



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 26, 2010

## Report Finds College Students Fail Basic Civics Test

“Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it” is one of the most oft-quoted aphorisms of Edmund Burke, an 18th-century Irish-born member of the British Parliament and fearless friend of liberty. Judging from the results of a recent survey conducted by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), most of the 14,000 college students who participated sadly will be repeating history.



Considering that most of the 14,000 students who completed the exam (7,000 seniors and 7,000 freshmen) scored an F on the portion of the test covering basic American history and institutions, not only will they be repeating history, but with test scores like that, they’ll be repeating history class, as well.

ISI, a conservative non-profit educational organization, has recently published the results of this sweeping survey in a 32-page report entitled “The Shaping of the American Mind: The Diverging Influences of the College Degree and Civic Learning on American Beliefs.” Sit down before you read this report because the data will knock you off your feet.

In 2007, ISI administered a 60-question test to 14,000 students at 50 colleges nationwide. The questions were designed to measure the students’ aptitude in four areas: basic American history, government, foreign affairs, and economics. In a companion study, in 2008 ISI administered a shorter exam (33 questions) to a random sample of 2,508 Americans without a college degree in order to have a standard level against which the impact of a college education on a threshold level of familiarity with basic American institutions could be determined.

Here are a few frightening figures certain to keep you up at night:

- 71% of Americans failed the civics knowledge test;
- 51% of Americans could not name the three branches of government;
- The average score for college seniors on the civics knowledge test was 54.2% (an “F” by any standard);
- The average student’s test score improved only 3.8 points from freshman to senior year;
- Freshmen at Cornell, Yale, Princeton, and Duke scored better than seniors on the civics knowledge test.
- 79% of elected officials that took the civics knowledge quiz did not know the Bill of Rights expressly prohibits the government from establishing a religion.
- 30% of office holders did not know that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are the inalienable



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rights referred to in the Declaration of Independence.

- 27% of politicians could not name even one right or freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.
- 43% did not know the purpose of the Electoral College.
- 39% of lawmakers believe the power of declaring war belongs to the president.
- >The average score for college professors who took the civics knowledge quiz was 55%.

So, while our nation's most elite colleges are not imbuing our children with a knowledge of our history and our government, the study makes it clear that those universities are becoming round the clock factories churning out poorly instructed liberals with little civic knowledge and even less faith and less devotion to principles of liberty than those Americans who didn't go to college.

It's not just ignorance of the founding and the structure of government that is being fostered at these so-called institutions of higher learning. The classrooms are becoming hothouses of left-wing opinions, as well. For example, according to the findings published by ISI, college graduates are more likely than non-graduates to favor legalizing same-sex marriage and abortion on demand. By contrast, college graduates are less likely to believe that the Bible is the word of God and that hard work and perseverance can make the American Dream come true.

Similarly, the study's findings revealed that regardless of one's formal education, one's knowledge of basic American civics determined one's faith in America and trust in the tenets of liberty upon which it was established. This shift is evident in the fact that non-college graduates who scored higher of the civics knowledge quiz than college graduates were less likely to believe that "America's founding documents are obsolete." Furthermore, the learned, though not college educated respondents are correspondingly less likely to agree that "the Ten Commandments are irrelevant" to the world today.

This research is, according to the organization's website, the fourth such study conducted by ISI in an attempt to scientifically measure the impact of a college education on civic knowledge and citizenship. Unremarkably, the results have not changed much over the years and once the numbers are crunched it is irrefutable that having a college education does almost nothing to buttress one's overall knowledge of the fundamental history and composition of American government.

In contrast, what a formal education at one of America's university does so effectively, however, is engender doubt in the American way of life, incubate irreverence for the pillars of liberty upon which the nation was built, and perhaps most disturbingly, sap the faith in God and the institutions of religious worship.

The various interesting findings of the study, including the questions asked and the results, as well as the scientific analysis thereof, can be found [here](#).

And, if you're brave, test your own knowledge of America's history, government, foreign policy, and economics by taking the quiz posted online [here](#). Good luck! And remember, eyes on your own paper. Judging by the results of this study, many of you college graduates might be tempted to cheat!



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