could have majored in history or political science), while teachers licensed to teach history at the middle school level must have passed the same history test or a middle school test in English and history for grades 5–8 (for a middle school humanities license). The state planned at first to require 24 academic hours in English and 24 in history for a middle school humanities license (roughly equivalent to the number of academic hours required for a traditional major with a minor). Hours before the final version went to the Board of Education, the president of Lesley University, Margaret McKenna, called the then Commissioner of Education, insisting that this requirement be reduced. Lesley University prepared a large number of middle school generalist teachers, and this requirement, I inferred, threatened enrollment numbers or survival of their program. The compromise – the McKenna Amendment, as my staff and I openly called this particular regulation afterwards – requires only 36 (not 48) academic hours in all for the two subjects.

Second, the revised regulations and licensure tests made it clear what disciplines should be stressed by prospective teachers of history or U.S. government in their undergraduate coursework. The topics required for study in the preparation programs for each type of teacher (the regulations do not list the number of courses required, just the topics that have to be studied) come from only the four disciplines of history, political science, geography, and economics, and the weights on the licensure tests reflect the proportion of topics listed for each discipline. Those seeking a history license for grades 5–8 or 8–12 now take a licensure test with 37–39 items on U.S. history, 30–32 items on world history, and 30–32 items on geography, government, and economics (plus two short essays). And, to attract students who major in political science, Massachusetts now has a license called political science/political philosophy, for grades 5–8 or 8–12. This licensure test contains 18–20 items on political philosophy, 24–26 items on U.S. government and civics, 18–20 items on comparative government and international relations, 24–26 items on history, and 11–13 items on geography and economics (as well as two short essay questions). Topics from sociology, anthropology, and psychology as disciplines are not addressed on either licensure test, nor can teachers be licensed to teach these subjects in K–12.

To indicate how well test-takers have fared on the new test for U.S. government teachers, Table 1 shows the passing rate on all test administrations in 2010 of the revised history test and the new political science/political philosophy test. As can be seen, the number of first-time test-takers passing the new test at each administration of the test in 2010 ranges from 10% to 54.5% of the total of those taking the test for the first time. It is a very low number. But, even if only about 26 teachers pass this test each year and teach U.S. government in grade 12 (when it is apt to be taught in Massachusetts), that number will accumulate over a ten-year period and form a solid core of knowledgeable U.S. government teachers. An unanswerable question is why most test-takers fail this licensure test? What kind of courses have they taken as (most likely) political science or history majors or minors? The test is not at a high school level of difficulty (I was told by the test development company that it was at the college level in difficulty), and the passing score was not set low by those who set it (teachers of U.S. government and faculty in political science and history departments across the state). But they were the ones who made the recommendation to the commissioner of education on where the passing score should be set, knowing what percentage of test-takers on the first few administrations of the test in 2003 would then be considered passers.

Who Wants Our Basic Principles and Documents Taught?

One might ask if the focus of the TAH grants program on our basic principles and documents, as desired by Senator Robert Byrd and his colleagues in the U.S. Senate who helped to establish them in 2000, still reflects what the public wants. The first two literature standards in the list of high school exit standards for English in Achieve, Inc.'s American Diploma Project (ADP), released in 2004, suggest it does. The first standard is: "Demonstrate knowledge of 18th and 19th century foundational works of American literature." The second is: "Analyze foundational U.S. documents for their historical and literary significance (for example, The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, Abraham Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address,' and Martin Luther King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail')."

The description of the methodology for this project explains that Achieve's staff worked closely "with two- and four-year postsecondary English and mathematics faculty; with a wide array of humanities, sciences and social sciences faculty; and with front-line managers in high-growth, highly skilled occupations" to identify the "must-have" competencies in English and mathematics "for success in all of these arenas." In other words, higher education and the business world saw these ADP English standards as priorities for all high school students. Achieve's project addressed only English and mathematics content, but since a vast majority of the states have subscribed to the standards produced by this project, one may conclude there is indeed broad public support for them.

Should Emphasis Be on Civic Participation rather than Civic Literacy?

