

THE HAMILTON CENTER FOR CLASSICAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION

at the University of Florida

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Florida should establish a new academic unit devoted to:

- increasing the *political and intellectual diversity* of the UF faculty;
- providing students with a non-partisan civic education in *American ideals and institutions*;
- providing students with a traditional liberal education in the great books that form the foundation of *western intellectual tradition*;
- promoting civil discourse and freedom of thought on campus.

RATIONALE

The fundamental mission of the university is to seek truth. That mission is threatened by cancel culture and uniformity of opinion on campus. A recent scientific poll¹ of students at the University of Florida found these alarming results:

- **80%** of UF students oppose allowing a pro-life scholar to speak on campus;
- **72%** oppose allowing a scholar critical of pandemic lockdowns to speak;
- **79%** think shouting down an invited speaker is acceptable;
- **82%** say they cannot express their opinion because of how professors, administrators, or other students would respond.
- **Over a third** of UF students think it is acceptable to use ***violence*** to stop campus speech.

At every major American university, the political uniformity of faculty fuels this conformism and cancellation among students on campuses across the country. One study finds that conservatives comprise *less than 3 percent* of faculty at the University of Florida based on FEC records.²

This imbalance is no accident: Over a third of U.S. professors *openly admit* that they would discriminate against conservative scholars professionally.³ The lack of political balance on campus hinders our ability to educate students, because genuine education is a *dialogue*, not a *monologue*.

Coincident with this problem of conformity in the university is the problem of pervasive civic illiteracy. A recent study by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation reported that only 38% of Floridians would pass a basic U.S. Citizenship Test; only 2% would score a grade of A- or higher. Although the proportion of college-educated Americans has risen since 1945, civic knowledge has not risen with it.⁴ Public universities, in particular, have a duty to remedy this deficiency.

The magnitude of these challenges requires a response of commensurate scale: the establishment of a new, robust, and fiercely independent center of learning and research within the

¹ Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) 2021 Free Speech Rankings. <https://tabsoft.co/3ByPOUP>

² National Association of Scholars, "Partisan Registration and Contributions of Faculty in Flagship Colleges," <https://www.nas.org/blogs/article/partisan-registration-and-contributions-of-faculty-in-flagship-colleges>.

³ "Academic Freedom in Crisis: Punishment, Political Discrimination, and Self-Censorship," Center for Study of Partisanship and Ideology (2020).

⁴ Derek Bok, "The Crisis of Civic Education," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, <https://bit.ly/3FHHuV6>.

University of Florida to provide *choice* for Florida's students and their parents dissatisfied with the present offerings.

*The Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education at the University of Florida will provide students with an education in the ideas, traditions, and texts that form the foundation of western and American civilization.*⁵

PRECEDENT IN OTHER STATES

Florida will not be the first state to take precisely this step. In 2016, dissatisfied with ideological homogeneity and civic illiteracy at Arizona State University, the Arizona state legislature established the *School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership* (SCETL) at Arizona State University.

This new school now thrives with fifteen faculty members and multiple degree programs. See **Appendix B** for a list of ASU SCETL's courses and achievements. SCETL's professors have expanded the intellectual diversity of the faculty at ASU, and their courses have dramatically expanded the opportunity for traditional liberal education and civic education at ASU.

Arizona's core insight was that the needs they saw could not be addressed by working within existing academic departments or by simply establishing a center to gather *existing* faculty to host guest lectures. What was necessary was a *new academic unit* with the ability to hire new faculty who can bring fresh perspectives to the table and develop a innovative suite of courses that expand, diversify, and enrich the intellectual community of the university.

PRECEDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

There is precedent at UF for the particular *organizational structure* the Hamilton Center would need. UF's Latin American Studies Center exists *outside* any particular college. It has "center-based" faculty appointed fully (100%) *within* the Center; the Center offers its own courses and degree programs; it has its own by-laws and its own faculty governance; and the Center's faculty Director reports to the Provost, not to a college dean.

The Hamilton Center should have a similar organizational structure, albeit a very different academic mission. The Hamilton Center should be led by a faculty Director who reports to the senior leadership of University of Florida. It should not be housed within any existing college of the University. Rather, to maintain its distinctiveness and mission, the Hamilton Center should function as an independent academic unit with its own faculty offering courses as well as degree programs. Hamilton Center faculty should normally be "center-based," with their appointments fully (100%) in the Center, not in existing departments and colleges. Existing departments should not have the authority to block the appointment of externally recruited faculty to the Center. The appointments should be made at regular rank (tenured and tenure-track).

