



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

Vol. iv, Number 1, Fall 2025

FORUM

EXPLORING IDEAS + INSTITUTIONS THAT SUSTAIN A FREE SOCIETY



A PUBLICATION OF THE SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP



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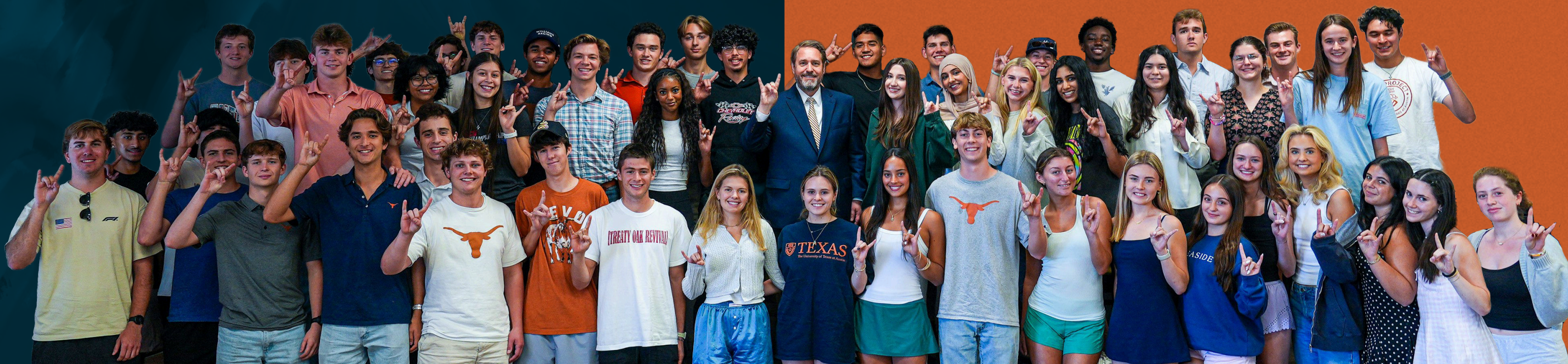
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“We educate students, help them discern their vocational calling, and enlarge their intellectual horizons; support scholars who pursue the life of the mind and the advancement of knowledge for its own sake; and draw on the wisdom of the past to inform the public debate on the most pressing issues of the day.”

DEAN'S NOTE

Justin Dyer
Dean, School of Civic Leadership

John Milton, the great seventeenth century English poet, called a “complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and public, of peace and war.” We were honored this semester to welcome our inaugural cohort of Civics Honors majors—more than one hundred founding freshmen. It is a first-class first class, and they will soon have the responsibility of performing with justice, skill, and magnanimity the offices of private and public life in peacetime and in war.

The School of Civic Leadership has a unique interdisciplinary mission that sits at the intersection of liberal and civic education. Distilling this mission to three words, the School of Civic Leadership is in the business of educating for freedom. To the American Founders, freedom and self-government were one and the same. The free man is one who governs himself; the free society is the community of free men that governs itself. Yet as Ronald Reagan noted in 1967, “Freedom is a fragile thing, and it is never more than one generation away from extinction.” Reagan, like the American Founders before him, recognized that moral and civic education is necessary to preserve what our Constitution refers to as “the blessings of liberty.”

In aristocratic ages, education is for freemen, vocational training for laborers, and learning for scholars. The modern American research university combines these three things together—as it should. We educate students, help them discern their vocational calling, and enlarge their intellectual horizons; support scholars who pursue the life of the mind and the advancement of knowledge for its own sake; and draw on the wisdom of the past to inform the public debate on the most pressing issues of the day. Our vision is of a flourishing community of students, scholars, and public intellectuals pursuing truth together and shaping the public conversation through our work; an active network of well-educated and wise alumni taking responsibility for their communities, raising families, and giving back to the university; and a university community that is enriched because of the existence of the School of Civic Leadership.

Acceptance letters recently went out to the SCL Class of 2030, and we have turned our focus to recruiting the SCL Class of 2031. There is a time for everything and now is a time to build. Our days are busy launching programs, recruiting new faculty, and designing SCL's future home in a renovated space adjacent to the turtle pond in the heart of campus. We are grateful to have the support of UT Austin's leadership, from President Davis on down, and we are happy to have you with us as we continue this journey.



First Semester at SCL

A Semester of Discovery

The first cohort of Civics Honors majors at the School of Civic Leadership—107 students from across Texas and beyond—closed their inaugural semester with purpose and momentum. They arrived in August eager to test themselves against demanding texts and ideas. But just as striking has been the spirit and excitement they have brought to every corner of SCL: the conversations that spill out of classrooms, the friendships formed over shared intellectual puzzles, and the energetic but respectful debates about important ethical and political questions. College is always a time of growth, but at SCL, students are finding that growth happens not only through study, but through the habits of attention, curiosity, and community that begin to take root during their first year.



