



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

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FORUM

EXPLORING IDEAS + INSTITUTIONS THAT SUSTAIN A FREE SOCIETY

The University of Texas at
School of Civic L



A PUBLICATION OF THE SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP



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DEAN'S NOTE

Justin Dyer
Dean, School of Civic Leadership



“Building this school is an act of civic responsibility. It is driven by people who love the academy, who revere the American spirit of liberty, and who are committed to preserving the best of the American and Western traditions.”



This Dean's Note is adapted from Justin Dyer's 2025 State of the School of Civic Leadership address, delivered at UT Austin's Littlefield Home on April 25.

We've begun a tradition: offering reflections on the state of the School of Civic Leadership. At its heart, this is a moment to share what we're building—and why. Our mission is often summed up in a single, urgent phrase: the preservation of civilization and our cultural inheritance.

President Reagan once warned that “freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.” That truth underscores everything we do. Civic education isn't just about understanding government; it's about preparing the next generation to sustain the principles that make self-government possible.

Etched on our main building, with the Board of Regents' endorsement in 1935, are these words: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” William Battle, who led the faculty committee behind that inscription, said it best: “the injunction to seek truth as a means to freedom is as splendid a call to youth as we can make.” That call still rings true today.

But we must ask: the truth about what?

Our tradition seeks the deepest truths—about man, God, and the universe. And it begins with our civic inheritance: individual rights, human dignity, religious liberty, constitutionalism, private property, voluntary associations, and personal responsibility. Civics is the study of the rights and obligations of citizenship. Yet no one is simply a “citizen.” We are citizens of a particular political order. So, we ask: what is America? What are its founding ideals? What are its vulnerabilities? And how do we secure its future?

These questions lead to others still more profound: What does it mean to live well? What is government for? How should religion inform public life? What lessons should we draw from history? What analytic tools do we need to better understand our world? This is the kind of education worthy of a free person and necessary for a free society.

In 2023, the Board of Regents charged us with providing an education rooted in the Western tradition and American constitutionalism—one that prepares students for careers in private industry, public service, and national security. We are answering that charge by making new faculty hires, building new courses, and growing the Civitas Institute.

This fall, we launch the Civics Honors major with our first cohort of one hundred students. What began as an idea has become a reality. We've built a team animated by mission—thoughtful, serious, and hopeful. We are united by the conviction that the work we're doing matters.



Our culture values intellectual honesty, humility, and friendship in pursuit of the truth. We assume the best in one another, challenge each other's assumptions, and seek not to tear down but to build up.

We are still a startup—perhaps two startups at once—and we are moving fast. We are creating teams, hiring scholars, recruiting students, launching publications, producing podcasts, shaping networks, and forging a culture of truth seeking.

Building this school is an act of civic responsibility. It is driven by people who love the academy, who revere the American spirit of liberty, and who are committed to preserving the best of the American and Western traditions.

Thank you for being part of this important work. Now is a time to build.



Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction

Board of Regents Invests \$100 Million in UT's School of Civic Leadership

On May 5th, The University of Texas System Board of Regents announced a transformational \$100 million investment in a permanent home for the School of Civic Leadership at The University of Texas at Austin.

The funds will pay for the renovation of UT's Biological Laboratories building as the school's future home, enabling its expansion and helping it become the national leader in civic education.

"The elected leaders of our state, as well as the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System, have long seen a need for programs in higher education that prepare future leaders to safeguard freedom," said Board of Regents Chairman **Kevin Eltife**. "We have needed a place where civic education is focused on the foundational principles of our constitutional democracy. The School of Civic Leadership at UT Austin is that place, and today we are giving it a permanent home."

Regents created the school in 2023 to equip the next generation of leaders with the philosophical, economic, and historical understanding needed to preserve constitutional democracy. The school is built on free speech and free inquiry, bringing together scholars from across disciplines and perspectives to encourage the exchange of different viewpoints and ideas.

"We are incredibly grateful for Chairman Eltife and the Board of Regents' support along with our state leadership to advance our University and the important mission of the School of Civic Leadership," said UT Interim President **Jim Davis**. "This investment will bring renewed purpose to one of our most historic campus buildings as home of the top civics program in the country. It will be exciting to see how our students and faculty use this building to impact our state, nation and the world."

