



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Civic Leadership

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FORUM

EXPLORING IDEAS + INSTITUTIONS THAT SUSTAIN A FREE SOCIETY



**TEXAS
29**



A PUBLICATION OF THE SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP



Here Comes SCL 29!

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DEAN'S NOTE

Justin Dyer
Dean, School of Civic Leadership



“Freedom, rightly understood, means self-government: individuals governing their passions, communities governing their affairs, nations free from the despotic control of foreign enemies. Freedom is both a personal and civic calling.”



At our recent convocation for the School of Civic Leadership (see pg. 14 for the full transcript), I shared a reflection inspired by C.S. Lewis's 1944 address to students at King's College in London. Lewis spoke to young men and women who had lived their university years under the shadow of war and who were about to take on the responsibilities of leadership in a world still in turmoil. His message to those students remains as timely today as it was then. He warned them of the danger of living for the Inner Ring—that perpetual desire to be on the inside of the right group, the winning circle, the place of influence.

Lewis warned that if belonging to an Inner Ring becomes your chief ambition, you will never be satisfied. There will always be another circle further in, another recognition to chase, another compromise of integrity or character to make. “The quest of the Inner Ring,” Lewis wrote, “will break your hearts unless you break it.”

The antidote is to make the work about the work, pursuing your calling, your studies, and your craft for their own sake. If you do, you will find yourself surrounded by others who love the same things, and out of that shared love, true friendships will grow. Leadership and influence will likely follow—but for the right reasons, at the right time, in the right way.

That is the vision we hold for the School of Civic Leadership. Our hope is that our students will form real friendships and a community oriented around the pursuit of wisdom and truth. Our curriculum centers on the spiritual and intellectual roots of Western civilization; the history of America's founding and ongoing struggle to live out its ideals; America's national defense and her ongoing role in the world; the economic systems that promote prosperity; and the skills and values essential to leadership in a free society.

Faculty and students come from different cities and states, different schools, and different backgrounds. We do not expect uniformity of opinion, and we welcome honest disagreement, respectful debate, and the courage to change one's mind. As a community, we seek truth together. As the inscription on our Main Building reminds us, “the truth shall make you free.”

Freedom, rightly understood, means self-government: individuals governing their passions, communities governing their affairs, nations free from the despotic control of foreign enemies. Freedom is both a personal and civic calling.

We want our graduates to go on to successful careers, advanced study, business ventures, and networks of influence. But above all, we want those achievements to flow from a love of wisdom, truth, and freedom.

We have at a unique moment and a unique opportunity. Let us build something significant together.

New SCL Faculty Joining Us in 2025-26



Josh Banerjee is an assistant professor of intellectual history and economics in the School of Civic Leadership. He has held visiting fellowships at Duke University, in the Center for the History of Political Economy, and the Civitas Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. He was also a 2024 James Buchanan Fellow at the Mercatus Center. His research interests span a variety of issues in historical economic policy and performance, as well as the history of both economic and econometric thought. Banerjee earned his undergraduate and master's degrees and a Ph.D. in economic history from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Alexander Batson is an assistant professor of intellectual history in the School of Civic Leadership. He is an historian of early modern Europe. His research focuses on intellectual history, jurisprudence, the history of classical scholarship, and the Protestant Reformation. His monograph project, *The Secure Sea: The Greek Tradition in European Imperial Ideology*, examines how early modern thinkers used ancient Greek literature and history to craft visions of empire based around limited, secure, territorial seas. His research has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*, and *Journal of the History of International Law*, among other places.



Alexis Carré is an assistant professor of political theory in the School of Civic Leadership. His work examines the philosophical groundings of liberal democracy as the permanence of war puts them to the test. His dissertation, “War and Law: The Refounding of Liberalism Against the Conservative Revolution in Leo Strauss and Raymond Aron,” received the 2021 Raymond Aron prize for research. His broader research interests include radical critiques of liberal democracy, the political thought of Pierre Manent, and military theory. He received his Ph.D. from the École Normale Supérieure (Paris) and carried out his post-doctoral research at Princeton, Harvard, and the University of Texas at Austin.



Reid Comstock is an assistant professor of instruction and assistant director of student experience in the School of Civic Leadership. In his teaching, he seeks to bring to life the foundational texts of the philosophical tradition so that students will encounter the questions which animate those texts as live and pressing questions and grapple with the answers they offer in a thoughtful and honest way. He believes that through such engagement with the great texts of this tradition students will hone the tools of critical thinking, learn how to engage charitably with one another, and acquire greater clarity about themselves and the world they inhabit. His hope is that by growing in these ways his students will be better equipped to navigate the practical and moral problems that will arise in their own lives. Though he teaches widely across the tradition, his research focuses on ancient philosophy, in particular the thought of Plato and Aristotle. In his research, he examines how Plato and Aristotle think about the connections between virtue, happiness, and education. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame.



Mark Hoekstra is the Larry Faulkner Professor of Economics in the School of Civic Leadership. He also holds appointments as a research fellow at I.Z.A. and a research associate at NBER. Prior to arriving at UT Austin, Hoekstra was the George J. Boden Professor of Economics at Baylor University, and the Private Enterprise Research Center Rex B. Grey Professor of Economics at Texas A&M University. Hoekstra's research in empirical microeconomics addresses a wide range of questions relevant for public policy. He received a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Florida.



William Inboden is executive vice president and provost of the University of Texas at Austin, where he holds the William Powers, Jr. Chair and a joint faculty appointment with the School of Civic Leadership and the Department of History. Inboden's newest book is *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, The Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (Dutton, a Penguin Random House imprint). He is also the author of *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge University Press), co-editor of *The Last Card: Inside George W. Bush's Decision to Surge in Iraq* (Cornell University Press), co-editor of *Hand-Off: The Foreign Policy That George W. Bush Bequeathed to Barack Obama* (Brookings Institution Press), and has published numerous articles, book chapters, and commentary on American foreign policy, the presidency, and American history. Inboden received his Ph.D. and M.A. degrees in history from Yale University, and his A.B. in history with honors from Stanford University.



