



Civic Discourse

PEIMS Code: N1130028

Abbreviation: CIVDISC

Grade Level(s): 11-12

Award of Credit: 1.0

Approved Innovative Course

- Districts must have local board approval to implement innovative courses.
- In accordance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §74.27, school districts must provide instruction in all essential knowledge and skills identified in this innovative course.
- Innovative courses may only satisfy elective credit toward graduation requirements.
- Please refer to [TAC §74.13](#) for guidance on endorsements.

Course Description:

This course is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive citizens in both their private and public lives. It uniquely approaches civic discourse through the lens of psychology, exploring evidence-based material in order to understand why people act as they do, what biases people are prone to, and how these factors affect civic life. Students will learn essential communication and collaboration skills and apply these newfound skills to conversations on stimulating topics such as politics, morality, religion, and culture. Students who complete this course will have developed a strong understanding of the need for strong civic discourse and a toolkit for how to effectively practice it.

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

- (a) General requirements. This course is recommended for students in grades 11 and 12. Recommended prerequisite: United States History Studies Since 1877. Students shall be awarded one credit for successful completion of this course.
- (b) Introduction.
 - (1) Civic Discourse is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive citizens in both their private and public lives. It uniquely approaches civic discourse through the lens of psychology, exploring evidence-based material in order to understand why people act as they do, what biases people are prone to, and how these factors affect civic life. Students will learn essential communication and collaboration skills and apply these newfound skills to conversations on stimulating topics such as politics, morality, religion, and culture. Students who complete this course will have developed a strong understanding of the need for strong civic discourse and a toolkit for how to effectively practice it.
- (c) Knowledge and Skills.

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- (1) Civic discourse. The student describes the need for civic discourse in society as well as the personal benefits of being able to engage constructively with others. The student is expected to:
 - (A) explain the benefits of speaking to people with whom one disagrees;
 - (B) discuss historical and scientific examples of constructive disagreement such as the cases of Nobel Prize Laureate Barry Marshall and Dr. Alice Stewart;
 - (C) analyze arguments on various issues from multiple points of view; and
 - (D) analyze the advantages and disadvantages of free speech in societies and organizations such as universities and corporations.
- (2) Intellectual humility. The student analyzes and applies the concept of intellectual humility. The student is expected to:
 - (A) describe the concept of intellectual humility and its application to civic discourse
 - (B) identify examples of how one might show intellectual humility; and
 - (C) demonstrate intellectual humility in classroom conversations and mock disagreements.
- (3) Growth mindset. The student examines the concept of growth mindset. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify and describe the benefits of a growth mindset;
 - (B) analyze examples of scientific studies involving growth mindset; and
 - (C) identify and analyze the effectiveness of growth mindset techniques such as explaining personal abilities as fluid, considering mistakes as a learning opportunity, or challenging oneself to do something not yet mastered.
- (4) Dual process theory. The student describes dual process theory and how it relates to civic discourse. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify and describe the differences between System 1 (automatic/intuitive) and System 2 (rational/analytic) thinking and how these differences effect discourse;
 - (B) analyze the role of System 1 and System 2 thinking in human judgment formation; and
 - (C) analyze examples and scientific studies involving dual process theory.
- (5) Cognitive biases. The student analyzes cognitive bias and its effect on civic discourse. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify and discuss examples of post-hoc justification, motivated reasoning, and confirmation bias;
 - (B) describe the effects of various biases on interpersonal communication and civic discourse;
 - (C) identify biases in the thoughts, words, and actions of self and others; and
 - (D) identify and apply appropriate strategies to counteract bias in self and identify historical examples.

