

GRAND CHALLENGES *and* OPPORTUNITIES

USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

REIMAGINING SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACIES

PART 1

Knowing Otherwise — Systems, Information & Power

Part 1 will begin by examining the architectures of knowledge production and dissemination. Participants will explore systems-thinking as a tool not only to analyze complexity, but to challenge assumptions about neutrality, credibility, and authority.

As emerging technologies—from algorithmic curation to generative AI—reshape how information is created, circulated, and trusted, we will consider their impact on learning, public discourse, and justice. Together, we'll interrogate the construction of “facts,” the politically polarizing nature of truth, and the cultural dynamics of misinformation and disinformation.

MODERATOR



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PANELISTS



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Robert Medrano

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- Project Specialist for the USC Democracy Project
- Former secondary social studies teacher and instructional coach
- USC Rossier EDL graduate in 2020

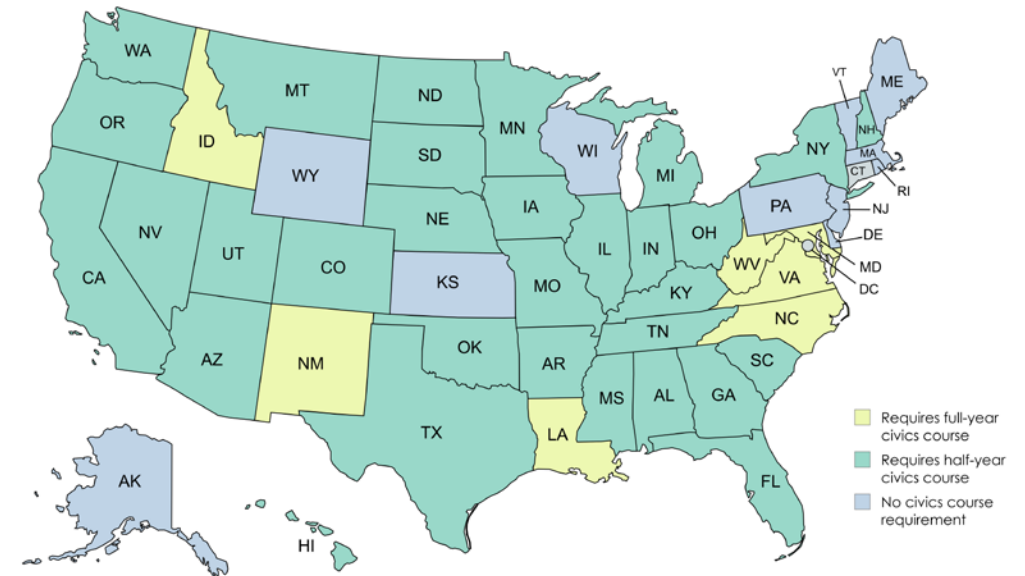


Conventional Approaches to Civic Education

“The United States invests just 5 cents in civic education for every 50 dollars that goes to education in the STEM subjects.”

- Focuses on government structures and national observances
- Emphasizes formal acts of citizenship
- Uses normative vocabulary with narrow connotations
- Risks reinforcing a one-size-fits-all model of participation

U.S. Civic Education Policies by State



Created with mapchart.net

- Craiutu, S. and Ngalande, J. (2024). *State civics requirements in 2024*. Hoover Institution.
- Ito, M., Soep, E., Kligler-Vilenchik, N., Shresthova, S., Gamber-Thompson, L., & Zimmerman, A. (2015). Learning connected civics: Narratives, practices, infrastructures. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 45(1), 10-29.
- Mirra, N., & Garcia, A. (2017). Civic participation reimagined: Youth interrogation and innovation in the multimodal public sphere. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 136-158.
- Woodwell, Jr., W.H. (2024). *Connecting civic education and a healthy democracy*. Carnegie Corporation.

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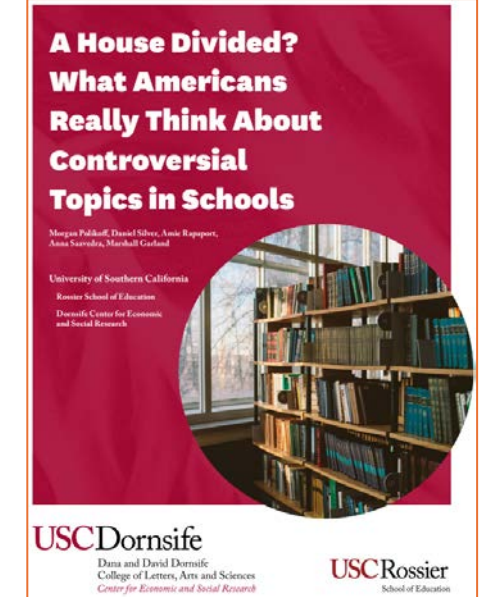
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The Challenge of Teaching Civics

- Topics framed as controversial can discourage open dialogue
- Legislative restrictions create fear of backlash and professional risk for teachers
- Neutrality as silence can legitimize harmful views
- Teachers often lack support to facilitate dialogue on complex social issues and current events

Between 2021 and 2022, government officials across federal, state, and local jurisdictions introduced 563 measures that aimed to prohibit teaching issues that introduce “divisive concepts” about race.