Andrew Johnston is an associate professor of economics in the School of Civic Leadership, a Faculty Research Fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and a senior economist on the Council of Economic Advisors in the Executive Office of the President during the 2025-26 academic year. Previously, he was associate professor of economics at UC Merced. Johnston's research focuses on how policy shapes employment and wages, how public schools can attract and retain excellent teachers, and how family life affects child development and opportunity. He received a B.S. in economics and mathematics from Brigham Young University and a Ph.D. in applied economics from the University of Pennsylvania.



John Kitch II is an assistant professor of instruction and the assistant director for academic experience in the School of Civic Leadership. He studies the institutions, ideas, and traditions that form American political life. He is also a contributing fellow at Defense Priorities. Kitch is currently working on a book manuscript that explores how American leaders today can take strategic lessons from foreign policy choices in the nation's past. His writing on American foreign policy has appeared in outlets such as The Hill, The National Interest, and RealClearWorld. Before completing a Ph.D. at Louisiana State University, Kitch earned an M.A. from the University of Oklahoma and a B.A. from Baylor University.



Benjamin A. Kleinerman is a visiting professor in the School of Civic Leadership and the R.W. Morrison Professor of Political Science at Baylor University where he teaches classes on political thought and political institutions. He also is on the Board of Directors of the Jack Miller Center. Kleinerman is the Chair of the American Political Thought section of the American Political Science Association (APSA), and he has published articles in *Perspectives on Politics* (APSA), *American Political Science Review*, *Texas Law Review*, and several edited volumes including *Nomos* and *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. He has also been invited to give talks at Yale University, the University of Notre Dame, Xavier University, Kenyon College, and the University of Cincinnati. Kleinerman's first book, *The Discretionary President: The Promise and Peril of Executive Power*, has been reviewed in *The New Republic* and *Political Science Quarterly*. He has also published on other subjects including literature and politics and American political history.



Elly Long is an assistant professor of political theory in the School of Civic Leadership, where she will begin teaching in Fall 2026. Her research interests include the history of political thought, politics and religion, and American political thought. Her work has been published in *History of Political Thought*, *American Political Thought*, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Political Science Reviewer*, and *Augustinian Studies*. Her dissertation, "Augustine and the Politics of Contingency," studies the contributions Augustine's theological vision affords to our understanding of the unchosen aspects of our political lives, particularly as they relate to contemporary debates about political realism, cosmopolitanism, meritocracy, and pluralism. She completed her Ph.D. and undergraduate studies at Princeton, and she also holds a master's degree in theology from the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies.



Ivan Marinovic is a visiting scholar in the School of Civic Leadership and a professor of accounting at Stanford Graduate School of Business. He is the co-founder and co-director of the Stanford Classical Liberalism Initiative. Marinovic is an applied game theorist who is interested in information economics and contract theory. His scholarly papers have appeared in journals including *Review of Economic Studies*, *Journal of Finance*, *Journal of Financial Economics*, and *The Journal of Accounting and Economics*. He received a B.A. in economics and an M.A. in financial economics from Universidad Catolica de Chile, a Master's in Economic Theory from the Toulouse School of Economics, and a Ph.D. in accounting and information systems from the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University.



Justin McCrary is a senior research fellow at the Civitas Institute where he focuses on antitrust, financial markets, and statistical methodologies. He also has an appointment at UT Austin's School of Law and is a visiting professor in the School of Civic Leadership. An economist by training, Justin McCrary has been teaching in law schools since 2008 when he joined the UC Berkeley faculty. Prior to Berkeley, he was on the University of Michigan faculty in the policy school and the economics department. He most recently has been on the Columbia faculty, where his teaching portfolio centers around antitrust. He is also a faculty research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. His academic work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Arnold Foundation. He has an A.B. from Princeton University and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.



Matthew K. Reising is an assistant professor in the School of Civic Leadership. His research focuses on constitutionalism in the history of political thought, from the classical and medieval world to the American colonies. His articles have won various awards and appeared in multiple academic journals, including *The Thomist*, *American Political Thought*, *Polis*, and *History of Political Thought*. He was previously a John and Daria Barry Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the James Madison Program at Princeton University, and a predoctoral teaching fellow and the assistant director of the Zavala Program for Constitutional Studies at Baylor University. He received his Ph.D. in political science at Baylor.



Diana Schaub is a visiting professor in the School of Civic Leadership, professor emerita of political science at Loyola University Maryland, and a non-resident senior scholar in the social, cultural, and constitutional studies department at the American Enterprise Institute. She was the Garwood Teaching Fellow at Princeton University in 2011-12 and visiting professor of political theory in the government department at Harvard University in 2018, 2020, and 2022. From 2004 to 2009 she was a member of the President's Council on Bioethics. She was the recipient of the Richard M. Weaver Prize for Scholarly Letters in 2001 and is the author of *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu's Persian Letters* along with numerous book chapters and scholarly articles in the fields of political philosophy and American

political thought. She is a coeditor (with Amy and Leon Kass) of *What So Proudly We Hail: The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*. She is a member of the board of directors of the Abraham Lincoln Institute, and sits on the publication committee of National Affairs. Her book on Lincoln's rhetoric and statesmanship, *His Greatest Speeches: How Lincoln Moved the Nation*, appeared in 2021 from St. Martin's Press.



Tom Schwartz is a visiting scholar in the School of Civic Leadership and a distinguished professor of history, political science, and European studies at Vanderbilt University. Previously, he was an assistant professor of history at Harvard. He is a historian of U.S. foreign relations, American politics, the history of international relations, modern European history, and biography. He has published numerous books and articles, most recently *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (Hill and Wang, 2020). His other books include *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Harvard, 1991), *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Harvard, 2003), and he co-edited *The Strained*

Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter (Cambridge University Press, 2009). Schwartz has a B.A. from Columbia, an M.A. from Oxford, and an A.M. and Ph.D. from Harvard.



