



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

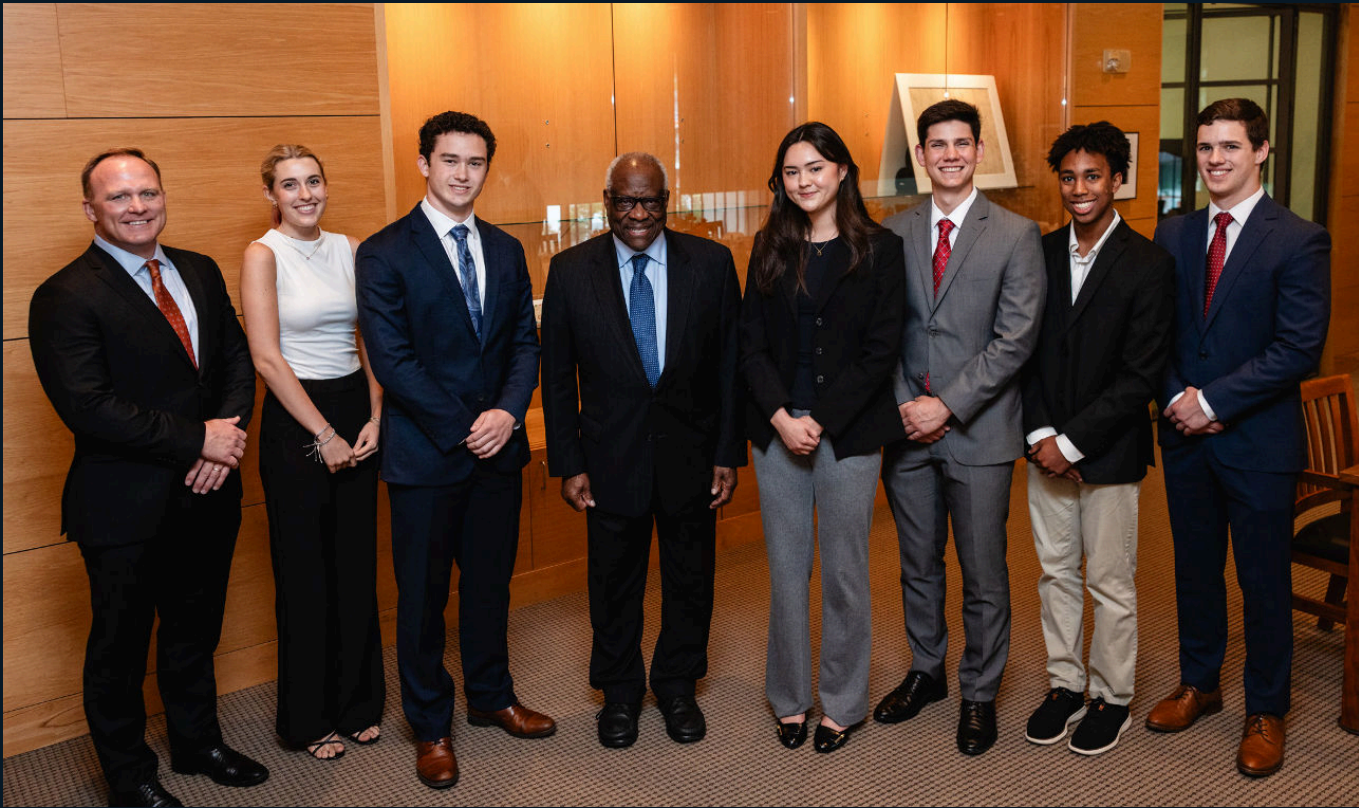
Vol. iv, Number 2, Spring 2026

FORUM

EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM

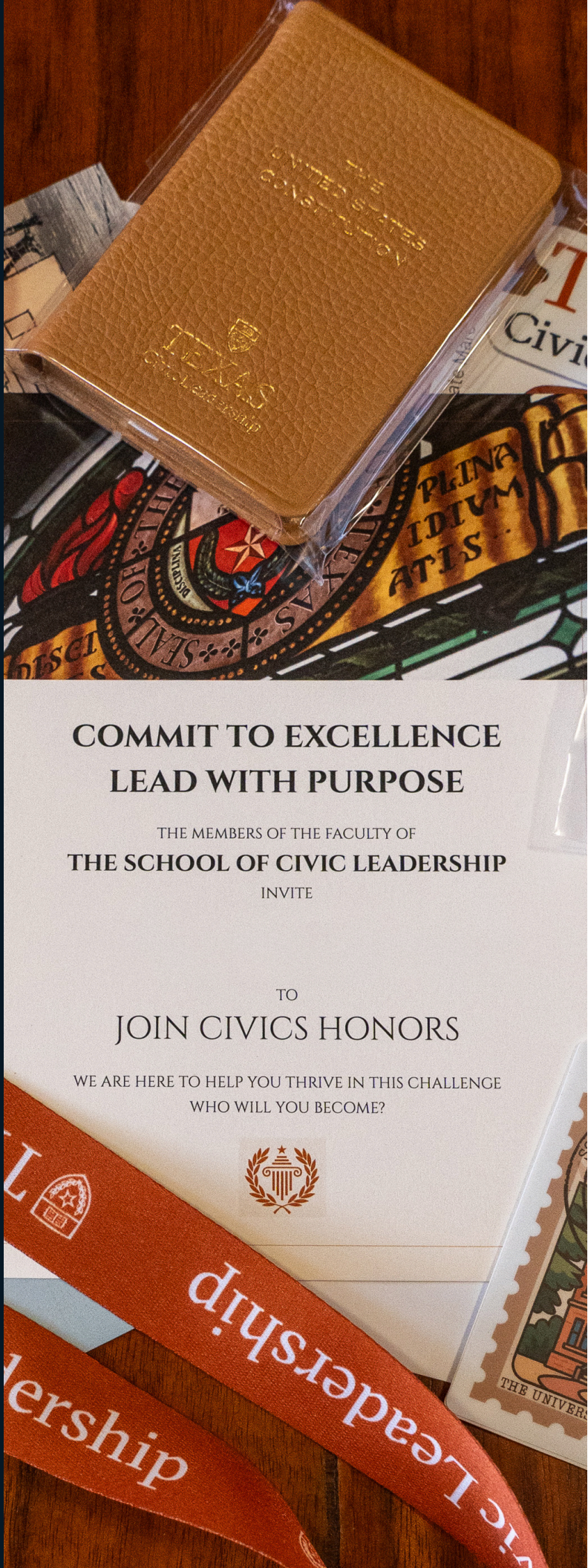


A PUBLICATION OF THE SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP



It is my sincere hope that your work to revitalize the teaching and research of Western civilization and the American constitutional tradition will lead the way in the reform of our nation's colleges and universities. And, I hope that your example will help to rejuvenate our fellow citizens' commitment to the principles of the Declaration of Independence.

Justice Clarence Thomas, in a lecture delivered on UT Campus, April 15, 2026



Inside

DEAN'S NOTE	4
SPRING SEMESTER	6
YEAR ONE HIGHLIGHTS	12
MEET OUR STUDENTS	16
VISITING SCHOLARS AND PUBLIC EVENTS ...	18
RESEARCH LUNCHES.....	23
MEET OUR FACULTY	24
THE ROAD AHEAD.....	26
SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT	28
IDEAS IN PUBLIC.....	30



Dean's Note

Justin Dyer

Dean, School of Civic Leadership



It was not clear in 1776 or in 1863 that the American experiment would endure. And in truth, it has never been clear. There are no guarantees. Ronald Reagan noted that “freedom is a fragile thing and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction.” That is always true, and that is why the task of educating for freedom in a republic is a perennial one, handed off to each new generation.



In July 1858, just before his series of debates with Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln gave an oration in Chicago to commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Looking back 82 years to 1776, Lincoln said, we find that “there were men living in that day whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers.” They were, he said, “iron men,” who “fought for the principle they were contending for.” And by “what they then did,” he said, “the degree of prosperity that we now enjoy has come to us.”

And yet, as Lincoln noted, most Americans in the audience that day were not descended from that founding generation by direct lineage. The principles of the Declaration of Independence united them. There is an “electric cord in that Declaration,” Lincoln said, that will link “those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., likely had this speech, or one like it, in mind when he delivered his most famous speech standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial. “Five score years ago,” he said, “a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation Proclamation.”

