



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

Vol. iii, Number 1, Fall 2024

FORUM

EXPLORING IDEAS + INSTITUTIONS THAT SUSTAIN A FREE SOCIETY

Lord Andrew Roberts



A PUBLICATION OF THE SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP



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DEAN'S NOTE

Justin Dyer
Dean, School of Civic Leadership

The Texas Constitution

instructs our legislature to establish, support, maintain, and direct “a university of the first class,” which raises a fundamental question: what is a university? Today, universities operate big-time athletics programs, host concerts, maintain police forces, and run residential life programs—but none of these is the institution’s essence.

At its core, a university is a community of people dedicated to discovering and disseminating knowledge about reality. It is a truth-seeking institution. Longstanding norms of academic freedom, open inquiry, and freedom of speech derive from that purpose.

Because academic freedom is a subset of freedom writ large, James Madison’s defense of liberty in *Federalist* 10 is relevant to the argument for intellectual freedom on campus. In Madison’s view, human beings, fallible as we are, will inevitably come to different conclusions and hold differing opinions when we are at liberty to exercise our reason. We must structure the resulting conflict, not suppress it.

Madison noted that one could eliminate disagreement by abolishing liberty, something akin to extinguishing fire by getting rid of air. Life, of course, cannot continue without air, and the university cannot continue without the free exchange of ideas. Eliminating it would mean the end of the university as a truth-seeking enterprise.

The case for academic freedom presumes a particular understanding of human nature, knowledge, and education’s purpose. It rests on the classical view of human beings as rational beings with an innate desire to know and the capacity to discover objective truths about the world.

Some argue that there are no objective truths for us to discover and that power struggles underlie all academic discourse. On its own terms, this view fails to give a coherent account of academic freedom or free speech—other than seeing each as a construct of those who wield power. If everything were indeed about power, the university would cease to serve its essential purpose; it would instead become an entirely different kind of institution guided by different norms.

Philosopher Roger Scruton noted that order “is simply the other side of freedom, and the thing that makes freedom possible.” The protection of academic freedom and free speech, and therefore the university’s core purpose, requires us to enforce university regulations about when, where, and how we exchange ideas with one another. Such restrictions, well-established in U.S. constitutional law, reflect the truth that anarchy and freedom are incompatible.

In the 1930s, former UT Austin president William Battle chaired a committee that proposed a prominent inscription on the Main Building that would capture the university’s overarching purpose: *Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*. “Truth and freedom are so essentially the foundation of education, character, and progress,” Battle wrote to the committee, “that the injunction to seek truth as a means to freedom is as splendid a call to youth as we can make.” That principle remains as relevant today as it has ever been.



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“The case for academic freedom presumes a particular understanding of human nature, knowledge, and education’s purpose. It rests on the classical view of human beings as rational beings with an innate desire to know and the capacity to discover objective truths about the world.”



The University of Texas at Austin's School of Civic Leadership is now accepting applications for its inaugural class, which will enroll in Fall 2025. The school is among the first in a growing number of civics-focused colleges, institutes and initiatives being launched at public universities across the U.S. to prepare students for civic responsibility through the study of America's founding principles, economic foundations, and history.

Students who gain acceptance to this pioneering cohort will become eligible for the school's flagship program, the Bachelor of Arts with a major in civics honors, where they will study the intellectual inheritance of Western Civilization and the American constitutional tradition.

The School of Civic Leadership launched its first academic program this fall, a minor in philosophy, politics and economics in collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts, as well as general education courses and electives on topics including the history of democracy, moral leadership in economics, and the pursuit of happiness. Next fall, in addition to the civics honors major, the school plans to launch a minor in civics available to students across campus.

To support these programs, the school has hired ten inaugural faculty members who began teaching during this fall semester. During the coming months, the school will continue to build on this foundation by recruiting additional faculty members.

School of Civic Leadership Update

The School of Civic Leadership passed a significant milestone in September, when UT Austin's Faculty Council approved proposals for a B.A. with a civics honors major as well as a civics minor. In fall 2025, the SCL will launch the civics honors major and civics minor, alongside a philosophy, politics, and economics (P.P.E.) minor, which the SCL offers in partnership with the College of Liberal Arts.

This year's SCL faculty search aims to fill four positions, with roles in intellectual history, constitutional studies, the Larry R. Faulkner Distinguished Professorship, and a distinguished visiting professorship. **Scott Carrell**, chair of the faculty appointments committee, said, "I'm very pleased with our faculty recruiting efforts. We had strikingly positive response for all four positions, with more than 470 total applications. Our search is still in progress, but we're recruiting faculty who are excellent in terms of research and teaching. They're eager to educate students who are ready for civic life's responsibilities."

In fall 2024, SCL faculty and affiliated faculty taught 344 students across nine courses. Those courses included: Inflation in America (**Carola Binder**); Introduction to Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (**Dan Bonevac** and **Dirk Mateer**); Aquinas: Goodness and Badness (**Patricio Fernandez**); Moral Leadership in Economics (**James T. Hackett, Sr.**); Economics and Ethics (**Dirk Mateer**); Policy Research Lab (**David Puelz**); Constitutional Principles: Core Texts (**Raul Rodriguez**, **Abigail Thomas**); Pursuing Happiness (**Ryan Streeter**); and Democracy: The History of an Idea (**Alexander Batson**).

The School of Civic Leadership announced three scholarships for its inaugural undergraduate cohort in 2025-2026



In spring 2025, the SCL will offer fifteen courses, including: Constitutional Rights (**Justin Dyer**), Perennial Problems in Civic Thought (**Antonio Sosa**), Truth and Persuasion (**Alexander S. Duff**), Democracy and Capitalism (**Carola Binder**), Excellence of Character: The Virtues (**Patricio Fernandez**), Political Thought of Frederick Douglass (**Joey Barretta**), Constitutional Principles: Core Texts (**Catherine Borck**), Politics and the Transcendent (**Sarah Beth V. Kitch**), Introduction to Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (**Dan Bonevac** and **Dirk Mateer**), and Foundations of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (**Dan Bonevac** and **Rob Koons**).