Lauren Spohn is an incoming assistant professor of intellectual history in the School of Civic Leadership. She completed a D.Phil. in theology at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, where her research focused on analogy and philosophical anthropology in the thought of John Henry Newman. Spohn, a filmmaker and essayist, explores questions of human meaning, ethics and technological progress, philosophy of history, and the search for transcendence. Her research and creative work have been featured in a variety of domestic and international outlets, including *The New Atlantis*, *Catholic Herald*, and *The Tablet*. Previously, she completed a master's degree in intellectual history at Oxford and an A.B. in English literature at Harvard.



Barry Strauss is a distinguished visiting scholar in the School of Civic Leadership and the Bryce and Edith M. Bowmar Professor of Humanistic Studies Emeritus at Cornell. He is also the Corliss Page Dean Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is a classicist and a military and naval historian. He has authored nine books on ancient history, most recently *The War that Made the Roman Empire: Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavian at Actium* (Simon & Schuster, 2022), and over sixty scholarly articles and reviews. Strauss is a well-known television personality with appearances on The History Channel, The Discovery Channel, CNN, PBS, and Netflix. He is also host of the popular podcast, "ANTIQUITAS: Leaders and Legends of the Ancient World." He received a B.A. from Cornell and a Ph.D. from Yale.



Joshua Stuchlik is a visiting professor in the School of Civic Leadership and a professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was also previously a distinguished visiting fellow at the University of Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study and the Stockdale Center for Ethical Leadership at the United States Naval Academy. Stuchlik writes and teaches in the areas of normative ethics, just war theory, political philosophy, and epistemology. His book, *Intention and Wrongdoing: In Defense of Double Effect*, provides a comprehensive defense of the ethical principle of double effect, and his current work is on the moral philosophy of twentieth century British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe. In addition to his book, Stuchlik has published articles in journals including the *Journal of Ethics and*

Social Philosophy, the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, the *Journal for Value Inquiry*, and the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. He received his B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh.



Thomas M. Ward is an associate professor of philosophy in the School of Civic Leadership and the Department of Philosophy (by courtesy). His research focuses on the history of philosophy, especially in the Middle Ages. He is the author or translator of several books including, most recently, *After Stoicism: Last Words of the Last Roman Philosopher*, and a translation, with commentary, of John Duns Scotus's *Treatise on the First Principle*. He has been a N.E.H. Fellow (2022) and Harvey Fellow (2009-2011) and is a past winner of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy Founder's Award (2013) and the American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly Rising Scholar Essay Contest (2018). Before taking up his post at UT Austin, Ward was an associate professor of philosophy at Baylor University

and assistant professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University. He studied philosophy at Biola University, theology at Oxford University, and received his Ph.D. in philosophy at UCLA.

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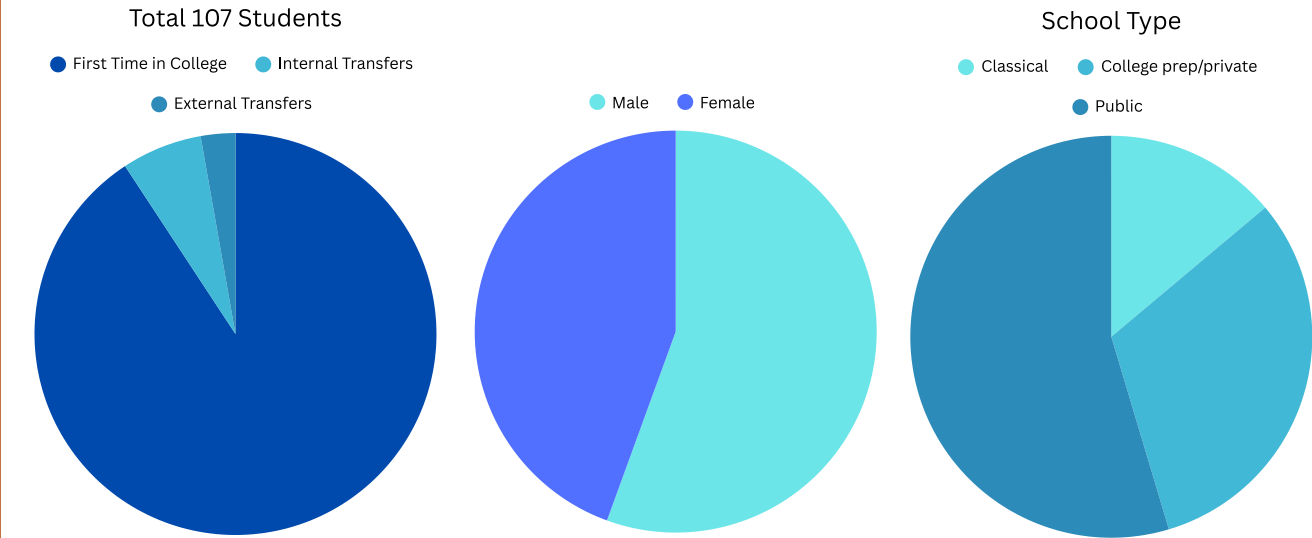
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Convocation Address
Dean Justin Dyer
August 28, 2025

The great philosopher Homer Simpson once said that “Being popular is the most important thing in the world.” We laugh, because we know it isn’t true – but the joke is that at different points in our lives we all act like it is true. I thought of that recently when rereading C.S. Lewis’ 1944 address to students at King’s College in London.

Lewis gave the talk at the end of World War II, just before the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive on the Western front. Most of the students at King’s College had spent their entire university years under air raids, rationing, and the uncertainty of wartime London. They were about to graduate to a world at war. Many dons and students had already fought; some had died.

King’s College was one of the places where Britain’s future leaders were forged – and Lewis offered a spiritual survival guide for those about to shoulder public responsibility at a time when civilization hung in the balance. Lewis chose, on that occasion, to speak to the students about the danger of craving to be in the know, to belong to the right group, and to have insider status.

One of the dominant elements of human experience for most of us, for at least parts of our lives, is – as Lewis said – “the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside.” In childhood, it may be the clique, the team, or the social media followers. In college, it may be the sorority or fraternity, the prestigious fellowship, the elite law school, the secret society, the political tribe, or just being one who received an invitation to the most exclusive party. In adult life, after college, there are a thousand more Rings, and an endless desire to be in the know, among these people, in a position of influence, invited to those events, running in this circle, living in that neighborhood, among the few who have achieved this or who have done that.