Counting back five score years from 1963 takes us to 1863, when Lincoln gave his most famous speech to dedicate the war cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. “Four score and seven years ago,” Lincoln



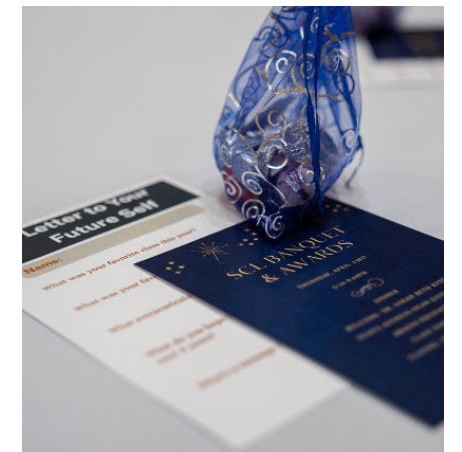
said, “our Fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Four score and seven takes us back to 1776 and the signing of the Declaration of Independence by those iron men. And now, Lincoln said at Gettysburg, there was a great task remaining for the living to safeguard a new birth of freedom after the Civil War.

It was not clear in 1776 or in 1863 that the American experiment would endure. And in truth, it has never been clear. There are no guarantees. Ronald Reagan noted that “freedom is a fragile thing and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction.” That is always true, and that is why the task of educating for freedom in a republic is a perennial one, handed off to each new generation.

The School of Civic Leadership was created to provide such an education for freedom—both in the sense of a liberal education appropriate for a free person capable of ordering his or her own life by wisdom, and in the sense of a civic education appropriate for a free people capable of safeguarding the American experiment in self-government, now two and a half centuries old. As we approach the nation’s semiquincentennial, we are grateful for our first class of Civics Honors majors, now rising sophomores, and we look forward to welcoming our second class of Civics Honors majors in the fall.

As we approach the nation’s semiquincentennial, we are grateful for our first class of Civics Honors majors, now rising sophomores, and we look forward to welcoming our second class of Civics Honors majors in the fall.



Every new educational venture has a first everything: a first class of students, a first day, a first semester, a first full year. At SCL, the 2025-2026 school year saw our first research lunch, our first guest speakers, our first student organization, our first “Disputed Questions” debate, our first professional development seminars for K-12 teachers, our first ice cream social.

This issue of *Forum* showcases some of the incredible events, speakers, and discussions that took place at the School of Civic Leadership during the spring semester. We also review how our faculty, research, and mission have dominated the headlines recently, and we look at what’s ahead, as we add academic programs and majors, and we welcome our second class of incoming students this fall.

Although the first year of our inaugural undergraduate class is ending, it’s clear that everything at SCL is just beginning.

CAREER DISCOVERY SERIES

The spring semester at SCL commenced with the Career Discovery Series, which welcomes distinguished leaders from education, public service, and national security to speak with students about leadership, character, and purpose.



David Mebane, the Founder and CEO of Fat Tire Tours, also visited SCL. A lifelong entrepreneur, traveler, and storyteller, Mebane is passionate about creating meaningful experiences that connect people with history, culture, faith, and one another. He shared stories illustrating the challenges and benefits of founding and running a business, especially one that operates across international borders. He also addressed questions from students on his experience in the tourism industry.



In early February, students heard from **Ian Rowe**, Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and founder of Vertex Partnership Academies in New York. Rowe emphasized character formation through the four cardinal virtues of courage, justice, temperance, and prudence (wisdom), and encouraged students to use these virtues as steady guideposts for living with agency and purpose.

All that is morally right rises from some one of four sources: it is concerned either (1) with the full perception and intelligent development of the true; or (2) with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed; or (3) with the greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit; or (4) with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control.
Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis (On Duties)*, 44 BCE



In late February, Admiral **William H. McRaven** discussed leadership, service, and resilience with our students. The retired four-star Navy admiral and former Commander of U.S. Special Operations served as Chancellor of The University of Texas System from 2015 through 2018, and delivered a famous commencement address at UT in 2014. He continues to teach and write on leadership, national security, and service, and in his talk, he emphasized hard work, taking meaningful risks, and staying humble.

If you made your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task. And another. And another. And by the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that the little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you'll never be able to do the big things right. And if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made. And a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better. So if you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.
Adm. McRaven, UT Commencement Address, 2014

Watch Admiral McRaven's 2014 University of Texas commencement speech here!



Spring Semester at SCL



TRUTH AND PERSUASION

Over two spirited days in February, the students of Dr. **Alex Duff's** CIV 302 class, "Truth and Persuasion," rewrote history as they debated and defended the policies that would come to shape the United States Constitution. Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and Moderates challenged one another's ideas, offered rebuttals, and voted on what should be included. By stepping into the roles of America's founders, students experienced firsthand how difficult and important the Constitution-making process really was, and what it meant to imagine the future of a nation.

A WALK AMONG THE WILDFLOWERS

In mid-April, SCL welcomed spring with a nature walk at the LBJ Wildflower Center in Southwest Austin. Students and faculty explored the gardens, admired the seasonal blooms, and even had a chance encounter with Athena, the center's famous resident owl.



TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Food, games, and community filled Littlefield Home as SCL students gathered to celebrate Texas Independence Day on March 2. Students also got an early look at SCL's new promotional video, which featured many familiar faces from the crowd.



A FOUR-LEGGED STUDY BREAK

Boo and Winston from Divine Canines visited campus to offer students some cheerful stress relief during midterms. From impressive tricks to plenty of treats and pets, the visit brought lots of smiles across campus ahead of spring break.



COFFEE WITH ROBERT KAPLAN

In March, SCL's Distinguished Senior Lecturer **Robert D. Kaplan** spoke with our students about recent developments in Iran and the broader Middle East. Drawing on his long career as a journalist and writer on geopolitics, he offered context for understanding the region's shifting political landscape.

In Spring 2026, Kaplan taught CIV 365: Great Thinkers in Realism and Geopolitics

THE PPE CAPSTONE SHOWCASE

At Littlefield Home, students in the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics minor presented their capstone projects during an end-of-semester showcase. Using tri-fold displays, they shared their research and discussed their work with guests and fellow students.



A SWEET END TO THE SEMESTER

With finals approaching and summer just around the corner, SCL students gathered on Littlefield Lawn for an end-of-semester ice cream social. Sundaes, lawn games, and talk of summer plans made for a fitting sendoff to SCL's first undergraduate year.



THE YEAR ONE BANQUET

As the semester drew to a close, students from the inaugural class gathered for a dinner banquet celebrating the completion of the first year at the School of Civic Leadership. Bringing the students together in one room offered them a chance to reflect on all they had accomplished together. Awards, class superlatives, and remarks from Dean **Justin Dyer** and Associate Dean **Sarah Beth Kitch** marked the occasion.



JUSTICE CLARENCE THOMAS DISCUSSES THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

U.S. Supreme Court Justice **Clarence Thomas** visited UT Austin to deliver an inspiring lecture commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

In his remarks, Justice Thomas highlighted SCL's mission to help students "encounter the distinct inheritance of Western civilization and the American constitutional tradition as part of a larger quest for wisdom about how to live and how to lead."

Watch the full recording here!



All too often, there is an unfortunate tendency when discussing the Declaration to make these self-evident truths and first principles of government obscure. Intellectuals want you to believe that our founding principles are matters of esoteric philosophy or sophisticated debate. Even those who support them too often talk about them as if they were academic playthings. They overcomplicate them, take the spirit out of them, and discuss them in a way that puts us to sleep.

But the principles of the Declaration of Independence as I encounter them are a way of life. They are not an abstract theory that you only learn in college or law school, but the basic premises of our Constitution and government that you can learn from the people all around you.

Justice Clarence Thomas, April 15, 2026

READING GROUPS TACKLE PLATO AND J.S. MILL

Reading groups are at the intellectual core of the School of Civic Leadership. Each semester, students and faculty gather weekly in small groups to read closely and discuss great texts, focusing on core questions about human life, living well, duty, and wisdom.

This spring, one group read Plato’s *Alcibiades I*, in which Socrates challenges an ambitious young man on whether self-knowledge is required for rule, and they put special focus on the mirror analogy.

