



## Equip students with generations of wisdom

2010-02-15 12:44:09

The ongoing economic crisis and recent scandals in business and politics, from Fannie Mae and Enron to Bernie Madoff and William Jefferson, highlight the need for a greater emphasis on the fundamental values and principles of our country.

College coursework focusing on Western civilization and American traditions would teach students critical thinking and reasoning skills and provide a solid grounding in civic responsibility and ethical character — improving society in the wake of moral muddiness.

A few years ago, The Intercollegiate Studies Institute, a non-profit educational organization, commissioned a test on American civics to more than 14,000 undergraduate students at 50 universities. Baylor, West Texas A&M University, and the University of Texas at Austin were included in the survey. On average, the Texas students who took the survey answered only 49.3 percent of questions correct. To be blunt, they failed miserably.

The study also found that Texas undergraduates gained just a trivial 2.9 percent of their civic knowledge during their college years. Additionally, undergraduates at these three Texas universities were below the national average in the number of history, government and economics courses taken during college.

From scandals in business to the lack of civic literacy among our college students, it is clear there is a demonstrable need for more focus on Western civilization and ethics at our universities, and it seems some lawmakers in the Texas legislature agree.

Last November, Texas House Speaker Joe Straus, at the request of House Higher Education Chairman Dan Branch, issued an interim legislative study to determine "the feasibility of offering an optional curriculum that emphasizes ethics, Western civilization, and American traditions to satisfy portions of the Texas Core Curriculum" at Texas public universities.

The public should have an interest in the development of this study since they contribute tax dollars to these universities. Texas universities have an opportunity to stand out at the national level by establishing and developing such a curriculum, and a curriculum based on Western civilization and American traditions has the potential to attract new students and professors and expand the university's support base.

Additionally, students will benefit from the skills they learn as employers increasingly seek graduates with a comprehensive education, who demonstrate civic responsibility and ethical behavior, and who have critical thinking skills. Coursework that exposes students to American ideals, institutions and traditions will make them — and our state — more competitive in today's global economy.

More importantly, a thorough exposure to coursework exploring moral questions and the founding principles of our country will prepare students to face ethical challenges that arise in their day-to-day lives.

A college education should be about more than high starting salaries. We want our college graduates to read, write and speak well, and to think critically. We want them to be able to make thoughtful moral choices and fully appreciate what it means to be human. Evidence suggests that our state's public universities do not adequately address these important areas.

Without a renewed emphasis on Western civilization at Texas public universities, the principles that have made our nation the envy of the world will be lost in the classroom of this generation. Our universities need to address this deficiency, and if they do not, the legislature should find ways to encourage universities to do so.

Elizabeth Young is a higher education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

© Copyright 2010 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)