Elite status, social groups, inner circles, influence, secret knowledge – these things are not bad or evil, but they are dangerous, especially for bright, young, motivated, ambitious honors students at the best university in the best state in the best country in the world. If being “in” is your dominant motivation, you’ll never be satisfied. There will always be another Inner Ring still further in, another group whose recognition you crave, another inner circle of influence you want to enter, angling and jockeying for power and position and prestige, with a continual pull to sacrifice the things that are truly good in life – including your own character and integrity – for this elusive and unsatisfying thing. When you do get into some Inner Ring, what you will find is ambition and self-interest and striving but not virtue, kindness, or loyalty.

The Inner Ring, sought on those terms, is not where you will find meaning or where you will find your true friends. And so Lewis told these students about the embark on a world torn apart: “Unless you take measures to prevent it, this desire is going to be one of the chief motives of your life . . . [and] whether by pining and moping outside Rings that you can never enter, or by passing triumphantly further and further in—one way or the other you will be that kind of man.” That kind of man, having lived that kind of life, will in the end be what Lewis called a scoundrel – unscrupulous, treacherous, ruthless, and without real friends.

“The quest of the Inner Ring,” Lewis said, “will break your hearts unless you break it.” The way to break it is through honest work and honest friendship. And if you do break the quest for the Inner Ring, a surprising thing will happen. You’ll make the work about the work, pursuing excellence in your craft. You’ll find yourself among others doing the same, and together you’ll take responsibility for the success of your organization or your field. If you pursue hobbies and avocations that genuinely interest you, that you love for their own sake, you will find yourself surrounded by others who share those interests and passions – and real friendships will blossom – and probably some networking opportunities, too, but that won’t be the point. If you choose what to do because you love it, because you have a gift and an interest and a sense of purpose, and not because you want to be “in” with the right people, you will likely end up in a position of leadership and influence – there is a certain paradox here – but it will have been for the right reasons, pursued in the right way.

Why bring all of this up at the convocation for the first class of the School of Civic Leadership? Because our hope is that you will develop true friendships oriented around a shared love of wisdom, knowledge, and study. Your study will be anchored by the



vision for the university summarized by the Latin motto in our seal, proposed by William Battle in 1903: *Disciplina Praesidium Civitatis*. It is a short Latin rendering of a famous quote from Mirabeau Lamar, the second president of the Republic of Texas, from his address to the Texas Congress in 1836: “Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy.” In our Latin motto, the translation is literally “study is the guardian of the city.”

We will not all agree with each other. Your professors have different interpretations and different outlooks. They each ask different questions and give different answers. We expect the same from you. You come from different schools, different states, different backgrounds. Have the courage to say what you think, be respectful of others, consider that they may be right and you may be wrong. Be willing to change your mind. Be grateful if someone helps you look at the world in a different way. Cherish these four years. It is a unique time of life, and you will never have the opportunity to sit, think, read, and debate in this kind of community, in quite the same way, again.

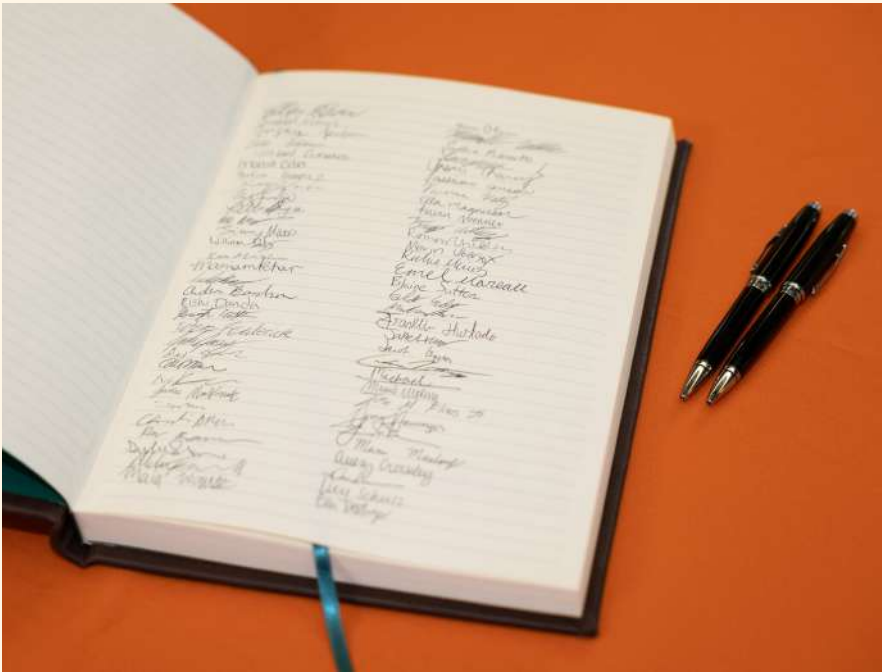
policies and business culture that promote prosperity and human flourishing; and the skills, principles, values, and aptitudes necessary for leadership in a free society.

We will not all agree with each other. Your professors have different interpretations and different outlooks. They each ask different questions and give different answers. We expect the same from you. You come from different schools, different states, different backgrounds. Have the courage to say what you think, be respectful of others, consider that they may be right and you may be wrong. Be willing to change your mind. Be grateful if someone helps you look at the world in a different way. Cherish these four years. It is a unique time of life, and you will never have the opportunity to sit, think, read, and debate in this kind of community, in quite the same way, again.

The aim of your study in the School of Civic Leadership is truth and freedom. Ninety years ago, in 1935, a faculty committee led by William Battle recommended an inscription for the Main Building on campus: “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” When the faculty proposed this to the Regents, Battle explained: “Truth and freedom are so essentially the foundation of education, character, and progress that the injunction to seek truth as a means to freedom is as splendid a call to youth as we can make.”

