

Reigniting civic literacy in Arizona and beyond

New ASU podcast series 'Civics in a Year' to commemorate 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence

By Megan Neely, ASU News
September 5, 2025

On July 4, 2026, the United States will celebrate 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

To commemorate the nation's history, the [School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership](#) at ASU has partnered with the university's [Center for American Civics](#) to launch the "[Civics in a Year](#)" podcast, which will release 250 mini episodes leading up to the anniversary.

Hosted by [Liz Evans](#), program director for civic education and outreach, the podcast interviews professors and experts from across the country about civics education topics and explores different aspects of American civics from federalism to elections in 10-minute episodes. The podcast will also feature "kid edition" episodes to include younger listeners.

"We're doing the 'Civics in a Year' podcast because we want to make sure that civic literacy and civic education are accessible for anybody," Evans said.

The podcast bases its topics on the center's [Civic Literacy Curriculum](#), a free resource that includes historical backgrounds, workshops, edited primary texts, exercises, worksheets and discussion prompts that can be incorporated into lesson plans. Topics will include a range of interests such as the colonial time period, systems of government, and rights and responsibilities.

The curriculum — as well as the Arizona Civics Test required for high school graduation — is based on the United States Customs and Immigration Naturalization Test, which is required by the federal government to become a naturalized American citizen.

[Trevor Shelley](#) recently joined the podcast to discuss the [American economy](#) and define a commercial republic. Shelley, director of graduate studies and assistant professor in the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, has a background in political theory and focuses his research on philosophers who were influential for the American founders, such as Baron de Montesquieu and Adam Smith, as well as later interpreters of the American project, such as Alexis de Tocqueville.

"As many thoughtful commentators rightly argue, for a republic — or a constitutional democracy — like ours where the people are sovereign, the people need to be aware of not only their rights, but

their responsibilities as citizens,” Shelley said. “A proper understanding of the institutions and ideas involved in American political and economic life empowers individuals to be mindful and protective of their liberties, and thereby shape and direct policy in the proper interest of the people and toward the public good.”

[Richard Avramenko](#), the school’s director, who helped plan the 250 episodes, said that he hopes that listeners will be able to reflect on how significant the American experiment in governance has been.

“For 250 years now, a system of governance has been unfolding that aims to limit the power of the state over the people. In historical terms, this accomplishment is simply remarkable,” he said.

“If we can help the teachers and get them to a good place, their students are better off for it,” Evans said. “That’s when we start seeing things like the National Assessment of Educational Progress’ numbers going up, students who can tell you the three branches of government. My research is on making sure the workshops we do matter and work for teachers.”

Making civic education accessible

The need for resources that Arizona State University provides continues to rise across the country.

[Paul Carrese](#), the founding director of the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, was asked to participate in a national study on civic education in 2021. The [Educating for American Democracy](#) report built a framework to address growing concerns about civic literacy rates dropping in K-12 education.

“One of our arguments from that report is that a renewal of attention to priority for citizenship education would be good for K–12 public schools as well as for America,” said Carrese, now a professor in the school and director of the Center for American Civics. “This consensus developed across people who were K–12 experts, state education experts and professors like me, that revitalizing citizenship education would be good for public schools, in particular with the challenges public schools have with getting students excited about school.”

Studies within the past five years have continued to validate the calls to refocus on the subject. A [2022 survey](#) from the University of Pennsylvania reported that less than half of Americans can name all three branches of the federal government. A [2023 report](#) by the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 22% of eighth graders scored as proficient in civics.

“It’s general knowledge that Americans are becoming less and less civically literate. The School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at ASU is the trailblazer in reversing this trend,” Avrameko said. “There are at least nine other states that have followed our lead, and more to come.”

The school leads several projects that oversee a multitude of other free resources for educators, students and the general public to learn more about American civics.

The [Arizona Constitution Project](#) consists of three aspects: the Arizona Pocket Constitution, including a printed booklet and a new website; the Living Repository of the Arizona Constitution; and the digital Arizona Constitution. These are the first public resources in the state’s history

dedicated to promoting public understanding of the document.

“The upcoming website is accessible to an Arizona citizen or aspiring citizens, students, teachers and is a valuable resource for scholars,” Carrese said. “It gives this historical account of the Arizona Constitution, its founding, its origins, the evolution of it and the current official Arizona Constitution today given all the amendments that have occurred.”

The Arizona pocket constitutions, developed with the help of Associate Professor [Sean Beienburg](#), include essential information and core operations of the state’s constitution.

“(Beienburg) is one of the leading experts in the country as a political scientist about state constitutions and the evolution of particular state constitutions, so he developed for us a slim and essential Arizona Constitution as a pocket-sized document,” Carrese said. “This doesn’t have the whole record of the constitution, but if you’re an Arizona citizen, teacher or student, this is what you really need to know now about the Arizona Constitution.”

Another initiative from the school focuses on expanding the use of their [Civic Classics Collection](#). Built in collaboration with ASU Library, it houses documents ranging from The Federalist Papers to George Washington’s inaugural address. The collection of rare books and manuscripts resides in Hayden Library on ASU’s Tempe campus and is used for public programming.

(Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHvS2jlr7IE>)

The School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership also leads the [Civic Discourse Project](#), a multiyear initiative that addresses pressing societal issues. Each year addresses a new theme and invites scholars, civic leaders and public intellectuals to engage in discussions surrounding the challenges Americans are facing. This academic year’s theme is “America at 250.”

These resources and podcast episodes are just a few ways the school and center are supporting communities with research of public value. Staff, faculty and students are looking forward to celebrating 250 years of America and what might come in the next bicentennial.

“The 21st century is very different from the 18th century, but these ideas still govern our lives and our thinking, and America would be a healthier civic community if more of us knew about these principles and institutions,” Carrese said. “I’m really excited that we’re devoting such a big chunk of the 250th anniversary commemorations to understanding the founding principles, ideals, institutions and why they still matter.”

Avramenko hopes to not only expand the school’s current resources but also spread the word on how they can be used both locally and nationally.

“To be civically literate here in America is to understand and appreciate just how much has been accomplished,” he said, “and then from that, see how much more we can continue to accomplish.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Flags fly at the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News