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AMEX Jul-27-2007 9:35 am ET

Index	Last Trade	Change
NASDAQ	2591.10	-8.24
SP 500	1477.51	-5.15
Russ 2000	786.67	-4.81
AMEX	2268.39	-26.58
NYSE	9631.82	-22.56
30 YR BOND	49.33	-0.13

Jul 27, 2007 10:04 AM ET
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News

Fighting civic illiteracy

By [JOANN LIVINGSTON](#) Daily Light Managing Editor

Posted: Thursday, July 26, 2007 11:58 AM CDT

After a recent study reported only 48 percent of college students correctly identified the phrase, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," as part of the Declaration of Independence, a team effort to strengthen civic literacy has been launched.

Intercollegiate Studies Institute, which authored the landmark study, announced Tuesday it would work with six affiliates of the State Policy Network of think tank organizations - including the Austin-based Texas Public Policy Foundation - toward a goal of strengthening the teaching of America's history and institutions on college campuses.

ISI's Jack Miller Center for the Teaching of America's Founding Principles has donated \$90,000 for the three-year effort, which will fund statewide communications and awareness-building activities by the participating affiliates, with the TPPF joined by the Washington Policy Center, John Locke Foundation in North Carolina, the Independence Institute in Colorado, Mississippi Center for Public Policy and Maine Heritage Policy Center as grant recipients.

"Shockingly, in some cases, students knew less at the end of their college years than when they first set foot on campus. But these scores are hardly an indictment on colleges and universities alone," TPPF president Brooke Leslie Rollins wrote in a recent commentary about the issue. "The average improvement during one's undergraduate years was a mere 1.5 points (almost three points for Texas), highlighting failures in civic education in K-12 days as well.

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"The report concludes that 'students don't learn what colleges don't teach,' arguing that student knowledge will improve when schools require students to take more courses in American history and economics," Rollins wrote. "The same can be said for all of education whether in middle and high school classrooms or on college campuses. Ultimately, those who care deeply about the future of this country — moreover the future of liberty and freedom — know that civic virtue is essential to the system of self-government we enjoy today. ... Indeed, we might wonder whether students failing at civics also fails our country, and how well we are preparing future generations to lead this country in the tradition of its founders."

The study, which was released in June, included results from a questionnaire

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given to 14,000 randomly selected seniors and freshmen on 50 campuses across the nation.

Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn., was ranked first in the study, with Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., ranked 50th.

In Texas, students at Baylor University (20th), West Texas A&M University (21st) and the University of Texas at Austin (23rd) were tested.

Each student was given a 60-question multiple-choice test that covered the topics of American history (17 questions), government (14 questions), America and the world (16 questions) and market economy (13 questions). "The themes consist of basic civic knowledge or concepts, not obscure or arbitrarily selected knowledge," the summary notes.

The study reported low scores, with an average score of 53.2 percent for seniors and 51.7 percent for freshmen. The study noted most colleges showing gains in civic learning are among the lesser known. Another finding indicated some of the nation's most prestigious colleges saw freshmen scoring higher than seniors, which the study characterized as "negative learning."

"So, even though students arrive on campus with inadequate knowledge of America's history and institutions and in great need of improved civic literacy, institutions of higher education in America do little to facilitate this learning," an executive summary of the study reads. "On average, three years of higher learning adds a dismal 0.2 percent to student's already limited knowledge of American history and a meager 0.9 percent in government and political thought. Colleges and universities fared little better in teaching about 'America and the world,' adding 1.7 percent in average student learning." ISI's study made five recommendations:

- improve the assessment of learning outcomes at the college and university level
 - increase the number of required history, political science and economics courses
 - hold higher education more accountable to its mission and fundamental responsibility to prepare its students to be informed, engaged participants in a democratic republic
 - better inform students and their parents, public officials and taxpayers of a given university's performance in teaching America's history and institutions
 - build academic centers on campuses to encourage and support the restoration of teaching American history, political science and economics
- "ISI has clearly demonstrated a commitment to reforming higher education and promoting civic engagement in future generations — causes SPN members certainly value," SPN president Tracie Sharp said. "ISI has a proven track record of success in creating awareness of these issues and implementing change. We look forward to working together to further this cause."

"The joint effort with SPN is another step forward in our attempt to expose this void in higher education and evoke change," said Mike Ratliff, ISI senior vice president and executive director of the Jack Miller Center. "We recognize that legislators and other key decision makers on the state level are very important regarding higher education and that their support is needed to institute reform. Teaming up with SPN and its members allows us to reach these key audiences."

It is anticipated the six SPN affiliate members will use their grant funding to communicate to key decision makers — state legislators, college trustees, alumni, faculty, donors, parents and students — the need for colleges to engage in the effective teaching of America's history and founding principles. As part of ISI's call for reform and in response to requests from some of the nation's leading scholars, the Jack Miller Center also is supporting the establishment of academic centers of excellence dedicated to teaching



Poll

What's your favorite summer activity?

traveling

swimming

league sports

cooking out

camping

gardening

staying inside

don't like the summer

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America's history and founding principles. Centers are now active on college and university campuses across the country, including the University of Chicago; University of Colorado, Boulder; University of Texas, Austin; Georgetown University and Emory University.

"Dozens of new academic centers of excellence are active now or are being planned by dedicated professors on college campuses nationwide," Ratliff said in an earlier press release. "These centers are strengthening undergraduate education in our history through public lectures, conferences and workshops, post doctoral fellowships, graduate student fellowships, student and faculty seminars, alumni and donor events and sponsorship of visiting professors."

ISI expects to release another study in September that will include data from a second administration of the questionnaire at college campuses across the country.

The Jack Miller Center also has announced it will host a National Strategy Summit on Higher Education Reform in Florida in January.

On the Internet:

www.isi.org
www.tppf.org

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