The School of Civic Leadership announced three scholarships for its inaugural undergraduate cohort in 2025-2026. The three scholarship funds—Civitas, Praesidium, and Disciplina—take their names from the University seal and reflect the virtues civics honors majors will cultivate: civic responsibility, moral leadership, and practical wisdom. The Civitas Scholarship, an award of \$4,000, will honor five students whose record of academic achievement and civic responsibility indicate a distinctive capacity to excel in the civics honors major. The Praesidium Scholarship and Disciplina Scholarship will recognize thirty-five outstanding students.

SCL faculty and staff are eager to welcome students in fall 2025. "I'm excited to see students benefit from our transformative curriculum as they study the great questions of American civics in a vibrant intellectual community," said **Catherine Borck**, assistant director of academic programs.



NEW SCHOLARSHIPS ANNOUNCED FOR 2025

Civitas Scholarship (\$4000)

to five outstanding incoming first-year students whose record of academic achievement and civic responsibility indicate a distinctive capacity to excel in the Civics Honors major. The School of Civic Leadership will renew this award annually for recipients who are in good standing in the Civics Honors major and maintain a 3.5 GPA.

Praesidium Scholarship (\$2500) Disciplina Scholarship (\$1500)

to thirty-five incoming first-year students based on need and merit. Recipients in good standing in the Civics Honors major will be eligible to reapply for the scholarship in subsequent years.



Congrats to SCL associate professor Carola Binder!

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The 10 Best Books of 2024

The year's outstanding works of fiction and nonfiction, selected by the Journal's Books editors.

FEATURES

SPRING 2025 COURSES

UGS 302 Constitutional Rights
(Justin Dyer)

Some of the most contentious debates in American politics involve competing claims about individual rights guaranteed and protected by the U.S. Constitution. In this class, our readings and discussions will be oriented around two questions: What are the rights that the Constitution protects, and how are these protections enforced? We will begin by considering protections for rights in the original Constitution and the first ten amendments before exploring the significance of the Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1868. We will then turn our attention to modern constitutional rights controversies, and our primary focus will be on the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections for “life, liberty, and property” and its insistence that every person be afforded the “equal protection of the laws.”

CIV 301 Perennial Problems in Civic Thought
(Antonio Sosa)

Examines civic conflicts and controversies, with a view to understanding their root causes. Readings from classic and contemporary texts on political theory, ethics, and practice.

CIV 302 Truth and Persuasion
(Alexander S. Duff)

Examines what humans can know, how they reason, what thinking is, and how humans communicate to persuade others. Readings in logic, epistemology, and rhetoric include classical writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian as well as modern and contemporary thinkers and leaders, with emphasis on case studies of effective persuasion.

CIV 303K Democracy and Capitalism
(Carola Binder)

Examines classical liberal thought as it relates to political and economic liberty. Investigates how classical liberal ideas about political and economic liberty influence the modern development of democracy and capitalism. Explores potential tensions between democracy and capitalism. Studies empirical evidence and classic writings on relationship between democracy, capitalism, and human flourishing.

CIV 305 Excellence of Character: The Virtues
(Patricio Fernandez)

Investigates the nature, grounds, and consequences of moral excellence in political communities. Close reading of classical texts (such as Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Aquinas), contemporary philosophical analysis (such as Foot, Anscombe, MacIntyre), results of scientific research, and reflections on history, biography, and literature (such as Shakespeare, Austen). Attention to application to contemporary problems.

CIV 309 Political Thought of Frederick Douglass
(Joey Barretta)

This course will examine the political thought of prominent African American abolitionist and reformer Frederick Douglass. Douglass is most well-known for his powerful denunciations of chattel slavery, but this course will show that Douglass’s thought covered numerous subjects as part of his conception of America as a multiethnic society. In addition to his work against slavery, this course will examine Douglass’s constitutional thought, his opposition to proposals for colonization, and his advocacy for a practical and philosophic education to prepare a human being to live as a free citizen.

CIV 312P Constitutional Principles: Core Texts
(Catherine Borck, Tyler Thomas)

This course involves the close reading of primary texts that have shaped or that reflect deeply on American democracy, including the Declaration of Independence, the *Federalist*, and Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*.

CIV 322K Politics and the Transcendent
(Sarah Beth V. Kitch)

Examines the relationship between theology (both revealed and natural) and political theory in the Western world. The political significance of theological ideas such as the proposition that all human beings are created equal; that all human beings are created in the image of God; beliefs in divine providence and judgment; metaphysical foundations of natural law and free will.

PPE 301: Introduction to Philosophy, Politics,
and Economics (Dan Bonevac and Dirk Mateer)

This course introduces the interdisciplinary cluster of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. It introduces some of the key intellectual tools from each of these disciplines, and shows how they can be used together to shed light on important theoretical and practical debates in morality, economics, and politics. Topics to be discussed include the nature and justification of property rights, the uses and limits of market prices in coordinating economic activity, the role of government regulation in correcting market failure, and the ethical dimensions of economic growth, exploitation, and repugnant transactions. In addition, the course provides students with the tools they need to understand and apply causal inference to a wide variety of policy issues.

PPE 320: Foundations of Philosophy, Politics,
and Economics (Dan Bonevac and Rob Koons)

Examine distributive justice, collective action, and the rule of law. Reflect on how these approaches amplify and limit civil discourse.



Fall 2025 admissions to the School of Civic Leadership is now open.

The new **School of Civic Leadership** is home to a community of scholars on a mission to find out what it means and what it takes to be free and to live well.

The SCL prepares students for lives of significance and for successful careers in education, government, business, the arts, medicine, culture, law, diplomacy, and the military, among other fields.

The proposed Civics Honors Program introduces students to the intellectual inheritance of Western Civilization and to the American constitutional tradition. Students develop competence across three major areas of coursework: Constitutionalism, Western Civilization, and Civic Leadership. From the first intellectual foundations through a capstone thesis and internship, students gain experience that will inform a life of service.

*While approval is pending for the proposed Civics Honors Program, students can apply to the School of Civic Leadership as undeclared majors. We anticipate that the Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Civics Honors will have final approval prior to the 2025-2026 academic year.

For more info, contact Sarah Beth V. Kitch at sb.kitch@utexas.edu or Antonio Sosa at antonio.sosa@austin.utexas.edu or visit civicleadership.utexas.edu

TEXAS Civic Leadership
The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership





BLAKE JOHNSON

What is the guiding philosophy behind your philanthropy?