Faculty members from UT's business, economics, government, law, philosophy and public affairs programs are affiliated with the school. It offers courses that explore foundational knowledge and core skills that connect to a variety of career paths including law, business and entrepreneurship, public service, national security, and health professions.

The school will welcome the first one hundred freshmen to its new Civics Honors major this fall. It is on pace to meet its



UT Austin's nineteenth school will gain a permanent home, thanks to a \$100 million investment from the Board of Regents to renovate the Biological Laboratories building at Texas's flagship university.

goal of hiring twenty dedicated tenured or tenure-track faculty members by Fall 2026.

"This is a bold investment that empowers the School of Civic Leadership to fulfill its mission to prepare leaders committed to the principles of freedom, self-government and civic responsibility," said **Justin Dyer**, dean of the School of Civic Leadership. "We are profoundly grateful for the board's commitment to our mission and its investment in the future of our country."

Skills developed in the School of Civic Leadership are in demand in today's workforce. Employers who recruit and hire UT students value the importance of civic knowledge, strong communication and analytical skills, intellectual breadth and the ability to consider a wide range of viewpoints.

The school, which has been housed temporarily in UT's Littlefield House, is expected to move to its renovated home in 2028, once renovation of the 101-year-old Biological Laboratories building, known as "BIO," is complete. Select programs in the College of Natural Sciences and the Jackson School of Geosciences, which are currently housed in BIO, will move to more modernized lab facilities elsewhere on campus.

"This investment will bring renewed purpose to one of our most historic campus buildings as home of the top civics program in the country. It will be exciting to see how our students and faculty use this building to impact our state, nation and the world."

~ UT Austin Interim President Jim Davis



Speakers at the announcement of the \$100 million investment in the School of Civic Leadership: UT Austin Interim President Jim Davis, Governor Greg Abbott, UT System Chairman Kevin Eltife, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, and Civic Leadership Dean Justin Dyer.



"We need to get back on the pathway of ensuring that we're educating our students with the leading concepts that have led to the great country we are today," said Governor Abbott. "Today, we restore classical civics and leadership education at The University of Texas at Austin. The issues that will be the defining issues of the next century are issues that the United States dominates in, such as artificial intelligence and space. The University of Texas has laid the groundwork to ensure that it is educating the next generation that will inherit complex issues and lead the way forward to make sure Texas remains the greatest state in the greatest country in the history of the world."

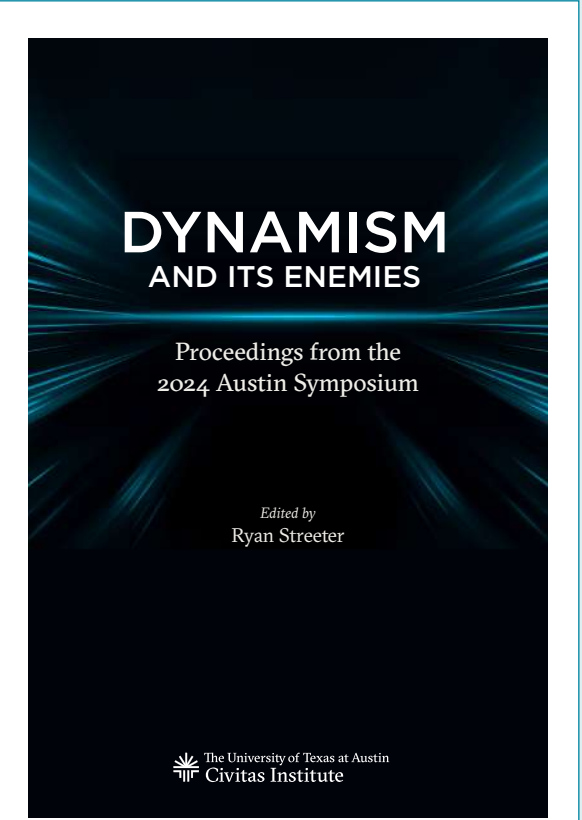
Governor Greg Abbott lauded the \$100 million investment by The University of Texas (UT) Board of Regents to the UT School of Civic Leadership that will help the school become a national leader in civic education.



Economic Dynamism Symposium

How can we promote economic growth and reduce stagnation?