GONE TO CIVIC LEADERSHIP

SCL kicked off Welcome Week with Gone to Civic Leadership, a Texas-sized party for our incoming class. SCL students, faculty, and

staff enjoyed a barbecue dinner and an ice cream sundae bar alongside their new friends. Dean **Justin Dyer** then led our newest students to the university's Gone to Texas event at the UT Tower, where incoming students celebrated their arrival on the Forty Acres with a pep rally and fireworks.

FIRST TAILGATE

Students, faculty, and staff gathered at the Littlefield Home to watch the UT Longhorns take on the Ohio State Buckeyes in UT's first football game of the season. Guests viewed the game on multiple screens both inside and outside and enjoyed a full breakfast buffet, including pancakes fresh from the griddle.



INTELLECTUAL LIFE AND FORMATION

Although students were busy with their coursework, they were hungry to continue their engagement with the great texts and ideas of our tradition outside the classroom. This semester, more than thirty-five students participated in two Oxford-style reading groups, one devoted to David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, another to the Declaration of Independence. These groups met weekly for an hour and offered students a chance to wrestle with questions that are both centuries old and urgently contemporary: What is justice? What makes an action virtuous? Does virtue benefit the person who lives it? And how do the claims of the Declaration—about God, natural rights, and the source of legitimate political authority—speak to Americans today?

One evening, a group of students staged a semi-dramatic reading of Plato's *Laches*, each taking on a different role (with Socrates distributed across several voices). After the reading, students engaged in a spirited conversation about courage, self-knowledge, and whether philosophy really is (as Socrates insists) indispensable to living well. These were not assignments or required events; they are just the sort of activity that Civics Honors majors want to be a part of in their free time.

The semester's intellectual conversations also stretched beyond ancient and early modern texts. In partnership with the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life and the Patman Center for Civic and Political Engagement, SCL hosted "Together We Dine," an evening of facilitated

dialogue at Q2 Stadium. Sixty UT students—including about twenty from SCL—shared a meal and talked across political, ideological, and personal differences. Guided by Common Ground Texas, they shared stories and explored difficult topics with openness and generosity. Many students described the event as "eye-opening" and "transformative"—not because anyone changed their mind, but because they discovered that genuine understanding is possible, and that most people's convictions grow out of experiences worth taking seriously.





LIFE BEYOND THE BOOKS

Of course, students also found plenty of time to unwind and build friendships in lighter (but no less meaningful) ways. The Thursday before Halloween saw dozens of students gather on the lawn of the Littlefield House for pumpkin painting. Afterwards, students who opted to enter their pumpkin into a competition made short persuasive speeches arguing why their pumpkin deserved to win—an impromptu exercise in rhetoric that ended with **Lila Lingner** taking first prize for her Snoopy pumpkin.

The semester gave students other opportunities to spend time together. In the third week of October, students went in groups of 13–15 to visit the Blanton Museum of Art, where gallery educators led sessions on the “art of attention”—teaching students how to spend time with and appreciate works by El Greco and Velázquez in the Spirit and Splendor exhibition of Spanish baroque art. On a Saturday morning, students met at the Barton Creek Greenbelt for a hike under the live oaks and limestone cliffs. These moments gave students the space to breathe, explore Austin, and deepen the friendships that are becoming central to their SCL experience.



CONNECTIONS THAT SHAPE A FUTURE

One of SCL’s distinctive promises is the opportunity to learn from and build relationships with people whose lives in public service, business, and the academy model the habits of thoughtful leadership. This semester, the Career Discovery Series brought students face-to-face with guests including **Susan Cain** (author of *Quiet*), **Bill Johnson** (chairman of the U.P.S. board), **John Mackey** (co-founder of Whole Foods), and former U.S. Senator **Kay Bailey Hutchison**. In intimate, conversational interviews led by SCL’s chief development officer, **Bryce Waller**, each speaker reflected on moments that shaped their careers and the lessons they would offer a new generation. Students asked their own questions in an open Q&A, hearing from Mackey about how failure teaches us limits and from Cain about the importance of orienting one’s life around the values that matter most.



FIRST SEMESTER AT SCL

Students also connected with scholars through our “Meet the Professor” series. They shared lunch with philosopher **Jennifer Frey** of the University of Tulsa, who led a conversation on virtue and the good life, and with **Juan Miguel Matheus**, a Bowden resident fellow and former deputy in the Venezuelan National Assembly. Matheus’ reflections on the collapse of democratic institutions in Venezuela offered students a vivid reminder of the fragility—and importance—of constitutional democracy.