My philosophy is simple: focus on shaping the concrete while it’s still wet. Children and youth are like fresh concrete—impressionable, full of potential, and ready to take form. The earlier we invest in them—whether through education, mentorship, or opportunities—the stronger and more solid their foundation will be. By giving them the right tools and guidance now, we’re helping shape not just their futures but the future of our communities as a whole.

Why do you support the School of Civic Leadership?

I support the School of Civic Leadership because it reflects everything I believe in—helping young people grow into leaders who will shape the future of our communities and beyond. For me, it’s about giving back to Texas, a state that has always stood for hard work, American fundamentals, and bold leadership.

I want students here to learn not just the skills to lead but the values that define great leaders—integrity, accountability, and a genuine commitment to serving others. My hope is that they leave this program ready to become the kind of civic leaders and C.E.O.s who inspire change and make UT, and the world, proud.

In general, what role do you think public education can play in cultivating future leaders?

I believe public education plays a crucial role in cultivating future leaders by teaching the values that define American leadership—hard work, integrity, and the fundamentals

that have shaped our nation. Public schools have the unique ability to reach our youth from all backgrounds, instilling these principles early on when they can have the greatest effect.

By setting the right course during these formative years, we’re not just educating future leaders; we’re shaping the character and vision of those who will guide our society forward. Public education is where the foundation is built, and when it’s done right, it creates leaders who carry these values into everything they do, making a lasting difference in the world

You have founded and sold several successful businesses, including Byte, which was acquired for more than a billion dollars. What advice do you have for SCL students who are considering careers in business or entrepreneurship?

Throughout my journey of creating large companies like Alter, Byte, and Currency, I’ve learned that success in business and entrepreneurship isn’t about luck or shortcuts—it’s about determination, persistence, and maintaining the right mindset.

First, understand that challenges and setbacks are inevitable. What separates successful entrepreneurs from the rest is the ability to face these obstacles head-on, nimbly adapt, and keep going. Persistence is everything—sometimes the difference between success and failure is simply refusing to quit when things get tough.

Second, attitude is everything. A positive perspective doesn’t just help you; it inspires your team and keeps you focused on solutions rather than problems. Approach every situation with the mindset that you can find a way forward, and often, you will.

Finally, don’t underestimate the value of hard work. Big ideas are important, but execution is what brings them to life. Be willing to outwork the competition, put in the time, and do what others won’t. There’s no substitute for consistent effort.

If I can leave you with one thought, it’s this: The most successful leaders I know weren’t afraid to fail—they embraced failure as a step toward growth and learning. Stay determined, keep your perspective, and work with purpose. The rest will follow

As part of UT Austin, the School of Civic Leadership takes pride in our Texas roots. What makes you optimistic about Texas’s future?

What makes me optimistic about Texas’s future is the spirit of the people who call it home. Texas has always stood out in America as a place of boldness, resilience, and opportunity. It’s

a state that thrives on hard work, self-reliance, and a deep sense of pride in its history and culture.

Texas is where big ideas are born and where people aren’t afraid to dream big, work hard, and take risks. It’s a place where tradition and innovation live side by side—rooted in strong values like independence, integrity, and community.

I believe this unique combination of character, ambition, and opportunity sets Texas apart from any other state and gives me great confidence in its future. Texans don’t just embrace challenges; they turn them into opportunities. With the next generation of leaders stepping up, I have no doubt that Texas will continue to lead the way, shaping the future of our nation and the world.

What would you say to others who are considering supporting the School of Civic Leadership?

I would tell anyone considering supporting the School of Civic Leadership that it’s an opportunity to invest in something truly unique. As someone who isn’t from Texas, didn’t attend the University of Texas, and is a proud graduate of the University of Arizona now living in Los Angeles, I’ve still been drawn to Texas because of what it represents—a place of bold ideals, resilience, and leadership.

The School of Civic Leadership embodies the philosophies that I believe are the core ingredients which have yielded great societies and outcomes. Under the visionary guidance of Dean Justin Dyer, the school is doing something that I haven’t seen anywhere else: its cultivating leaders grounded in integrity, hard work, and a commitment to serving their communities.

For me, supporting the school is not just about what it’s accomplishing now but about shaping the future. I want my children and future generations of my family to be connected to the values and vision that this school stands for. It’s a rare and powerful institution, and I’m honored to be part of its mission. If you believe in developing the kind of leaders who will make a meaningful difference, this is the place to support.



Braver Angels Recap

On September 25, the School of Civic Leadership co-sponsored the first in a planned series of student-led debates that aim to promote civil discourse at UT Austin.

In the first workshop, structured as a “Single Issue Fishbowl,” participants considered the viability of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In the fishbowl format, students on either side of the issue successively sat as a group in front of the audience and answered the Braver Angels emcee’s questions on their views and the rationales underlying them. The emcee also asked both groups to express their doubts about their own positions. The format’s design fosters open-mindedness by asking both sides to consider the view they oppose. It emphasizes listening to understand rather than persuade. The point was not to win the debate or change minds, but to express one’s views earnestly and straightforwardly and then to listen to the opposing side express their views.

Students from both sides expressed their views with passion and eloquence. They disagreed where they felt compelled to but agreed where possible. The event was an example of civility. This example was even more impressive as it concerned an issue that so often leads to discussions that inflame more than enlighten.

SCL helped to organize the event in cooperation with several UT and national organizations: Braver Angels, the LBJ School of Public Affairs, State Senator Sarah Eckhardt, and Atidna, a UT student group that promotes Jewish and Arab solidarity.





What initially drew you to the field of economics?

I always joke that I became an economist by accident. I went to the Air Force Academy thinking I wanted to be an aerospace or astronautical engineer. I took some engineering classes, but I wasn't sure engineering was the right fit for me. Then, in my sophomore year, I took a required economics class, and it just clicked. Economics came naturally to me, and it matched how I thought, so I decided to major in it.

After graduating, I became a finance officer in the Air Force, and later, the Academy asked if I'd be interested in going back to graduate school for economics. I was more interested in an M.B.A., and they told me I could do whatever I wanted as long as I showed back up at the Air Force Academy with a master's degree in economics.