- Alexander, T., Baldwin Clark, L., Reinhard, K., & Zatz, N. (2023). *CRT forward: Tracking the attack on Critical Race Theory*. UCLA School of Law Critical Race Studies.
- Polikoff, M., Silver, D., Rapaport, A., Saavedra, A., & Garland, M. (2022). *A house divided? What Americans really think about controversial topics in schools*. University of Southern California.
- Woo, A., Diliberti, M. K., & Steiner, E. D. (2024). *Policies restricting teaching about race and gender spill over into other states and localities*. RAND.

Opportunities for Civic Education

- Move beyond “one-size-fits-all” civics to reflect the lived experiences of students
- Recognize plural forms of participation
- Support schools as spaces to practice critical thinking and civil dialogue
- Develop laboratories of democracy where students engage in complex understandings of the world



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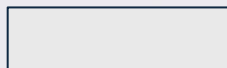


[Redacted] posted to **Gun Issues 1**

Feb 19 · 5:49 PM · 🗨️

Hello everyone I will be joining you in this debate.

And I quote: "We lose eight children and teenagers to gun violence everyday. If a mysterious virus suddenly started killing eight of our children everyday, America would mobilize teams of doctors and public health officials. We would move heaven and earth until we found a way to protect our children. But not with gun violence."
(<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/gun-violence>)



There have been more deaths in 2017, 2018, and 2019 from strokes, Alzheimer's disease, Diabetes, kidney disease, and the number of deaths per year is 50,046. not from guns

Like • Feb 27, 2019, 12:28 PM

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Storytelling: The 4 C's

I left my gun on the porch and it didn't kill anybody

By [redacted]



Tributes on the streets

This is a spot in my neighborhood where someone was fatally shot one night during the summer of 2017. This was ruled as a cross fire. Someone was trying to kill someone else and accidentally shot someone that had nothing to do anything. This is one reason why I disagree with carrying firearms.



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New Architectures of Argument Writing

- ◉ Articulation of Needs
- ◉ Activation of Empathetic Imagination
- ◉ Collective Speculation
- ◉ Pragmatic Iteration
- ◉ Reflection & Revision

It's kind of surreal because it's kind of like, 'Hey, there are people out there outside of you and there are people that exist, and have lives, and have experiences that aren't you.' And that's kind of weird to think about . . . So seeing these other people and reading about the experiences they've had – it's very eye-opening.

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Corinne Hyde EdD (she/her)

Professor of Clinical Education
USC Rossier School of Education

How have our information ecosystems changed?

Challenges

- Lack of regulation or global strategy
- Sociopolitical unrest and polarization
- Economic pressures
- Censorship, intimidation, and disinformation
- Decline of trusted sources
- Algorithmic bias
- AI limitations
- Technological manipulation

Opportunities

- Rapid scientific and computing advances
- Unprecedented access to news and information
- Ability to create and connect globally
- Higher productivity and user-friendly technology
- Transformation of learning and education

What implications do those changes have for democracy?



Photo by Denise Applewhite

“I don't think we have wrapped our heads around how much technology has allowed the manipulation of individuals and democracies.”

- Maria Ressa, journalist and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States



How can we sustain our democracy in new information ecosystems?

- Limit information intake to what you can process.
- Verify sources and facts before sharing.
- Counter misinformation with credible evidence.
- Foster dialogue and resist polarization.
- Strengthen information and civic literacy.
- Defend free access to information.
- Learn and adapt to AI responsibly.

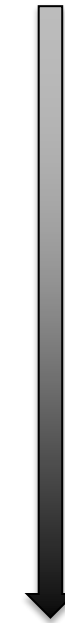
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TECHNOLOGY: LEVERAGING *PHENOMENA** FOR *USEFUL* PURPOSES

- **PHYSICAL** (e.g. Photoelectric Effect)
- ◉ **CHEMICAL** (e.g. Catalysis)
- ◎ ***GEOLOGICAL*** (e.g. *Petroleum*)
- ◉ **BIOLOGICAL** (e.g. Bioengineering)
- ◉ ***SOCIAL-BEHAVIORAL***
- ◎ ***ARTIFICIAL*** (e.g. *Design, Data*)



Increasing
complexity

**And combinations of phenomena, including the discovery of new phenomena*