Many concerned people believe the emphasis in civic education should be on active civic participation rather than civic literacy. Many others believe that foundational civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions precede or should at least accompany active and responsible civic participation during the school years. The advisers to the NAEP civics tests over the years fall into the latter camp, and they reflect a diverse public perspective on the question. As NAEP notes on its website, a steering committee made up of representatives of major education and policy organizations and of business and government oversaw and guided the development of the civics test framework, while a planning committee composed of teachers, curriculum specialists, teacher educators, assessment experts, and lay people drafted this framework. NAEP further notes that the NAEP civics tests measure all three

major components of the framework: civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Table 1. First-Time Test Takers and Test Retakers for the History and the Political Science/Political Philosophy Licensure Tests, March 2010–November 2010

| Test Name | First-Time Test Takers | | Test Retakers | |
|--|------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | N | % Passing | N | % Passing |
| November 2010 | | | | |
| History | 207 | 74.4 | 83 | 38.6 |
| Political Science/Political Philosophy | 9 | 11.1 | 6 | 50.0 |
| September 2010 | | | | |
| History | 100 | 68.0 | 63 | 20.6 |
| Political Science/Political Philosophy | 11 | 54.5 | 5 | 40.0 |
| July 2010 | | | | |
| History | 257 | 75.9 | 89 | 40.4 |
| Political Science/Political Philosophy | 10 | 40.0 | 6 | 0.0 |
| May 2010 | | | | |
| History | 233 | 71.7 | 87 | 29.9 |
| Political Science/Political Philosophy | 10 | 10.0 | 8 | 12.5 |
| March 2010 | | | | |
| History | 255 | 76.5 | 95 | 32.6 |
| Political Science/Political Philosophy | 20 | 25.0 | 8 | 37.5 |

NAEP acknowledges that it cannot directly measure the extent to which students participate in civic activities such as student government or attend public meetings. Nor can it measure the level of their skills in doing so. In fact there are no systematic national data on students' voluntary participation in community activities available from any source. On the other hand, we do know that membership in such diverse adult organizations as the Parent Teacher Association, the Elks Club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues has declined by roughly 25 to 50% over the past two to three decades, according to Robert Putnam's well-known research in 1995 and 1996. Simultaneous declines in what high school students say they are studying and in the voting turnout

for young adults (as one measure of active civic participation) suggest that the development of civic literacy leads to rather than follows participation in this country's forms of self-government.

How Common Core's Reading Standards Can Help to Increase Civic Literacy

In 2010, a movement to develop national standards in basic subjects came to fruition, although they are not called national standards. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers jointly developed in a project titled Common Core State Standards Initiative a set of "state-initiated" standards in mathematics and a set in the English language arts and reading (Common Core 2010). Enticed by the criteria in the USDE's Race to the Top competitive grants and encouraged by a variety of organizations heavily funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, about 46 states including Arkansas have adopted Common Core's standards.

It is important for the purpose of this essay to understand that the precise title of Common Core's English language arts standards is "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects." The document does not make it clear exactly who is to be held accountable on forthcoming common tests based on these standards for teaching "literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects," but the document does expect teachers across the curriculum to teach students in their courses how to read and understand the textbooks and other reading materials they assign. The standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects for Grades 6-12 appear on pages 59-64 of this document.

What is more important for the state of civic literacy in this country is the content of two of Common Core's Reading Standards for Informational Text. So far as it looks, English teachers are to be held accountable for the following standards in grades 9-12:

For grades 9-10: Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.

For grades 11–12: Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (including The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address) for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

The fact that 46 states have, at this writing, adopted Common Core's standards is further indication that there is broad support for these particular standards. How can Common Core's two content-specific standards for English/reading teachers in grades 9–12 help to decrease civic illiteracy in this country? First, the two standards are clear that before they graduate from high school, all students must read and understand the seminal documents that were, surprisingly, not listed for study in seven of the ten TAH grants I helped to review in 2004. Second, the two standards expect students to understand their "purposes, rhetorical features, related themes, and concepts." If the testing consortia now developing common tests based on Common Core's standards faithfully address these two standards, then civic illiteracy in this country should decrease.

Implications of Common Core's Reading Standards for Political Science Departments

Let us begin with the most obvious implications. It is reasonable to assume that all teachers should know something about the historical and cultural context of the topics or texts they teach. If English teachers are to teach high school students how to read and understand our seminal political documents, they ought to understand their historical context and their philosophical background, regardless of the number or kind of "reading comprehension strategies" they employ. Since they probably majored in English, it is unlikely that they were required to study the context and background for these documents, as one would expect history and U.S. government majors to have done. This means that the nation's high school English teachers probably need considerable professional development in the context and background of the political documents their high school English departments choose to teach their students how to read. Who is better equipped to provide this professional development than departments of political science and political philosophy?