Another group read John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, exploring his defense of free speech, the difference between “dead dogmas” and “living convictions,” and how argument and debate shape the latter.



Exercise yourself first, my wonderful friend, in learning what you ought to know before entering on politics...

Plato, *Alcibiades I* (Early 4th century BCE)

However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)

BIOETHICS, MEDICINE, AND HUMAN DIGNITY

This spring, **Avery Matthews** presented her UT CNS Polymathic Honors thesis, “A Body or Embodied: The Need for an Embodiment-Focused Philosophical Anthropology in Medicine.” Avery’s interdisciplinary research combined deep study of great thinkers such as Leon Kass and Abraham Joshua Heschel with interviews of leading medical professionals to argue that a humane approach to medicine and healing requires understanding what it means to be human within a philosophy that sees the mind and body as inextricably linked.

She worked with our own Dr. **Sarah Beth V. Kitch**, Dr. **Stacia Rodenbusch** (UT CNS Polymathic Honors), and Professor **O. Carter Snead** (University of Notre Dame). Her project highlights how SCL faculty contribute to the intellectual life across campus, helping students from different academic backgrounds explore complex questions with mentors from multiple fields. Congrats, Avery!



FREEDOM AND VIRTUE SEMINARS

Designed for motivated high schoolers interested in Western civilization, the American constitutional tradition, and the enduring questions of civic life, our Freedom & Virtue Seminars offer a firsthand look at the rigorous intellectual life at SCL.

Prospective students join a small cohort led by SCL faculty studying foundational texts and ideas, grappling with questions about freedom, purpose, citizenship, and the common good while experiencing the discussion-based approach that defines our classrooms. The program takes place periodically throughout the year and gives students the opportunity to connect with faculty and peers over lunch, explore the UT campus, and learn more about SCL’s academic programs and growing community.



SCL encourages high school students to grapple with tough questions, like “What does it mean to be free?” and “What’s worth doing in my life?”



STUDENT-LED INITIATIVES

Throughout the spring semester, students continued to shape the intellectual culture of SCL beyond the classroom—through organizations, events, and publications. The student-run Civics Law & Policy Society hosted lectures and discussions, including a Q&A with **William Galston** and **John Yoo**, as well as a guest talk from **Tobi Young**, who shared insights from a remarkable career at the intersection of law, public service, technology, and national security. A proud citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, Ms. Young brought a powerful perspective on leadership and civic life.

The Civics Law & Policy Society also launched *The Symposium*, a student-run journal on Substack focusing on philosophy, civic thought, and the collegiate experience. With essays, reviews, analysis, and creative work, the publication reflects the growing culture of inquiry and debate taking shape among SCL students during the school’s inaugural year.

The Symposium was founded with the recognition that each individual’s understanding of the world is necessarily partial, so we must be in dialogue to inch closer to truth.

Lillian Weimer, “In Search of the Whole,” *The Symposium* (Apr. 12, 2026)



Guest speaker Tobi Young addresses SCL student organization Civics Law & Policy Society.

DEBATING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

At SCL, civic education begins with serious questions—especially those without easy answers. This spring, we launched our “Disputed Questions” series, bringing scholars and public thinkers together to debate difficult issues at the center of American civic life. The inaugural event asked a provocative constitutional question: Is the modern American Presidency a form of constitutional dictatorship?

DISPUTED
QUESTION

IS THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY
A CONSTITUTIONAL DICTATORSHIP?

A CONVERSATION WITH
WILLIAM GALSTON AND JOHN YOO
MODERATED BY SANFORD LEVINSON



April 7 4:30 - 6:00 pm Thompson Conference Center, Room 1.110

Moderated by distinguished UT law professor **Sanford Levinson**, the discussion featured *Wall Street Journal* columnist **William Galston** and legal scholar **John Yoo**. Drawing on constitutional history, political theory, and Clinton Rossiter’s study *Constitutional Dictatorship: Crisis Government in the Modern Democracies* (Princeton University Press: 1948), the conversation examined the scope of executive power in the United States and explored how war powers, foreign policy, and congressional delegation have shaped the modern presidency.

SCL partnered with UT School of Law, the Civitas Institute, the Center for Law and Democracy, and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Core Texts and Ideas to host this event.

In all republics there is not [an] inherent and fatal weakness... a democratic, constitutional government beset by a severe national emergency can be strong enough to maintain its own existence without at the same time being so strong as to subvert the liberties of the people it has been instituted to defend.

Clinton Rossiter, *Constitutional Dictatorship*



A NEW LOOK AT THE STORY OF SCL

Our new promotional film, “A Challenge Worthy of Your Ambition,” highlights the students, ideas, and ambitions that define the School of Civic Leadership.

Featuring student voices and scenes of campus life, the short video captures our commitment to intellectual curiosity and inquiry, both inside and outside the classroom.

Watch now!



Find Your Path
in the School of Civic Leadership

- ✦ **MAJOR IN CIVICS HONORS**
The Bachelor of Arts in Civics Honors integrates insights from philosophy, political theory, economics, and the American experience of constitutional self-government to strengthen the skills and the character necessary for leadership in business, public service, and law.
- ✦ **MAJOR IN GREAT BOOKS HONORS**
The Bachelor of Arts in Great Books Honors, offered in partnership with the Thomas Jefferson Center for Core Texts and Ideas, examines the permanent questions and enduring themes of human life across philosophy, religion, art, and literature.
- ✦ **MAJOR IN STRATEGY & STATECRAFT**
The Bachelor of Arts in Strategy & Statecraft, offered in partnership with the Clements Center for National Security, provides a unique humanities training in history and great texts along with contemporary strategic analysis for careers in diplomacy, intelligence, defense, and the private sector.



LILLIAN WEIMER

How did you discover SCL, and what drew you here?

I was first introduced to UT through my brother, who was involved in ROTC, government, and the Jefferson Scholars Program [part of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts & Ideas]. He heard about SCL and encouraged me to check it out. I visited SCL for a Freedom & Virtue Seminar, and what stood out immediately was the passion of the professors and administrators. The school isn't just about sitting down in a classroom or going to a lecture; it is the professors and community that make the place. The small class sizes, wide range of disciplines in politics, philosophy,

and economics, as well as the many opportunities to grow as a student all drew me to SCL, especially as someone looking to pursue law.

Schools are sometimes separated in what they study: either you study philosophy or you study political science or you study economics. But what I loved about SCL was having economics, philosophy, political science, and government all in one major. I don't think you can study those disciplines separately and have a full understanding of the impact they have on communal life. Each discipline gives you a particular framework to look at the world through, and it's most helpful to have all of those accumulated in one brain—so you can look at the world through different lenses to try and improve the world as much as possible. The School of Civic Leadership was really the only place I felt offered that kind of coursework, that would allow me to look at the world through all of those different frames, and enable me to make a positive impact on the world, because I could have a nuanced perspective on the world.

What are your career aspirations, and how has SCL helped prepare you for them?

I am strongly interested in pursuing policy work after graduation before attending law school, particularly in judicial policy analysis and appellate law. The coursework at SCL provides both a moral and intellectual grounding for those professions.

We look at the founding ideas of America and the Constitution, what it means to live in a democratic society, as well as the ideas that precede the American constitutional order and help sustain our democracy today. I think it is important to engage seriously with those ideas before entering professions responsible for upholding them.

But SCL also equips you with practical skills. *Truth and Persuasion* [CIV 302] is great for learning how to construct and evaluate an argument, while the discussion-based seminars teach you how to engage charitably with people, even when you disagree with them.

Tell us about some of your favorite classes.

One class that especially stood out to me was *Excellence of Character: The Virtues* [CIV 305] with Professor Lauren Spohn. We looked at how Western civilization built up ideas and then later philosophers tried to break them down. We studied thinkers from Socrates and Aristotle to Augustine, Aquinas, Newman, and Nietzsche, examining how philosophers within the same tradition built upon or challenged one another's ideas. We examined modern ideas like moral relativism and nihilism alongside older traditions focused on virtue, flourishing, and human happiness, and the question of what it means to live a good life.

What were some of the highlights from SCL's first year?