I ended up at the University of Florida, where I enrolled in both the business and economics programs. But because Florida didn't offer a standalone master's degree in economics, I was effectively pushed into the first year of the Ph.D. program. It was there that a professor, David Figlio, introduced me to empirical research, particularly into education policy, and that set me on my path. I convinced the Air Force Academy to let me stay another year to finish my Ph.D. in economics, and I've been doing it ever since.

What sparked your interest in using the tools of economics to study education?

David [Figlio] gave me one of his working papers, back in the early 2000s when the National Bureau of Economics Research would publish working papers, and I found it fascinating. I realized these were the kinds of questions I wanted to work on. Around the same time, my wife, who was in graduate school for education at UF, had an idea: together, we could study the effect of school counselors in her school. She helped me collect data for the study, and we co-authored a paper on the effect of school counselors by looking into the random placement of counselor interns in Alachua County, Florida. That's how I got into education research, and David, who ended up as dean of the Northwestern University School of Education and then provost at University of Rochester, was a big influence on my path.

How has your work on education evolved since then?

Economists are particularly interested in understanding causal effects—essentially, figuring out whether a particular intervention directly causes an outcome. We want to know whether a certain policy actually improves

graduation rates, for example, rather than just being associated with higher graduation rates. This is critical, because it tells us whether a given policy, if implemented, is going to have the intended effect. It is similar to how medical trials work, where you try to isolate the effect of a treatment.

With that in mind, my early research focused on college persistence—how students choose majors, what makes them stay in college, and so on. Later, I became interested in peer effects, which are the ways a student's peers influence their academic achievement. I used data from the Air Force Academy, where students have limited choices in their initial years, to study these effects. Since students there are randomly assigned to classes, squadrons, and roommates, it's like a natural research lab. I looked at how these random social interactions influenced academic outcomes.

After that, I extended a similar approach to studies of the effect that professors have on student achievement. I found that, basically, students didn't do as well in classes taught by more experienced professors, but that taking those classes led to better outcomes down the road, because the students mastered fundamentals of understanding in a way that their peers, who took the same class with less experienced professors, didn't. That is probably the work I'm best known for—my work on the ways peer effects and social interactions affect educational outcomes. It has been replicated at other universities, including Bocconi in Italy, one of Europe's top business schools.

You recently moved to Texas, which has recently been at the forefront of innovation in education policy. Now that you're here, what do you want to work on next?

My research focus has shifted quite a bit in recent years, though it is still on education. When I was at UC Davis, where I co-led the California Education Lab, I worked on improving California's K-12 and higher education systems, especially around college access and persistence, which is my passion. We did a number of studies of financial aid programs in California. We also looked into the transition from high school to college, and how students' learning in high school affected their academic performance in college.

My hope is to do similar research in Texas. I've been in talks with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board about studying how we can improve persistence and graduation rates, particularly in community colleges, where rates are often quite low. Texas is exploring new funding models that incentivize schools to improve graduation rates, like bonuses for graduation and dual enrollment, and I'd love to study how those policies effect outcomes.

What do you think is the largest challenge of translating research into policy?

The hardest part is that research often takes years to get right, while policymakers need quick, actionable insights. In my experience, the key is to create short summaries or policy briefs that distill complex findings into something digestible to policymakers and members of their staff. These shouldn't oversimplify complex issues, but they should include clear policy recommendations that are grounded

in research, as well as the expected effect of those recommendations. Clear, concise write-ups can make a huge difference in communicating research to decision-makers.

You've had some direct policy experience, too, through your time with the Council of Economic Advisors. What was that like?

It was actually what made me decide to become an economist full-time. In 2004, I got the chance to work on the Council, on the White House staff, during the Bush administration. I worked on labor economics and public finance, looking at job growth and the quality of the jobs that were being created as the economy grew.

It was inspiring to be around some of the world's best economists, like Greg Mankiw from Harvard, Harvey Rosen from Princeton, and Andrew Stanwyck from Dartmouth. It made me realize that I wanted to spend the rest of my career as an economist, even though I loved the Air Force and loved my experience there. Eventually, I left active duty in the Air Force and committed to focusing on my research.

Do you think that time in government shaped the way you approach your research?

Definitely. My time as a finance officer in the Air Force and later in D.C. gave me a good understanding of how government bureaucracy works, and related to that, the challenges of implementing effective policy. The Council of Economic Advisors is focused largely on trying to avoid making huge policy mistakes, and that perspective has stuck with me. It's

made me more pragmatic about how research can inform policy.

Looking ahead, how do you see the field of economics evolving, especially as it relates to education?

The early 2000s, when I came along, was the era of big data. For the first time, states like Texas and Florida were implementing school accountability systems and making data available to researchers. That has been a boon for research into education for the last twenty years.

Now, in addition to that, we're seeing a shift toward using randomized control trials, or what I call "pilot studies," to evaluate policies before they're implemented on a larger scale. This helps us understand the true effect of a particular policy, before it is implemented across an entire state, which helps policymakers ensure only the most effective and efficient policies are rolled out state-wide.

It's crucial to do those pilot studies in a systematic way so that we can, circling back to where I started, estimate causal effects. I think this approach—partnering with states and school districts to pilot and scale programs that improve educational outcomes most efficiently—will become even more important in the future.

Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

I'm excited to be part of the Civitas Institute and the School of Civic Leadership because we're aiming to bridge the gap between research and practice, and to make sure that our work is accessible and has a positive effect in Texas.





Tell us about your early life. How do you think it shaped your career and your worldview?

My parents brought me to the United States from South Korea at the ripe old age of 3 months. They chose to settle in Philadelphia not because it was the home of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in the 18th century, or of the Phillies and the Eagles in the 21st century, as I might have hoped. Instead, they were admirers of Eugene Ormandy and the great Philadelphia Orchestra and reckoned that if the city had a world-class orchestra, everything else there must be pretty good too.

Growing up in a city and state where the nation's history is all around—from Independence Hall to Gettysburg—inspired my interest in the Founding, the Constitution, and the Civil War. The high school I attended was established before

the Constitution to educate Episcopalian clergy. It required six years of Latin and offered five years of ancient Greek. My school was not one for fancy Marxist theories: we learned math, science, Western Civilization and American history, and even had to play a sport every season. I learned at an early age about the West's great struggles to build the political, economic, and cultural institutions that have made America a great nation that is still, in Lincoln's words, "the last best hope of earth."

