

The Center on Civic Literacy

Sheila Kennedy, JD; Erin Braun; Nichole Davis; Michael Marsala

IUPUI, SPEA

Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis

Abstract

The Center for Civic Literacy at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis was established to address the public deficit in constitutional and civic knowledge. It will be the nation’s first research center devoted to studying what our citizens do and do not know about their representative republic.

Self-government in a democratic state requires a civically educated citizenry. There is ample evidence that Americans, on average, are civically illiterate. Only 36 percent of Americans can correctly name the three branches of government (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2007). Fewer than half of 12th grade students can describe the meaning of federalism (NAEP, 2006). Newsweek recently asked 1,000 U.S. citizens to take the official citizenship test; seventy-three percent couldn’t say why we fought the Cold War, 44 percent were unable to define the Bill of Rights, and 94 percent were unable to list the correct number of Constitutional amendments (Romano, 2011). Surveys such as these, as well as the few formal studies that have been completed on civics, point to an alarming “civics recession” (Quigley, 2011).

Annenberg Public Policy Center. 2007. “Annenberg Public Policy Center Judicial Survey.” http://www.annenbergpublicpolicy.org/Downloads/20071017_JudicialSurvey/Survey_Questions_10-17-2007.pdf (May 30, 2011).

National Assessment of Educational Progress. 2006. “NAEP – Civics 2006: The Nation’s Report Card.” http://nationsreportcard.gov/civics_2006/ (May 30, 2011)

Romano, Andrew. “How Dumb Are We?” *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 20 Mar. 2011. Web. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/03/20/how-dumb-are-we.html>

Quigley, Charles. “National Assessment Governing Board – Newsroom – Press Releases –2010 NAEP Civics Report – Charles N. Quigley’s Statement.” *National Assessment Governing Board*. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <http://www.nagb.org/civics/statement-quigley.htm>

The Center for Civic Literacy’s poster presentation highlights three things:

1. The current deficit in research and understanding of civic literacy
2. The intersection of civic literacy and civic engagement
3. The research agenda devised through our potential partnerships and National Advisory Committee