THE LAW AND POLICY SOCIETY

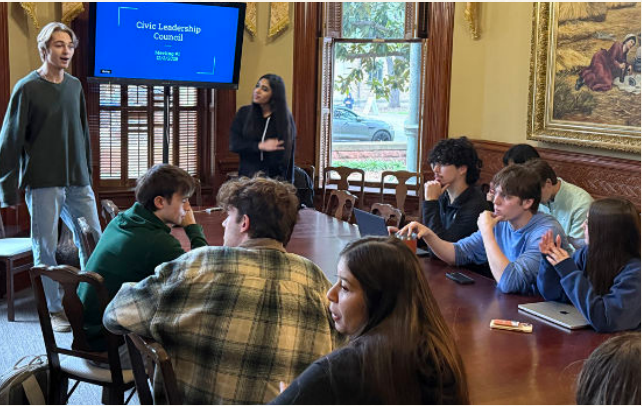
The semester closed with an especially encouraging sign of student initiative: the creation of the Law and Policy Society, a new organization designed by and for Civics Honors majors interested in legal careers. The Society plans to launch a “Lives in the Law” speaker series—conversations with legal professionals aimed at showing students that the law is not merely a credential, but a vocation with civic, moral, and societal dimensions. They also intend to host debates and roundtables that will give students practice engaging difficult issues with rigor, charity, and confidence. The organization represents exactly what SCL hopes to nurture: students who take ownership of their education and build institutions that will outlast them.



CININNATUS FELLOWS

This fall marked the launch of SCL’s Cincinnatus Fellow program, which provides students with extracurricular opportunities for intellectual community. This semester’s signature event was a visit by **Robert George** and **Cornel West**. The day included a fireside chat about friendship across political disagreement and an intimate conversation in the Littlefield Home with a group of our fellows. Students also served as greeters and ushers at a pre-event reception, which gave them the chance to meet faculty members, community leaders, and friends of SCL.

In November, we welcomed **Pete Peterson**, dean of the Pepperdine School of Public Policy and **Abby Zovak**, director of external affairs at the Public Interest Fellowship for information sessions designed to help students begin to think about their postgraduation plans.



SCL COUNCIL

This semester also saw the formation of the Civic Leadership Council, a student-led body created to represent SCL within the university-wide Senate of College Councils. The Council will strengthen communication between students and faculty, coordinate across student organizations, and help shape a vibrant, purposeful student life at SCL.



And it's a Wrap!

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Freshman Marc Malouf

Where are you from?

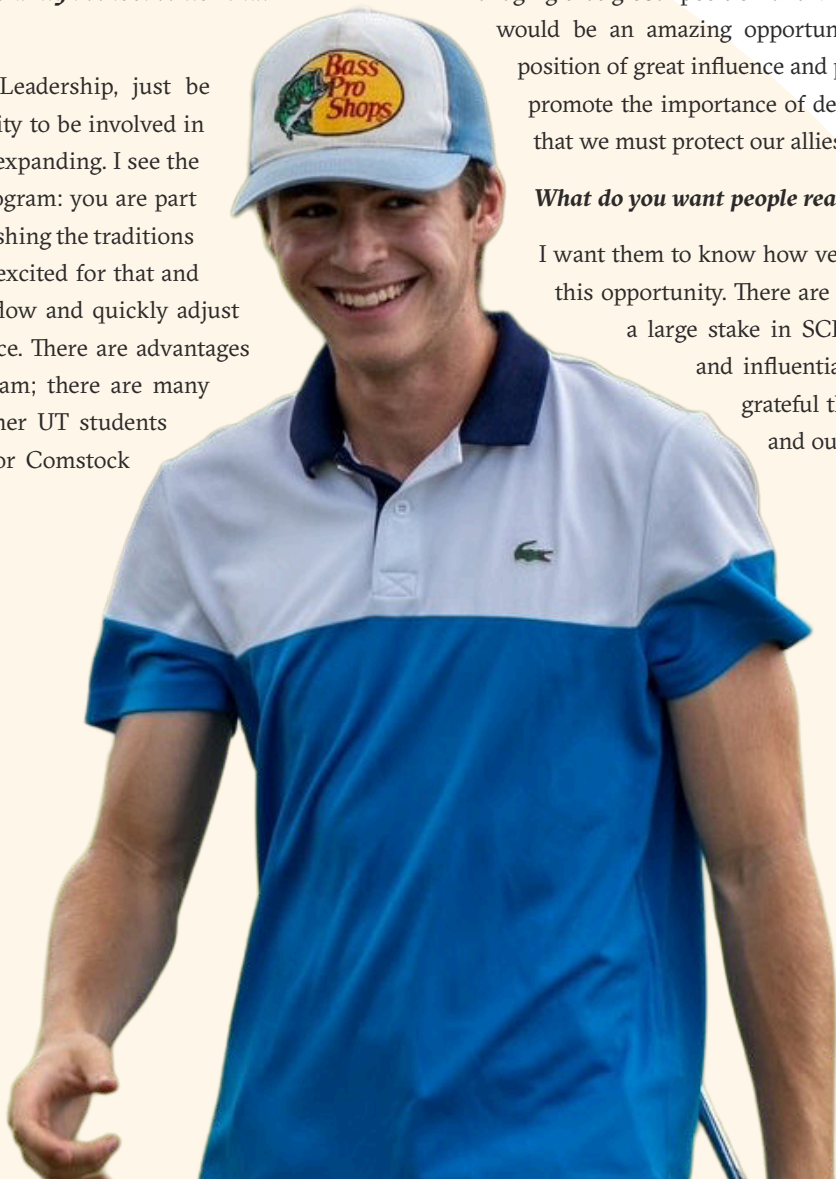
I am from Dallas, Texas.