Growing in friendship with my cohort was a huge highlight. We went to Barton Springs together. I had a great time launching the Civics Law & Policy Society with some fellow students, and we put together roundtable events where we discussed contemporary topics such as the Trump administration, Venezuela, and the intervention in Iran.

Finally, cultivating my interpersonal relationships with my professors and with the administration allowed me to catalyze my ideas into action, and I don't think I could have gotten that at more established schools with a larger student body.

What is *The Symposium* and what do you hope it achieves?

A lot of my inspiration came from the idea that intellectual conversation should not be confined to an ivory tower or rendered inaccessible by the use of esoteric language. I wanted to move closer to the idea that intellectual conversation starts when you're having fun, debating with friends.

Our sense of meaning in the world isn't just individual; it's assembled in groups of people, and that's kind of what *The Symposium* tries to get at: that through rendering our understanding of the world on paper, we can inch closer to a communal understanding of what it means to live well and together as a community, both in agreement and intention, and in disagreement with each other.

Sometimes in class it's hard to see the end goal—it feels like you're just working towards an A. But the ideas we're studying go beyond the classroom, and *The Symposium* is a place for those ideas to take root outside of the classroom. That's kind of the community that we're hoping to foster; that college isn't just for getting a good GPA and going into the workforce. It's to cultivate your mind and your cognitive faculties to be able to live well in the world.

What's so amazing about SCL is that even when I have disagreements with my classmates, as we come at different issues from different perspectives—all it has done is clarify our own understandings of the world and hasn't created any animosity between us. It's only strengthened our relationships because we're able to disagree with each other charitably and still have this enduring sense, an overarching sense that our friendship persists, even if we disagree.

What advice would you give to a student considering SCL?

Every day is a great day filled with opportunity—and you just have to go out there and seize it. Capitalize on every opportunity you have, even if you feel like you're out of your depth. Do things that are scary, that put you outside of your comfort zone.



DR. ZENA HITZ ON THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Kicking off the spring semester at the Littlefield Home, philosopher and author **Dr. Zena Hitz** explored the relationship between intellectual life, freedom, and human flourishing. Drawing from her book, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton University Press: 2020), Dr. Hitz discussed what it means to succeed, and why reading long and difficult books has a lot to do with it. She argued that the study of great texts and enduring ideas remains essential to both personal growth and civic life, and she reflected on the role that failure, contemplation, and inwardness can play in cultivating a meaningful life.



PRESIDENTS' DAY: LINCOLN AND THE CHALLENGE OF AMERICAN STATESMANSHIP

SCL marked Presidents' Day with a conversation tackling some of the toughest questions in our civic life: How should an American leader act in times of crisis? Can

a statesman be both a practical politician and a moral leader for a nation? In what ways does the American constitutional system shape presidential leadership? President Abraham Lincoln confronted these questions in his quest to save the American union and to end the evil of slavery.

Co-sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Core Texts and Ideas, the event welcomed Visiting Professors **Benjamin Kleinerman** and **Diana Schaub**, and was moderated by Dr. **Dana Stauffer**.



REVOLUTIONS AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

In early March, SCL joined the Clements Center for National Security and the Department of History in hosting Stanford scholar **Dan Edelstein** for a conversation on his recent book, *The Revolution to Come: A History of an Idea from Thucydides to Lenin* (Princeton University Press: 2025). The conversation explored how revolutionary thought has developed across centuries of political and intellectual history, from Greek Antiquity to the Bolshevik seizure of power in modern-day Russia.

How we think about revolution is ultimately conditioned by how we think about history. People who believe that history is progressing toward a better future are more likely to place their trust in a revolution. Those who, conversely, assume that future societies will face the same problems that they always have in the past will likely view revolutions with skepticism. To understand how the meaning of revolution changed throughout history, we must examine competing accounts of human time.

Dan Edelstein, *The Revolution to Come* (2025)



WHO LAYS DOWN THE LAW? CONGRESS, THE PRESIDENT, OR SOMEONE ELSE?

In late March, Dr. **James Stoner** visited SCL to discuss the role of executive orders shaping federal policy, and what place they hold within the Constitution's framework. His talk explored the tension between Congress's legislative authority and the growing use of executive orders by presidents seeking to advance policy goals when Congress does not act. He considered when executive orders may be constitutionally legitimate, when legislation offers the better path, and how courts respond to executive orders compared with statutes. At the center of the discussion was a broader question about American self-government: do the people, through their representatives, truly lay down the law?

The larger question is the extent to which, in the contemporary world, stability and lawfulness and governance remain goods that constitutional democracies ought to value, regardless of short-term partisan advantage—electoral or psychological. In part, this is a question of whether Congress can regain a sense of speaking for the people, which might in turn require recovering some sense of national unity that transcends partisan majorities.

Dr. James Stoner, March 26, 2026



BRITISH POLITICS ROUNDTABLE

In partnership with UT's Program in British, Irish, and Empire Studies (BIES), SCL brought together scholars for a roundtable on contemporary British politics featuring Professor **Eric Kaufmann** of the University of Buckingham, Professor of Government **David Leal**, and SCL Assistant Professor **Josh Banerjee**.



ADMIRAL BOBBY INMAN VISITS SCL

Admiral **Bobby Ray Inman** joined SCL for a discussion of world affairs in late March. One of the most renowned intelligence experts of the 20th century, Admiral Inman served as Director of Naval Intelligence, Director of the National Security Agency, and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence during the Cold War. He became an adjunct professor at UT Austin in 1987 and is now Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy Emeritus at the Texas LBJ School.



JEWVS VS. ROME

In mid-April, SCL welcomed historian and classicist Dr. **Barry Strauss** for a discussion of his recent book, *Jews vs. Rome: Two Centuries of Rebellion Against the World's Mightiest Empire* (Simon & Schuster, 2025). The conversation explored the turbulent centuries surrounding the rise of the Roman Empire, the emergence of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, and the repeated Jewish revolts against Roman rule, which made them Rome's most rebellious subjects. Some Jews remained loyal to Rome, while others sought help from what today might seem like an unlikely source: an ancient Iranian empire, Parthia.

Dr. Strauss is the Corliss Page Dean Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University as well as the Bryce and Edith M. Bowmar Professor in Humanistic Studies Emeritus at Cornell University.

The era from 63 BCE to 136 CE marked two centuries of violence and revolution. They witnessed the decline and fall of the Roman Republic, the rise of Rome of the Caesars and its continuing wars for dominance against the Iranian Empire of Parthia, the only imperial rival to Rome left after the conquest of Carthage and the Hellenistic kingdoms. Caught in the middle, both geographically and politically, was the cauldron of tiny Judea—home of Rome's most determined insurgencies and the soil from which the seedlings of both rabbinic Judaism and Christianity would begin to grow.

Barry Strauss, *Jews vs. Rome*



ALLEN HERTZKE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

In mid-April, SCL welcomed political scientist and author **Allen D. Hertzke** for a discussion of his new book, *Why Religious Freedom Matters: Human Rights and Human Flourishing* (Notre Dame Press, 2026)

Drawing on decades of scholarship, Hertzke argued that religious freedom is essential to democracy, peace, and human flourishing, while violations of such freedom can incite violence and terrorism, deepen social divisions, harm economic vitality, and constrain the lives of other vulnerable people. He also examined the paradox of state privilege in religion, arguing that government favoritism can harm religious minorities while distorting and weakening the majority faith it claims to protect.

Allen D. Hertzke is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Oklahoma and the author or editor of ten books, including *Freeing God's Children* and *The Future of Religious Freedom*. This event was held in partnership with the Bech-Loughlin First Amendment Center at UT Austin's School of Law.

Religious freedom uniquely matters to peaceful, democratic, and flourishing societies because it goes to the heart of human personhood and experience: the right to be who we are, to act on our ultimate commitments, and to be treated with equal worth and dignity.