The Oxford English Dictionary offers several definitions of freedom. One of them is “the state or fact of not being subject to a despotic or foreign power.” Freedom, in this sense, is self-government. It is the self-government of the individual who is not subject to the

The focus of your study in the School of Civic Leadership will be on the spiritual and intellectual roots of Western civilization, especially the encounter between biblical religion and classical philosophy, the twin-chambered heart of Western civilization for millennia; history of America’s establishment of free government under a written constitution, and America’s struggle to realize the aspirations its founding; defense of America’s interests abroad and her place among the nations of the world; economic



despotic powers of his own passions or appetites and is not subject to the arbitrary, irrational, willful control of another. And it is the self-government of a community of free individuals taking responsibility for their own affairs, free of the despotic powers of foreign adversaries.

This sense of freedom as self-government brings together each of the themes, and areas of study, of our school. Mirabeau Lamar’s full quote, which we often forget, is that “Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy, and while guided and controlled by virtue, the noblest attribute of man. It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge, and the only security which freemen desire.” When Battle proposed this for the UT Seal, he said that it was “at once a justification of the university’s existence and an ideal of its future.” The School of Civic Leadership advances that tradition at UT Austin.

After your study, we want you to go out into the world and get good jobs, get into good graduate schools, build business, take responsibility for your families and communities, and form networks of influence that have a positive impact on the world. But we hope those things flow first from a shared love of what we are doing and what we are studying together.

We have a unique moment.

We have a unique opportunity.

Let’s build something significant, as friends together, in the pursuit of truth and freedom.

Ellie Dillinger



Administered by the Texas Exes, the Forty Acres Scholars Program in the premier full-ride, merit-based scholarship for The University of Texas at Austin.

Where are you from?

I'm from Boerne, Texas, which is about thirty minutes northwest of San Antonio.

Could you tell me a little bit about your journey to UT?

I feel like my journey started the first time I toured UT, which was probably my sophomore year in high school. I was walking around campus and felt very at home and comfortable. Even then I knew I would be interested in applying.

I was debating between UT and Baylor when I began applying to college. I'm thankful I didn't go to Baylor because SCL was the right place for me.

Once Baylor was out of the picture, I told myself that I was going to go to UT, no matter what happens with scholarships, because it felt so right. I had already met my roommate and there were many signs pointing me to UT.

UT also had the new School of Civic Leadership. I was so excited once I read about it, because I had never seen that major. Every other major I had thought to apply for, I worried would bore me after a couple of years. When I saw SCL's major, I knew I had to go to UT because it is the only place with a major that really interests me.

What attracted you to the School of Civic Leadership?

My school counselor received an email about the new civics major. She knew I was interested in going to UT and eventually law, so she told me about it. I had forgotten about it until I was applying to UT and looking through the list of majors and not finding anything that really appealed to me. Then I remembered the civics major and I checked it out. A little bit of backstory: my high school does a senior thesis every year. I chose the topic, “dangers of polarized thinking and how we need to embrace more nuance and civil discourse.” As I was reading SCL's website, I realized that the courses related directly to my thesis topic. That confirmed that Civics Honors was the major for me.

How has your experience with the School of Civic Leadership been so far—for example, during freshman orientation or at other SCL events you've attended?

When I attended an open house in the fall, I watched the mock seminar and sat in on a few classes, including Professor Comstock's. I enjoyed the classes so much. It reminded me of my classical Christian high school where we have a lot of discussion-based classes. That's what I've grown up in, and it's the best learning environment for me. When I got to go to the open house, I saw similar discussion-based courses, where everyone was thinking out loud with each other. We were talking about Aristotle and ancient philosophy and it fascinated me. The open house really increased my interest in the School of Civic Leadership.

I was very confused about how to register and everything on the first day of orientation. Our advisory meetings were super helpful. I left fully reassured, knowing exactly what I was supposed to do. So even though SCL is a new program, I feel like they quickly were able to put us on track and tell us what we needed to do.

What are the questions that move you?

I remember reading on the website some of the main questions that SCL asks: What is truth? What is goodness? What is beauty? Over the past school year, through my thesis, I've been

fascinated with digging into the question about what truth is. I love this concept of seeking and chasing the truth and trying to find it, even though our biases make it hard for us to fully see it. I really love how discussion with people from different backgrounds and viewpoints can bring us closer to the truth by helping us examine our own biases and see the world in new ways.

What classes within the School of Civic Leadership are you most excited about taking, and why?

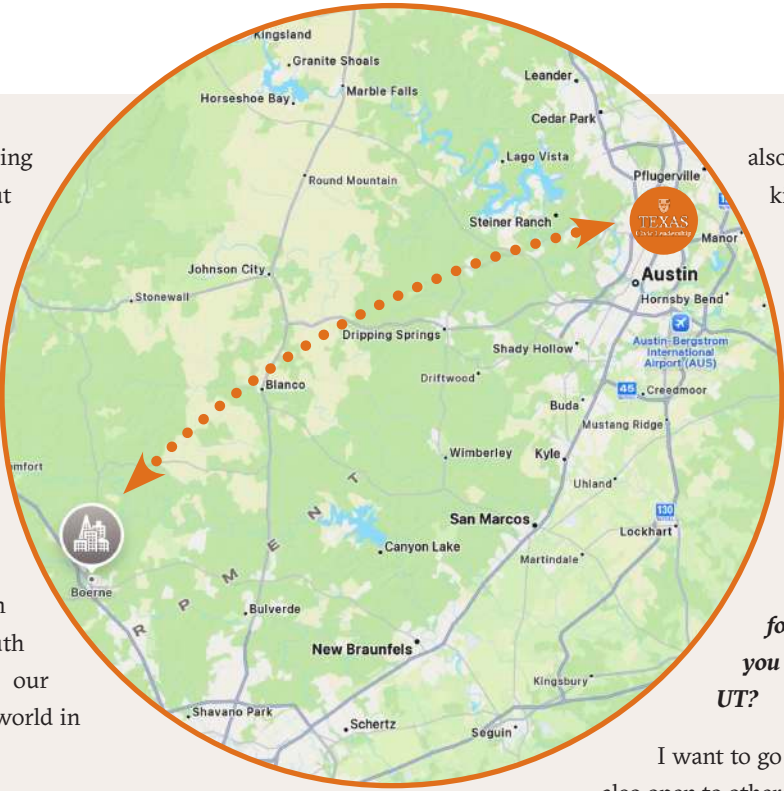
I am really excited to take “Truth and Persuasion.” Seeking truth is fascinating to me, and I know we will deep dive into ancient philosophy. Professor Comstock is teaching it, and I remember

I remember reading on the website some of the main questions that SCL asks: What is truth? What is goodness? What is beauty? Over the past school year, through my thesis, I've been fascinated with digging into the question about what truth is. I love this concept of seeking and chasing the truth and trying to find it, even though our biases make it hard for us to fully see it.

enjoying his class at the open house. It is also going to be very heavily discussion based. Those are my favorite kinds of classes, because they help me learn and grow so much as a person.