Early in your career, you clerked for Justice Clarence Thomas on the U.S. Supreme Court. What is the most important lesson you learned from him?

Serving as a law clerk at the Supreme Court is an extraordinary experience, but the privilege of spending it in Justice Clarence Thomas's chambers makes it unique and unforgettable. I learned from working at his right hand for a year about the central importance of courage and commitment. Justice Thomas taught his four clerks that the greatest freedom we have as human beings is to think for ourselves, and that the most important character trait is to have the courage to stand up for those views. Commitment to our own freedom of thought is harder than it would seem due to a world of constant debate and criticism, one that social media only exacerbates.

Who or what would you consider the most significant influence(s) on the development of your views on the Constitution?

I have had wonderful teachers in college and law school, most of whom no doubt would disagree with me on most things! I have found the most profound influence to be the continuous reading of those who have thought about

constitutionalism before us—Hobbes, Machiavelli, Locke, and Montesquieu (thanks to my Harvard professors, Harvey Mansfield and Daniel Bell for guiding me through them the first time), and then our extraordinary American Founders, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, and Adams, and then our re-founder, Abraham Lincoln.

Among other topics, your work at Civitas will focus on comparative constitutionalism. What questions are you most interested in exploring, and how did those interests develop?

I think the American Constitution established human history's most successful governing system, but it is not above examination and criticism—in fact, quite the opposite. We should always seek to understand and evaluate our governing framework. Comparing the systems of other countries is one important way to understand our own Constitution's consequences—even though I think little of progressive judges and scholars' proposals to actually use foreign law to interpret our Constitution. In seeking to understand the harmful effects of the lawfare campaign against President-elect Donald Trump, for example, I turned to two countries that I admire—South Korea and Brazil—that have had a practice of prosecuting their presidents once out of office.

You have been a professor at Berkeley Law for more than thirty years. On what constitutional question has your point of view changed most significantly over the course of your career?

I have found myself thinking more deeply lately about the Civil War and the questions of slavery and secession. I have come to conclude that, while slavery is one of the worst deprivations of the

natural rights of man (or woman), the Constitution permitted it until the Civil War and Reconstruction. It was legal and yet immoral at the same time. I also have changed my view on Lincoln: rather than someone who violated the Constitution to save the Union, I have become convinced that most of Lincoln's war measures were legal under 19th century rules of warfare and of a constitution in an extraordinary emergency.

You have served in all three branches of U.S. government. How do you think that experience shaped your perspective on the Constitution?

I thought that to research the U.S. separation of powers, I should work within it first-hand. Much of the political aspects of Capitol Hill and the executive branch cannot be fully understood by reading about them in books or talking about them in the

classroom. My service as an aide in the Supreme Court, the Senate, and the Justice Department left me with a richer understanding of "departmentalism":

the right of each branch of government to interpret the Constitution for itself, within the sphere of its unique constitutional responsibilities. So, for example, I thought Andrew Jackson had every right to veto the re-chartering of the Bank of the United States because he thought it unconstitutional, even though the Supreme Court had upheld the Bank as constitutional, Congress had created it in 1789, and past presidents (such as Washington and Madison) had approved previous versions. I thought that Lincoln was right to refuse to apply Dred Scott beyond the individual case.

Do you think the system of checks and balances between the branches of government is functioning as the Framers intended? Why or why not?

The Framers expected that the separation of powers would produce conflict between the three branches, which would limit the

federal government's actions and preserve individual liberties. I think their vision still operates in part, but that it suffers because of the progressive constitutional

revolution led by Woodrow Wilson and Teddy Roosevelt. Under the progressive vision, Congress delegated lawmaking power to the agencies, where experts who were insulated from political or judicial control set policy. Political parties would unify control over the president and Congress to smooth these delegations and overcome the separation of powers. Our government today still operates within this progressive Wilsonian framework.

What do you think will be the most important constitutional question on the next decade?

I believe that the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice John Roberts, has set as its mission a restoration of the Constitution's original structures for government. The Framers believed that states would decide most policies that affect everyday life. The federal government would intervene narrowly to address problems that affect the nation as a whole, such as foreign affairs and national security, interstate commerce, and a standard set of federal rights. Within the national government, a separation between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches would further keep the federal government within its appropriate limits. The growth of the welfare state and the blurring of the separation of powers has allowed federal agencies to exercise unprecedented authority over the lives of the citizenry. In an era when presidents exercise power through the agencies and Congress seeks to avoid responsibility, it is up to the Supreme Court to restore balance to the American constitutional order.

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Civitas Outlook

You recently joined the Civitas Institute as editor-in-chief of *Civitas Outlook*, our new online magazine. What is your vision for *Outlook*?



The goal for the journal is to regularly publish writing that upholds constitutionalism, economic growth and innovation, political thought, and the arts of association which we commonly refer to as civil society. These perennial elements make America truly exceptional, and they are constantly disputed, ignored, or encroached upon by many ideas and habits. We want to discuss not only the problems of the administrative state, progressive constitutional thinking, identity politics, or why universally bad ideas like heavy tariffs or industrial policy produce long-term deleterious outcomes, but what the next generation of classical liberal and conservative ideas should be. Tremendous gains, for example, have been achieved in recent Supreme Court terms along originalist and textualist lines. But that should also prompt new thinking and writing about what is the next line of arguments, theories, and strategies for continuing the recovery of a free society. What should be the next generation of originalist thinking? *Civitas Outlook* aims to be a leader in that effort.

Regarding economic growth and economic freedom, we know the American economy has retreated from the robust innovation and productivity that marked its ascent in the postwar era. Many identify this problem, but their progressive or populist policy ideas support state-directed rules to support particular economic sectors. But this leads long-term to high-performing assets and resources being shifted via fiscal and regulatory edicts to lower performing assets and resources. Growth and dynamism are compromised, special interests

grow, bureaucrats get even cushier positions. So, it becomes essential for *Civitas Outlook* to publish pieces that examine the theoretical and empirical evidence for what leads to long-term dynamism and innovation.