RECRUITMENT OF FACULTY TO THE HAMILTON CENTER

If Hamilton Center faculty were to be hired through *existing* departments, the result would be a replication of what already exists.

⁵ The Center is provisionally named in honor of **Alexander Hamilton**, the American founder who took the greatest interest in the importance of Florida to the future of the United States. See Gilbert L. Lycan, "Alexander Hamilton's Florida Policy," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 50 (1971), pp. 143-157.

To recruit for SCETL, Arizona State University appointed an *external* board of *nationally distinguished scholars, drawn from across the country, with relevant experience and expertise*. This board included Harvey Mansfield of Harvard University and scholars of the Hoover Institution at Stanford. This board made recommendations for the recruitment of founding faculty, and the result was an excellent, highly qualified, mission-aligned faculty.

The UF Board of Trustees should follow this same process. The Board of Trustees and President should appoint a Hamilton Center *national board of academic advisers* to advise on the recruitment and development of the Hamilton Center. The Hamilton Center advisory board should be composed of distinguished scholars with relevant expertise, such as Professor Robert P. George of Princeton and Professor Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard.

MISSION OF HAMILTON CENTER AT UF

The following mission statement for ASU's SCETL was written by political philosopher Harvey C. Mansfield of Harvard University. It provides a useful model:

Universities in America today live in an atmosphere of a certain conformity of opinion and suffer from an obvious lack of debate. Often there seems to be more open and vigorous debate in American society and politics than where one should expect it, in the American university. Yet the solution is not to bring in more politics and greater contention from outside, thus disturbing the peace necessary in a university for study and scholarly inquiry.

This center seeks to introduce a new level of debate over the large questions of life that always arise. These are questions of value: What is the best form of government? The most efficient and just economy? The good life for an individual? And also basic questions of fact and concept: Is science the only kind of knowledge? Does history have a direction and purpose? Is moral choice a fact or delusion?

These questions do not have easy answers, and indeed the questions have always been clearer than the answers. As a learning community of faculty and students, this center will approach them in two ways. One way is to look beyond the time and borders of our present society to the great thinkers who have contended for the high status of teachers of humanity. Some, like Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, are known as literature; others, like Plato, Marx and Nietzsche, known as philosophy. Both poets and philosophers make us aware that our way of life is not the only way, and they combine to teach us how our way is distinctive and how we ought to judge it.

The other way of studying the fundamental questions is to look within ourselves to the American leaders, both intellectual and political, who have inspired us. Here we turn from the human task of thinking for oneself to the civic vocation of contributing to our common life. As citizens our students face the responsibilities of the nation and the world that will be theirs when their time to lead arrives. We need to know what principles and institutions have made us Americans and whether they need to be reformed or reasserted.

Since America was founded on certain ideas rather than a single race or nation, we need to see what those founding ideas were. We need to see how they have guided our people to live, and how we have changed, for better and worse. Ours is the most thorough and enduring democratic society in history, and yet we debate its faults. We need to see how the ideas of the Founding Fathers were both invoked and reformed through the succession of leaders after them: by Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson,

Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, Martin Luther King and Ronald Reagan – and let’s not forget Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams, Edith Wharton and Betty Friedan. Nor can we fail to mention the two greatest books on America – *The Federalist* and Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*.

In sum, our new center looks outward to humanity and inward to America. Its ambition is to teach critical minds and to puncture complacency – and it tries to be both proud of genuine greatness and humble about human imperfection.

TIMELINE

Winter 2022: The legislature includes a Specific Appropriation for the Hamilton Center at UF in the General Appropriations Act.

Spring 2022: The legislature includes, as part of the act *implementing* the 2022-2023 General Appropriations Act, the attached legislation to establish and structure the Hamilton Center.

Summer 2022: Board of Trustees and President of the University of Florida appoints the *Hamilton Center Board of Fellows*, consisting of distinguished scholars from around the country aligned with the mission of the Hamilton Center, to advise the Board of Trustees and President on selection of the founding faculty of the Hamilton Center.

Fall 2022: The Board of Trustees and President hire the faculty Director of the Center and founding faculty.

Years 1 - 5:

- Build an externally recruited, 100% center-based faculty of nationally recognized scholars;
- Create undergraduate and graduate degree programs;
- Offer courses in fulfillment of general education requirements for students from across the university;
- Offer public-facing debates and panels as a center of civic learning for the entire community;
- Provide opportunities for thousands of Florida civics teachers and high school students to engage with the Hamilton Center through civic education training and programs.

BUDGET

For the 2022-23 academic year, we recommend a **start-up specific appropriation of \$2M to the Hamilton Center at UF**.

