

JACK MILLER CENTER *for Teaching America's Founding Principles & History*

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I am Hans Zeiger, President of the Jack Miller Center, a nationwide network of scholars and educators dedicated to advancing the study of America's founding principles. An important element of the Jack Miller Center's work has been building campus centers devoted to the American Political Tradition and liberal education across the country. We believe that the serious study of that tradition, far from being the sole purview of a political party or of interest only to academic historians and political theorists, is the right of all Americans. Such an education is necessary for informed and responsible citizenship.

We are not alone in this opinion. Most Americans, reaching across party lines, support content-based civics in the classroom. A poll we sponsored found that over 70 percent of parents believe that civics education should focus on the core principles of the American founding, and most parents do not believe that their children are currently receiving enough civics education.

The new Civics Institutes at the Ohio State University and University of Toledo proposed by SB117 would be an important step in the right direction insofar as they would promote a broad understanding of the American Political Tradition while emphasizing the importance of freedom of inquiry and liberal education.

These new institutes seek to educate "university students in the principles, ideals, and institutions of the American constitutional order." Civics education unites Americans around a common knowledge of the American Political Tradition. Voices from the left and the right can identify with it—even as they disagree about the best way to interpret and understand that tradition. This education allows students and citizens to disagree productively, based on their shared understanding of the actual texts, arguments, and legal documents that created this country.

Intellectual diversity and civil discourse are indispensable prerequisites for any university education. The mandate of these two new institutes includes the charge of "value[ing] intellectual diversity in higher education... and [to] aspire to enhance the intellectual diversity of academic life at the university." They will do so by "creat[ing] a community dedicated to an ethic of civil and free inquiry, which respects the intellectual freedom of each member, supports individual capacities for growth, and welcomes the differences of opinion that naturally occur in a public university community." The ultimate goal of both institutions, as should be the ultimate goal of a college education is to "educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth." We may, and do, disagree on what exactly the truth is. But we can agree that the best education is that which equips students with the ability to seek it.

The battle for the soul of our nation will be won or lost in our classrooms.TM

Finally, it is important to embrace efforts that encourage the study of “the books and major debates which form the intellectual foundation of free societies” and “the core texts and great debates of western civilization.” As the administrations of colleges and universities around the country question whether humanities education is a worthy pursuit, these new programs indicate an admirable confidence in the significance of liberal education for a free people. The opportunity to study the great works of the past should be widely available to any student interested and capable of undertaking it, rather than becoming the preserve of only the few. There is, furthermore, a deep link between a liberal education that allows students to survey themselves and their own times broadly, and a civic education that equips them with the skill, ability, and mindset to work together with other citizens for the betterment of the country as a whole. Simply put, these civics centers help American students become informed American citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hans Zeiger". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Hans Zeiger
President
The Jack Miller Center