Higher Education Civics Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Melissa G. Ballard

Senate Sponsor: Lincoln Fillmore

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill amends provisions related to general education writing requirements.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- requires the Center for Civic Excellence at Utah State University to incorporate analytical writing assignments based on certain seminal documents;
- allows other institutions of higher education to voluntarily adopt similar writing requirements;
- directs the Utah Board of Higher Education to establish minimum requirements for using primary source documents in writing courses; and
- makes technical and conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

53H-4-307.5 (Effective 05/06/26) (Repealed 07/01/30), as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2025, First Special Session, Chapter 8

ENACTS:

53H-3-610 (Effective 05/06/26), Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53H-3-610** is enacted to read:

53H-3-610 (Effective 05/06/26). Incorporation of seminal documents in writing courses.

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Founding documents" means primary source documents that are foundational to the establishment and development of the United States of America, including:

(i) the Declaration of Independence;

(ii) the United States Constitution;

(iii) the Federalist Papers;

(iv) the Bill of Rights; and

(v) other documents identified by the board as foundational to American constitutional history.

(b) "Presidential speeches" means speeches, addresses, or written messages by presidents of the United States that address matters of national significance or articulate principles of governance.

(c) "Seminal documents" means primary source documents of enduring significance to American history, government, or civic discourse, including:

(i) founding documents;

(ii) presidential speeches;

(iii) Supreme Court opinions that establish major constitutional principles; and

(iv) other historical documents identified by the board that have shaped American institutions or democratic traditions.

(d) "Writing course" means a general education course in which the primary focus is the development of writing skills and that awards credit toward fulfilling the written communication requirement described in board policy.

(2) Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, the board shall establish a policy that:

(a) requires an institution of higher education to incorporate seminal documents into writing courses where the institution and the course instructor determine the incorporation is appropriate and advances the learning objectives of the course;

(b) encourages analytical writing assignments that use seminal documents as primary sources to develop a student's skills in:

(i) close reading of primary source texts;

(ii) analysis of historical and rhetorical context;

(iii) synthesis of multiple sources; and

(iv) evidence-based argumentation;

(c) preserves the discretion of institutions of higher education and faculty members to:

(i) determine when and how to incorporate seminal documents into writing courses;

(ii) select specific seminal documents appropriate to course objectives;

(iii) design assignments that align with course objectives and student learning outcomes; and

(iv) determine the format, length, and scope of number of assignments using seminal documents; and

(d) maintains genre diversity in writing instruction by ensuring multiple forms of writing are taught, including:

(i) narrative and creative writing;

(ii) technical and professional writing;

(iii) research writing;

(iv) digital and multimodal composition; and

(v) other genres appropriate to course objectives.

(3) The board may compile and maintain a list of seminal documents that institutions and instructors may reference when incorporating seminal documents into writing courses.

(4) Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, an institution of higher education other than Utah State University may voluntarily adopt structured writing course requirements similar to those described in Subsection 53H-4-307.5(3)(e).

(5) The board shall find an institution of higher education that adopts structured requirements under Subsection (4) as in compliance with the policy established under Subsection (2).

Section 2. Section **53H-4-307.5** is amended to read:

53H-4-307.5 (Effective 05/06/26) (Repealed 07/01/30). Center for Civic Excellence -- Curriculum.

(1) The center shall:

(a) govern the general education program and general education courses at Utah State University; and

(b) ensure that:

(i) the general education program aligns with the general education program requirements described in board policy; and

(ii) there is general education transferability to and from Utah State University and other institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education.

(2) The center is founded on the following principles, values, and purposes:

(a) a commitment to viewpoint diversity and civil discourse, ensuring that students understand opposing points of view and can contribute in the public square in civil and productive ways;

(b) the development of program outcomes and courses that engage students in enduring questions of meaning, purpose, and value; and

(c) the cultivation in students of the durable skills necessary to thrive in educational, social, political, economic, and personal contexts.

(3) The center shall ensure, within the general education program:

(a) a cap of 30 credits;

(b) the integration of six written and oral communication credits with three humanities credits;

(c) that three three-credit courses in the humanities:

(i) engage with perennial questions about the human condition, the meaning of life, and the nature of social and moral lives;

(ii) emphasize foundational thinking and communication skills through engagement with primary texts predominantly from Western civilization, such as:

(A) the intellectual contributions of ancient Israel, ancient Greece, and Rome; and

(B) the rise of Christianity, medieval Europe, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment;

(iii) include texts for each course that are historically distributed from antiquity to the present from figures with lasting literary, philosophical, and historical influence, such as Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Lao Tzu, Cicero, Maimonides, Boethius, Shakespeare, Mill, Woolf, and Achebe; and

(iv) are organized around themes central to the preservation and flourishing of a free society, such as the moral life, happiness, liberty, equality and justice, and goodness and beauty;[~~and~~]

(d) that one three-credit course in American institutions:

(i) engages students with the major debates and ideas that inform the historical development of the republican form of government of the United States of America;

(ii) focus on the founding principles of American government, economics, and history, such as natural rights, liberty, equality, constitutional self-government, and market systems; and

(iii) use primary source material, such as:

(A) the Magna Carta, the United States Constitution, the Federalist Papers; and

(B) material from thinkers, such as Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Adam Smith, John Locke, Montesquieu, and Alexis de Tocqueville[~~.~~] ; and

(e) that writing courses offered through the center:

(i) incorporate seminal documents as described in Section 53H-3-610;

(ii) require students to complete at least three analytical writing assignments that use seminal documents as primary sources for analysis;

(iii) emphasize foundational thinking and communication skills through close reading and analysis of primary texts, consistent with Subsection (3)(c)(ii);

(iv) encourage the use of seminal documents for additional writing assignments, class discussions, and other pedagogical purposes beyond the minimum requirements described in Subsection (3)(e)(ii);

(v) integrate, where appropriate, primary texts and source materials described in Subsections (3)(c)(iii) and (3)(d)(iii); and

(vi) develop in students the capacity to engage with complex texts, analyze historical and rhetorical contexts, and articulate evidence-based arguments in writing.

(4) The vice-provost overseeing the center:

(a) shall ensure that the center:

(i) no less than seven days before the first day of class for a given semester or other academic term during which the institution offers a course, makes available to the public on the institution's website a syllabus for each section of the courses in the humanities described in Subsection (3) that:

(A) provide the section number;

(B) provides a brief description of each major assignment and examination;

(C) lists any required or recommended reading;

(D) provides a general description of the subject matter of each lecture or discussion;

(E) is accessible from the home page of the institution's website by use of not more than three links;

(F) is searchable by keywords and phrases; and

(G) is accessible to the public without requiring registration, use of a user name and password, or another method of user identification;

(ii) continues to make the information described in Subsection (4)(a) available on the center's website until at least the second anniversary of the date on which the center initially posted the information; and

(iii) updates the information described in Subsection (4)(a) as soon as practicable after the information changes; and

(b) may assign duties under this Subsection (4) to one or more administrative employees.

Section 3. **Effective Date.**

This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.