Allen D. Hertzke, *Why Religious Freedom Matters*

Professional Development Seminar

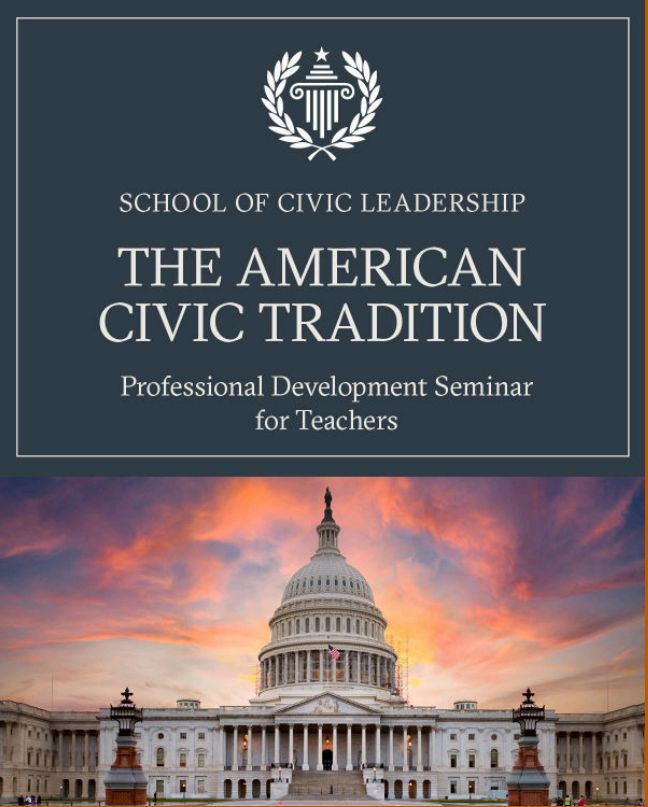
TEACHING THE AMERICAN CIVIC TRADITION BEYOND THE FORTY ACRES

Civic education extends beyond the undergraduate classroom. That's why we launched a major new initiative aimed at strengthening the teaching of American history and constitutional government throughout Texas. Supported by a \$1.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Summer Institute program addresses a critical national priority to support the K-12 teaching corps entrusted with transmitting the principles of American constitutional self-government.

Over the next three years, SCL faculty will lead a series of content-rich professional development programs designed to provide teachers with a coherent sequence of instruction anchored in the close study of primary sources and the practice of Socratic pedagogy.

The seminars will be oriented around the discussion and exploration of many of the same profound, timeless questions that appear in the pages of this issue of *Forum*, such as:

- Who should interpret the Constitution?
- To what extent is the Declaration influenced by the political philosophy of John Locke?
- To what degree do liberal democracies need energetic executive power?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Federalism and a federal constitution?
- How does Lincoln develop his argument against popular sovereignty with respect to slavery?
- How should an individual deal with a law that he or she recognizes is unjust?
- How do the liberal, progressive, and conservative visions of the American future compare?



In order to understand the texts and ideas that influenced the Founders during the creation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, participants will read John Locke, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist papers, letters and speeches from Madison, Jefferson, Lincoln, as well as Patrick Henry and Frederick Douglass. They will also analyze speeches from Woodrow Wilson, FDR, Antonin Scalia, MLK, Malcolm X, and many more.



Get Involved with SCL!

Building a new school is a community effort and we need your help. Here are some of the ways you can invest your **time, talent, and treasure** with the School of Civic Leadership.

Time

- Volunteer:** Help with orientations, campus tours, or info sessions
- Read, Follow, and Share:** Sign up for our newsletter, follow us on social media and share your favorite content
- Host:** Host an event in your home for friends in your community who care about our mission

Talent

- Mentorship:** Share your advice and experience with students
- Internships:** Create an internship program at your company to give our students opportunities to put their education into practice and build professional networks
- Workshops:** Do you have a unique skill like public speaking or fundraising? Consider running a short workshop with students to share that knowledge with them

Treasure

- Start a scholarship:** Fund scholarships for high-achieving students
- Create an endowment:** Create a lasting legacy by endowing faculty chairs, student awards, or programs
- Matching gifts:** Ask your company to match employee donations to SCL

We'd love to hear from you!

Chief Development Officer
Bryce Waller
bryce.waller@austin.utexas.edu



Throughout each semester, SCL faculty and staff gather weekly for ongoing research lunches. This informal forum is dedicated to the exchange of ideas, early-stage research, and rigorous scholarly conversation—over lunch, of course—where folks can have a lower-pressure, interdisciplinary discussion and receive constructive feedback. These lunches reflect our commitment to intellectual community and the collaborative pursuit of knowledge, as well as encourage the very habits of dialogue and inquiry that are fundamental to our mission, and which we try to instill in our students every day.

Amidst the many sandwiches that were devoured, we saw Dr. **Thomas Schwartz** discuss American foreign policy during the Cold War, **Evan Coulter** present on science and civic life in Plato's *Timaeus*, and SCL Professor **Matthew Reising** lead a conversation on Phillis Wheatley's poetry during the American Revolution.

In the second half of the semester, Dr. **Lauren Spohn** led a discussion on John Henry Newman's "An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent," while Assistant Professor **Alexander Batson** asked how Renaissance scholars engaged with the classics in his presentation, "The Reconstruction of Athenian Law, 1540-1650." **Richard V. Burkhauser** joined us to present "Identifying the Value Judgments in How Poverty is Measured in the United States: Trends in Poverty Measurement (1939-2023)," discussing how poverty has been defined and measured over time in the United States. SCL research fellow **Allison Reising** presented "Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Imagining 'The Runaway Slave' through Euripides' *Medea*," which explored classical reception in the 19th century.

In April, our final two lunches welcomed Professor **Tom Ward** to discuss John Duns Scotus on natural law and natural goodness, and **Barry Strauss** presenting research about the role of deception in military strategy.



PROFESSOR JOSH BANERJEE

What was your academic background before joining SCL?

I studied economic history at the London School of Economics (LSE) right from undergraduate level and master’s through to Ph.D. After defending my Ph.D. in the summer of 2023, I joined Duke University in the fall for a year as a post-doctoral visiting scholar. There I deepened my research in the history of economic thought—that is the intellectual formation of the economics discipline; how the key thinkers formulated their ideas and theories, and the way in which they came to be adopted in economic policy.

Following Duke, I joined UT’s School of Civic Leadership for the academic year as a post-doctoral fellow where I continued publishing research in economic history, macroeconomics, and the history of economic thought.

What attracted you to SCL?

I was deeply intrigued by the prospect of a multidisciplinary academic school that brought together economists, historians, political theorists and philosophers (amongst others) to have broad ranging discussions on questions of shared intellectual interest. Indeed, certain questions in the humanities and social sciences have always cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries, and the idea that I could contribute to – and in turn learn from – other scholars on the big questions relating to the human condition and human flourishing was too tempting to pass up on!

The potential to teach courses in economic history and the history of economic thought also appealed to me enormously. I wanted to show that economics doesn’t simply consist of abstract math and dubious behavioral assumptions, but rather it offers a powerful set of tools which can complement other disciplines in enhancing our understanding of the world.

Tell us a bit about your research—what problem or question are you answering?

During my Ph.D. and in the few years since, much of my research (though by no means all) has been focused on

the period following the Second World War, namely the emergence and operation of a new economic order known as the Bretton Woods system. This period from the late-1940s to early-1970s was one of unprecedented prosperity in the Western world, but it wasn’t always plain sailing. My research has examined the trials and tribulations of key countries operating under the fixed exchange rate system during this period, and the challenges for policy makers operating under this unique iteration of the gold standard. Right now, I’m trying to explore why this system ultimately met its demise in the early-1970s and who—if anyone—bears responsibility for this outcome.

I am also active in tracing out the emergence, evolution and demise of Keynesian economic thought, which was taken up by a panoply of distinguished thinkers who did not always agree on the “correct” interpretation of Keynes nor how to best reflect his vision in meeting the new challenges posed by a different era. I delve into their academic writings as well as personal correspondence stored in archives around the world to chart the rise and fall of this highly influential school of economic thought.

What are two books you’ve read that have had a huge influence on you?

Two of my favorite academic books—which are absolute classics within my field—are *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* by Charles Kindleberger, and *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* by Robert Heilbroner.

These two books really illustrated to me how economics can be applied to enrich (and even transform) our understanding of the past. They demonstrate that the tools one acquires in theory and statistics classes are not the end point of economics. Rather, there are numerous ways of studying the sometimes gradual and other times cataclysmic processes of economic change through time. These authors infuse solid economic reasoning with history, politics, and the social and human touch to help explain how certain ideas, modes of thinking, and behaviors have contributed to writing the human story throughout the centuries.