On April 16th, in Littlefield Home, four economic policy and history scholars joined students and professionals to discuss this question at the Civitas Institute’s second annual Austin Symposium on Economic Dynamism. **Ryan Streeter**, executive director of the Civitas Institute, introduced **Joel Mokyr**, professor of economics and history at Northwestern University, the Symposium’s keynote speaker. Prof. Mokyr’s talk focused on techno-pessimism—the notion that transformative technological progress has ceased. Mokyr cited the advent of the internet and related innovations as proof against this thesis. Successive talks by **Virginia Postrel** of Works in Progress, **Adam Thierer** of The R Street Institute, and Civitas’s own **Arthur Herman** followed Mokyr’s keynote. Postrel gave an account of dynamism itself, defining it as a “liberalism centered on learning and discovery.” Her comments centered on dynamism’s necessary conditions and openness as a necessary value for the “dynamist,” especially openness regarding criticism and debate. Thierer focused on policies in the last few decades that have induced stagnation in areas like energy development. He suggested that state regulations in these areas had caused stagnation to ossify. We would do well, he suggested, to



If you would like a copy of the talks from the 2024 Austin Symposium, featuring Dierdre McCloskey, Dan Shoag, Cass Sunstein, Ed Glaeser, Ryan Decker, and Ned Phelps, email civitas@utexas.edu for your complimentary copy.

follow the general rule of post hoc punishment rather than install precautionary regulatory regimes that ensure that “nothing happens.” Herman closed the symposium with some comments on dynamic societies’ cultural conditions and pointed to the Scottish Enlightenment as an example. He cited mobility, free markets, and natural law as conditions for dynamism. All the symposium’s speakers offered cause for reflection about how to foster cultural and economic conditions in which more people can exercise their agency to create a better world.

Civitas Outlook Launch

In December 2024, the Civitas Institute launched Civitas Outlook, a new online journal that represents a community of scholars and thinkers who write about the core ideas of freedom and virtue, constitutionalism, economic growth, and dynamism crucial to citizenship and flourishing as human persons in a free society. Civitas Executive Director Ryan Streeter wrote this essay at the Civitas Outlook’s launch.

Civitas Outlook blends the best of our received traditions and institutions with an optimism about what creators, entrepreneurs, and technology can do for freedom and prosperity.

At its founding in 1947, the Mont Pelerin Society published a Statement of Aims claiming that Western civilization’s “most precious possession,” the freedom of expression, was threatened by ideologies that seek to “suppress and obliterate all views but their own.” The Society was founded to combat totalitarian collectivism and the ideologies that supported it.

Today’s totalitarian impulse is not primarily collectivist in the political sense but rather takes the form of cooperative anti-liberalism, where cultural, political, and economic elites pursue ideological aims—on issues like climate change, public health, and social justice—at the expense of liberty and self-determination. This is increasingly met by oppositional illiberalism, especially on the reactionary right.

A liberal society rests on liberty and vitality at the most local level. These lose meaning when narrow ideologies restrain agency, power is concentrated, or self-improvement is seen as illusion. We launched *Civitas Outlook* amid cynicism about democratic capitalism and rising anti-liberal sentiment. Yet the engines of opportunity in America remain powerful. We are heirs to innovation and upward mobility that is the world’s envy.

Civitas Outlook prioritizes free inquiry, history, empirical research, and philosophical reasoning over intellectual fads.

We share a concern with societal stagnation and a drive for greater dynamism. That means rewarding creativity, removing barriers to aspiration, and enabling innovation at all levels. We defend individual liberty and community self-determination wherever it is threatened—whether by speech suppression on campuses or stifling regulation.

We also defend the institutional conditions for liberty: the rule of law, constitutionalism, a functioning legislature, and civil society. Our authors do not always agree, but they share a deep respect for liberal democracy’s achievements. Gratitude for our inheritance, even while confronting current failures, is central.

Civitas Outlook is skeptical of elite monocultures. Our contrarianism calls out ideological overreach by media, academia, government, and corporations. Though anti-elitism can be misused, public distrust in experts is understandable. By identifying excesses, we hope to restore trust in institutions.

As a university-based publication, we aim to revitalize academic exchange. Higher education has too often embraced anti-liberal norms, but we’re part of a new effort—through the Civitas Institute, which is part of the School of Civic Leadership at UT Austin—to promote rigorous debate about freedom and society. We provide a forum for academics who share that commitment.

Finally, our home, in Austin, Texas—a hub of classical liberal energy and contrarian thought—shapes our identity. Though national in reach, our spirit is rooted in this dynamic city.

