

# 50-STATE COMPARISON

## CIVICS EDUCATION

Many American colleges and universities are neglecting civics education. While some states or university system boards require students to study key documents and events in American history through mandatory course requirements, most do not. Instead, students are permitted to fulfill their history or social studies requirements by taking niche or specialized courses on a wide range of themes, often unrelated to civics. Consequently, countless college graduates leave college without a solid foundation in American history or government.

In this report, we first analyze which states require civics as a condition for high school and college graduation. In another section, we analyze the teacher preparation programs at flagship universities across the country to see how well teachers are being prepared to pass on civic knowledge. By examining these data, policymakers, university administrators, and the public can learn how well their state's institutions are performing and where improvements may be needed. Whether the focus is on implementing civics requirements at the **institutional, system, or state level**, this comparison aims to provide a clear picture of the current state of civics in higher education.

### Key Takeaways:

- Most states do not require civics in their colleges' general education programs.
- Fourteen states, at either the legislative or board level, require students to take at least one course in civics.
- Most states require civics for high school graduation, but some do not require future teachers to study it sufficiently in their preparation programs.

## States that Require Civics for All Undergraduates

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Georgia
- Missouri
- Nevada
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Texas
- Utah
- Wyoming

### Civics Education Graduation Requirements by State

State	Civics Course Required for HS Graduation	Civics Course Required for University Graduation
Alabama	✓	—
Alaska	—	—
Arizona	✓	✓
Arkansas	✓	✓
California	✓	○*
Colorado	✓	—
Connecticut	✓	—
Delaware	✓	—
Florida	✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓
Hawaii	✓	—

\*The California State University System has a college civics requirement, but the University of California System does not. The state receives partial credit because not all undergraduates are required to take a civics course.

	Civics Course Required for HS Graduation	Civics Course Required for University Graduation
Idaho	✓	—
Illinois	✓	—
Indiana	✓	—
Iowa	✓	—
Kansas	✓	—
Kentucky	✓	—
Louisiana	✓	—
Maine	✓	—
Maryland	✓	—
Massachusetts	✓	—
Michigan	✓	—
Minnesota	✓	—
Mississippi	✓	—
Missouri	✓	✓
Montana	✓	—
Nebraska	✓	—
Nevada	✓	✓
New Jersey	✓	—
New Mexico	✓	—
New York	✓	—
North Carolina	✓	✓
North Dakota	✓	—
Ohio	✓	✓

	Civics Course Required for HS Graduation	Civics Course Required for University Graduation
Oklahoma	✓	✓
Oregon	✓	—
Pennsylvania	✓	—
Rhode Island	—	—
South Carolina	✓	✓
South Dakota	✓	✓
Tennessee	✓	—
Texas	✓	✓
Utah	✓	✓
Vermont	—	—
Virginia	✓	—
Washington	✓	—
West Virginia	✓	—
Wisconsin	—	—
Wyoming	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>

## Teacher Preparation Programs at Flagship Institutions: Civics Requirements

Flagship institutions with the most civically aligned teacher preparation programs:

- University of Arkansas
- Indiana University Bloomington
- Louisiana State University
- University of Michigan
- University of Mississippi
- University of Missouri
- University of Montana
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- University of North Dakota
- Pennsylvania State University
- Purdue University
- University of Rhode Island
- University of South Dakota
- Stony Brook University
- Texas A&M University
- University of Texas at Austin
- Texas Tech University
- University of Utah
- West Virginia University
- University of Wyoming

Flagship institutions with the least civically aligned teacher preparation programs:

- University of California, Berkeley
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Flagship	Degree	American History	American Politics
University of Alabama	BSE, Secondary Education	○	✓
University of Alaska Fairbanks	BA, Secondary Education with a double major in political science	—	✓
University of Alaska Fairbanks	BA, Secondary Education with a double major in history	—	—
University of Arizona	** No secondary BA offered, not analyzed		
University of Arkansas	B.A.T. in Social Studies Education	✓	✓
University at Buffalo	**Does not offer a BA, not analyzed		
University of California, Berkeley	BSE, Educational Sciences	—	—

Flagship	Degree	American History	American Politics
University of Colorado Boulder	BA, Middle and High School Teaching (social studies track)	○	—
University of Connecticut	**Combined BA and MA program, not analyzed		
University of Delaware	BA History Education	—	✓
University of the District of Columbia	**Does not offer BA, not analyzed		
University of Florida	**Does not offer a BA, not analyzed		
University of Georgia	**Combined BA and MA program, not analyzed		
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Secondary Education, Social Studies Specialization, BEd	✓	✓
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Middle Grades Education: Social Science, BS	—	—
Indiana University Bloomington	Secondary Education BSED (history)	✓	✓
University of Iowa	Students double major in teaching degree and major content area (history, American Government endorsement)	—	✓
University of Kansas	Secondary (6-12) History, Government, and Social Studies Concentration	—	✓
University of Kentucky	Middle Level Education, B.A.E., social studies	○	—
Louisiana State University	History, B.A., Secondary Education - History	✓	—
University of Maine	Middle and Secondary Education - Social Science	—	✓
University of Maryland, College Park	Secondary Social Studies Education/History double major, B.A.	○	✓
University of Massachusetts Amherst	**Combined BA and MA program, not analyzed		