- (6) Moral matrices and moral foundations. The student describes the principles of moral psychology and decision making and applies these ideas to analyze civic discourse. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify and discuss the concept of a moral matrix;
 - (B) identify strategies to break out of a moral matrix and investigate other moral matrices;
 - (C) identify and discuss the concept of moral foundations and differentiate moral foundations from moral matrices;
 - (D) compare the six different moral foundations, including care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, and sanctity, and identify common examples of each;
 - (E) identify language that signals different moral foundations in various modes such as in political speeches or advertisements; and
 - (F) apply moral reframing by identifying which moral foundations another person’s view relies upon and then reframe one’s own position in terms of those foundations.
- (7) Roots of politics. The student analyzes various political philosophies present in modern-day U.S. civic life. The student is expected to:
- (A) describe the history of how various political philosophies, including left/progressive, right/conservative, and libertarian, developed in the U.S. and have evolved over time;
 - (B) identify and discuss the writings of key thinkers of each of the political philosophies such as John Rawls, James Baldwin (left/progressive); Edmund Burke, Thomas Sowell (right/conservative); and John Stuart Mill, and Milton Friedman (libertarian);
 - (C) identify the relationship between a moral matrix or moral foundation and the various policy positions of political philosophies; and
 - (D) analyze which moral foundations the political traditions tend to build upon.
- (8) Cognitive reappraisal. The student applies the process of cognitive reappraisal. The student is expected to:
- (A) explain the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors;
 - (B) describe common cognitive distortions, including mental filtering; jumping to conclusions; personalization; all-or-nothing thinking; catastrophizing; overgeneralization; labeling; making “should” statements; emotional reasoning; and magnification and minimization;
 - (C) identify examples of cognitive distortions in text and other media;
 - (D) identify and describe the causes of repeated distorted thinking patterns;
 - (E) describe and give examples of how one could reframe distorted thoughts into more realistic thoughts; and
 - (F) describe the benefits of cognitive reappraisal to civic discourse.
- (9) Core beliefs. The student examines the concept of core beliefs and how they shape thinking and discourse. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify and describe the formation of core beliefs and describe their impact on discourse;
 - (B) analyze and evaluate personal core beliefs;
 - (C) identify and describe seven common types of maladaptive core beliefs, including dependence of self-worth on approval, dependence of self-worth on love, dependence of self-worth on achievement, perfectionism, entitlement, omnipotence, and lack of autonomy;
 - (D) discuss the process for revising personal core beliefs; and
 - (E) identify intrinsic values and compare intrinsic values to core beliefs.
- (10) Communication techniques. The student evaluates the importance of effective communication with others in order to reach mutual understanding. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify and practice fundamental principles of effective communication;
 - (B) apply effective communication techniques in written and verbal communication;
 - (C) explain the components of constructive feedback and practice giving constructive feedback to peers;
 - (D) explain how to effectively receive and act on constructive feedback; and
 - (E) apply constructive feedback from peers and instructor.
- (11) Dialogue facilitation. The student understands effective facilitation of group discussion on a civic or moral topic. The student is expected to identify and apply dialogue and group facilitation techniques.
- (12) Social media. The student evaluates the role of social media in shaping civic discourse. The student is expected to:
- (A) describe the ways in which social media discourse differs from in-person discourse;
 - (B) discuss the positive and negative effects of social media on discourse;
 - (C) identify the methods social media uses to capture and retain one's attention and evaluate the effects those methods; and
 - (D) participate in constructive discourse with other students on a social media platform with instructor supervision.
- (13) Habit formation. The student describes the process and methods of habit formation. The student is expected to:
- (A) explain the importance of forming positive habits;
 - (B) explain various barriers to habit formation such as lack of planning or resistance to change and strategies to overcome those barriers; and
 - (C) describe and apply multiple habit-formation techniques such as the "WOOP" method (write down your Wish, desired Outcome, possible Obstacles, and Plan

for addressing them); developing a mantra; having an accountability partner; or creating long-term incentives.

Recommended Resources and Materials:

This course is based, in part, on the OpenMind Platform, a nonprofit educational project of New York University - Stern School of Business. At <https://openmindplatform.org/library>, you will find a vast array of suggested materials that correspond to this curriculum, including books, articles, and videos. In addition, they have produced a comprehensive outline for facilitating (https://openmindplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/OpenMind_Student-Handout_12-12-18.pdf) and participating (https://openmindplatform.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/12/OpenMind_Student-Handout_12-12-18.pdf) in dialogue workshops.

Additional resources can be found through the Aspen Institute’s The Better Argument Project (<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/citizenship-and-american-identity-program/the-betterarguments-project/>) which works to teach American to have better conversations, and guidance can be found through the innovative work at Theory of Enchantment (<https://theoryofenchantment.com/>).

Videos:

- Heffernan, Margaret. “Dare to Disagree.” TED, June 2012, https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree?language=en .
- Galef, Julia. “Why You Think You’re Right -- Even If You’re Wrong.” TED, Feb. 2016, https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_galef_why_you_think_you_re_right_even_if_you_re_wrong .
- “The Joy of Being Wrong.” Youtube.com, FreeThink, John Templeton Foundation, May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRXNUx4cua0&feature=youtu.be>.
- “Crucial Conversations | Joseph Grenny.” Youtube.com, VitalSmarts Speakers, Dec. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuJgqTs-G44>.
- “Reclaiming the narrative: Rwanda, 20 years later. | Debra Kamin | TEDxPorto.” Youtube.com, TedxTalks, May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiZ2df7CBfg> .

Audio:

- “How to Humbly Disagree.” Philosophy Talk, 11 Mar. 2018, www.philosophytalk.org/shows/howhumbly-disagree.

Guides:

- “Effective Communication: Barriers and Strategies,” University of Waterloo: Centre for Teaching Excellence. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/communicating-students/telling/effective-communication-barriers-and-strategies>. Guide.
- “Difficult Conversation” Small Group Study Guide, Triad Consulting Group, <https://triadconsultinggroup.com/sites/default/files/Small%20Group%20Study%20Guide.pdf> . Guide.
- “Ten Conditions for Change: a framework for creating positive behaviors,” Sparkwave.Tech, <https://www.sparkwave.tech/conditions-for-change/> . Guide.

