



SCHOOL OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP

# THE AMERICAN CIVIC TRADITION

Professional Development Seminar  
for Teachers



This three-day seminar series examines the theoretical ideas that informed the creation and development of America's political system and some of the contemporary challenges to the maintenance of American democracy. Topics include the Declaration of Independence, free speech in a democracy, slavery and the American founding, and major social and political movements in American history.

Participation in these **small**, seminar discussions is **selective**; breakfast, lunch, refreshments, and reading packet provided.

**Teachers will receive a stipend of \$1,000**

## GOALS OF THE INITIATIVE

- Understand the texts and ideas that influenced the Founders during the creation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- Study the perspectives of historical figures who were engaged in the central debates that shaped the United States.
- Consider how fundamental principles introduced at the Founding have influenced political and social movements throughout American history.
- Learn how to incorporate these primary sources and new knowledge into lessons for students

## FACULTY

**Dr. Matthew Reising**  
University of Texas at Austin

Register  
here



**June 8th-10th, July 6th-8th, 2026**  
**University of Texas at San Antonio**  
**San Pedro I**

## DAILY SCHEDULE

Breakfast 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.  
Session I: 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
Session II: 10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.  
Lunch 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.  
Session III: 1:15 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

## Contact:

[SCLK12@utexas.edu](mailto:SCLK12@utexas.edu)



**TEXAS**  
Civic Leadership



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

# Sample Guiding Themes and Questions

*These seminars will be oriented around the discussion and exploration of shared questions. Ideas interact with politics and history—to see how, we follow out these and other similarly profound questions.*

## **Natural Rights and the Social Contract**

What is the meaning of a state of nature and natural rights?

To what extent is the Declaration influenced by the political philosophy of John Locke?

## **Who Should Interpret the Constitution?**

Should constitutional interpretation be left solely to the Courts, or do the executive and legislative branches have a role to play?

When should a decision on matters of constitutional interpretation be considered final?

## **The Executive and Congress**

To what degree do liberal democracies need energetic executive power?

What are the different characters of the Senate and the House?

## **Federalism**

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a federal constitution?

## **Slavery and the Constitution**

How did some of the Founders expect to see the problem of slavery resolved?

How does Lincoln develop his argument against popular sovereignty with respect to slavery?

## **Civil Rights Movement**

How should an individual deal with a law that he or she recognizes is unjust?

The Future of our Constitution?

How do the liberal, progressive, and conservative visions of the American future compare?

## **Sample Texts, Authors, and Resources**

Declaration of Independence, and the US Constitution

John Locke, Second Treatise on Government

Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers

Letters and Speeches from James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry

Letters and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass

Speeches from Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt

Speeches from William Brennan and Antonin Scalia

Speeches from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

Texts from William Brennan, Antonin Scalia, and many more ...