Outside of academics, what organizations, clubs, or initiatives are you looking forward to getting involved in at UT?

I have a lot that I'm interested in, but I know I can't do it all. I'm a Christian, so I really want to get involved with a local church and potentially Young Life or Revive on campus. I've heard amazing things about both. I also played tennis throughout high school, so I'm thinking about joining club tennis. I feel like it would be a good way to keep me accountable to staying active. I've



also wanted to design for some kind of publication. I'm not sure if I'll have time for that at first, but graphic design is my favorite hobby and my creative outlet. I did it all throughout high school for my school magazine. Those are the three main things that I'm interested in currently.

When you picture yourself four years from now, what do you hope to have accomplished at UT?

I want to go to UT Law if possible, but I'm also open to other paths. I want to be able to look back and see all the relationships I've made with people and all the people I've connected with and see how they've affected my life and how I've affected theirs. And I want to know that I didn't waste my time in college, but that I fully lived presently. I also want to know that I didn't just take from the

school but instead gave back and made it better.

What career are you planning on pursuing after college?

As of now, I want to go to law school and become a lawyer, but I would really like to do some kind of nonprofit law. The author Bob Goff is one of my inspirations for going into law. He went to Uganda with his law degree, and he helped prosecute witch doctors in the area. He helped save a lot of children who were being trafficked. Their system was very broken. I really want to do some kind of mission-based work like that with my law degree, so long as finances allow.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Jim Truchard



Dr. Jim Truchard, co-founder and former C.E.O. of National Instruments—an Austin-based test and measurement company founded in 1976—sat down with SCL chief development officer Bryce Waller to discuss his interest in the school and his recent gift that established the Jim

and Marcia Truchard Chair and the Patrick C. Oxford Professorship.

What first sparked your interest in engineering and technology?

I grew up on a farm outside Columbus, Texas, without electricity. When I was about ten, my brothers and I built a crystal radio so I could listen to broadcasts. That hands-on experience—and the problem-solving it required—was my first exposure to technology. I went on to study physics at the University of Texas, inspired in part by the space race. Over time, I gravitated toward electronics while working in acoustics at UT's Applied Research Lab, ultimately earning a Ph.D. in electrical engineering.

What led you to co-found National Instruments?

I wanted to stay in Austin, and I didn't see a job I wanted. So, I created a job. The area of software-based instrumentation did not exist and in the area where we were doing research; there was no off-the-shelf instrumentation for the acoustic and sonar work we were doing for the Navy. We built custom systems ourselves, and I saw the opportunity to create a business around test and measurement technology. Competing with the likes of Hewlett-Packard, we bootstrapped the company, managed cash flow carefully, and grew from three people to more than 7,000 employees over forty years. Along the way, I developed leadership principles focused on creating a win-win environment for customers, employees, partners, and shareholders.

What were the biggest challenges you faced starting out?

We had no private-sector business experience—my background was all academic. We learned business concepts through books, mentors, and forums, and then applied them in practice. Self-financing was critical. I've often advised entrepreneurs to do the same, though it's harder in today's venture capital-driven environment.

You recently made a generous gift to the UT School of Civic Leadership. What inspired that?

I believe we urgently need civic leadership today. Bureaucracies, left unchecked, tend to serve themselves. History shows that even highly educated, intelligent people can rationalize unethical actions. The Nazi regime, for example, was underpinned by intellectual movements like eugenics and geopolitics, disciplines supported by academic institutions worldwide, decades before Hitler's rise. These examples remind us that leadership must be anchored in an ethical framework that includes humanity at its core. The School of Civic Leadership can provide those guideposts to keep future leaders from going off course.

What ethical principles do you believe are most important for leaders today?

Leaders need a shared ethical framework—not just personal moral preferences. Societies must be anchored in ethical frameworks that uphold human dignity. Without that, even well-intentioned systems can justify harmful actions.

What do you hope students at the School of Civic Leadership will take away from their time here?

I hope they gain a deep understanding of ethics and decision-making, especially within bureaucracies. Smart people are adept at rationalizing, so leaders must learn to recognize when clever arguments stray from ethical principles. By studying historical examples—both successes and failures—they can build the moral resilience to stand firm, even under pressure. Ultimately, I want them to leave prepared to be principled leaders and great citizens.

TEXAS
29



This summer, the School of Civic Leadership welcomed its inaugural class as they began their academic journey on the Forty Acres. The cohort participated in SCL orientation sessions designed to help them acclimate to university life, prepare for their studies, and register for classes.

In total, 101 students took part in orientation and registration, which included seven freshman in-person sessions, one freshman online session, and one transfer session. Most students attended the in-person freshman orientation, which was a three-day, two-night experience on UT's campus.

The first day featured a college meeting at the Littlefield Home, where assistant director **Jennifer Sainz-Bauer** and senior academic program coordinator **Meg Campbell** introduced students to Austin, shared campus resources, and outlined academic expectations. Students also connected with their peers through interactive icebreakers, where they bonded over shared interests and built connections within the community they'll share for the next four years.