What drew you to the School of Civic Leadership?

I really like politics, philosophy, and economics. I came to appreciate those topics more during high school. In my free time I'd watch videos or listen to podcasts that touched on those subjects. I went to a Catholic high school, so there was an emphasis on theology and asking the deeper questions. That really left an imprint on me and I became interested in theology too. SCL offers an opportunity that few other schools offer: I am unsure about my plans after college, but an SCL education provides openings to go into different career fields like business, politics, law or even graduate school. It gives me the chance to wait until I'm older and more sure before I decide on a career path.

What advice would you give a high school senior that is considering SCL?

For the School of Civic Leadership, just be excited about the opportunity to be involved in something that is new and expanding. I see the beauty of joining a new program: you are part of figuring it out and establishing the traditions and expectations. So to be excited for that and be willing to go with the flow and quickly adjust is my biggest piece of advice. There are advantages to SCL being a new program; there are many opportunities here that other UT students might not receive. Professor Comstock



comes into our CIV 109 class every week and tells us about multiple different opportunities that are offered. Because SCL is small, everyone has equal access to those, and I think that is special.

What is the most interesting civics class that you are taking?

I am in a class with a super interesting structure called Democracy and Capitalism. We have a lot of readings that we do independently and then in class we have conversations about the readings. We also do interviews in that class. It is interesting hearing different students' perspectives. It's interesting to see how different people and their experiences allow them to have different points of view.

What is your dream job?

It is to be Secretary of State. The U.S. is in a really important position globally, on both a military and democratic level. Managing that global position and visiting other countries would be an amazing opportunity. The U.S. is in a position of great influence and power. I would like to promote the importance of democracy and the idea that we must protect our allies.

What do you want people reading this to know?

I want them to know how very grateful we are for this opportunity. There are so many people with a large stake in SCL who are important and influential in the world. I am grateful that they believe in us and our program.

ACULTY

Professor Lauren Spohn

What was your academic background before joining the SCL?

I went to public high school here in Texas and then studied at Harvard College from 2016 to 2020. I concentrated in English literature, but did coursework and research all across philosophy, history, and economics. One of the great things about Harvard, too, is that it gives you a chance to explore a lot of different vocational paths, so over the summers, I did a number of internships—in the municipal government of Buenos Aires, in finance in Boston and New York, in addition to academic research. That broad range of experience really opened my personal and intellectual horizons. After undergrad, I completed a master's in intellectual history at Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship, which gave me the wonderful opportunity to chase down questions that had been bothering me a long time. What does it mean to say the world is “modern”? How did it get that way? Why does it seem so disenchanted compared to medieval and ancient world pictures? After that degree, I took a year to work in technology investing here in Austin before I returned to Oxford for my doctoral studies in philosophical theology. Now I'm here!

What attracted you to the SCL?

The mission! What better gift is there to give people than to help them more fully realize their dignity and freedom as human persons—and equip them to do the same for others on their own vocational paths? It's a great privilege to be able to work with such high-caliber people all devoted to that noble goal, building something new within an institution as reputable and resource-rich as UT. Austin, too, is an exciting place to be doing this work. Between tech, research, government, arts, food trucks, running trails... There are great opportunities for a free exchange of ideas. It's sort of like a frontier town. (But with better rule of law for anyone who isn't riding a Lime scooter.) And fittingly, you can always see the horizon! Nothing like a few years in Oxford to make you miss the big Texas sky.

Tell us a bit about your research.

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on St John Henry Newman, a nineteenth-century Catholic theologian and philosopher who thinks a great deal about the relationship between faith and reason, and nature and grace. In that research, I study how Newman helps us think about the way we come to real knowledge about God—“real” in the sense that we can make intelligible truth-claims about the Source of Being, and real in the sense of personal, lived, and embodied, like the knowledge I have of a close friend. For Newman, a crucial part of coming to know God lies in



our capacity to make good judgments, decisions that are free, reasoned, and reasonable without being verifiable by a “failsafe rule.” A giant thumbs up doesn't flash across the sky when we discover the meaning of life, for example, or decide this way of living is higher and better than another way. We don't answer such questions in mathematical proofs or logical syllogisms. But can we still say some answers are truer than others? Newman thinks we can, but we have to be willing to practice virtue, engage in dialogue, test our judgments in the ongoing inquiry, and risk personal transformation at every step. And the answer lies less in a “paper proof,” he would say, than in a communal way of life—participation in a tradition, we might say—that has the most explanatory power in making sense of our shared human experience.

You also do other creative work, right? Tell us about that.