What class are you teaching right now? What do you hope students carry with them long after they leave your classroom?

I have been teaching a course called Democracy and Capitalism [CIV 303K] this academic year, which explores the potential complementarities and antagonisms between a democratic political system and a market-driven economy based largely (but not exclusively) on private ownership. It embraces political economy and historical approaches in that students acquire broad insights into what many of the great economic thinkers over the centuries have written in relation to the link between economic freedom and civil liberties. We try to unpack why the author wrote what they did in the context of their own times, and ask whether there are any transcendent lessons for us when confronting the challenges of the 21st century.

Overall, I hope students can carry with them a few overarching takeaways from their time in my classroom. First, economics can speak to a much wider audience than simply economists alone, and is in fact too

important to be left to just the economists! Political economy and economic history in particular carry well across disciplinary boundaries and have the potential to enhance your understanding of the human condition in remarkable ways. Second, we live in a time of enormous economic change: economic forces are at play that will exert a staggering impact on the lived experience of not just your own generation, but those yet to be born. By equipping yourself with some understanding of economics and its interplay with politics and history, you prevent yourself being left at the mercy of events, or having to rely on others to interpret for you what will be decisive forces in shaping the course and character of the 21st century.

Read Professor Banerjee’s brand new article, “The Contested Legacy of Keynes’ ‘General Theory’” in *Civitas Outlook*.



WELCOMING THE CLASS OF 2030 TO SCL

Recruitment efforts for SCL's second undergraduate cohort continued through the spring semester, with admitted student visits, Welcome to Texas events, and welcome packets being sent out to future Longhorns. Excitement is building around the Littlefield Home for the arrival of the Class of 2030 to the Forty Acres.



THE ACKERMAN PROGRAM ON JEWISH AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND ROSENTHAL-LEVY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

This spring, UT announced the creation of the Ackerman Program on Jewish and Western Civilization and the launch of the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars Program. These two major initiatives will deepen the study of Jewish thought, philosophy, and American civic life at SCL. Supported by philanthropic gifts from **Tomas and Abby Ackerman, Gary and Lee Rosenthal, and Paul and Karen Levy**, the programs build on the success of similar initiatives at the University of Florida and will provide students with new opportunities to explore the foundational ideas, texts, and traditions that have shaped the Western world and the American constitutional order.

Beginning in Fall 2026, the Ackerman Program will offer unique undergraduate courses on:

- The Hebrew Bible and the Human Condition
- Jewish Thought and Western Philosophy
- Jews and American Democracy

The program will also include a new study abroad program in Israel, allowing students to spend time in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other locations across Israel. Key areas of inquiry will also include:

- The Land of the Hebrew Bible
- Jerusalem and Athens
- The dynamics of the Israeli economy

The Ackerman Program will also serve as the academic home of the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars Program, a prestigious national scholarship that provides exceptional students with full tuition support.

To learn more, visit the link in the QR Code:



TWO NEW MAJORS

Beginning in Fall 2027, SCL will expand our academic offerings with two new undergraduate majors: **Great Books** and **Strategy and Statecraft**.

A \$10 million grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities will fund 16 new faculty positions across both majors, furthering our mission of preparing students for thoughtful citizenship and leadership in fields such as law, medicine, business, and national defense.

The Great Books major will immerse students in the foundational texts of philosophy, literature, theology, political thought, and science that have shaped Western civilization for over two thousand years. Through close reading, discussion-based seminars, and interdisciplinary study, students will engage with enduring questions about justice, liberty, human nature, and what it means to live a good life. The B.A. in Great Books Honors is offered in partnership with the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas.



NEW MINOR + CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

In addition to our new majors, SCL will soon be offering a new Minor in Civic Leadership and a Certificate in Classical Education. These programs complement our existing Minor in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics.

The Minor in Civic Leadership is a great option for polymaths and intellectually curious students in any major looking to deepen their studies with examination of the texts and ideas that shape Western civilization, the American constitutional tradition, and the foundations of free economies.

The Certificate in Classical Education provides a pathway for students across UT Austin to get hands-on training as well as explore the theory and methodology of classical education.

Sample courses include:

- Ancient Worlds I: Human Divine and II: Philosophy and the City
- American Letters: Colonial Times to Reconstruction
- Renaissance, Reformation, and the Age of Reason
- The Modern Soul

The Strategy and Statecraft major is designed to prepare students for careers in diplomacy, national security, intelligence, defense, and public service. The B.A. in Strategy and Statecraft is offered in partnership with the Clements Center for National Security, and will focus on the study of political theory, military and diplomatic history, strategic analysis, and the practice of leadership under conditions of uncertainty.

Sample courses include:

- Perennial Challenges in Strategy and Statecraft
- American Military and Diplomatic History
- Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice

Together, these two new majors represent an ambitious and important realization of SCL's academic vision, and our growing role within the intellectual life of the University of Texas.



ROSENTHAL-LEVY SCHOLARS PROGRAM



Gary Rosenthal and Paul Levy, founders of the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars Program, recently sat down with SCL chief development officer Bryce Waller to discuss their vision for civic education, the importance of studying Jewish and Western civilization, and the new scholarship program they established at the School of Civic Leadership. In partnership with the Ackerman Program on Jewish and Western Civilization, the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars Program will provide four-year scholarships and leadership opportunities for exceptional undergraduate students preparing for lives of civic leadership.

What led you to create the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars program at the School of Civic Leadership?

We are strong believers in the value and necessity of providing our most exceptional students with a thorough grounding in the great ideas of Jewish and Western civilization and the responsibilities of American civic leadership.

For decades, the academy has neglected the great books and ideas which provide the underpinnings for our liberal democratic society and the deeper wisdom that young people need as they become citizens and leaders. Far too many university programs are filled with courses that at best question these ideals and at worst are destructive of them. This degradation of the humanities and lack of balance must be addressed. UT's School of Civic Leadership, with its emphasis on exploring the great books and ideas of Jewish and Western civilization, the enduring lessons of history, and today's cultural, moral, and political challenges, provides the ideal environment to achieve our goals for the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars.

Describe the impact you hope these scholarships will achieve.

Our hope and expectation is that these scholarships will help attract the brightest minds and most serious students to the School of Civic Leadership. Immersed in this community of learning, we believe the result will be that Rosenthal-Levy alumni will go on to become leaders in their fields and contribute meaningfully to strengthening every dimension of American civic life. We also believe that Hebraic ideas—drawn from the Bible and from the rabbinic tradition—are central to the American project and foundational for understanding the history and meaning of the West. We want to make sure that our students have these teachings as an integral part of their education and, consequently, their future actions as parents, members of their communities, and participants in their larger American society.

Why is civic education so important right now?

As any survey will demonstrate, our universities are totally lacking in any meaningful viewpoint diversity. Classical education, the great books of Western civilization, and our Judeo-Christian values have been neglected and marginalized. Understanding our great intellectual traditions, as well as the historical and current challenges to these traditions, is essential to being an educated person and responsible citizen. We see the School of Civic Leadership and the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars program (and the accompanying Ackerman program) as an antidote to many of these weaknesses in our current higher educational system. For the American people to make wise decisions as individuals and as a society, it is imperative that we have an enhanced focus on civic education—the classical great books and the Judeo-Christian values underlying Western civilization.

What skills, values, or virtues do you hope the recipients of these scholarships will exhibit upon graduation?

Most importantly, we value the ability of our scholars to chart their path in life with well-educated minds and well-formed human souls. To be an educated person, one must have serious exposure to the literature, history, philosophy, political thought, economics, and strategy

that has made America in its 250th year the great country that it is.

These ideas provide a construct for understanding what works, what benefits humankind, how to have a successful society, as well as the evils and ills which degrade the unique republic we all enjoy. With these ideas and ideals in mind, our scholars will demonstrate a high level of discernment in every dimension of life—including the close-at-hand circle of family and friends, the communal realm of religious and civic organizations, and the much larger political and societal arenas. They will be able to demonstrate a competence in leadership that too often is significantly absent in the current environment.

What experiences will the Rosenthal-Levy program make possible for students and how do you see those shaping their overall education?

