

## **Civics Education and RGSCP at the University of New Hampshire**

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### **0. Preamble**

The [Responsible Governance and Sustainable Citizenship Project](#) is housed within the department of Classics, Humanities & Italian Studies and is the result of a settlement in a suit that penalized TYCO International for its illegal business practices. The funds were put into the University System of New Hampshire until a decision could be made about how to best employ them, which were meant to promote ethics generally in public settings and particularly in business practices. Eventually, faculty in the Classics, with support from state officials who recognized the importance of the Humanities in civic and ethical training, created a proposal that was accepted by state and college officials, and the money was put into an endowment that is under the stewardship of the Advancement Office at UNH. RGSCP receives around \$240,000 in yearly interest from the endowment. The project is overseen by a Steering Committee of five: Director of RGSCP, Dean of Liberal Arts, Sustainability Officer, Member Chosen by the Secretary of State's Office, and an at-large faculty member. The director—which I became in August, 2022—runs day-to-day operations within the strategic parameters set by the Steering Committee. Until this year, the director did not have sufficient administrative support; in January, 2024, a program support administrator was hired using RGSCP funds, and it has made a huge difference in just these few months.

### **1. Civics at UNH**

There is no mandated civics component in the current general education system, which is termed “Discovery.” Four years ago, just prior to the pandemic, I was the chair of a committee to reevaluate general education. The committee put forward a proposal (see Appendix) that we add a civics component (Civics and Democratic Governance) as part of a palette of requirements that involved social issues of importance. The pandemic, along with resistance by several units on campus to other aspects of our proposal, rendered it null and void. A new committee has just been formed; a civics requirement of some sort is currently being discussed. At the very least, I'd hope we'd create a university dialogue on matters of civic engagement; RGSCP would be ready to support such a venture or a more robust university requirement.

### **2. RGSCP: Overview of Commitments**

The memorandum of understanding for RGSCP includes several mandates. First, it requires a postdoctoral fellow in Classics, whose duties involve teaching courses on civics, government, sustainability, and social responsibility.<sup>1</sup> This is currently the main vehicle for delivering curriculum. The position is, however, fungible in that other faculty can teach a mission-specific course to free up the postdoctoral fellow to teach other courses (such as ancient language to improve their teaching portfolio). In addition, the postdoc is to conduct research in an area directly or indirectly related to the mission of RGSCP and contribute service to programming (see below, Symposium on Citizenship). Second, we have a responsibility to support

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<sup>1</sup> Courses include: Democracies and Republics, Individual and Society, Rome and the Founding of the USA, Greek and Roman Women, Sustaining Ancient Rome, Greece.

programming in Sustainability, one of the strategic pillars of our university.<sup>2</sup> Third, we support the curriculum involving business ethics. Currently, this involves a singular course, taught by philosophy and business school faculty, that is both a major requirement for business students (accreditation standards for business schools require ethics training in some fashion) *and* fulfills the Humanities requirement for the university. This is a less-than-ideal situation for several reasons, of which I'll highlight two. First, the course is taught in a large class format (about 100 enrollments per section) with little time for close reading and discussion. Second, that it fulfills the university Humanities requirement takes business students from other classes that would provide them a broad-based education. The director of RGSCP at the time recommended a selection of smaller-format philosophy courses that would provide needed ethics content, but the dean of the business college preferred a more economical form of delivery. After a few years of RGSCP's financial support for the philosophy lecturer, the college and university assumed the main costs for the faculty. At present, RGSCP funds the TAs for the class and other sundry costs. It is worth pointing out that there is a meeting between college deans, the RGSCP director, and philosophy faculty in the next weeks to discuss the future of this course.

### 3. RGSCP: Projects & Grants

Broadly speaking, we provide financial support in four main categories:

- 1) Discretionary Grants (up to \$1500 each with a maximum pool of \$15,000)
- 2) Major Grants: **Citizenship and the Public Good Lab** (pool up to \$50,000)
- 3) Youth Programs (pool up to \$50,000)
- 4) Support for Sustainability and Business Ethics (up to \$20,000 and \$15,000 respectively)

Because of the lack of administrative support, the directors of RGSCP have tended to partner with existing initiatives, such as the [Civil Discourse Lab](#) in the Department of Communication. That program is aimed at strengthening student and community discourse on difficult topics through research, programming and praxis. Among much else, the CDL provides programming on civics, especially but not exclusively around election time. Its focus, however, is less on the nuts and bolts of governance and civics than on creating the conditions for respectful (and hopefully productive) discussion on points where two parties disagree.

A success story is the reintroduction of the **Future Leaders Institute**, a week-long overnight camp for ambitious high-school students on big topics, combining both Classics and Philosophy. The first iteration of this program (I was co-director) was in 2014 and covered the tricky subject of money, greed and corruption. It was reprised in 2015–2017 (on various topics like artificial intelligence) with high student satisfaction, and a number of students who attended decided on UNH as their college of choice. Because it was an intense program that demanded a lot on faculty, it was put on hold for a few years; Covid-19 postponed its reintroduction. I'm pleased to report, however, that it's running this summer *at no cost to participants*, with an estimated 20

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<sup>2</sup> Currently, we support Sustainability Award Incentives, matched by the Sustainability Institute, which provides seed monies for projects that may later be scaled up. In addition, we support summer fellowships for student interns in public or private organizations that have projects that tie into RGSCP's mission. Finally, we provide sundry support for the [Changemaker Collaborative](#).

students taking part; debate of the ethics bowl style will be a central component. We're hopeful that several students who could otherwise not afford such an experience can and will take part.