In the words of Mont Pelerin’s founding document: *Civitas Outlook* “seeks to establish no meticulous and hampering orthodoxy...but to facilitate the exchange of views among minds inspired by common ideals... to contribute to the preservation and improvement of the free society.”

www.civitasoutlook.org



The University of Texas at Austin
Civitas Institute

- 37 fellows
- 40 public events
- 88 speakers
- 1300 event attendees

Civitas Outlook

- 150 articles in its first 4 months
- 71 different authors
- 40%+ of the articles featured & cited
- 80k page views
- 87k unique readers



Littlefield Carriage House

The historic Littlefield Carriage House, which neighbors SCL's office in the Littlefield Home, has been fully renovated and now serves as a dedicated home for School of Civic Leadership faculty and postdoctoral fellows. The restoration, which preserved the Carriage House's charming 19th century façade, provides offices for five SCL faculty members and six postdoctoral fellows. By blending traditional architecture with modern functionality, the Carriage House symbolizes SCL's aspiration to combine the best of classical and professional education. With the renovation complete, the SCL's physical presence at the heart of UT Austin's campus continues to expand.

From the Ancient World to the New Aristotelianism

The Civitas Institute, along with Oxford University's Centre for Theology, Law and Culture at Pusey House, co-hosted "From the Ancient World to the New Aristotelianism," a three-day colloquium and workshop held at Oxford in January 2025. The first day opened with a public debate between University of Notre Dame Professor **Melissa Moschella** and Civitas's **Robert Koons** on the principles of natural law. Day two featured a private "book scrub" at Oriel College. Contributors—among them SCL Dean **Justin Dyer** and Koons—engaged in structured peer critiques of chapters for an edited volume tracing natural law's intellectual history. All Souls College hosted two simultaneous workshops on the colloquium's final day: one explored whether natural law requires teleology, chaired in part by Koons; the other, the relationship between Roman law and natural law. Distinguished scholars from UT and beyond—including Dyer, Koons, and doctoral candidate from UT's Department of Government, **Candace Terman**—contributed to this in-depth academic exploration of natural law's past and future.



Applications open August 1 for Fall 2026 admissions to the School of Civic Leadership

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 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.

For more info, contact civics@austin.utexas.edu or visit civicleadership.utexas.edu





Rex Tillerson

Rex Tillerson, former president and C.E.O. of Exxon Mobil and U.S. Secretary of State, recently spoke with SCL's chief advancement officer, Bryce Waller, to talk about his experience at UT, how it prepared him for his remarkable career, and how he hopes his recent investment in the School will help prepare students for lives of significance and service.

How did UT set you up for success in your business and in your life?

I grew up in moderately small towns: Stillwater, Oklahoma and Huntsville, Texas. My high school graduating class was about 210 people, so when I came to the University, I suddenly joined a community of nearly 50,000—a big transition for me. Without question, exposure to such a diverse population and learning how to assimilate was important to my maturation at that stage of life. Being in the Longhorn Band helped, because I stepped on the campus and immediately had 350 friends. I also was a member of the Tejas Club. One of our hallmarks was our weekly coffees. Invited guests, from the controversial Madalyn Murray O'Hare to the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Texas, would come talk to us. The discussions afterward often lasted until the sun came up. It was a great way to be challenged in your own beliefs, and either

having those beliefs changed because of the discourse with others or strengthened through that discourse. That kind of exchange was crucial to my development in terms of learning how to interact with people who hold different views than I do.

At a recent luncheon hosted by the Clements Center for National Security, you spoke about the importance of honesty and integrity in leadership. Why do you think those qualities are so important, and what can we do to help instill them in the next generation?

I attribute much of where the country finds itself today, socially and politically, to an erosion of integrity in our society and among our leaders. For nearly twenty years, I've been following Pew Research data on how the American people view their leaders. It's striking how little faith there is in leaders to act ethically and honestly, but it's not hard to see why. All you have to do is turn on the television or look at social media.

What happens in Washington trickles down into all other aspects of our society. Our leaders have normalized lying. They've normalized dishonesty. They've normalized unethical behavior, and we just cannot allow that. You cannot possibly hope to solve societal or global challenges if you cannot deal with one another honestly and openly and have discourse on your differences and find solutions to them.