Yes, I integrate my research with making animated and documentary films, writing essays, and developing other creative ventures. I think of these things as philosophy by other means. I was in Japan last year, for example, assistant-directing a documentary series about a sixteenth-century samurai saint, and it was an incredible adventure to see the ways that Newman's ideas about grace and nature shed light on everything from samurai ethics to the liturgical practice of the Japanese tea ceremony. I'm also blessed with amazing creative friends and love nothing more than working on stories with them.

What's something you've read that changed your life?

This quote from Newman: “The idea which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects.” AND this quote from Stan Lee, which was unfortunately misquoted in the original Spider-Man movie: “With great power there must also come great responsibility!”



Truth Matters

The School of Civic Leadership welcomed Professor **Robert P. George** of Princeton University and Professor **Cornel West** of Union Theological Seminary for a conversation on a question at the heart of both university life and democratic citizenship: why does truth matter? Moderated by SCL dean **Justin Dyer**, the discussion unfolded in a Q&A format that invited the two scholars to reflect on the nature of truth, how it has been understood across philosophical traditions, and how individuals can cultivate the moral and intellectual habits needed to perceive and defend it.

From this foundation, the conversation turned to the contemporary university. Considering recent events on campuses nationwide, both speakers emphasized that the pursuit of truth is inseparable from the defense of free inquiry and robust speech. Universities, they argued, falter when they prize comfort over candor or mistake avoiding offense for intellectual rigor.

George and West then explored the difference between genuine civil discourse and mere politeness. Civil discourse, they noted, demands disciplined listening, a willingness to reason together, and the courage to disagree without diminishing another's dignity. Drawing from their long friendship, they offered examples of how principled disagreement can strengthen rather than weaken a community committed to shared truth-seeking.

The program concluded with questions from SCL students and members of the wider UT community, many of whom pressed the speakers on how to cultivate these habits in their own lives. The evening left listeners with a clear charge: to make truth the organizing principle of intellectual life, and to model the virtues—humility, honesty, and mutual respect—that sustain it. Afterward, students gathered near stage to greet the speakers, continuing the conversation in a spirit of genuine engagement.

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 or underserved 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

Questions? Other ideas? Want to get involved? Email Ryan.Waller@SCL.org



Supporter Spotlight

The Ackerman Program on Jewish and Western Civilization



Thanks to a generous gift from Tomas and Abby Ackerman, in partnership with the Tikvah Fund, the School of Civic Leadership will launch The Ackerman Program on Jewish and Western Civilization in the fall of 2026. The program will offer a new sequence of courses exploring Jewish thought and history, the foundations of Western civilization, Zionism and modern Israel, and the American political tradition. Three new SCL faculty members will anchor the effort, which will also feature study-abroad opportunities, academic conferences, visiting scholars, and other special programming.

SCL’s chief development officer **Bryce Waller** sat down with Tomas Ackerman to discuss his family’s gift and what he hopes it will contribute to life on the Forty Acres.

What first stirred your interest in supporting a program that brings Jewish thought into conversation with the broader currents of Western civilization?

Algorithms, podcasters, and politicians are constantly stoking resentment and grievance—emotions human nature tends

to latch on to over more difficult concepts like personal responsibility. The foundational values that built this country—family, faith, hard work—are under coordinated attack. Jewish thought, with its emphasis on gratitude, moral agency, and critical inquiry, has deeply shaped Western civilization. When one studies the Torah, every word has layers of interpretation, teaching us to ask why, to seek meaning, and to wrestle with complexity. We believe a program that reconnects students with these foundational ways of thinking can counter the negative cultural forces pulling young people toward cynicism and division.

We are also excited about this program’s connection to Israel. Israel has been cast as a convenient scapegoat. It’s held to impossible standards and facts, including the Jews’ indigenous, historical connection to the land, are routinely twisted in an attempt to advance inherently antisemitic viewpoints. Our hope is students will get a chance to travel and study in Israel as a part of this program and be able to evaluate the nuances of this amazing country with their own eyes.

When you look at the intellectual challenges facing young Americans today, what gaps do you hope this program will help address?

Too many young Americans are searching for meaning and being handed narratives built on grievance and victimhood. This framework pushes young people to fight various fictional “evils” in order to redeem themselves rather than to cultivate gratitude, purpose, and responsibility. Critical thinking has been replaced by simplistic oppressor-versus-oppressed storylines that flatten reality. We owe them something better. Students need to learn how to ask second-layer questions, to understand tradeoffs, to see that nothing in life is black and white. Asking “why” and wrestling with complexity is invaluable—in business, in public life, in understanding the world. The Judeo-Christian principles that informed the Constitution and guided the Founders are fading from view. These ideas need to be reintroduced and reinforced. We see this program as a beachhead for reasoned thought, moral clarity, and historical literacy.

What experiences shaped your vision for this gift?

I was born in Czechoslovakia, lived under communism, and all four of my grandparents were Holocaust survivors. I recognize the early warning signs of rising antisemitism and creeping socialist thinking—signs I experienced firsthand as a child before coming to this amazing country of opportunity. My own life embodies the American dream: my family came to this country with nothing, and not a day goes by that I don’t thank G-d for the blessings I’ve received. I feel a responsibility to help sustain that dream for others. These personal experiences created in me both gratitude and urgency: a desire to protect what makes America exceptional and to invest in institutions that fortify the values that safeguard liberty.

