

Melissa G. Ballard proposes the following substitute bill:

## Higher Education Civics Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Melissa G. Ballard

Senate Sponsor: Lincoln Fillmore

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### LONG TITLE

#### General Description:

This bill amends provisions related to general education writing requirements.

#### Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- allows institutions of higher education to voluntarily adopt certain 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:

ENACTS:

**53H-3-610**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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

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

**53H-3-610 . 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  - (iv) other historical documents identified by the board that have shaped American institutions or democratic traditions.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 may voluntarily adopt structured writing course requirements similar to the following requirements:
- (a) incorporate seminal documents as described in this section;  
(b) require students to complete at least three analytical writing assignments that use seminal documents as primary sources for analysis;  
(c) emphasize foundational thinking and communication skills through close reading and analysis of primary texts, consistent with Subsection 53H-4-307.5(3)(c)(ii);  
(d) encourage the use of seminal documents for additional writing assignments, class discussions, and other pedagogical purposes beyond the minimum requirements described in this Subsection (4);  
(e) integrate, where appropriate, primary texts and source materials described in Subsections 53H-4-307.5(3)(c)(iii) and 53H-4-307.5(3)(d)(iii); and  
(f) develop in students the capacity to engage with complex texts, analyze historical and rhetorical contexts, and articulate evidence-based arguments in writing.
- (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. Effective Date.**

This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.