Our society is at the point where we don't trust others to act honestly and ethically, and we've become so polarized that we can't even have a meaningful conversation. The solution is in our local neighborhoods and communities. Start with yourself. Are you acting honestly, ethically and truthfully in your interactions with others? Be an example for young people. Work on what you can influence in your local communities and your neighborhoods, your school boards, your community elections. We've got to help the next generation understand the value of committing to a life of integrity, a life of ethical behavior. If we don't, future generations are going to have some tough issues on their plate that they won't have any way to solve.

What is a book every leader should read?

Leadership begins with your values. That's going to define who you are and the kind of leader you're going to be. I'm a huge supporter of the Boy Scouts of America (now called Scouting America). I've been involved with the organization for my entire life, and my value system is a direct outcome of that

experience. My training as a Boy Scout—to help other people at all times with honesty, commitment, duty and honor—shaped the kind of leader I wanted to be.

Books can help leaders see how others might view their values. *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand was a huge influence on my commitment to meritocracies. When individuals are empowered to live to their full potential, they can do enormous things not just for themselves, but for others. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Goodwin is a great book on how Lincoln put together his cabinet at the time of the Civil War. *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* by Andrew Roberts demonstrates the power of persevering. Even our greatest leaders have to deal with their flaws, and Churchill dealt with his successfully.

You can learn a lot about different leadership styles by reading about and observing what other great leaders did, and where and why they failed. More often than not, our failures are directly attributed to the kind of leader we are and the leadership decisions we make. It goes back to choosing your value system, being committed to it and never wavering, because it will guide you for the rest of your life.

Why is education in civic leadership so important?

In the past few decades, we've seen a decline in the fundamental understanding of civics and in the teaching of history and philosophy. You cannot be an effective American citizen if you don't have a reasonably good understanding of how our government functions. The system relies upon people going to the ballot box and being knowledgeable about their choices. Unfortunately, so many people vote based on social media feeds and how entertaining someone might be, as opposed to considering if a candidate is going to effectively manage our nation's tremendous challenges. I hope public schools will start making civics and history a bigger part of their curriculum again.

What values and beliefs guide your philanthropic work?

We created The Tillerson Foundation in 2016, but most of our philanthropy comes from our personal assets as we build the foundation over time. Our focus is on five areas of support: faith-based organizations, democracy and democratic institutions, youth development, health care and medical research, and the arts. Regardless of your field of endeavor, the

arts can communicate so much and help us understand the values we've chosen.

How does your generous gift to the School of Civic Leadership fit within that framework?

It goes back to what I was saying about citizenship and values-based leadership, but it also aligns with our support of democracy, democratic institutions, and youth development. Education helps young people develop into productive American citizens. What excites me about the School of Civic Leadership is it provides a structured approach to allowing people to engage in discourse in a respectful way and disagreeing with one another in a productive and non-destructive way while emphasizing the values of integrity and ethical behavior. There's so much we can learn from one another, even if we don't hold the same views.

In your farewell address as Secretary of State, you spoke about the need for accountability and the importance of daily acts of kindness. Do you have any further advice to offer School of Civic Leadership students as they begin their educational journey?

We need more leaders with servant-based values and a breadth of knowledge, whether in the public sector, private sector, or nonprofit. They need to be prepared to have the strength of conviction to stick to their values, because they will be tested by people who are going to try to force them to do things they know aren't right. So often people think, "Gosh, if I don't do this, this is the end of my career." I promise you that's not true. Stick to what you know is right, and good things are going to happen to you because a better door is going to open. People want to be associated with others who are honest people of integrity. They want to be on their team, and they'll follow you because they see that quality in you.

That happened to me throughout my career. I had some bosses who weren't all that great. We all are going to have those. I learned something from all of them, and I moved on. I molded myself into the kind of leader I wanted to be based on what I experienced as a follower. It's important to go through life with that mindset. We're all works in progress. We're never complete.