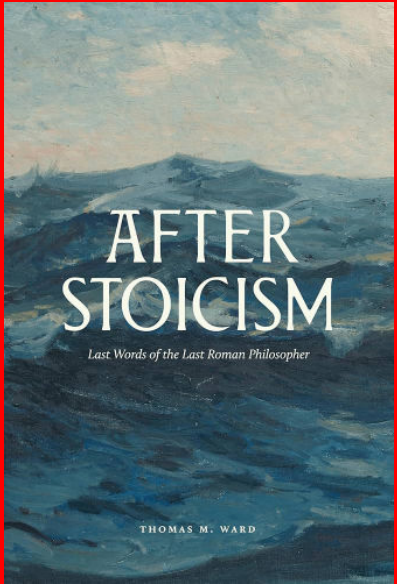
What do you hope a student who completes this course sequence will carry with them—intellectually, morally, and civically?

We hope graduates leave with moral courage, intellectual independence, and an understanding of the traditions that shaped this country.

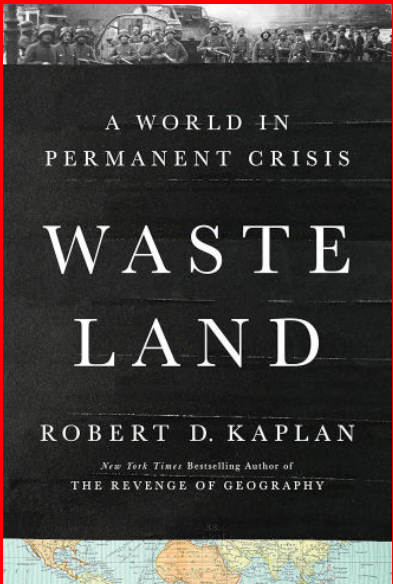
Looking a decade down the road, what would success look like to you for the Ackerman Program and for the students who pass through it?

We hope to see graduates spread across the political spectrum and across society—business, law, public service, academia—acting as thought leaders and cultural ambassadors, shaping the world through principled action. The graduates of this program will likely be outnumbered in the battle for this country’s future, but they will be victorious. They’ll have the historical grounding and moral clarity to meet the challenges ahead. The UT motto of “What starts here changes the world” is exactly what SCL exists to do, and we are so grateful to be playing a small part in helping its mission. We’re also incredibly grateful for the leadership of President Davis, Provost Inboden and Dean Dyer in this endeavor; our country owes them a huge debt of gratitude.

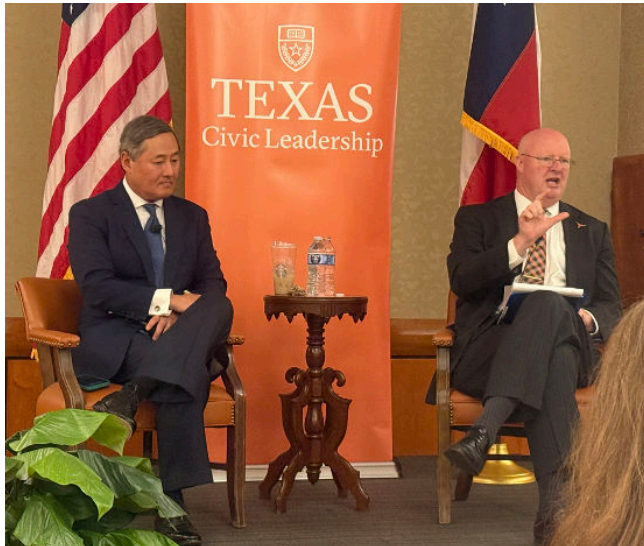
FACULTY PUBLICATIONS



TOM WARD
SCL Associate Professor



ROBERT KAPLAN
SCL Distinguished Senior Lecturer



Constitution Day

To mark Constitution Day, Civitas senior research fellow **John Yoo** joined UT provost **Will Inboden** for a thoughtful luncheon discussion on the enduring significance of America's founding charter. Moving through a range of contemporary social and political challenges, both speakers emphasized that on their own, neither the Constitution nor the law can carry the weight of sustaining republican government. Enduring self-rule, they argued, depends on the character, institutions, and shared commitments of civil society.

In closing, Yoo reminded students and SCL faculty that while the United States is an exceptional nation, it remains young, and that Americans still have ample opportunity to live up to the promises embedded in the founding documents for generations to come.



Teaching the Twentieth Century: Communism and Dissent

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation partnered with the School of Civic Leadership to host a two-day faculty seminar. The seminar prepared early- and mid-career professors to teach a course on communism from a variety of perspectives. The seminar included four sample class sessions from a senior professor as well as four sessions on potential syllabi and pedagogy. For example, **Gary Saul Morson** conducted sessions on communism and literature, and **Daniel J. Mahoney** led sessions on communism and revolution. The renowned historian **Sean McMeekin** delivered a keynote address.



