

## Talking Points

### Rogers

1. **The weakening of the informal civic education process (ICE) makes importance and strengthening of the formalized civic education process (FCE) all the more important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

In the United States (as in most countries today) the institutionalized civic education found in primary, secondary and higher education curriculums are the epitome of the *formalized civic education* (FCE) process. In America, the foundation of this FCE process is laid by federal, state or local (school board) legislation, statutes and mandates. The *informal civic education* (ICE) process typically involves institutions of civil society that can provide civic education but only do so as a by-product of their primary activities and goals. To give practical substance to ICE, it is institutions like families, groups (political, social or economic), the media, etc., that play just as important a role in the civic political socialization of citizens. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, numerous works by scholars all point to the weakening of the ICE process. For example, scholars have noted how ICE has been weakened by increased usage of television and (as a distant second) women joining the workforce (Putnam Dec. 1995); the language of authority in media and print (Ostrom 1997); a decline in public trust (from events like Vietnam and Watergate) and confidence (from events like the controversial 2000 election) of government, as well as lack of parental socialization of children into politics (Stroupe Jr. and Sabato 2004). Theda Skocpol even argues interest groups are no longer the civic education arenas they once were, as they increasingly minimize member roles preferring “checkbook membership” (2003). On top of this, the latter twentieth century saw the rise of independents and the weakening at least in the electorate of political parties as an ICE force (Wattenberg 1996). Combined, these elements point to the importance of a viable and rigorous FCE!

2. **Numerous national studies all persistently find poor civic literacy rates among Americans.**

National surveys of citizens and national studies at the collegiate and secondary levels of education by groups (like the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) or The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)) or scholars (like Delli Carpini & Keeter, and Niemi & Junn), as well as state level studies in California and Oregon all show the weak civic literacy of Americans.

3. **A 2007 survey of state mandates of secondary education by Jennifer Dounay for the Education Commission of the States (ECS) reveals that while the general subject area of social studies still receives equitable mandated coverage by most states when compared to other subjects (like English, Math, and Science), within the category of**

**Social Studies, government or civics (particularly state government) receives minimal mandated coverage.**

- States average mandating almost 3 Carnegie units (CU) coverage of social studies and Arkansas mandates 3 units. More importantly, Dounay reports a number of states either have raised (6) or will be raising (2) their social studies requirements while she found *none* are lowering it (2007). Unless this is the latter half of a cyclical pattern over time, it seems social studies is actually seeing a growth in mandated coverage as 16% of states have increased or are increasing its CU coverage.
- If the ideal is 1 CU of coverage with American national government getting .5 CU and state government getting .5 CU, then the norm for most states fails to meet it. In fact, most state-mandates do not exceed .5 CUs of national government. Twenty-two (soon to be 24) states including Arkansas require one semester of civics/American government. Four states (Idaho, Maryland, Nevada, and West Virginia) exceed this requiring a full year. However, that still leaves 14 states that require less than .5 of a CU and 10 others with no state-mandate for civics. Even with two states bolstering their current civics requirements, more than half the states fail to require at least .5 CU of civics/American government.
- Worse, States that mandate coverage of their own government are rare, as only one state (Washington) mandates any CU (less than .5) coverage. Five (soon to be six) other states require some coverage of their own government but fail to designate a CU amount and an seventh state makes it an elective. So only eight states have any mandates some coverage of their state government, while 84% of states have failed to mandate any coverage of it in secondary education.
- Overall, only 16% of states mandate coverage of both American and state government and only 10% approach the mark of 1 CU of state-mandated civics at the high school level. In particular, Arkansas lacks adequate mandated coverage of state and local government at the high school level.

**4. Kedrowski's survey of collegiate coverage of civics/government shows most public institutions of higher education have no state-mandated coverage of civics or government.**

- Again, if the ideal is 1 CU of coverage with American national government getting .5 CU and state government getting .5 CU, then states fail to meet it. Most states at best require some coverage of civics but fail to specify any CU. Thus, often a US history or other social studies course will meet the mandates of most states.
- Given that America is a federal system of government, states are more likely to require college students in public institutions to study their own state governments

(2/50) than the U.S. government (1/50) and almost as likely to require they study their state constitutions (4/50) as the U.S. Constitution (5/50).

- Arkansas really is somewhere in the middle here as it requires either US history or American government (but no state and local government) as part of its general education requirements.

### Gooch and Rogers

**1. Many scholarly studies promote the conventional view that specific courses in American Government or civics does not have a noticeable impact on a citizen's level of civic literacy although increased education clearly does. Contrary to this view, research conducted at Arkansas Tech University (ATU) shows a sizeable increase in civic knowledge, at least in the short term, from one course of American Government.**

- Recent data collected on 948 ATU students in American Government from Fall 2008 to Spring 2011 revealed that 86.5% of the students failed to score at least a 60%, or passing grade for naturalization, on a sample of 25 questions taken from possible US naturalization questions. That is, over 8 out of 10 students who took the citizenship exam would have failed their naturalization test and thus failed to meet the requirements for naturalized citizenship.
- When a pre- and post-test survey (N of 303) of the same cognitive assessment was introduced in the American Government classes of ATU in the Fall 2010 semester, 72% of the students exhibited improvement. More importantly, as a result of taking the course in American Government at ATU in the fall of 2010, students on average improved their civic literacy score on the naturalization test by 8.93 points and 42.5% improved their civic literacy scores by over 10%. Finally, while almost 80% of the students failed the pretest, that percentage declines to about 52% in the posttest, a 30% improvement in the pass-rate.

### Warner and Sebold

**1. There is a lack of a standardized approach to civics education in Arkansas colleges and universities.**

In a phone and e-mail survey sent out to all colleges and universities in Arkansas, there was a response by 17 out of 44 coordinators, eight of which were from four-year public universities, two from four-year private universities and seven from public two-year colleges. According to the research

- *several colleges or universities (two of the four-year private universities and one of the two-year colleges) do not offer an American National Government or related class.*
- The participants in this study revealed that 29 percent of the colleges and universities employ full-time instructors and 35 percent employ mostly full-time

instructors to teach American national government. In particular, two-year colleges are least likely to employ full-time instructors, often having half or fewer instructors employed full-time.

- Overall, most of the schools attempted to evaluate their students in some way (pre-test or post-test), and many were open to conducting this assessment online. Many participants mentioned they would be interested in producing an assessment that could be used to compare campuses.

#### Ash and Stewart

**1. Arkansans strongly support the idea that high school students be required to pass a citizenship exam in order to graduate.**

- A 2006 survey of 403 Arkansans found that 75% of participants supported or strongly supported the requirement of passage of a citizenship exam by high school students for graduation while only 20% opposed or strongly opposed such a measure.

#### Sandra Stotsky

**Recommendations for the Arkansas Board of Education and Department of Education**

**1. Allow for and encourage *two consecutive years of U.S. history in high school.*** The possibility of two consecutive years of U.S. history, whether in grades 9-10 or 10-11, was built into the 2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, and many U.S. history teachers in Massachusetts told department of education staff that this was the best gift they could ever have been given, whether or not they liked the new standards. A two-year U.S. history course at the high school level would enable history teachers to spend sufficient time on the Constitutional Period. They would have a clear incentive to do so if the state also decided to require a high school civics or U.S. history test for graduation that emphasized the Constitutional Period.

**2. Require the currently required U.S. government course to be given in the fall semester of grade 12 and to address Western political philosophy and the Founding in-depth.** No student should graduate from an American high school without an upper high school level understanding of such basic political principles as limited government, consent of the people, balance of powers, checks and balances, and an independent judiciary.

**3. Create a teacher preparation program and a licensure test for teachers of U.S. government and political philosophy.** The licensure program and the corresponding teacher test should reflect an undergraduate major or graduate coursework in U.S. government and political philosophy. Prospective teachers can easily take courses equivalent to a minor in U.S. history so that they can be licensed in both subjects and be more employable in small high schools.

**4. Eliminate the social studies license for high school history teachers.** Teachers licensed to teach history at the high school level should be history or political science/philosophy majors.

**5. Require accreditation of teacher preparation programs in U.S. history or U.S. government in state's institutions of higher education by professional associations dedicated to the discipline of history or political science, not the National Council for the Social Studies.** If accreditation or program approval is carried out by NCATE for the Arkansas Department of Education and Board of Education, the Board of Education can ask discipline-based organizations to provide peer reviewers for these programs.

**6. Require demanding licensure tests in U.S. and world history and in U.S. government that stress the history of Western political thought and the Enlightenment.** A good high school student could easily pass most existing teacher tests in history or social studies. At present, the major companies that construct teacher tests use professional peers—teachers and faculty in higher education (including schools of education)—for reviewing test items and determining cut scores. However, test items and passing scores for teacher tests are more likely to reflect fear that demanding tests will produce high failure rates (with political and economic consequences for the state's teacher preparation programs) than to reflect appropriate academic standards.

**7. Require all U.S. government and history teachers to participate once every five years in a five-day We the People summer institute.** These institutes are offered in almost every state every year by the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, California. They are among the most academically rigorous workshops available for K-12 teachers and should be approved for

professional development credits as part of the required credits teachers must accumulate for license renewal.

**Recommendations for Political Science and Political Philosophy Departments in Arkansas**

**8. Review course offerings to make sure that all prospective teachers of U.S. history and U.S. government have had course content that addresses the National Standards for Civics and Government, originally published in 1994 by the Center for Civic Education (CCE 1994).** Unlike the reception given to the National U.S. and World History Standards when they were released in the early 1990s, individuals and groups along the entire political spectrum enthusiastically commented on these standards when they came out.