I don't think you can ever speak enough about civil society and what it contributes to human flourishing. The journal is referring to this as "pursuit of happiness" because the arts of association speak to the rich set of relationships that produce another density within a pluralist society beyond just the individual and the state. The pursuit of happiness entails individuals in partnership with others employing their reason, prudence, and judgment to achieve goals in any number of contexts that would not be possible without that cooperation. The journal looks forward to showing this need across American society.

We have an outstanding line-up of regular contributors who were excited to join *Civitas Outlook*. These include scholars like **Jonathan Adler, Sam Gregg, Yuval Levin, Josh Blackman, Scott Winship, Veronique de Rugy,** and **Joseph Postell**. We also look forward to featuring essays from our own talent of Civitas Fellows who obviously have incredible depth and expertise that we look forward to tapping.

What kind of writing will *Outlook* publish?

I think much of this is in the first paragraph of the above answer. Overall, we are going to be drawing from those who have a tremendous interest in contributing to public conversation about pressing issues in constitutional law, politics, economics and innovation, and civil society.

There is no shortage of online publications. What will differentiate *Outlook*?

Our approach is to contribute to the foundation of what makes American society unique as a web of law, institutions, and partnerships that have contributed to freedom, virtue, and commerce in a manner that is unparalleled in history. We are very much at a time when we need to draw from our foundations and apply it in new ways if we want to continue and advance this constellation of American excellence. But we will not be hyperventilating in this regard; prudence and sane thinking will mark our writing. The journal is also not going to rebrand as "new thinking" failed policy ideas whose

defeat was so overwhelming that we forgot why we rejected them many decades and centuries ago. I think the contribution that the journal will bring is excellent research that is applied persuasively and winsomely to the problems before us.

What big questions are you most looking forward to exploring in *Outlook*?

How do we confront not only an entrenched entitlements state but the stunning growth of means-tested entitlements over the past four decades?

What does rebuilding Congress to its constitutional role of first among equals consist of given the paltry state of the branch in relation to the executive and judicial branches?

Beyond thinking that the executive branch will police its own excesses, what are the ideas and policies for limiting the administrative state after recent victories in the major questions doctrine cases and undermining Chevron deference?

How do we restore higher economic growth rates, business start-ups, and innovation overall?

What are the elements of a society that believes in economic growth?

How do we rebuild trust in our primary institutions in society, not only government, but education, houses of worship, journalism, medical institutions, and many more? What happens if we do not?

What kind of reader do you think *Outlook* will most appeal to?

The writing will be attractive to those who deal with ideas as a regular part of their day, academics, journalists, think tankers, and the like. But I also think the content will be appealing to the American citizen wanting to think deeper about how we have arrived in our current state as a constitutional people. They read and hear about the deep state, D.E.I., education run amok, or they have experienced dismal economic policies. We're going speak eloquently about these problems, but in a manner that the citizen can draw from and find stability and meaning within our current scene.

We also know that college students in this country are wrestling with basic questions about their country and what

they should do as citizens, and how they should prepare for their future lives. Contrary to what many think, they are not lost to collectivism or identity politics. We know with a fairly high degree of certainty, that the future doesn't belong to the progressive arc of history. But what ideas will shape our future? Students are grappling, too, with many basic issues and,

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significantly, questions about meaning and purpose for their lives. This journal will speak to them on these basic questions.

What will you look for when bringing on new writers? How do you plan to balance established voices with emerging talent?

I think what is most important is those who understand that we have arrived at a different moment in our constitutional/political/economic understanding. But what does that mean and what does it entail? What does populist-driven conservatism, for example, mean? What does it mean to be led directly by the people? Was our Constitution ever opposed to that, or is the issue more layered and institutional? There are many younger writers that I look forward to publishing on these and other questions.

Looking toward the future, what are you most excited about?

I think it's the unknown developments, events, cases, controversies that will happen and that we will get to analyze and attempt to understand for our readers. This is a journal that has the resources to provide great depth of understanding on so much that is going to unfold in our country in the coming years.



This November we welcomed Bryce Waller to the School of Civic Leadership to serve as our first chief development officer. Bryce is a UT alumnus and brings over fifteen years of executive leadership experience both in non-profit and for-profit sectors to this role. We wanted to take a moment to introduce you to Bryce and his family as a way of welcoming him to the team.

Bryce, tell us a bit about your background and experience.

I spent much of my childhood in Houston and moved to Austin while I was in high school. My wife Lisa (née Madrid) and I both majored in English at UT and actually sat next to each other in front of the Tower at our graduation. Since then, we have added three kids to the mix and collectively lived in Paris, Barcelona, California, Montana, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Austin, Bogotá, and now back in Austin! It's been an exciting journey.

For most of my career I have served as a Presbyterian pastor. I received a master of divinity from Westminster Seminary California and have served in both church and seminary leadership roles, most recently at an English-speaking church in Bogotá, Colombia. I also spent several years running my wife's family's business in San Antonio—a local restaurant called Chris Madrid's. I

have served in a variety of settings but organizing people and resources to help achieve the mission has been a common thread in each of those roles.

What aspects of your experience have prepared you for this role?

As a pastor one of my main responsibilities is to be a good listener and to help people see how their individual lives fit into a bigger story. Often those conversations centered around stewardship and how to best deploy the resources with which people have been entrusted—both financial and otherwise. I have to ask good questions to help people discover their unique gifts, passions, and areas where the world's needs intersect with their interests and abilities. Developing a new school like the School of Civic Leadership will require the work of a larger group of supporters who recognize the need for such a school and who want to use their resources to help make it a reality, and my background has helped prepare me to build the support network we will need to be successful.

At the same time, I have also sat on the other side of the development conversation as a business owner. I understand what it's like to have limited resources and a desire to see those resources used in the most effective

way possible. I understand what it feels like to have to choose from many worthy causes to have the most effect. So, I hope I can bring the best of both of those worlds together as we embark on this new project.

What attracted you to the School of Civic Leadership?

During my time overseas I grew to appreciate even more the unique strengths of the United States and the ideas and institutions that have made it into the free and prosperous place it is today. But I also understand how easy it is to take those ideas for granted. As the old Scottish proverb “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations” recognizes, it is easy to lose an inheritance—both physical and intellectual—in a relatively short time. What attracts me to SCL is its mission to make sure our country does not lose the rich history we have inherited. And not only that, but to ensure that history is further enriched and expanded for a new generation of leaders.