Learning the Lessons of Ancient Rome

As the nation approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the School of Civic Leadership began its yearlong series on the ideas that shaped the American founding by hosting **Lawrence W. ("Larry") Reed**. Reed's lecture examined the forces behind Rome's dramatic rise and eventual decline; highlighted the civic virtues, economic practices, and cultural commitments that had once sustained the republic; and addressed the corruption, centralization, and civic decay that later undermined it. Drawing out the parallels for today, Reed encouraged students to consider how the strengths and failures of classical civilization illuminate the challenges modern self-government faces. His remarks set the stage for the broader commemorative conversations to come in this anniversary year.

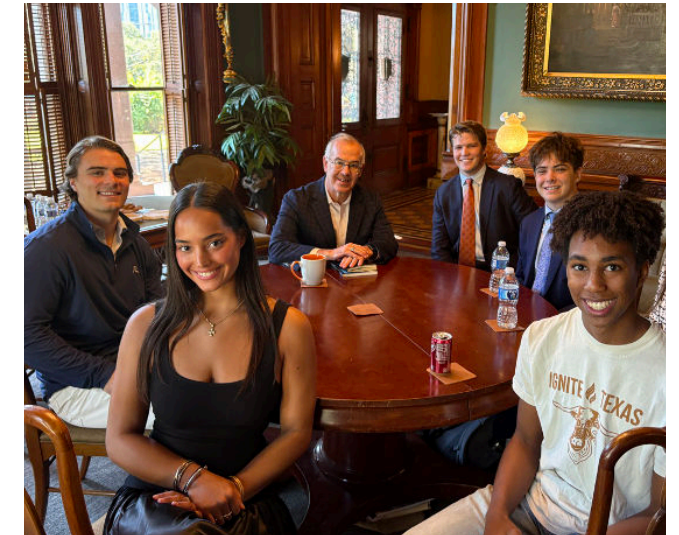


Student Feature — David Brooks

This fall, SCL hosted New York Times columnist **David Brooks**, who addressed a small group of SCL students. They discussed their different personal and educational backgrounds, shared interests, and experiences with the School of Civic Leadership.

SCL students came to UT from public, private, boarding, and classical Christian high schools; those diverse academic backgrounds shaped their unique perspectives. Despite those differences, they are united by a shared love for philosophy and the Great Books.

Much of the discussion with David Brooks centered around the School of Civic Leadership itself and the reasons why they had



chosen to enter the program. Though their fields of interest were different, many of the students are interested in future careers in law. SCL students reported that the program engages a wide range of intellectual interests, while its small classes foster a strong sense of community. The conversation with Mr. Brooks served not only as an engaging exchange, but also a meaningful affirmation of the values and academic vision that define the School of Civic Leadership.

Technology and Philosophy in the Cold War

SCL professor **John Kitch** led a Jack Miller Center sponsored seminar for Texas social studies teachers. The session's goal was to provide teachers with useful knowledge for their classrooms. The day's theme was "Technology and Philosophy in the Cold War." Kitch led the teachers through a textual analysis of two Eisenhower speeches. "A Chance for Peace" from 1953 and 1957's "Our Future Security" are two of the best texts for understanding how swift technological changes affected the American experience in the middle of the 20th century.

Participants asked questions of the texts, debated underlying philosophical issues, and shared tips for teaching complex material related to American history. The teachers were especially excited to reflect on their role in securing the next generation of American prosperity. Eisenhower held a conviction, expressed in "Our Future Security," that the endurance of America's republic required excellent education.

The day ended with a classroom application workshop led by **Aubrey Brawner**, SCL's assistant director of recruiting and a

former classical school teacher. Here, teachers worked through specific lesson plans and classroom activities that would be immediately useful. Finally, the seminar was a great opportunity for teachers to experience Littlefield Home’s beauty and to learn more about SCL’s mission of educating for freedom. We look forward to developing relationships with an ever-growing network of Texas teachers in the years ahead.

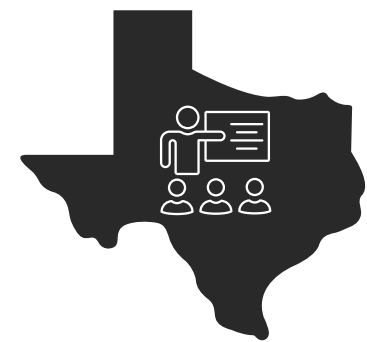
Mark Pennington on Foucault

The School of Civic Leadership welcomed professor **Mark Pennington** for a lecture drawn from his recent Oxford University Press book, *Foucault and Liberal Political Economy*. Pennington examined the problem of over-government and the complex interplay between state authority and decentralized forms of power. This issue, he argued, troubled Foucault more deeply than is often recognized. Pennington contended that resisting the dangers of an expanding administrative state requires a renewed appreciation for the “negative” freedoms and rights emphasized in the classical liberal tradition. By placing Foucault in this unexpected conversation, Pennington encouraged students to rethink how power operates in modern societies and to consider the enduring relevance of liberal constraints in preserving individual autonomy.