These scholarships are all merit-based. They are intended to attract the highest talent, no matter one's background. Rosenthal-Levy Scholars will be part of a community of learners at the School of Civic Leadership. Not only will they have access to the School's exceptional faculty and its unique courses and programs, they will also form a community of their own for mutual study, education, intellectual exchanges, and participation in the Scholarship's own extensive activities.

Furthermore, they will gain access to mentorship and internship programs, opening up distinct avenues for self-discovery and intellectual and professional advancement. As part of our emphasis on the Jewish tradition, our scholars will spend at least a semester in Israel, learning about the Jewish roots of the West and the Zionist ideals and heroic leaders who created the modern state of Israel.

Who has inspired your philanthropic priorities? Historical figures? Authors? Mentors?

The American founders who had a deep understanding of both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and the broader Western canon from Aristotle to Cicero to Locke. They were learned in the great books, and they applied the knowledge and lessons of their classical readings and

education to create the great nation of which we are so fortunate to be citizens. We look to the American founders as a great model of excellence.

Why should other philanthropists consider supporting efforts like this right now?

Our efforts at the Rosenthal-Levy and Ackerman programs are highly scalable across the American university landscape. Many schools are emulating what the School of Civic Leadership is doing.

If America is going to have well-educated leaders across the civic arena, in all areas of human endeavor, we will need many more individuals who have been exposed to the ideas and discourse that predominate at the School of Civic Leadership and shape the vision of the Rosenthal-Levy Scholars program. As such, we welcome all philanthropists who want to help support our efforts or to launch similar programs of their own. We want to be a model that inspires others.

Gary Rosenthal and Paul Levy join a growing list of donors securing SCL's future through endowed gifts:

Ellen and John Bender
J.P. Bryan
Harold Carter
Stephanie and Jonathan Carson
Peter R. Coneway Family Foundation
Joe and Faith Gutierrez
Bill and Susie Johnson
Blake Johnson
Ronald and Tara Krolick
Carolyn Madrid
Scott and Kim Martin
David and Shelby Marquardt
The Pearlman Family Foundation
Joel Robuck
The Stillwater Foundation
Rex W. Tillerson
James Truchard

From headlines and opinion pages to academic journals and essay collections, SCL faculty and academic programs continue to inform and shape the national conversation about civic education, history, public life, and the ideas that sustain a free society.



Why Prices Won't Drop After the Trump Tariff Ruling, According to Economists

February 25, 2026

SCL Associate Professor of Economics Carola Binder offered her wisdom to NPR's James Doubek in a piece about prices and tariffs.

"For a consumer, it doesn't really matter what authority that the president calls on to impose the tariff," says Carola Binder, an economics professor at [SCL]. "Some particular tariffs might go down. And so that would mean that prices of particular goods could go down, but the overall level would remain pretty high."

Tariffs under Section 122 technically have a 150-day limit. But, Binder says, "after 150 days, if Congress doesn't extend the tariffs, it seems that the president could just let the first set of tariffs expire and then declare a new set again." Lawsuits over this are likely and this could end up at the Supreme Court again.

James Doubek, "Why Prices Won't Drop," NPR



America Wins at the National Civics Bee

If young people don't learn to be good citizens, what kind of country we will be in 2076?

March 6, 2026

A WSJ opinion piece by Jim Nicholson and Emma Bloomberg highlights the National Civics Bee and its role in strengthening civic knowledge and American public life. Proud partners of the National Civics Bee, SCL hosted the Texas State Civics Bee finals on June 6 on the UT campus.

Too often, civics is reduced to memorizing the mechanics of government. In reality, it's about how people work together: listening, thinking critically, solving problems and collaborating across differences.

Jim Nicholson and Emma Bloomberg, "America Wins at the National Civics Bee," *The Wall Street Journal*



The Curse of Middle-Sized Wars

In Iran, Trump Risks Falling Into a Familiar Trap

March 11, 2026

In an essay for *Foreign Affairs*, SCL Distinguished Senior Lecturer Robert D. Kaplan warned that the US remains especially vulnerable to "middle-sized wars"—that is, conflicts that begin as limited interventions but expand via miscalculation, mission creep, and weak political discipline. Drawing on the history of wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, Kaplan warns that a conflict with Iran could follow a similar trajectory, evolving into a prolonged and destabilizing entanglement that lacks a clear political outcome or a path to victory.

Colin Powell... argued that the United States should not commit to a war unless it has overwhelming force, an exit strategy, a vital national interest, a clear objective, and broad support. This idea, which became known as the Powell Doctrine, has been sidelined in recent years. Yet it remains relevant. Perhaps the ultimate objective of the Powell Doctrine was not to avoid defeat, per se, but to avoid middle-sized wars.

Robert D. Kaplan, "The Curse of Middle-Sized Wars," *Foreign Affairs*



Diogenes for Our Time

March 20, 2026

Is Diogenes held in higher regard than he deserves? In a *Law & Liberty* book review, SCL Associate Professor Tom Ward engages Inger N. I. Kuin's *Diogenes: The Rebellious Life and Revolutionary Philosophy of the Original Cynic* (Basic Books: 2025) and takes a closer look at the reputation of the original Cynic.

No age is wholly righteous, so every age needs its philosophical naysayer. The Diogenes of Kuin's book, it seems to me, would be a little too at home in the world we have made for ourselves. Our nomisma is to smash the nomismata. A Diogenes for our own age would, I think, exhort us to do our duty to God and country, to help other people at all times, and to keep ourselves physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

Thomas M. Ward, "Diogenes for Our Time," *Law & Liberty*



The Primacy of Civic Life: Aristotle's Critique of Hippodamus

April 1, 2026

SCL faculty member Matthew Reising co-authored a new article with Sebastian Graham, "The Primacy of Civic Life: Aristotle's Critique of Hippodamus," published in a Special Issue of *Laws: Civic Engagement, Justice, and the Law in a National and International Context* (Vol II).

Drawing on Aristotle's critique of Hippodamus, the article argues that political inquiry should be guided by civic responsibility rather than by scientific methodology alone.

Aristotle warns that a political science that does not examine, understand, and place proper limits on its operating methodology could inadvertently wreak havoc on civic life. He thereby presents us a political science that is conscious of civic responsibility, or one that eschews schemes to achieve perfect legibility and instead privileges the realities of civic life in order to promote the common good.

Sebastian R. Graham and Matthew K. Reising, "The Primacy of Civic Life," *Laws*



The Fed's Favorite Inflation Measure is More Accurate Than CPI. It's also Slower

Two inflation reports drop this week, but neither captures the full picture of what's happening to prices in real time. The gap comes down to a trade-off economists know well: speed versus comprehensiveness

April 8, 2026

SCL faculty member Carola Binder spoke with Samantha Fields at Marketplace about inflation data and why economists use multiple indicators to better understand fluctuating price trends.

"If you have a lot of different inflation measures, they're all a little bit noisy. You're looking for that trend that they're all sharing, and that's going to give you a better idea of what that kind of true underlying inflation is doing," [Binder] said.

Getting a good idea of what inflation is doing in real time is particularly important in volatile moments, like now, with a war and rising oil prices.

But Binder said it's hard.

"You kind of think, 'Well, we know what's going on in the economy right now, the hard thing is predicting the future,' but it's actually hard to know what's going on right now," she said.

Samantha Fields, "The Fed's Favorite Inflation Measure," *Marketplace*

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Yale Takes Itself to Reform School

A faculty study agrees with many of academia's critics, believe it or not.

April 19, 2026

A Wall Street Journal editorial highlighted growing calls for reform in higher education, including in a new Yale faculty report, and cited SCL as part of a renewed commitment to free inquiry, academic rigor, and intellectual diversity.

Some of our friends on the political right think the rot in the academy is so great that an entire new system needs to be built. We've wondered the same. New programs like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Civic Life and Leadership and the University of Texas Austin's School of Civic Leadership are a welcome antidote and worth supporting.

The Editorial Board, "Yale Takes Itself to Reform School," The Wall Street Journal

The Journal of PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

Economic Dynamism: Teaching Creative Destruction Using Images

SCL faculty member Dirk Mateer received the James Gwartney Best Educational Note Award from the Association of Private Enterprise Education for his coauthored article, "Economic Dynamism: Teaching Creative Destruction Using Images," published in the Winter 2025 issue of The Journal of Private Enterprise.

