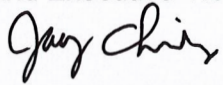


**To:** Members of the Board of Trustees

**From:** Jay Akridge, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Diversity

**Date:** June 11, 2021 

**Re:** Proposal to Establish Civics Literacy Proficiency as a Purdue Degree Requirement

This memorandum describes the background, purpose and need, and formal proposal of a civics literacy proficiency graduation requirement for undergraduate students, which has been developed at the direction of the Board of Trustees.

### Proposal

If adopted, this proposal will establish a graduation requirement for Civics Literacy Proficiency for baccalaureate degrees offered by the accredited institutions of the Purdue system that are organized within The Trustees of Purdue University.<sup>1</sup> This requirement will be effective at the start of the Fall 2021 semester for all incoming Purdue West Lafayette undergraduate students and the start of the Fall 2022 semester at Purdue Fort Wayne, Purdue Northwest, and the Purdue Colleges at IUPUI. A Civics Literacy Proficiency (transcripted) will also be available on a voluntary basis for all other current West Lafayette undergraduate students. Students can satisfy the two parts of the requirement any time between freshman year and graduation. The two parts are:

- (1) achievement of one of the following three options:
  - (a) completing 3.0 hours of course work from an approved list of civics literacy proficiency courses;
  - (b) completing twelve podcast learning modules created by the Center for C-SPAN Scholarship and Engagement; or
  - (c) attending six civics-related Purdue-hosted and -sponsored events<sup>2</sup>; and
- (2) successful completion of a civics knowledge test.

The requirement as proposed does not mandate additional credit hours beyond those currently required for degree programs. As with other campus-wide West Lafayette programs, the Civics Literacy Proficiency graduation requirement will be managed by the Office of the Provost. Similar campus-level management would be in place at Purdue Fort Wayne and Purdue Northwest, as well as an appropriate comparable structure for the Purdue Colleges at IUPUI. Any subsequent changes to the requirement would require approval by the Board of Trustees.

### Need

Surveys over the past decade from *Newsweek*, the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and many others have shown an extreme lack of knowledge among Americans when it comes to civics and governance.

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<sup>1</sup> This proposal is not intended to apply to Purdue University Global baccalaureate degrees.

<sup>2</sup> Purdue Fort Wayne, Purdue Northwest, and Purdue College at IUPUI can modify the three selectives as they deem appropriate, subject to final approval by the Board of Trustees.

Among survey findings:

- Just 26% of Americans can name all three branches of government.
- Only 55% knew which political party is in control of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Almost 60% failed to identify a requirement for ratifying a constitutional amendment.

A 2012 report of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, which was an initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, provided additional confirmation of the need. The report made an urgent call to higher education institutions in the United States to make civics literacy, inquiry and action part of the educational objectives to be achieved by every college graduate. This plan would involve adopting long-term, measurable standards to indicate the extent to which college students are gaining civics knowledge during their postsecondary education.<sup>3</sup>

Purdue University President Mitchell Daniels and Purdue University Board of Trustees members agree that civics knowledge is important and that there is a need to increase civics knowledge and an understanding of contemporary political issues, as well as expand awareness for civic participation.

### **Background and Process**

In January 2019, President Daniels presented to the Purdue University Senate data on the state of civics literacy in the U.S. and asked the University Senate to explore a civics literacy graduation requirement. He cited some of the indicators that suggest many citizens are unaware of basic knowledge regarding the United States government, its people, processes, and laws and policies.

As a first step toward exploring the idea of a civics literacy graduation requirement, under then Senate Chair Natalie Carroll, a campus-wide survey and town hall were held by the University Senate in spring 2019 to discuss how to determine a baseline of civics knowledge for new Purdue undergraduate students. In early summer 2019, at the behest of the new Senate Chair Cheryl Cooky, a Civics Working Group of disciplinary experts was formed to explore the issue further. One of this group's first steps was to create a pilot assessment of civics knowledge to distribute to Purdue's incoming freshman class during Boiler Gold Rush (BGR). The purpose was to assess civics knowledge among incoming freshman as compared to that of a national sample.

The fall 2019 semester was spent reviewing and analyzing survey results, collecting information about the civics literacy initiatives at other universities, and researching the various and best methods for assessing civics literacy. The Civics Working Group was Chaired by Cheryl Cooky and included three expert faculty members: Robert Browning, professor of political science and communication, and faculty director of the Center for C-SPAN Scholarship and Engagement; Jay McCann, professor of political science; and Phillip VanFossen, the James F. Ackerman Professor of Social Studies and director of the Ackerman Center for Democratic Citizenship in the College of Education. The group also included Peter Watkins (Academic Program Manager, Political Science), Frank Dooley (Senior Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning), Andy Zehner (I-DA+A), Nan Kong (University Senate, Educational Policy Committee), Assata Gilmore (then-Vice President of Purdue Student Government), Jeff Stefancic (Office of Dean of Students), and Michael Brzezinski (Dean of International Programs).

As a result of this research and analysis, the Working Group developed a recommendation for a Civics Literacy graduation requirement that was presented to the University Senate in spring

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<sup>3</sup> National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement [National Task Force], 2012.

2020. At that time, the infrastructure to support a requirement had not yet been developed. For example, the test was not yet constructed and piloted, nor were technological infrastructure mechanisms ready to monitor attendance at events or completion of courses or podcasts. The proposal was not approved, with 28 voting in favor, 51 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

At the request of the Provost, the same expert faculty on the Working Group continued with full development of the proficiency to offer a voluntary Civics Literacy Proficiency credential for Purdue undergraduate students. An expert consultant was hired to assist in creating the civics knowledge test, and items were developed and field-tested. The technological infrastructure to engage students and monitor completion of one of the three options was piloted with students during the Spring 2021 semester and will be ready for launch in July. A mechanism is being implemented to monitor undergraduate students' completion of one of the three options as well as the test. Civics Literacy Proficiency activities will be made available to Purdue West Lafayette students on a volunteer basis over Summer 2021. Significant work has been dedicated to ensuring that the curriculum, activities and test are informative, engaging, and accessible, and that the test is both valid and reliable. At various points during these three semesters, the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees was updated on the progress of the voluntary credential. While intended to be launched as a volunteer proficiency to be made available to all Purdue students, the current proposal would make the proficiency—consistent with the Board's direction—a graduation requirement beginning with the Fall 2021 entering class for undergraduate students at Purdue West Lafayette and Fall 2022 for Purdue Fort Wayne, Purdue Northwest, and the Purdue Colleges at IUPUI.

### **Recommendation**

As consistently recognized by the Academic and Student Affairs Committee, there is a need for Purdue undergraduate students to demonstrate a foundational understanding of civics. The processes and test to support this requirement are now, or soon will be, in place. Therefore, it is recommended that a graduation requirement to demonstrate Civics Literacy Proficiency be approved for all Purdue system undergraduate students (not including Purdue Global students) starting with new students matriculating in the 2021-22 academic year for Purdue West Lafayette, and the 2022-2023 academic year at Purdue Fort Wayne, Purdue Northwest, and the Purdue Colleges at IUPUI.

## **Civics Literacy Proficiency Requirement Timeline**

### **28 January 2019:**

Remarks of the President introduced the idea of the civics literacy requirement. Extensive Q&A followed.

<https://www.jconline.com/story/news/2019/01/28/purdues-mitch-daniels-bemoans-campus-civics-illiteracy-calls-test-graduate/2704554002/>

### **4 February 2019:**

Exponent article *Mixed Opinions about Mitch Daniels' Civic Literacy Test among Students*

[https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article\\_e96644bb-eea9-5eab-a887-348f18a40ce3.html](https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_e96644bb-eea9-5eab-a887-348f18a40ce3.html)

### **18 February 2019:**

In his remarks, President Daniels drew the Senate's attention to a campus-wide survey regarding a civics requirement that had been announced that morning in Purdue Today

### **1 March 2019:**

Civics Education Town Hall.

### **18 March 2019:**

President's remarks include a brief update on Town Hall—reportedly, “low attendance but great discussion.” Noted that EPC and SAC were working on the requirement; no other discussion of the matter is recorded.

### **12 April 2019**

Natalie Carroll reported on the Civics Survey and the Town Hall meeting.

### **15 April 2019:**

Cheryl Cooky presented Document 18-12, to establish a committee on civics literacy at Purdue. The discussion was compromised by ‘procedural issues’—in Joe Camp’s telling euphemism, it was “robust”—because the Document was presented, according to Professor Sanders’ interpretation, by the Steering Committee, which Professor Sanders perceived to be a Bylaws violation. Ultimately there was a vote and the motion to approve Senate Document 18-12 failed (did not meet the two-thirds requirement) with 40 votes in favor, 24 in opposition with 2 abstentions.