End of Year Holiday Party

The School of Civic Leadership and the Civitas Institute celebrated our third annual holiday party since our inception. SCL Dean **Justin Dyer** and CI Director **Ryan Streeter** toasted faculty and staff after a busy semester of welcoming our inaugural SCL class, hiring faculty, staff, and fellows, and implementing a slate of new programs and podcasts.



UT To Launch New Strategy and Statecraft, Great Books Majors With NEH Grant



SCL’s research lunches foster intellectual curiosity and collaboration, while offering faculty and staff a low-pressure environment to workshop arguments, share early-stage research, and receive thoughtful, constructive feedback from colleagues across disciplines. Beyond sharpening individual projects, research lunches strengthen the fabric of SCL’s scholarly community. They encourage cross-disciplinary connections and help cultivate a culture of open inquiry that defines SCL’s academic mission. Each session not only advances ongoing scholarship but also builds the habits of dialogue and collaboration essential to a flourishing intellectual community.



This semester, SCL hosted **Megan Perry** who spoke on Alfred the Great, and **Casey Spinks** on Kierkegaard’s ontology. **Ivan Marinovich** led a discussion on the economics of superstar CEO compensation and **Cynthia Ma** examined Plato’s *Statesman*. **Alexis Carre’s** topic was civil war and **Brad Wilcox’s** made the case that marriage matters more than ever.



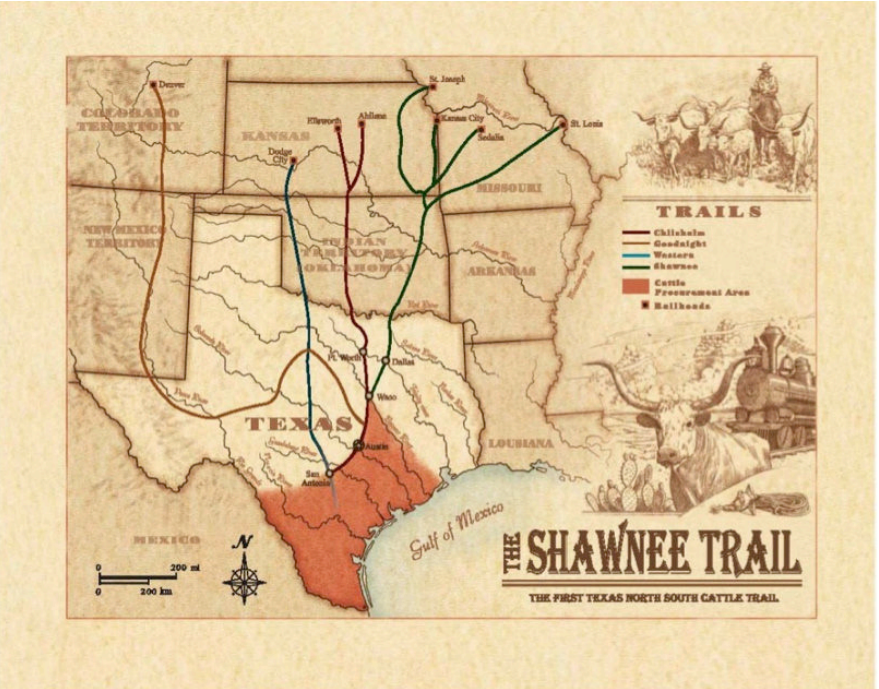
Shawnee Trail Regional Conference on American Politics and Constitutionalism

This past October, the Center for the Study of Government and the Individual (CSGI) at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, hosted the 12th Annual Shawnee Trail Regional Conference on American Politics and Constitutionalism, in collaboration with Mizzou’s Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy (KICD) and the School of Civic Leadership.

The Shawnee Trail Conference takes its name from the historic route that once carried cattle from Texas through Missouri and onward to the nation—a suitable metaphor for an academic hub that, for over a decade, has provided a serious yet convivial setting for scholars and graduate students in the various subfields of American politics to exchange their most recent research findings in a spirit of collegial fellowship.

The School of Civic Leadership was well represented at this year’s annual meeting. Our Postdoctoral Fellows, **Drs. Cynthia Ma** and **Casey Spinks** delivered thought-provoking papers on the underlying principles of the Declaration of Independence and Thomas Jefferson’s statesmanship, respectively. They were joined by incoming Assistant Professor **Joseph Natali**, who presented his research project, “Presidential Power and Constitutional Public Administration,” before some of our nation’s preeminent scholars in American Constitutional Studies.

We are grateful to our good friends at CSGI for their hospitality, and we look forward to continuing this important shared scholarly enterprise alongside our growing number of institutional partners from across the four states historically linked by the Shawnee Trail—Texas, Colorado, Missouri, and Oklahoma.



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