What are you looking forward to in this position?

A friend of mine who works in development at another university described his job as cultivating “relationships with purpose.” I like that phrase because it encapsulates what excites me about this role. I am looking forward to hearing the stories of our generous supporters, welcoming our students and families, and building a true learning community here at UT. Working together with others who share a love of UT, a love of our country, and a desire to shape the next generation of civic leaders is a great privilege, and I am eager to begin to build “relationships with purpose” towards that great cause.

Keeping the Republic: A Constitution Day Lecture

Marc Landy

Marc Landy, a professor of political science at Boston College, joined us for Constitution Day to discuss how the Constitution secures free government. He argued that the effective limits the Constitution places on the national government and tyranny of the majority are not themselves problems we need to solve, but responses to a problem. That problem is the difficulty—or even danger—posed by a popular government and a massive, modern state. Audience members contextualized Landy's argument by asking about our contemporary climate, particularly on how Congress clings to partisanship, the role of states today, and the administrative state. Despite these prevailing problems, Landy was optimistic, and cited the fact that public institutions are creating new schools across the country such as the School of Civic Leadership in response to these modern problems.

U.S. Trade Policy in the Next Administration

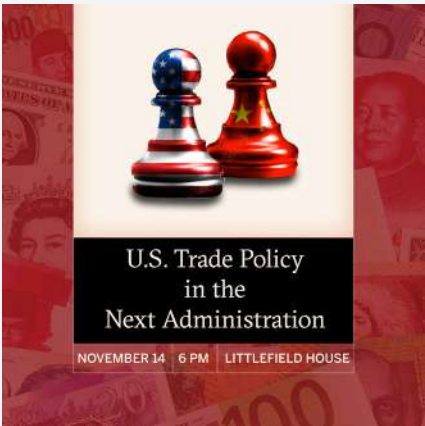
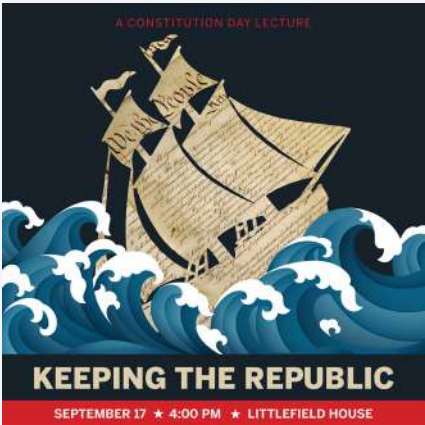
Scott Lincicome

The Cato Institute's **Scott Lincicome** spoke to the Civitas community about what to expect from “Trump 2.0.” after “Trump 1.0” brought about a series of tariffs that left long-lasting effects on industries, foreign governments, and American jobs. He argued that the new trade policy will have far reaching implications. Businesses will be prepared for the tariffs this time around, but the upcoming administration's increase in taxes on imports will lead to an even larger economic hit during “Trump 2.0” than they did during “Trump 1.0.” Private citizens will have to absorb higher prices on imported goods, and smuggling will increase. Other uncertainties include who Trump will choose to staff executive agencies and how other governments will respond to his personnel and policy decisions. Audience members then had a chance to ask questions, including about Congress's role in tariff policy, how foreign governments might respond, and the long-term effects such policies might have on the U.S economy.

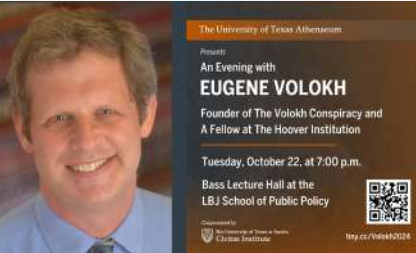
Winston Churchill and the U.S.-U.K. Special Relationship

Lord Andrew Roberts

In his famous 1946 “Iron Curtain” speech, Winston Churchill asked: “Would a special relationship between the United States and the British Commonwealth be inconsistent with our overriding loyalties to the World Organization?” **Lord Andrew Roberts** began his lecture on the history of the U.S.-U.K. “special relationship” with



this quotation. The relationship is a political-cultural alliance between the U.S. and U.K., in which the military component is the foremost feature. Because of their shared language and interests, the Americans and British can execute military expeditions together in a way uncharacteristic of other national alliances. Roberts argued that this alliance should continue because it protects against world tyranny. He noted that British disarmament and American isolationism serve as the primary limiting factors on the special relationship's survival. Roberts defended Churchill and the Anglo-American alliance against recent efforts to revise our history of Churchill and recast this alliance in a negative light. Roberts's speech serves as cause for reflection about the shifting waters in Western political discourse and the future of the United States's relationship with Europe and the world.



A.I. and Law Eugene Volokh

How is the world of law related to the A.I. world? This was the question UCLA Law's **Eugene Volokh** pursued with UT Law's **Ward Farnsworth** during a free speech week event hosted by Athenaeum and co-sponsored with the Civitas Institute. Volokh, former computer programmer turned legal scholar, argued that A.I. legal arbitration will overtake litigation in areas like contract law. By settling disputes between private actors without introducing lawfare, A.I. legal arbitration promises to save time and money. Although the A.I. legal arbitrator lacks human understanding and judgement and instead offers an English language output that resolves the input data given to it, Volokh does not see this impersonality as an issue. Volokh's concern is only whether A.I. produces results that compete with human decisions. The next decade will determine how L.L.M. (large language models) displace human judgement's role in law.



COLLOQUIUM ON ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Freedom and Willing Servitude in Plato's *Laws* Susan Sauvé Meyer

Does true freedom consist in slavery to the city's laws? In a lecture delivered in the Littlefield Home, University of Pennsylvania professor **Susan Sauvé Meyer** argued that it does not. According to Book III of Plato's *Laws*, she argued, someone enslaved is ruled unwillingly, but citizens must be ruled willingly for their constitution to be legitimate and not a despotism. Plato constructs a polarity in the *Laws* between the Persian regime, identified with slavery, and the Athenian regime identified with freedom. The crucial historical lesson that Plato draws from these cases is this: freedom from all rule is far worse than moderated rule by others.