Named for economist and educator James Gwartney, the award recognizes outstanding contributions to economic education. In the article, Mateer and his coauthors (Charity-Joy Acchiardo and Wayne Geerling of UT Austin and Stefani Milovanska-Farrington of the University of Tampa) present three lesson plans that use images to help students understand economic dynamism and creative destruction.

Images provide a compelling lens through which to visualize the process of creative destruction, a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942. They document not only the physical transformation of industries, cities, and technologies but also the human experiences intertwined with economic change—innovation, displacement, and adaptation. By capturing these moments, images offer tangible evidence of the forces of economic dynamism that drive growth.

Dirk Mateer, et al. "Economic Dynamism," JPE

NETFLIX

The Perfect Neighbor

The Oscar-nominated Netflix documentary, The Perfect Neighbor, cited research by SCL's Larry Faulkner Professor of Economic Mark Hoekstra on the so-called "Castle Doctrine" or "stand your ground laws."

The research, which was co-authored with Cheng Cheng and published in The Journal of Human Resources (July 2013), showed that these laws do not deter burglary, robbery, or aggravated assault, but do lead to an 8% net increase in the number of reported murders and nonnegligent manslaughters.

[Our] findings suggest that incentives do matter in one important sense: lowering the threshold for the justified use of lethal force results in more of it. On the other hand, there is also a limit to the power of incentives, as criminals are apparently not deterred when victims are empowered to use lethal force to protect themselves.

Mark Hoekstra and Cheng Cheng, "Does Strengthening Self-Defense Law Deter Crime or Escalate Violence?" JHR



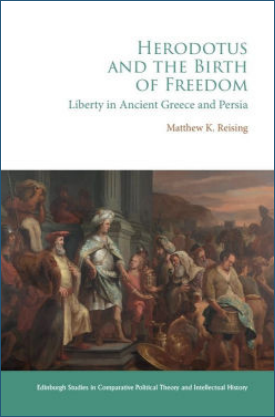
THE DECLARATION'S TRUTH

To mark the 250th anniversary of the American republic, our friends at The Civitas Institute published The Civitas Collection 250, which contains 25 essays examining the ideas, principles, history, and future of the United States. Among the contributors was our very own Dean Justin Dyer, whose essay, "The Declaration's Truth," reflects on the Declaration of Independence as America's founding creed and considers whether its claims about equality, dignity, and natural rights can survive in a secular age.

The founders' appeal to "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God," to the "Supreme Judge of the world," and to "divine Providence" reflected their conviction that rights have authority only if they are rooted in a moral reality beyond the reach of human will. Once that reality is denied, rights become the products of consent or power, vulnerable to the same tides of opinion that grant them.

Justin Dyer, "The Declaration's Truth," The Civitas Collection 250

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS



Herodotus and the Birth of Freedom: Liberty in Ancient Greece and Persia

Matthew K. Reising
Assistant Professor, SCL
Edinburgh University Press (July 2026)

Herodotus and the Birth of Freedom examines Herodotus' presentation of Persia in the History, arguing that Herodotus considered the Persians to be free rather than slaves and the Persian monarchs to be legitimate kings rather than oppressive tyrants.

Order here:



Heidegger's Revolutionary Politics: Russia, Iran, and the Anti-Western Imagination

Alexander S. Duff
Associate Professor, SCL
Cornell University Press (Forthcoming, October 2026)

Heidegger's Revolutionary Politics shows how metaphysics, history, and political longing intertwine in Martin Heidegger's work and inspire contemporary anti-Western intellectual and political movements.

Preorder here:



High School Juniors & Seniors

Freedom & Virtue Seminars



What does it mean and what does it take to be free? What's worth doing with my life? How do the principles of the American constitutional tradition enable us to think differently and live together?

Freedom & Virtue Seminars are SCL's signature program on campus for prospective students who are passionate about big ideas. Each seminar brings

together bright, motivated high school students to discuss an essential text of Western civilization or the American constitutional tradition with SCL's interdisciplinary faculty.

Preview the SCL classroom experience through great conversations on Aristotle, John Locke, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and more.

Sign up for a Freedom & Virtue Seminar today!

July 23, 2026 July 24, 2026 Summer & Fall 2026 dates TBD



Designed by longtime UT Austin Professor Charles Umlauf in 1960, *The Family Group* is an iconic bronze sculpture on the Forty Acres that symbolizes the family as the most basic economic unit of society.

Follow us on social media!





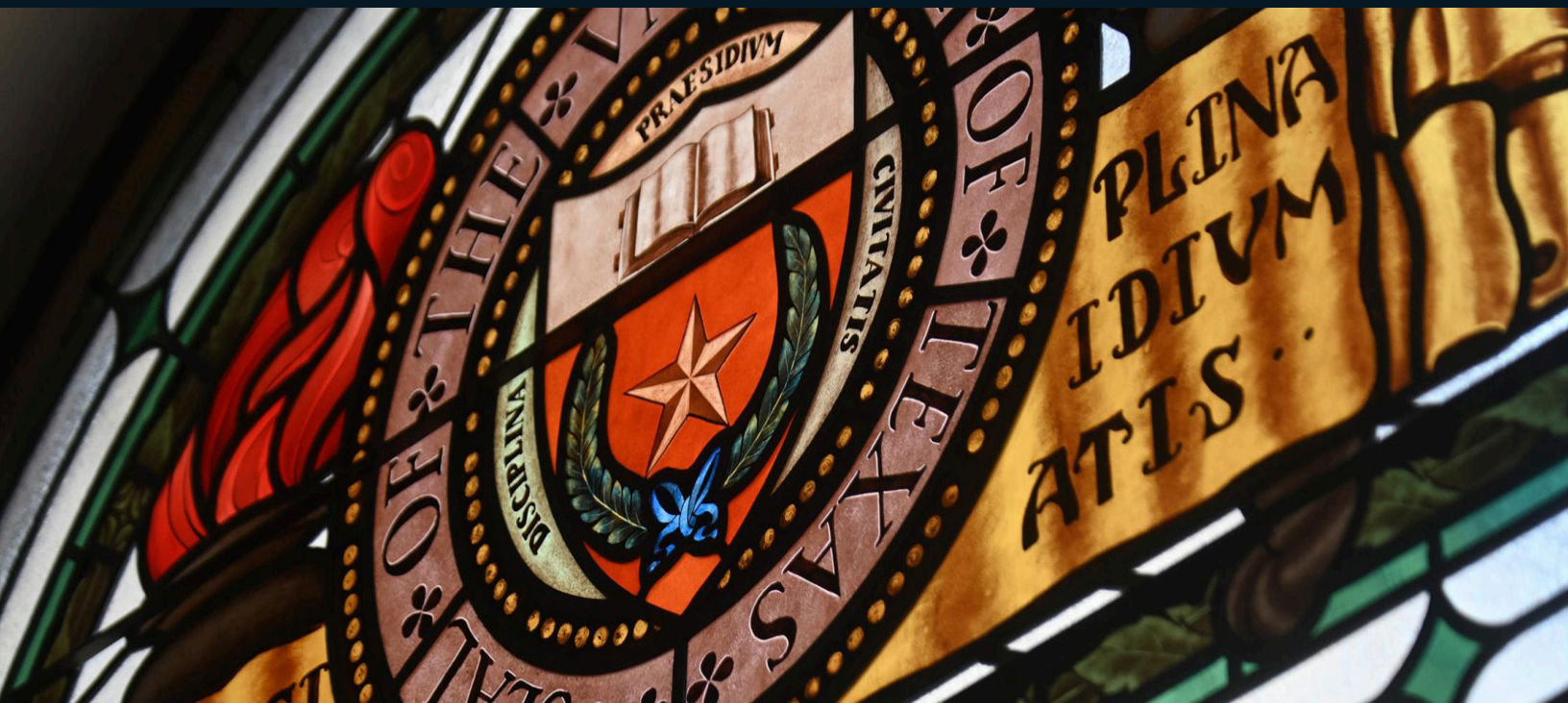
SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP
302 W. 24TH STREET
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712

CIVICLEADERSHIP.UTEXAS.EDU



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

Education for Freedom



MAJORS Civics Honors · Great Books Honors · Strategy & Statecraft
MINORS Civic Leadership · Philosophy, Politics, & Economics (PPE)
CERTIFICATE Certificate in Classical Education