Reading Material:

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“Tribalism, Groupism, Globalism.” *The Globalist*, 7 Jan. 2013, <https://www.theglobalist.com/tribalism-groupism-globalism/>. Sunstein, Cass.

“The Power of Dissent,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Sept. 2003.

Kling, Arnold. *The Three Languages of Politics: Talking Across the Political Divide*. Cato Institute, 2017.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Penguin Books, 2013.

Reeves, Richard V., Haidt, Jonathan, and Cicirelli, Dave. *All Minus One: John Stuart Mill’s Ideas on Free Speech Illustrated*. Heterodox Academy, 2018.

Porter, Tenelle. *Intellectual Humility, Mindset, and Learning*. Stanford Digital Repository, 2015

Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books, 2016.

Stone, Douglas, Patton Bruce, and Heen, Sheila. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. Penguin Books, 2010.

Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Simon & Schuster 1998.

Greenberger, Dennis, and Padesky, Christine A., *Mind Over Mood, Second Edition: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think*. The Guilford Press, 2015.

Recommended Course Activities:

The class applies these skills through a meta-approach. When students learn and discuss new material, the way in which they discuss the new material will be influenced by the techniques they have previously learned.

- Student “peel back the layers” of an argument in order to unearth the core of a disagreement. For each disagreement, identify: does the disagreement stem from a difference of (a) values, (b) information, or (c) interpretation?
- Students keep a “thought record” (mood journal) in order to identify and reframe cognitive distortions on a regular basis.
- Students describe the benefits of cognitive reappraisal to civic discourse by finding examples of it in their everyday lives.
- Students identify people in their own life or public sphere with whom they agree and disagree with on an issue of civic or moral importance. They will discuss how their agreement or disagreement affects their broader view or relationship with these people. They will then identify people in their own life or public sphere with whom they agree and disagree with on a low-stakes issue, such as food preference. They will discuss how this low-stakes issue does or does not affect their broader view or relationship with these people. The students will analyze how different issues impact their perceptions and relationships with others.
- Students practice their skills in real, practical conversations that are interspersed regularly throughout the course. The topics of these conversations can range across politics, morality, religion, and culture—as long as they occur frequently. The purpose is not only to have regular practice, but also to have students learn about relevant civic issues, analyzing them and dissecting them critically in order to widen their perspectives.
- Students are paired and practice different communication techniques. They will practice “listening to understand,” rather than “listening to respond” and give and receive constructive feedback. After successfully navigating this in person, students will engage with each other online, in order to simulate a conversation over social media.

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- Students gather a group of people (other students, family, or community members) to discuss a civic or moral topic of importance and lead a discussion. They will guide the conversation for productive and healthy discussion.

Suggested methods for evaluating student outcomes:

- **Class discussions.** Students may be assessed based on their level of participation, their ability to synthesize and integrate the concepts learned into their comments, as well as how well they exhibit the skills learned when participating (to create a positive, productive classroom discussion environment).
- **Reflections.** Student work may include writing in which they will synthesize and respond to the material on a more personal level.
- **Assignments and quizzes.** Student work may enable students to practice the material and apply it to various topics. Quizzes will test student comprehension of the material.
- **Projects.** Students may collaborate on 1-2 group projects as culminations of what they learned. However, teachers may encounter various logistical limitations to more ambitious projects. They are encouraged to explore other options, such as:
 - A “middle ground” option - A project that can be completed within the classroom, such as a project where students are broken up into teams, and two teams are paired for a debate following the norms for civic discourse they learned in the course. Or students work in teams to create and film a public service announcement (PSA) for their peers about civic discourse or social wellbeing. (Completed PSA's can be posted on social media for public viewing.)
 - A “basic” option - Have each student write a letter to a person whose viewpoint they strongly oppose, that (a) expresses a genuine understanding of the recipient's opposing viewpoint, and (b) puts forth the reasoning and evidence the student would like the recipient to consider (along the lines of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”). The student will actually receive the letter and write about what kind of response(s) they received.

Teacher qualifications:

An assignment for Civic Discourse is allowed with one of the following certificates.

- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--Government.
- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--History.
- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--Psychology.
- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--Social Studies.
- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--Social Studies, Composite.
- Grades 6-12 or Grades 9-12--Sociology.
- History: Grades 7-12.
- History: Grades 8-12.
- Junior High School (Grades 9-10 only) or High School--Government-Political Science.
- Junior High School (Grades 9-10 only) or High School--History.
- Junior High School (Grades 9-10 only) or High School--Psychology.
- Junior High School (Grades 9-10 only) or High School--Social Science, Composite.
- Junior High School (Grades 9-10 only) or High School--Sociology.
- Secondary Government (Grades 6-12).
- Secondary History (Grades 6-12).
- Secondary Psychology (Grades 6-12).

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- Secondary Social Studies (Grades 6-12).
- Secondary Social Studies, Composite (Grades 6-12).
- Secondary Sociology (Grades 6-12).
- Social Studies: Grades 7-12.
- Social Studies: Grades 8-12.

Additional information: