



To: Joanne Addison, Chair, CU Faculty Council
University of Colorado Faculty Council, Executive Committee
From: CU Denver Faculty Assembly
Re: Civics Literacy Among CU Denver Students
Date: 2018 November 08

Dear Joanne Addison and Members of the CU Faculty Council Executive Committee:

In the Spring and Fall semesters of 2018, the faculty leadership learned that the Board of Regents University Affairs Committee “charged the administration with exploring options and cost estimates for delivering civics education at each of CU’s three general campuses.” Following discussion at the CU Faculty Council, the CU Denver Faculty Assembly formed a task force to formulate a response to this call at its October 3rd meeting. The task force, consisting of faculty from representatives from the Departments of History and Political Science and faculty governance more broadly, articulated the following points to represent the collective consensus of the CU Denver Faculty.

This memo was presented to the CU Denver Faculty Assembly prior to its November 6th meeting. After reviewing this memo, the Assembly voted (28-0-0) (*approved-opposed-abstained*) on the following statements about this civics initiative.

The faculty of CU Denver thank the Regents for their invitation to examine the state of civics education and **support their endorsement of the importance of civics education**. We share the Regents’ concern about a lack of civics literacy among the broader US population and believe that it is in the interest of the university to ensure that its students are exposed to this topic.

1. **We believe that CU Denver offers many opportunities for students completing their programs to learn about civics in a meaningful way.** Current programming elevates students’ understanding of civics beyond the factual foundations required of Colorado’s high school students as currently mandated in the Colorado Revised Statutes §22-1-104, *Teaching of History, Culture, and Civil Government*.¹ The campus has multiple existing courses that cover civics in the context of their discipline, with many of these offered in the CU Denver Core Curriculum, for example HIST 1361 (an introductory American history survey through 1876) and PSCI 1101 (an introductory survey of the American political system). Existing CU Denver undergraduate courses pertaining to civics across multiple departments are listed in Appendix 01. According to enrollment data provided by the CU Denver / Anschutz Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness,² these courses comprised **5070 credit hours**, or approximately **1700 students**, during the 2017-2018 academic year.

¹ <https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/images/olls/crs2016-title-22.pdf>

² <https://tableau.ucdenver.edu/#/site/University/projects>

Moreover, the CU Denver campus regularly offers a variety of extracurricular academic opportunities that permit students to further explore civics. Recent examples include *Constitution Day*, an annual interdisciplinary and cross-institutional event facilitated by faculty from multiple departments at CU Denver, Metro State, and the Community Colleges of Denver (CCD); monthly panels engaging various issues in public policy sponsored by the School of Public Affairs; and numerous invited lectures hosted by CU Denver departments.

2. **Many courses with significant components addressing civics education are part of the Guaranteed Transfer (GT) Pathways General Education Curriculum, to which CU Denver adheres.** The curriculum refers to “the group of courses offered by an institution of higher education that every student enrolled in the institution must successfully complete to attain an associate’s or bachelor’s degree” [§23-1-108.5(2)(c), C.R.S.] and that meet the requirements of §23-1-125(3), C.R.S.”³ These courses were selected and approved in meetings involving two- and four-year faculty from all public institutions of higher education in Colorado.

This core curriculum structure enables faculty to provide civics teaching which helps students understand the importance of our governmental structure and function. This understanding refers to both how government structure and function was conceived by our founding fathers and how it has changed as our nation has evolved.

3. The faculty at CU Denver strongly believe in **the principle of offering students as much choice as possible in their courses.** Therefore, students can tailor their program to address their particular educational aspirations and needs, while also maintaining the appropriate rigor and accomplishment expected of all CU Denver alumni. Reducing student choice could have adverse impacts on recruitment and retention.

We believe that the best approach for promoting civics literacy is to continue to provide robust coverage of civics in the existing course requirements and by offering students ample opportunity, across a range of disciplines and extracurricular activities and events, to engage with this topic.

4. One of the strategic priorities of CU Denver is to “create a more cohesive, collaborative and inclusive culture” (*ibid*). From the perspective of pedagogy, the faculty feel strongly that **the diverse body of students we teach at CU Denver** (including 1413 international students from 65 countries, as of the Fall 2018 Census) **are best served by learning about civics through existing courses already offered on campus.** These courses, many of them introductory survey courses, allow students to explore civics in context (e.g., social, political, and historical) and provide opportunities to engage civics from multiple perspectives, two key features of an inclusive pedagogical approach.

³ <https://higher.colorado.gov/Publications/Policies/>

5. The Faculty at CU Denver are **concerned about the cost, in terms of both dollars and faculty time, of implementing, developing, and delivering a mandatory civics requirement.** As reported by the Office of Academic Programs in its August 1st, 2018 report, the cost may exceed one million dollars per year for CU Denver. We are concerned that a civics requirement will place more financial pressure on the institution, which is presently engaging in substantial effort to reduce costs.

Sincerely,

The CU Denver Civics Education Task Force

Peter Anthamatten, Associate Professor; Chair, CU Denver Faculty Assembly (Geography and Environmental Sciences)

Eric Baker, Teaching and Learning Librarian; Chair, CU Denver Academic Personnel Committee (Auraria Library)

Michael Berry, Associate Professor (Political Science)

Sasha Breger-Bush, Assistant Professor; Chair, CLAS Faculty Council (Political Science)

Tod Duncan, Assistant Professor C/T; Chair, CU Denver Educational Policies and Procedures Committee (Integrative Biology)

Rebecca Hunt, Associate Professor C/T; Member, CU Denver Faculty Assembly (History)

Sam Walker, Senior Instructor; Member, CU Denver Faculty Assembly (Philosophy)

Greg Whitesides, Assistant Professor C/T (History)

Appendix 01: Sample of CU Denver Undergraduate Courses with Civics Components

Courses Included as part of the CU Denver Undergraduate Core Requirements

Course Number	Course Title
HIST 1361	U.S. History to 1876
HIST 1362	U.S. History Since 1876
PSCI 1001	Introduction to Political Science
PSCI 1101	American Political System
PSCI 3034	Race, Gender, Law and Public Policy
PSCI 3035	Political Movements: Race and Gender

Additional Undergraduate Courses with a Civics Component

Course Number	Course Title
COMM 2020	Communication, Citizenship and Social Justice
COMM 4680/5680	Mass Media, Law, and Policy
COMM 4682/5682	Political Communication
HIST 1111	First Year Seminar
HIST 1381	Paths to the Present
HIST 1400	Controversies in History
HIST 3230	The American Presidency
HIST 4494	Red and Blue America: US History, 1973-Present
HUMN 4325	First Amendment: Theory and Context
PSCI 3064	Power and Empowerment in the United States
PSCI 3214	Federal Law and American Indians
PSCI 4024	Legislatures and Legislation
PSCI 4044	The Presidency
PSCI 4084	Local Government and Administration
PSCI 4094	Seminar in American Politics
PSCI 4457	American Political Thought
PSCI 4477	Constitutional Law I
PSCI 4487	Constitutional Law II
PSCI 4494	Judicial Politics
PSCI 4827	Women and the Law
PSCI 4934	CU in the Capitol