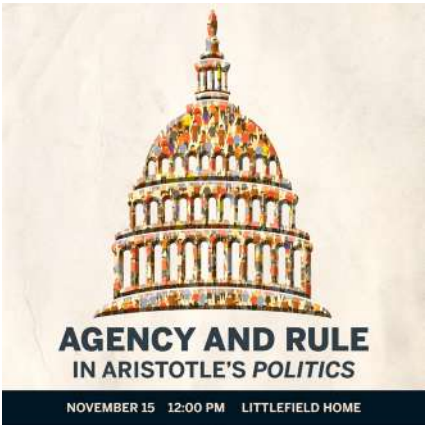
Aristotle on *Acrasia* David Charles

David Charles of Yale University and professors and graduate students from UT Austin's philosophy department gathered in the Littlefield Home dining room to discuss *acrasia*, or "weakness of will." *Acrasia* appears in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* when Aristotle asks, "How can someone do something he thinks is bad for him, acting against his better judgement?" Charles answers the problem of *acrasia* by positing that the failure to act according to one's better knowledge is a failure of the practical intellect which governs human action. According to Charles, it is a failure to understand "in the right desiring way" that leads to a failure to act rightly. The proper understanding of how to act amounts to a conviction of the right course of action informed by one's memory. Charles's lecture prompted a vigorous discussion concerning how desire and memory inform human action.



Agency and Rule in Aristotle's *Politics* Dhananjay Jagannathan

"What can we as modern people learn from Aristotle's *Politics*?" Columbia University's **Dhananjay Jagannathan** asked this question before a crowd of philosophy professors, graduate students, and undergraduates at a lunch lecture. Jagannathan proposes that the *Politics*—an unpopular work in certain regards among modern philosophers—presents various concepts that can benefit modern, democratic, egalitarian societies. Jagannathan distinguished between deliberation and decision in political communities, suggesting that rulers are those who decide, while the ruled within a polity can possess the power of deliberation which informs the ruler's decision. Jagannathan challenges us to ask which practices aid in deliberation and therefore inform decision making in democratic societies.





Summer Research Fellows

The Civitas Institute welcomed seven University of Texas at Austin graduate students to participate in this year’s Summer Research Fellowship. The program, which is open to Ph.D. students in economics, government, and philosophy, brings students together to workshop and refine their research proposals over the course of the summer.

A series of weekly sessions and writing workshops kicks off the fellowship’s first phase. They begin with an orientation session discussing research’s purpose and the role of graduate education in students’ broader academic and professional goals. For the rest of the summer, fellows take turns presenting their research projects to the group in two stages: first with a short presentation to gather initial feedback, followed by a longer, in-depth presentation later in the summer. This iterative approach helps students refine their work while benefiting from peer input. The summer culminates in a discussion of academic research and responsible citizenship and encourages fellows to consider the influence of their work beyond academia.

As the academic year begins, the Summer Research Fellowship changes focus to professional development. Fellows continue to meet for bi-weekly sessions where guest speakers join for conversations on publishing, the job market, and strategies for succeeding in graduate school. Throughout the summer and into the academic year, fellows engage with broader Civitas events, such as weekly research lunches, public lectures, and private seminars. This engagement further enriches Civitas’s collaborative, mission-driven environment.

Summer Research Fellows leave the program with a more refined research project, a more developed sense of the academic professional environment, and an intellectual community of fellows ranging from early to late career through the Civitas Institute.



Wednesday Research Lunches

Every Wednesday during the academic year, between twenty and thirty Civitas Fellows gather in Littlefield Home for research lunches. During these lunches, affiliated fellows—graduate students, postdocs, faculty members, or senior researchers—present their current research projects. The occasion has become a communal platform for sharing work, receiving feedback, and exploring new perspectives.

Most lunches spotlight a specific fellow’s paper or research topic. Occasionally, however, we welcome external speakers, roundtable discussions, and topical orientations to offer fresh insights and broaden our understanding of issues beyond our regular scope. These sessions, paired with convivial conversations and a shared meal, strengthen the collaborative environment that makes Civitas a dynamic community of scholars.

In the spring semester, we look forward to research presentations by **Alexander Batson, Abigail Thomas, Richard Burkhauser, John Yoo, Phillip Muñoz, and Janice Rogers Brown**, among others.



Society of Fellows meeting with Lord Andrew Roberts

A reflection by Hudson Thomas (Plan II, Government & History ‘26)

There are moments in life when the surreal becomes reality, when the larger-than-life moment takes shape in real time. My experience during the Civitas Institue hosted dinner with Lord Andrew Roberts was one of those moments. To quote one of my friends, during such times one feels that “the moment in which I find myself at present makes me nostalgic even now.”

This occasion’s setting was a casual Texas barbeque dinner. It’s not every day that a third-year undergraduate student finds himself seated next to one of the world’s foremost historians. Lord Andrew Roberts—member of the House of Lords, distinguished speaker, author, and Cambridge graduate—is even more impressive in person than his curriculum vitae conveys.

We discussed Queen Elizabeth and her deep appreciation of biographical history, heard stories about lunches between Roberts and Margaret Thatcher, examined current opinions on the state of modern international affairs, and considered the prevailing rhetoric surrounding British and American class systems and education during the night’s many compelling conversations.

Following the dinner, we listened to Roberts’s lecture on the U.S.-U.K. special relationship. I also had the privilege of participating in a private seminar with Lord Roberts and the Civitas Institute’s Society of Fellows undergraduate fellowship cohort. It was certainly an unforgettable week that underscored the value a thoughtful liberal arts education offers.

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Upcoming Events

- February 13 **Christof Rapp**: Aristotle on the Initiation of Self-Movement and Action
- February 27 **John Dinan**: State Courts, Constitutions, and Abortion Policymaking After Dobbs
- March 11 **Brad Inwood**: Chrysippus and the Embodied Mind
- March 27 **Yuval Levin**: American Covenant: How the Constitution Unified our Nation - and Could Again
- April 10 **Susan Collins**: Political Order and the Spartan Ideal

For a complete list of events visit CivitasInsitute.org/events



NEW MINORS IN CIVICS AND PPE Philosophy, Politics and Economics