State Courts, Constitutions, and Policymaking After *Dobbs*

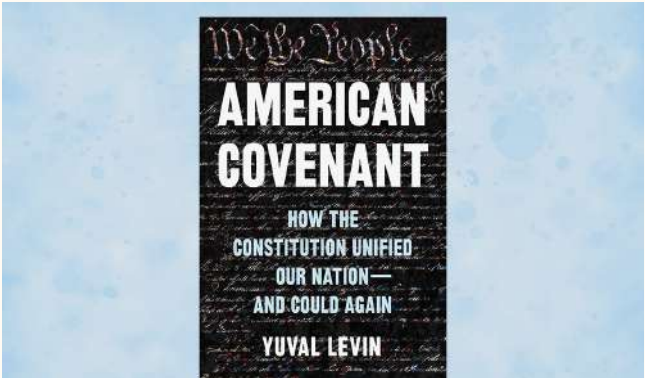
Students and UT affiliates gathered in the Littlefield Mirror Room to listen to Wake Forest University’s **John Dinan** speak on the merits of federalism after the *Dobbs* decision. Now that the Supreme Court has overturned *Roe*, he argued, we have an opportunity to turn to healthier national politics, because views on abortion will no longer motivate single issue voting in national elections. Moreover, state legislatures’ policies and constitutional amendments can reflect the American people’s various views on abortion. Since this creates a healthier and more democratic political environment, Dinan suggested that in the decision’s wake, both Democrats and Republicans can reasonably favor a turn to federalism on the question of abortion.



Executive Power and Court Battles

The Honorable **Edith Jones** lectured an audience of law students, professors, and undergraduates about the ongoing conflicts between executive administrative agencies and

federal courts. Jones, among others, criticizes various administrative agencies for not abiding by the separation of powers principle. These agencies simultaneously take on the role of legislator, judge, and executioner, thus undermining Founding principles and repeating the very error that spurred James Madison’s Pre-Revolution criticism of the Crown. By failing to observe the separation of powers, the Crown had committed an injustice against his people through a kind of administrative despotism.



American Covenant

How are we supposed to act together when we don’t think alike? The American Constitution’s Framers sought to answer this question through our establishing documents. It is also the question that **Yuval Levin** looks to recover through his treatment of the American Constitution in his book, *American Covenant*. In his lecture, Levin treated various problems related to the nation’s current political situation, as well as a provisional solution. Congress’s transference of responsibilities to assorted administrative agencies, the increasing fetishization of efficiency to hasten legislative functions, and the heightened culture of political theater all tend to undermine the legislature’s goal: to deliberate about what laws will best conduce to the common good of the citizens of the United States. Why does our republic not function as its Constitution states it should? We have given up this political and institutional culture of debate and deliberation to achieve our national aims, hence the ratcheting intensity of successive national presidential elections, among other signs of increasing polarization. Levin’s lecture provided some cause for further reflection about the state of our union and the causes of our political dysfunction.



The Stoics on Simultaneous Mental Conflict

Can one’s mind hold two conflicting judgments simultaneously? It seems that the answer, when taken precisely, must be no. How could a person hold that he is both alive and not alive at the same time in the same respect? This insight reflects the traditionally conceived Stoic opinion and is one that **Simon Shogry** of the University of Oxford attacked in the presence of various philosophy graduate students and professors in Littlefield Home. Shogry contended that through conflicts between impressions and judgements, simultaneous mental conflict is possible in Stoic thought. One can rationally perceive or feel one thing and rationally judge another. This is also how one’s passions can be cured: by seeing that those passions move one to actions that contradict one’s better judgement.



Chrysippus and the Embodied Mind

“Are virtues animals?” This startling question pervaded the lecture Yale University’s **Brad Inwood** delivered on Stoic

philosopher Chrysippus. Surrounded by eager graduate students, professors, and undergraduates in the Littlefield Home, Inwood went on to explain. Mind is an animal, he argued, in that it causes human beings to be animals. Since virtues are dispositions of the mind to act well, virtues are therefore animals. Inwood further explored how the Stoics taught that a kind of matter called the “pneuma” or spirit makes up the rational soul and how Stoicism differentiates the soul’s powers. He concluded by treating Chrysippus’ view that affections are judgements. The view works like this: in that I am afraid of X, it is because I judge that X is bad and terrifying. Inwood’s lecture provided cause for further reflection about the nature of rationality and embodiment as well as the relationship between judgements and affections.



Political Order and the Spartan Ideal

What is the the Spartan regime’s enduring relevance in contemporary politics? This is the question that University of Notre Dame professor **Susan Collins** sought to answer in a lecture delivered in Littlefield Home. Surrounded by graduate students, professors, and undergraduates in political theory, Collins argued that Aristotle praises Sparta for its ability to resist external enemies and internal faction, but contradictions often forgotten by those who invoke the Spartan ideal of government characterized the Spartan regime. The Spartans promoted luxury and wealth, for example, even while claiming to have a regime aimed at virtue’s cultivation. Aristotle further criticized the Spartan regime for failing to promote the life of full virtue only leisure makes possible. Collins closed by noting that contemporary fascination with Sparta is a sign of a return to older ideals, or “strong gods,” of nation, virtue, and piety.