### **14 June 2019**

Cheryl Cooky reported gave a Civics Update re: Campus Survey/Challenges and Questions to the BOT

### **9 September 2019:**

Cheryl Cooky addressed the Civics Literacy Requirement extensively in her remarks to the Senate, explaining that she had formed a working group to address it over the summer and updating the Senate as to their progress and findings. No discussion of these remarks is recorded in the minutes.

→ Over the course of the year, the Civics Engagement Working Group coordinated with the EPC, chaired by Andy Freed, with Cheryl Cooky facilitating coordination.

**26 September 2019:**

Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting to discuss updates on the receipt civic literacy survey given out to Boiler Gold Rush students as well as the BoilerConnect platform.

[https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article\\_f09b310e-e08b-11e9-97d1-3f5efbfe7bcc.html](https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_f09b310e-e08b-11e9-97d1-3f5efbfe7bcc.html)

**10 October 2019**

Cheryl Cooky gave a Civics Literacy Update to the BOT

**27 January 2020**

Chair Cooky gave an update on the Civics Group to the Senate in her remarks: “I look forward to the work of the Education Policy Committee on the Civics Literacy working group has also completed its findings and will deliver their report for consideration by the EPC.”

**7 February 2020**

Report at the Board of Trustees meeting from Cheryl Cooky and the Civics Literacy Working Group.

[https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article\\_5c1514e0-49fo-11ea-9abo-d32a3d83abc8.html](https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_5c1514e0-49fo-11ea-9abo-d32a3d83abc8.html)

**17 February 2020**

Chair Cooky gave an update to the Senate on the Civics Group in her remarks: “The Civics Working group met with the EPC who is looking at the feasibility and costs of the working group’s recommendations.”

**24 February 2020**

Article in Inside Higher Ed on the Civics Literacy requirement.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/24/purdue-looks-adopt-civics-knowledge-undergraduate-requirement>

**23 March 2020**

Andy Freed brought Document 19-17 Degree Requirements for Civics Literacy to the Senate on behalf of the EPC. Professor Freed noted the voting results from the EPC members. Professor Freed provided background to explain where we are today via a PPT presentation. He also provided the report of the Civics Literacy Working Group. A lengthy discussion followed Professor Freed’s review of the work done to create the document. Professor Cooky encouraged the Senators to review the report and refer questions to her or members of the working group.

**2 April 2020**

Cheryl Cooky reported on the Civics Literacy Working Group Report Update to the BOT

**20 April 2020**

Andy Freed introduced Senate Document 19-17 Degree Requirements for Civics Literacy for Action. Professor Freed noted that there had been discussion on this document at the

previous meeting. He summarized the EPC's view, which was that this is a requirements plan rather than an implementation plan. Much discussion had centered around whether the requirements were feasible. The Provost and administration are very supportive and have pledged resources toward implementation. This would also entail the Provost setting up a committee or task force to see how this would be done.

After some discussion, a motion to call the question being made and seconded, and voting proceeded via Qualtrics. Results: 28 in favor / 51 opposed / 2 abstentions. The resolution did not pass.

[https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article\\_8c97066c-834f-11ea-9621-8f6106b80f9d.html](https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_8c97066c-834f-11ea-9621-8f6106b80f9d.html)

### **11 June 2020**

The results of the Senate vote were mentioned in the BOT report by Deb Nichols.

### **July 2020**

The Provost asked the original architects of the Civics Literacy Proposal (VanFossen, Browning, McCann) to fully develop the idea as a voluntary credential that could be earned by Purdue students. Candiss Vibbert supported the team.

### **19 April 2021**

During the President's remarks, he announced that the Trustees plan to adopt the Faculty Civics Recommendations making it a requirement starting with the 2021 incoming class.

### **3 May 2021 (continuation of April 19 meeting)**

Document 20-60 was presented as New Business (resolution asking BOT to NOT vote on the Civics Proficiency requirement, and ask the Provost to bring such a proposal to the Senate for review). There was much discussion, and a vote to suspend the rules on it, which failed by a single vote (45 yes, 23 no, 8 abstentions). Votes to suspend the rules require a 2/3 majority, which is why the motion failed despite having a significant majority (it was basically 66% - 34%). So, no vote will be taken on 20-60 until the Senate reconvenes in the fall, assuming it is brought to the Senate then for action.