Additionally, we have helped sponsor HYPE (Hosting Young Philosophy Enthusiasts), which is an organization organized and run by high school students. Each year we host between 800 and 1100 students at UNH to have student-run discussions on important topics. This year, because of funding cuts to the university, RGSCP picked up the whole tab to ensure that this high-impact experience was able to run. Finally, RGSCP is supporting high-school ethics bowl teams as well as the weekly Junior Socratic Society meetings.

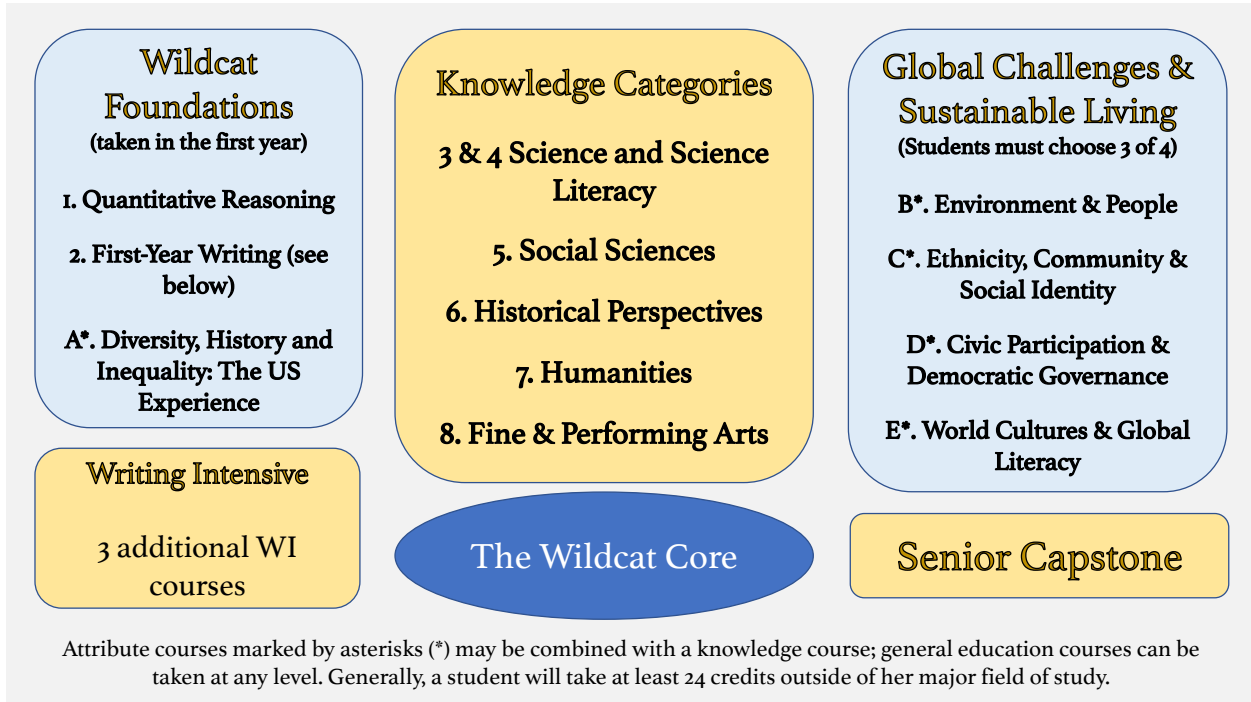
Four years ago, the Steering Committee agreed to fund an initiative to highlight faculty research, outreach, and teaching on the subject of **Citizenship and the Public Good**, committing significant funding for a period of three years. The pandemic put a hold on this and it was only able to be implemented last year, at which time we received several proposals for grants to promote scholarly and artistic projects on the subject. One of the stipulations for the grants was to participate in a working group to collaborate and energize the study and promotion of civic engagement in our college, but after a promising start faculty interest waned in the face of one's own research needs, increasing service commitments, and now recent budget cuts (14 million announced in October, 2023). We received only one request for a grant under this rubric this year. Because of this, plans to provide grants for collaboration between UNH and outside partners were postponed until a working group could be maintained for an academic year.

#### **4. RGSCP: Looking Forward**

We were able to negotiate a reduction in the teaching responsibilities of the Postdoctoral Teaching and Research Fellow from 2/2 (3/2 in the early years) to 2/1 so that the faculty member would have more time for research and programming. This year, on April 19, we will host a symposium on citizenship in the ancient and modern world. In addition, we have crafted our intermediate language courses (Latin and Italian) to have modules on citizenship. They will meet together to discuss targeted questions as well as present their own research topics. One challenge will be to energize faculty and students in other departments to attend. We have noticed that there is so much going on at the university, and faculty time is increasingly consumed in other ways, that attendance at academic events has been lower than in the past. We hope to buck the trend.

Given the lack of enthusiasm for grants in the Citizenship and the Public Good initiative (see above), we have been considering hiring a second postdoctoral fellow who would teach civics-specific courses such as "Democracy Now and Then" and "Democracy for the 21st Century" and redoubling our efforts in the area of curriculum rather than concentrate on grants for programming. With the help of a new administrative assistant, we have been able to identify *existing* curriculum and instructors who could be part of a constellation of faculty that could form the base for a civics working group or institute on campus. Again, faculty morale is low, and the budget crisis has caused upheaval in many departments, often requiring faculty to assume additional burdens that take them away from strategic planning. Even so, we will be reaching out to form a working group in late April, with a goal to meet once a month in academic year 2024–25.

Appendix: Proposed General Education Program Created in 2019–20



Current General Education (Discovery)