Braver Angels

Over the course of three months, the School of Civic Leadership partnered with Braver Angels and several other student organizations and UT institutions to host a series of non-competitive debates on some of today’s most pertinent public policy questions. We held the first on February 3rd. It followed a “fishbowl” format, in which two small groups (rather than two individuals or sets of individuals) take the floor as groups and together present their views on a given topic by answering the host’s questions. Eight to ten students, with four to five per side, debated the motion, “Should TikTok be banned in the U.S.?” The debate explored questions of free speech, national security, and privacy. At the debate’s heart was the question of whether the government had the authority to regulate citizen’ private speech if a foreign country was acting as an intermediate for that speech.

The second debate asked the question, “are D.E.I. policies more beneficial than harmful?” Four students, two on each side, presented their views and engaged with audience questions. The heart of the dispute rested on the question of meritocracy—what it is and how organizations and institutions reliably measure it. Audience positions ranged from strongly in favor of D.E.I., to strongly against, to somewhere in between. Two students arguing against the motion were members of SCL’s Society of Fellows. They made a compelling case in favor of individual merit as the guiding principle for hiring and admissions policies. They grounded their case in the essentials of the American constitutional tradition and its defense of liberty.

The semester’s third and last debate also followed in the fishbowl format. In this case, two groups of four to five students expressed their views on the question, “DOGE: mostly good or mostly bad?” This debate centered on the question of efficiency vs. procedure. All present agreed that government should use taxpayer money efficiently, but many also argued that DOGE should follow stipulated procedures when making changes to government programs rather than acting haphazardly. For some, this meant DOGE had gone too far, regardless of the good it might incidentally or ultimately do. For others, the emergency the problem of government inefficiency and unaccountability poses has reached a point that justifies DOGE’s unorthodox methods.

Universal Basic Income

Matt Zwolinski, University of San Diego professor and the author of *Arguing About Political Philosophy*, gave two talks for SCL’s Philosophy, Politics, and Economics students. The first centered on Robert Nozick. Zwolinski spoke to the students in P.P.E. 301 and engaged them with questions about Nozick’s work that piqued their interest and led many of them to stay after class to talk with him personally. He also gave a public lecture on Universal Basic Income to about two hundred students. Professor Zwolinski’s enthusiasm and reasoned approach to a complex subject resonated with the audience, and many students there came up afterward to learn more about the P.P.E. minor.

Free Societies in Crisis: Perspectives in Classical Liberal Political Economy

Scholars of politics, political philosophy, and intellectual history gathered at Littlefield Home for the two-day Free Societies in Crisis: Perspectives in Classical Liberal Political Economy conference. Participant papers covered a range of themes, including “Economic Freedom and State Sovereignty in Liberal Modernity,” “Economic Freedom and Equality in Liberal Modernity,” and “The Political Culture of Democracy in America.” Liberalism, explored through the work and commentary of political philosophers, liberal thinkers, statesmen, and political economists such as John Locke, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville, was a central theme. Following each panel, scholars engaged in lively discussion, offering questions, feedback, and critiques in a peer review-style environment. The conference concluded with a wine tasting event, during which participants discussed the “Role of Wine in America’s Constitutional Development.” The Center for the Study of Government and the Individual (University of Colorado–Colorado Springs), the Civitas Institute, and Claremont McKenna College partnered to host the event.

