

REACH ACT: FAQ

What does the REACH Act do?

The REACH (Reclaiming College Education on America's Constitutional Heritage) Act ensures that all undergraduate students at public colleges and universities complete a three-credit course in American government that includes close reading of the nation's foundational documents. These include the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, at least five Federalist Papers, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. The course must include a cumulative final exam comprising at least 20% of the final grade.

Why is the REACH Act needed?

Civic knowledge among college graduates is in serious decline. Surveys consistently show that students graduate with an insufficient understanding of the Constitution, the structure of government, and the principles of American democracy. While many colleges support civic engagement in theory, few require rigorous coursework in this area. The REACH Act addresses this deficiency by placing primary source documents at the center of a credit-bearing requirement, helping restore civic literacy and preparing students for informed participation in self-government.

Will this affect all college and university students?

No. At community colleges, the REACH Act only applies to students seeking an associate degree (two-year/60 credit hours) at a community college. It does not affect students seeking certificates or who participate in other non-degree programs.

At universities, the REACH Act only applies to students seeking a baccalaureate degree. Further, the REACH Act allows colleges and universities to exempt students from taking American government again in college if they have already demonstrated a college-level proficiency in American government by completing a college-level course in high school, such as AP, IB, or dual enrollment.

Will adopting the REACH Act add extra time to graduation?

No. The legislation explicitly states that the required course must be incorporated into existing degree requirements without increasing the total number of credit hours required to graduate.

How much will this cost students?

For most students, there would be no additional cost. The course would replace or fulfill existing general education requirements, such as a social science or government course. Since it is a credit-bearing class already covered by standard tuition, no extra charges are anticipated for students.

How much will this cost institutions?

The REACH Act is designed to be implemented using existing resources. Most colleges and universities already offer American government, political science, and history courses that could be adapted to meet the Act's requirements. These courses are already part of most colleges' and universities' general education course options. There may be minor administrative costs associated with compliance reporting and ensuring course content meets the law's standards, but no significant new expenditures are expected.

When the South Carolina General Assembly passed the SC REACH Act, no additional funds were appropriated and all colleges adapted to the three-credit-hour requirement using existing funds.¹

Will this legislation affect accreditation?

No. The REACH Act respects academic standards and does not conflict with accreditation requirements. Institutions retain flexibility in course design, instructional methods, and faculty oversight, provided they include the required readings and assessments. Accrediting bodies generally support efforts that enhance civic learning and student outcomes.

Eight states in the country have laws similar to the REACH Act. All have retained accreditation. For example, Texas law requires 12 credit hours in American and Texas government² and American and Texas history.³ All Texas colleges and universities have retained accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Why does the three-credit-hour course have to be in "American government" or "American history?" Why not let the universities choose which kind of course covers the founding documents?

The REACH Act specifies a course in American government or history because these disciplines provide the appropriate academic context for understanding the founding documents as instruments of political thought and constitutional design. The goal is not simply to expose students to these texts, but to ensure they study them in a rigorous setting that emphasizes their legal, historical, and civic significance.

Allowing universities to distribute this content across unrelated courses—such as literature, cultural studies, or general first-year seminars—risks diluting its civic purpose. Fragmenting the readings across disparate disciplines may lead to superficial treatment, inconsistent coverage, and an absence of the analytical tools necessary for meaningful engagement with the texts.

¹ South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office, [SC REACH Act Statement of Estimated Fiscal Impact](#), March 26, 2021.

² Texas Public Law, [Educ. Code Section 51.301:Government or Political Science](#).

³ Texas Public Law, [Educ. Code Section 51.302 American or Texas History](#).

By requiring the documents to be taught together, in a focused, credit-bearing course, the REACH Act ensures that students encounter them as part of a coherent narrative about the American experiment in self-government. This structure promotes civic literacy, not just historical familiarity or thematic exposure, and reinforces the public mission of higher education in preparing citizens for democratic life.

This is already taught in high school, why should it be taught again in college?

High school civics varies widely in quality and rigor, and many students enter college with only a superficial understanding of America's constitutional heritage. College provides an opportunity for more mature, in-depth engagement with complex ideas. The REACH Act ensures that students study these documents in full, in a structured academic setting, and are assessed on their comprehension—something rarely guaranteed in secondary education

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni notes, “the grim reality is that college graduates continue to show a level of ignorance of America’s system of government just as high school students do.”⁴ Among college graduates:

- 50% did not know how to amend the U.S. Constitution
- 9.6% thought “Judge Judy” was on the Supreme Court
- Less than 20% could identify the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation
- Only 18% could identify James Madison as Father of the U.S. Constitution⁵
- 39% believed the President can declare war.
- 16% believed Justice Scalia was the current Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Is the provision for the removal of a college chancellor too extreme?

No. As an officer of the state, it is the chancellor’s job to comply with his or her statutory duties. If he or she refuses to do the job, the Board should be empowered to remove the chancellor.

⁴ American Council of Trustees and Alumni, [Report: A Crisis in Civic Education](#), Jan 2015.

⁵ American Council of Trustees and Alumni, [America’s Knowledge Crisis: A Survey of Civil Literacy](#), 2019.