On the second day, students met individually with advisors Jennifer and Meg to discuss their preferred fall classes and how these would fit into their schedules. These conversations also offered guidance on what to expect at UT as students pursue their academic goals. Following these appointments, students connected with **Madison Gomez** and **Raina Tai**, SCL's new student associates, for peer advising on course registration and insights on university life.

Orientation concluded on the third day with students registering for classes and taking their first steps toward a successful semester as part of the SCL community.

FREEDOM AND VIRTUE SEMINARS



The School of Civic Leadership hosted four Freedom and Virtue Seminars at Littlefield Home over the summer, bringing together a total of seventy-four high school students to read and discuss classic texts in political thought, philosophy, theology, and economics. The students joined professors and postdoctoral fellows for seminar-style discussions and experienced the atmosphere and rigor of an SCL classroom. An interdisciplinary team of professors and postdoctoral scholars facilitated each seminar.



The seminars' facilitators included Professor **Alexander Duff**, who guided an analysis of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, and noted the students' eagerness to join the discussion and that "their initiative was contagious." Professor **Reid Comstock** led an in-depth analysis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which prompted students to think critically and see reading as a dialogue with the past. His session sparked thoughtful, college-level questions and deeper engagement with the text. Professor **Thomas Ward** led a discussion on C.S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* and Professor **Catherine Borck** led one on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Professor **Carola Binder's** seminar on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* engendered a discussion on effective altruism. Postdoctoral Fellow Casey Spinks led a close reading of the *Declaration of Independence* that guided students to approach the familiar text with a new, college-level analytical perspective. Postdoctoral Fellow **Megan Perry** moderated a conversation on St. Augustine's *The City of God*, and Professor **Benjamin Kleinerman** examined Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address. Professor **John Kitch** worked through a careful reading of President Eisenhower's 1961 Farewell Address. The seminars fostered active engagement, critical thinking, and a deeper appreciation for the ideas that shape civic life.



SUMMER INFORMATION SESSIONS

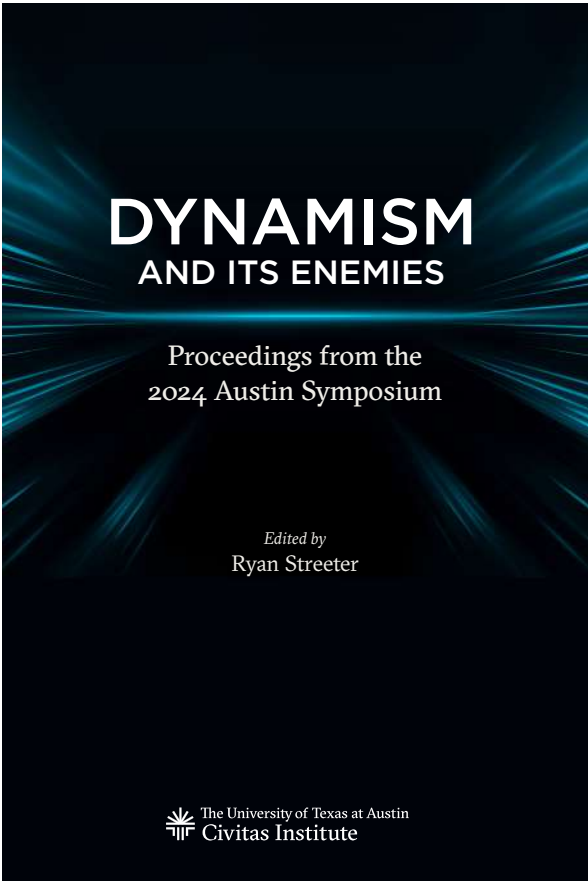


The information sessions were a significant milestone in SCL's recruitment and community-building efforts. They effectively introduced students to a place where leadership meets purpose.



The School of Civic Leadership hosted a series of nine in-person and virtual information sessions directed at connecting with prospective high school students. The sessions welcomed a total of 223 attendees from all over the United States to learn about SCL's classes and culture. The in-person info sessions invited parents, students, friends, and siblings to come to Littlefield Home and engage with our faculty and staff before the presentation. **Aubrey Brawner**, SCL's new assistant director of recruiting and civic education, and student affairs program coordinator **Andrea Wisniewski** welcomed guests. Associate dean **Sarah Beth Kitch** and **Reid Comstock**, assistant director of student experience, began the presentation by introducing the new school and its founding principles. Kitch and Comstock provided a narrative of what it means to lead in civic life and emphasized the school's dedication to fostering informed, ethical, and active citizens. The information sessions gave participants an inside look at the curriculum, faculty mentorship, and future degree programs. The sessions encouraged students to consider joining SCL and taking part in its mission, interdisciplinary curriculum, and commitment to public service. After the presentation, the students asked questions and engaged in dialogue with **Jennifer Sainz-Bauer**, assistant director for academic advising, and **Meg Campbell**, the senior academic program coordinator.





**DYNAMISM
AND ITS ENEMIES**

Proceedings from the
2024 Austin Symposium

Edited by
Ryan Streeter

The University of Texas at Austin
Civitas Institute

Dynamism and Its Enemies
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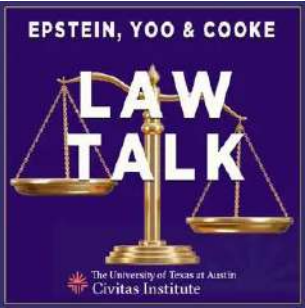
If we want more people in more places building and creating more good things, what should we do?

This volume, edited by Ryan Streeter, presents perspectives on key issues of economic and societal dynamism by **Ryan Decker** (Federal Reserve), **Ed Glaeser** (Harvard University), **Deirdre McCloskey** (University of Illinois at Chicago), **Edmund Phelps** (Columbia University), **Dan Shoag** (Case Western Reserve University), and **Cass Sunstein** (Harvard Law School).

The chapters in *Dynamism and Its Enemies* began as presentations at the 2024 Austin Symposium, a one-day seminar on dynamism in America hosted by the Civitas Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. This first annual event, held in one of America’s most dynamic cities, was designed to bring various leading scholars of dynamism’s various aspects into one place in order to think together about how to foster a more dynamic future.