Over the longer term, the Hamilton Center will be funded, like every other academic unit at the University of Florida, through a combination of philanthropy, tuition revenue, and state appropriations. Its name could be changed in recognition of transformation gift.

IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION

This effort will require well-constructed implementation language within the act implementing the 2022-2023 General Appropriations Act. Model legislation is contained in **Appendix A** below.

Appendix A: MODEL IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION

To implement the Specific Appropriation 000 of the 2021-2022 General Appropriations Act, section 0000.0000, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education. -

(1) The Trustees of the University of Florida may use the above-referenced specific appropriation to establish the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education at the University of Florida. The Center shall be an independent center of teaching and research within the University. The purpose of the Center is to support teaching and research in the ideas, traditions, and texts that form the foundations of western and American civilization.

(2) The goals of this Center are:

(a) To educate university students in the core texts and great debates of western civilization;

(b) To educate university students in the principles, ideals, and institutions of the American political order;

(c) To educate university students in the foundations of responsible leadership and informed citizenship;

(d) To offer university-wide programming related to the values of open inquiry and civil discourse.

(3) The Hamilton Center shall be led by a faculty Director appointed by the Board of Trustees who shall report to the President of the University of Florida.

(4) The Board of Trustees and President of the University of Florida shall appoint a seven-member Hamilton Center Board of Fellows, comprised of distinguished scholars from across the nation with relevant expertise and experience.

(5) The Hamilton Center Board of Fellows shall assist the Board of Trustees in the recruitment of the inaugural faculty Director of the Hamilton Center and two founding faculty members to be appointed with the protection of tenure or tenure eligibility. Following a national search, the Board of Fellows shall transmit to the Board of Trustees a list of recommended finalists for each position. The Board of Trustees and President shall appoint the faculty Director and two founding faculty members of the Hamilton Center.

(6) The faculty of the Hamilton Center shall have their appointments within the Center. Faculty appointed within the Hamilton Center shall not be required, but may be permitted, to gain joint or courtesy appointments within any other division of the University.

(7) The Hamilton Center Board of Fellows shall be dissolved following the appointment of the Center's founding faculty.

(8) Employment contracts for regular-rank faculty within the Hamilton Center shall include a provision guaranteeing reappointment within another division of the university, at the same rank and compensation, if the Hamilton Center should be eliminated at some future date.

Appendix B: Sample Courses and Achievements of Arizona State University’s School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership

- American Constitution
- Enlightenment & Revolution: Political Thought in Europe 1685-1815
- Federalists, Anti-Federalists & Enduring Debate
- Classical Political Philosophy: The Greeks
- Modern Political Thought: origins and Debates about Modern Liberty
- The Trial of Galileo
- Classical Political Philosophy & Statesmanship
- Democracies in Crisis
- Justice and Virtue
- Liberty and Equality
- Natural Law & the Common Good
- Theories of Democratic Citizenship
- Politics & Literature: Shakespeare & Machiavelli
- Debating American Constitutionalism
- Race and the American Story
- Arizona Politics & Constitutionalism
- Liberalism and Conservatism in America
- Lincoln: Rhetoric, Thought, Statesmanship
- Political Thought & Leadership of James Madison
- Tocqueville on Liberty, Equality and Democracy
- Transatlantic Perspectives on Democracy
- Law of the Constitution: Government and Powers
- Civil Liberties and Rights
- Great American Leaders
- Globalism & Nationalism
- Debates in American Public Policy and Civic Affairs
- Political Speechwriting
- Political Rhetoric and Public Speaking
- Politics and Leadership in the Age of Revolutions, 1775-1826
- Ideological Origins of Anglo-American Liberty: Four Modern Revolutions
- Left and Right Around the World
- Politics & Leadership in the Age of Revolution
- Shakespeare's Leadership Lessons: Performance & Politics
- U.S. National Security Challenges in the 21st Century
- National Security Policy Design
- Political Leadership and Statesmanship
- U.S. National Policy & Strategic Leadership: Afghanistan
- Classical to Modern Economic Thought
- Classics of Modern Economic Thought: Smith to Hayek and Beyond
- Women in Political Thought and Leadership
- Entrepreneurialism and Innovation
- Modern Political Thought
- Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- The American Political Economy
- Adam Smith and Classical Political Economy

Additionally, SCETL has developed:

- The university’s **most robust debate and speaker series** to promote **civil discourse** on campus;
- A **Civic Literacy Curriculum** for Arizona teachers to help them “prepare the next generation of leaders for American political and civil society”;
- A **State Seal of Civic Literacy** for high school diplomas; and
- A **Civic Leadership Institute** for high school students.