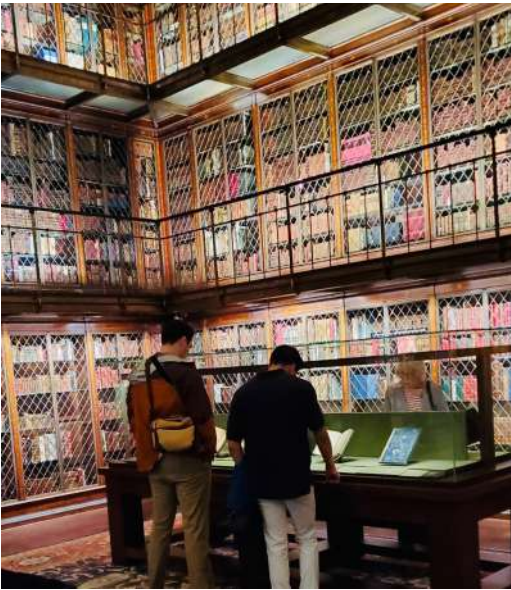
SCL Yield Day

Twice this semester, high school students admitted to the School of Civic Leadership’s inaugural cohort visited the Littlefield Home as part of “Yield Day.” SCL hosted these events to encourage admitted students who are still deliberating their college choice to consider the SCL and the Civics Honors B.A. Dean **Justin Dyer** gave opening remarks on SCL’s mission, principles, and the valuable education that students will get upon matriculating. Afterwards, **Sarah Beth Kitch**, SCL’s associate dean of undergraduate studies, hosted a panel that included SCL professors **Alexander Batson**, **Alexis Carré**, and **Patricio Fernandez**, and SCL’s new assistant director for academic advising, **Jennifer Sainz-Bauer**. Batson, Fernandez, and Carré spoke about their fields and how their respective areas of study will be a valuable tool towards the holistic academic experience that SCL offers. Sainz-Bauer spoke about the SCL ethos towards academic advising and student services.



SCL Welcome Weekend

From morning to midday on Saturday, March 29th, a multitude of newly admitted students to the School of Civic Leadership and their parents visited Littlefield Home for the Welcome Weekend hosted by UT Austin. The day started with breakfast, followed by remarks from Dean **Justin Dyer** about the advantages UT Austin and education in civics can offer students. SCL’s assistant director of academic programs **Catherine Borck** then delivered a welcoming and concise presentation explaining the nature of SCL’s distinctive curriculum and the requirements for the major in civics. The event closed with a panel featuring Justin Dyer, and SCL professors **Alex Duff**, **Scott Carrell**, and SCL postdoctoral fellow **Reid Comstock** with Catherine Borck moderating. Students and their parents asked the panelists various questions about their influences and teaching styles. Students were visibly excited and eager to begin their education with the School of Civic Leadership in the fall.



Society of Fellows trip to New York City: “Tocqueville and Modern Tocquevilleans”

From May 15-25, the Society of Fellows traveled to NYC. During their stay, the students focused on Tocqueville’s engagement with democratic culture or *mores*: religion, science, literature, civil associations, men and women, and democratic despotism. In addition to reading Tocqueville, students also studied a select group of modern “Tocquevilleans,” including Peter Lawler, Allan Bloom, Robert Nisbet, Christopher Lasch, Leon Kass, and Wilhelm Röpke. By studying these thinkers, students learned how someone who looks at culture with a Tocquevillean eye thinks about the problems of the the 20th century’s latter half. This trip brought Tocqueville’s thought alive for students in a fresh and invigorating way.



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? Email bryce.waller@utexas.edu or call 512.495.6100



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We’d love to hear from you!



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Incoming 2025-26 SCL Faculty and Fellows

Tenured & Tenure-Track Faculty

Josh Banerjee (Ph.D. London School of Economics and Political Science), assistant professor of intellectual history and economics

Alexander Batson (Ph.D. Yale University), assistant professor of intellectual history

Alexis Carré (Ph.D. École Normale Supérieure), assistant professor of political theory

Andrew Johnston (Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania), associate professor of economics

Elly Long (Ph.D. Princeton University), assistant professor of political theory

Matthew K. Reising (Baylor University), assistant professor of political theory

Lauren Spohn (D.Phil. University of Oxford), assistant professor of intellectual history

Thomas M. Ward (Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles), associate professor of philosophy

Visiting Faculty

Diana Schaub, professor of political science (emerita), Loyola University Maryland

Joshua Stuchlik, professor of philosophy, University of St. Thomas

Benjamin Kleinerman, R.W. Morrison Professor of Political Science, Baylor University

Postdoctoral Fellows

Evan Coulter, (Ph.D. Tulane University), postdoctoral fellow in philosophy

Maura Cowan, (Ph.D. Tulane University), postdoctoral fellow in philosophy

Jonathan Dahlsten, (Ph.D. University of California, Davis) postdoctoral fellow in political science

Cynthia Shihui Ma, (Ph.D. Tulane University), postdoctoral fellow in philosophy

Megan Renz Perry, (Ph.D. Yale University), postdoctoral fellow in medieval studies

Casey Spinks, (Ph.D. Baylor University), postdoctoral fellow in religion