Request a copy at media@utexas.edu

Podcasts Debut from the Civitas Institute

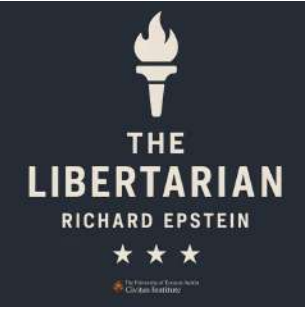


EPSTEIN, YOO & COOKE

**LAW
TALK**

The University of Texas at Austin
Civitas Institute

Law Talk, the popular podcast starring **Richard Epstein** and **John Yoo**, has a new home at the Civitas Institute. Join preeminent law professors Epstein and Yoo for a lively (and often funny) look at legislation and constitutional jurisprudence. *Law Talk* is hosted by **Charles C.W. Cooke**.



**THE
LIBERTARIAN**

RICHARD EPSTEIN

★ ★ ★

The University of Texas at Austin
Civitas Institute

Richard Epstein’s hit podcast *The Libertarian* returns, now at the Civitas Institute. Twice per month, Richard will offer his unique perspective on national developments in public policy and the law. *The Libertarian* is hosted by **Charles C.W. Cooke**.

Subscribe to both podcasts on Apple Podcasts or Spotify to be notified when new episodes are posted.

This summer, the School of Civic Leadership partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and seven chambers of commerce across Texas to host the nonpartisan Texas State Civics Bee competition in UT Austin’s Crum Auditorium. The National Civics Bee® encourages young Americans in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade to showcase their civic knowledge and engage with their communities. After winning in their local chapters, twenty-one middle school students from across the state came to compete at the State Civics Bee in Austin. The winners were:

First place/ \$1000: **Rishi Tirumalasetty** (Katy Chamber)

Second place/ \$500: **Taashvi Wadhwa** (Pearland Chamber)

Third place/ \$250: **Alexander Wang** (Bryan/College Station Chamber)

Rishi will travel to Washington, D.C. in November to represent Texas at the National Civics Bee. A big shout out to judges Judge Don Willet, Tobi Young and Derek Bietzel. We congratulate the twenty-one students who worked so hard to get here, as well as the families and teachers who supported them along the way. We will be rooting for Rishi in November!



Liberty in the Balance: Classical Liberal Perspectives on the Trump Era

Panmure House, Edinburgh

The Civitas Institute collaborated with Adam Smith's Panmure House in Edinburgh, Scotland to host a panel on the meaning of classical liberalism in a world after the Trump presidency. **Samuel Gregg**, director of research at the Acton Institute, discussed the historic relationship between nationalism and liberalism in continental Europe in the 19th century. His discussion established the context for the apparent conflict between nationalism and liberalism that we see in today's politics. **Adam Dixon**, professor at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, contrasted the differences between the ethnonationalism characteristic of certain elements of European politics and the civic nationalism characteristic of American political culture. **Veronique De Rugy**, senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center, treated Trump's platform and his populist status. Other topics discussed include the relationship between commerce and virtue, whether society overall should be goal directed, and the range of opportunities in the AI age. The discussion demonstrated that many of today's political controversies originated in 17th and 18th century debates.

The London Symposium on Dynamism

King's College, London

Scholars, policymakers, and researchers convened at the King's College in London, England, to discuss the sources of and obstacles to achieving dynamic societies. Works and Progress's **Samuel Bowman** discussed the disconnect between local and national governments in carrying out building projects. **Ryan Decker** of the Federal Reserve discussed causes of the rise in the opening of businesses during the COVID-19 lockdowns. **Munira Mirza** treated the various distinctive qualities that make London a dynamic city for culture and the arts. **Sam Dumitriu** of Britain Remade treated the generally counterproductive attitude of protection with respect to workers' readjusting to disruptive economic developments. **Marie Newhouse** of the University of Surrey and **Mark Pennington** of King's College, London, treated the philosophical and metaphysical origins of "stasis" or a lack of dynamism in society. Civitas's own **Ryan Streeter** discussed three sources that prevent dynamic growth in societies, including the politics of security, the politics of grievance, and managerialism. Various policy analysts also spoke on proposals for promoting dynamism in society. The symposium's speeches effectively captured the reasons for our inability to build or innovate in many domains of society and how we might ameliorate this.

Summer Teachers Symposium

The School of Civic Leadership and the Jack Miller Center hosted area middle and high school teachers for a summer institute on the American civic tradition. This professional development seminar led by assistant professor **Matthew Reising**, visiting professor **Benjamin Kleiernerman**, and Baylor University's **Shane Leary** introduced teachers to primary source texts and speeches from sources including the American Founders, the Federalist, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. Teachers participated in lively discussions, enjoyed a social lunch hour in the Littlefield Dining room, and considered sample teaching materials from Jack Miller teaching fellow Danton Kostandarithes. The School of Civic Leadership recently hired **Aubrey Brawner** as our coordinator of K-12 educational outreach. Plans for future events include one-hour online teacher professional development opportunities and half-day programming.



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.

<https://www.scl.utexas.edu/get-involved>



Chief Development Officer
Bryce Waller
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We'd love to hear from you!



SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP
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AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712

CIVICLEADERSHIP.UTEXAS.EDU

Upcoming Events

- 9/18 Constitution Day Fireside Chat with John Yoo
- 9/24 Unlocking Housing Supply: Market-Driven Solutions for Growing Communities
- 9/25 Truth Matters: A Book Talk with Robert George and Cornel West
- 10/21 California and Texas Policy Solutions
- 11/12 Energy in Developing Nations, Prosperity not Poverty
- 12/1 Foucault and Liberal Political Economy: A Book Talk with Mark Pennington



A New Publication from the Civitas Institute

Perspective is a free monthly print digest published by the Civitas Institute at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Civic Leadership. Each issue contains a single featured speech or essay, often adapted from a lecture delivered at a Civitas Institute event, related to the Institute's core themes: constitutionalism, economic dynamism, politics, and the pursuit of happiness.

To join the Perspective mailing list, please send your full name and mailing address by email to civitas@utexas.edu.