

October 31, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to address questions raised during the recent Faculty Senate meeting regarding the new Institute for American Civics (IAC). I have information from this meeting only secondhand, but I will do my best to answer questions as I understand them.

I will be on hand during the Faculty Senate executive committee meeting on November 7 and the full senate meeting on November 21. I hope that an initial discussion with the Executive Council will enable me to understand your concerns so that we can have a productive meeting with the full senate on questions about the IAC.

Let me begin by referencing the legislation that created the Institute for American Civics. The Tennessee General Assembly voted overwhelmingly (120-6) for this legislation, with the six “no” votes distributed equally by party.

The purpose of the IAC, as described in the enabling legislation is to:

1. *Foster a deeper understanding of the structures and institutions of federal, state, and local government.*
2. *Further the understanding of the principles and philosophies that contributed to the foundation and development of the United States and the State of Tennessee.*
3. *Promote civil discourse and constructive debate.*
4. *Enhance education in the fields of politics, economics, philosophy, American history, American government, and other related fields as appropriate with a focus on the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship; fundamental democratic principles; and the ways in which those principles are expressed in our federal, state, and local institutions.*
5. *Provide nonpartisan resources to students, faculty, state government agencies, and the general public regarding civic affairs.*
6. *Foster civic engagement through full and fair discussions that promote civil dialogue among those holding conflicting points of view.*
7. *Assist in ensuring that the University of Tennessee serves as a robust marketplace of ideas for all students and faculty.*

If you are interested in learning more about the Institute’s mission in the context of civic education in higher education, I invite you to [read the white paper](#) my team wrote this summer. I am currently participating in a working group of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences dedicated to renewing civic education on college campuses. UT is fortunate to be part of the working group, which is chaired by Ben Vinson III, Provost & Executive Vice President at Case Western Reserve University and David Campbell, Packey J. Dee Professor of American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame. There is a movement afoot for universities to help address our civic health, and the Institute is UTK’s contribution to that effort.

As you may have heard, the campus will seek approval of the creation of the Baker School of Public Policy, to be launched July 1, 2023. The IAC will be a sub-unit with the Baker School. Faculty teaching courses for the Institute will be housed within the School or borrowed from other departments.

The Baker School (once approved) and the IAC are being designed to avoid competition with other academic units. The mission of these two units is to offer our students opportunities to study and research theories, policies, and traditions of civic engagement and public service from a particular disciplinary perspective. The Institute is designed not only to enhance the civic knowledge, skills, and engagement of UT students and faculty, but also to promote civic knowledge, skills, and engagement statewide. There is not another entity on campus with that mission. To the extent that the mission of the Institute intersects with other academic units on campus, that intersection has the potential for deep collaboration. We are collaborating with Political Science on specific courses already, and we have an exciting project with History and English in the works. We look forward to collaborating with other departments.

Let me now address the two new courses we are proposing: IAC 201, “Construction and Reconstruction of the American Republic,” and IAC 202, “Civil Society and the State.” We constructed these courses with three goals in mind:

1. Meet our legislative mission and provide quality instruction to undergraduates.
2. Complement, but do not replicate, courses already taught on campus.
3. Structure courses in such a way that faculty from a variety of disciplines can choose to teach and partner with us.

The courses we proposed do all three of these things. The course entitled Construction and Reconstruction of the American Republic weaves together subject matter from History, Philosophy, and Political Science to provide a broad introduction to the history, politics, and philosophy of the founding and formative years of our country in a way that is intended to avoid duplication of any course taught in those departments. The course entitled Civil Society and the State addresses questions long considered by political scientists and political sociologists. Here, too, we have taken care to ensure that our approach is different and unique enough to justify a new course offering.

In developing syllabi for these courses, our team examined syllabi from other institutions and consulted with faculty both here at UTK and at other universities. We are proposing these courses as 200-level additions to the Vol Core curriculum. The material covered in these courses should be of interest to students University-wide, but also should stimulate students to explore these topics in greater depth by taking more specialized courses in History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology.

If other units on campus see ways of contributing to those courses, that is an opportunity for collaboration with the Institute.

I am happy to answer any further questions and appreciate your assistance in helping us move forward on this exciting initiative. I will see you on November 7.

Best,



Marianne Wanamaker, Executive Director
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