Next, it is also reasonable to assume that most preparation programs for English teachers (if not all) do not require prior coursework in political

science and U.S. history. Thus, departments of political science and political philosophy might well begin inquiries about what coursework should be required of aspiring English teachers or taken to satisfy core distribution requirements. It may well be that prospective English teachers should be required to take coursework on the Constitutional Period from both U.S. history and political science faculty. Or perhaps prospective English teachers, in order to address Common Core's standards, should be taking interdisciplinary coursework involving collaborating faculty in the English, U.S. history, political science, and philosophy departments.

Finally, high schools might standardize their course offerings so that all students take a U.S. government course in the fall of grade 12 and arrange for their teachers to collaborate with English teachers when the required documents are being taught. Since a one-semester U.S. government course is required in Arkansas, only its timing is at issue. It would be helpful if the textbook these U.S. government teachers use facilitated study of these required documents, such as Richard Remy's *United States Government: Democracy in Action*. Its chapters on the Founding Period (e.g., the Constitutional Convention, the English legal tradition, the Enlightenment era, and American colonial era antecedents to the Founding) contain material that all students should be familiar with before they graduate from high school.

Recommendations for the Arkansas Board of Education and Department of Education

1. Allow for and encourage *two consecutive years of U.S. history* in high school. The possibility of two consecutive years of U.S. history, whether in grades 9–10 or 10–11, was built into the 2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, and many U.S. history teachers in Massachusetts told department of education staff that this was the best gift they could ever have been given, whether or not they liked the new standards. A two-year U.S. history course at the high school level would enable history teachers to spend sufficient time on the Constitutional Period. They would have a clear incentive to do so if the state also decided to require a high school civics or U.S. history test for graduation that emphasized the Constitutional Period.
2. Require the currently required U.S. government course to be given in the fall semester of grade 12 and to address Western political philosophy and the Founding in-depth. No student should graduate from an American

high school without an upper high school level understanding of such basic political principles as limited government, consent of the people, balance of powers, checks and balances, and an independent judiciary.

3. Create a teacher preparation program and a licensure test for teachers of U.S. government and political philosophy. The licensure program and the corresponding teacher test should reflect an undergraduate major or graduate coursework in U.S. government and political philosophy. Prospective teachers can easily take courses equivalent to a minor in U.S. history so that they can be licensed in both subjects and be more employable in small high schools.
4. Eliminate the social studies license for high school history teachers. Teachers licensed to teach history at the high school level should be history or political science/philosophy majors.
5. Require accreditation of teacher preparation programs in U.S. history or U.S. government in a state's institutions of higher education by professional associations dedicated to the discipline of history or political science, not the National Council for the Social Studies. If accreditation or program approval is carried out by NCATE for the Arkansas Department of Education and Board of Education, the Board of Education can ask discipline-based organizations to provide peer reviewers for these programs.
6. Require demanding licensure tests in U.S. and world history and in U.S. government that stress the history of Western political thought and the Enlightenment. A good high school student could easily pass most existing teacher tests in history or social studies. At present, the major companies that construct teacher tests use professional peers – teachers and faculty in higher education (including schools of education) – for reviewing test items and determining cut scores. However, test items and passing scores for teacher tests are more likely to reflect fear that demanding tests will produce high failure rates (with political and economic consequences for the state's teacher preparation programs) than to reflect appropriate academic standards.
7. Require all U.S. government and history teachers to participate once every five years in a five-day We the People summer institute. These institutes are offered in almost every state every year by the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, California. They are among the most academically rigorous workshops available for K-12 teachers and should be approved

for professional development credits as part of the required credits teachers must accumulate for license renewal.

Recommendations for Political Science and Political Philosophy Departments in Arkansas

8. Review course offerings to make sure that all prospective teachers of U.S. history and U.S. government have had course content that addresses the National Standards for Civics and Government, originally published in 1994 by the Center for Civic Education (CCE 1994). Unlike the reception given to the National U.S. and World History Standards when they were released in the early 1990s, individuals and groups along the entire political spectrum enthusiastically commented on these standards when they came out.

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