Flagship	Degree	American History	American Politics
University of Michigan	Undergraduate Secondary Teacher Education: history endorsement	✓	—
University of Michigan	Undergraduate Secondary Teacher Education: social studies endorsement	✓	✓
University of Minnesota	**No Secondary BA offered, not analyzed		
University of Mississippi	B.A.Ed in Social Studies Education	✓	✓
University of Missouri	BSEd in Secondary Education with Emphasis in Social Studies (9th-12th grades)	✓	✓
University of Missouri	BSEd in Middle School Education with Emphasis in Social Studies (5th-9th grades)	✓	✓
University of Montana	BA History Education with a double major in History-History Education	✓	—
University of Montana	BA Social Studies Broadfield with a double major in history-political science	✓	✓
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Secondary Education: Social Studies	✓	✓
University of Nevada, Reno	PackTeach Secondary Education and History, B.A./B.A. in Ed.	○	✓
University of New Hampshire	**BA does not lead to licensure, not analyzed		
University of New Mexico	Bachelor of Arts in Education in Secondary Education: Social Studies Education concentration	—	✓
North Carolina State University	Middle Grades Education (BS): English Language Arts and Social Studies Concentration	—	✓

Flagship	Degree	American History	American Politics
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	**Does not offer BA, not analyzed		
University of North Dakota	Social Studies Education B.S.Ed.	✓	✓
The Ohio State University	BS Integrated Social Studies Education	—	✓
University of Oklahoma	Social Studies Education B.S. Ed.	○	✓
Pennsylvania State University	Secondary Education in Social Studies Education, B.S. (7-12)	✓	✓
Purdue University	Social Studies Education, BA	✓	✓
University of Rhode Island	Secondary Education: History/Social Studies content area with concurrent major in history, B.A.	✓	—
Rutgers University	**Combined BA and MA program, not analyzed		
University of South Carolina	Middle Level Education Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Social Studies concentration	○	
University of South Dakota	Secondary Education-History Education specialization (B.S.Ed.)	✓	✓
Stony Brook University	(Completed alongside social studies major) Social Studies Teacher Education Program	✓	✓
University of Tennessee	**Secondary social studies degree no longer offered, not analyzed		
Texas A&M University	Middle Grades 4-8 English/Language Arts/Social Studies BS	✓	✓
University of Texas at Austin	Liberal Arts • 7th – 12th Grade - History	✓	✓
Texas Tech University	Education, B.S.: Middle-Level Social Studies Concentration	✓	✓



Flagship	Degree	American History	American Politics
University of Utah	History Teaching BA	✓	—
University of Vermont	Teacher Education: Secondary Education B.S.Ed. (history concentration)	○	✓
University of Virginia	No course information available		
University of Washington	**BA does not lead to certification, not analyzed		
West Virginia University	Social Studies/Secondary Education, B.A.	✓	✓
University of Wisconsin-Madison	**Does not offer BA, not analyzed		
University of Wyoming	Secondary Social Studies Education with double major in Political Science, B.A.	✓	✓
University of Wyoming	(Secondary Social Studies Education with double major in History, B.A.	✓	✓

## Data Definitions

○ = **Partial credit** because the program only requires future teachers to take American History 1 (early American to 1865) or American History 2 (1865 to the present) but not both.

**Double Majors:** In some cases, a second degree in a specific content area, such as history, is required to teach in that area.

**Middle grades/middle level education:** Education typically for grades 6-8, but sometimes includes 5-9.

**Secondary education:** Typically refers to grades 9-12 or high school.

## Policy Recommendations

Improving civics education for college students and future teachers is vital for the nation's well-being. To be knowledgeable, responsible, and engaged citizens, students need to have a familiarity with American history and principles. Several policy reforms exist that can remedy the lack of civics education. Cost-effective, evidence-based recommendations include:

### Teach Civics to Future Teachers

Good civics education starts with civically-informed teachers. Teachers can not impart what they do not know well. This is why teacher preparation programs must **require all teacher candidates to take a course in American history and/or politics** that adequately addresses fundamental moments and documents in the country's history.

### Curriculum Enhancement

One of the simplest ways to ensure that students engage with foundational American documents, such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, is to integrate a **mandatory 3-credit course on American Institutions and Ideals** into an institution's general education requirements. A model civics course is outlined in the [REACH Act](#), which requires students to read key documents such as the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and at least five essays from the Federalist Papers.

### Civics Literacy Assessment

To evaluate students' understanding of essential civic concepts, colleges and universities should implement a **College Civics Literacy test** as a prerequisite for graduation.

### First Amendment Education

Civics education should start at the beginning of the academic year in freshman orientation. Colleges and universities should **develop orientation programs** that emphasize the significance of the First Amendment and its role in American democracy.

### Constitution Day Observance

Institutions can foster a deeper appreciation of the nation's founding principles by organizing **annual events** to commemorate Constitution Day.

### Regular Civic Knowledge Surveys

A useful way to gauge and improve students' civic understanding over time is to **conduct periodic surveys**. An institution-wide survey will give college leaders a clearer picture of students' civic knowledge and the ability to fill in the gaps through curricular reform and civic-oriented events.

College is a crucial time to prepare students for responsible citizenship. The knowledge they learn about their country's history, ideas, and institutions will influence how they conduct themselves in their professional and personal lives. Students need to take civics in high school. But it is also important for college students to study civics at a deeper and more advanced level. Colleges should do everything they can to ensure that college graduates—including future teachers—are equipped with an in-depth understanding of the ideas and history on which this country rests. Fortunately, many opportunities for reform exist. Implementing any one of these recommendations would be a significant stride toward improving students' civic knowledge.

### **For More Information**

Want to learn more? The Martin Center is happy to provide supplemental data, model policies, or additional research on this topic. You can reach us at 919-828-1400 or [info@jamesgmartin.center](mailto:info@jamesgmartin.center).

### **About the Martin Center**

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country. We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.