

Civic Knowledge Rubric

The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education commissioned this rubric, which was developed, in consensus, by faculty and staff across the country in 2016. To learn more, visit bit.ly/civicrobics.

Framing Language

Civic knowledge is a dimension of the larger concept of civic learning. Historically, higher education has taken responsibility for preparing college students for their public lives as contributing members of communities and professions who are concerned for the well-being of broader society. This public purpose is enacted, in part, through an emphasis on civic learning, or learning that develops the capacity of college students to be informed and active society members, capable of working effectively with others to address local, national, or global issues. Civic knowledge is foundational to developing competencies for such informed civic action. Civic knowledge includes understanding the diverse forces (e.g., cultural, historical, economic, religious, sociological) that shape political systems and civic life through interactions among the for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental sectors. It can be contextualized in the present or the past and has implications for understanding local, regional, national, and international contexts. Students can gain civic knowledge throughout their college experience—it cannot be adequately integrated into a student’s knowledge base, thinking, and actions through a single course or discipline. It is accumulated across a student’s entire college experience through an institution’s curricular and co-curricular programming, not solely from books or media sources. Such knowledge deepens when it is applied through civic engagement and civic practice and within the context of everyday problem solving. Consequently, some elements of this rubric deal with learning about facts, concepts, and principles.

Other elements focus on application, participation, and using knowledge in various community settings. Since a central reason for developing civic knowledge in students is to

enable them to participate in informed and effective ways in civic and democratic life, the performance descriptors at the capstone level reflect knowledge arising from the integration of *facts, concepts and principles* with the *action* of civic engagement.

Additionally, a US-centric grasp of civic knowledge is insufficient to equip students to be informed and active civic participants. Students also need a comparative understanding of different systems of governance around the globe. To prepare responsible and effective global citizens, a student’s college experience should provide opportunities to apply civic awareness globally, beyond local or national circles.

Reflection is also a valuable component of civic knowledge. Civic knowledge expands considerably when it is accompanied by opportunities for reflection provided at various levels.

This rubric is designed to assess civic knowledge on a programmatic or institutional level across time. Instructors may find the performance descriptors at particular levels useful for defining learning goals for a course or an assignment. Depending on the course context, during a single term, there may be development *within* one level rather than growth from level to level.

Users of the Civic Knowledge Rubric are encouraged to consult other closely related VALUE Rubrics: Civic Engagement, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence, and Global Learning, as well as the Weber State University Community Engaged Learning Outcomes Rubric, the Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis Civic-Minded Graduate Rubric, Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualification Profile Civic and Global Learning Outcomes.

Glossary *The following are not intended to be dictionary definitions but are given to clarify the meaning of the vocabulary of this rubric.*

Civic identity: A sense of self that values active participation in societies—local, national, and global—with commitment and responsibility to work with others towards public purposes.

Civic issues: Societal ideas and positions that are or have been disputed and unresolved (e.g. immigration, prohibition, slavery, terrorism, women’s suffrage, etc.).

Civic life: The part of a person’s life concerned with affairs of the community, nation, and world. As used in the performance descriptors, this inclusive term “civic life” encompasses various aspects of civic values, rights, assumptions, and/or responsibilities.

Civil society: The arena where people voluntarily associate to advance common interests; an enabling framework for democracy.

Forces: The cultural, historical, and economic forces and systems that position societal members to act for change or to preserve the status quo (e.g., forces such as race and racism, unemployment and recessions, droughts and famines).

Formal (legal) relationships: Those written into guiding documents (such as a constitution and the laws passed under that constitution) and built into the structures and processes of governmental and religious institutions. Examples range from the U.S. Constitution’s explicit separation of church and state to the law defining how religious organizations can qualify for exemption from taxes.

Informal relationships: Those guided not by law but by tradition and custom.

Integrated identity: An identity that has integrated various aspects of identity (including personal, social, and civic) into one cohesive identity.

Levers of power: Elements within political systems that individuals and groups can engage to influence or bring about change in the system or its results (e.g., challenging a law in the Supreme Court, lobbying, passing a law by referendum, voting a politician out of office, etc.).

Personal identity: A sense of self that may be developed and experienced primarily through family relationships, familial cultural practices and beliefs, personal values, attributes, and characteristics.

Social identity: A sense of self shaped by one’s participation in socially-defined categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, and the like. Common processes of socialization teach us ways to think, feel, and act consistent with our locations within these categories—within systems that privilege some identities and oppress others.

Social movements: People and/or organizations that collectively focus on and work toward a shared goal of bringing about change related to a political or social issue, often over an extended time period. Examples of social movements include but are not limited to Abolitionist, Anti-Apartheid, Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, Civil Rights, Labor, and Sustainability. Although the people in social movements work on shared goals, there is often much debate within the movements on the exact nature of those goals and the strategies for reaching them.

Systems of belief: Ways of viewing the world, relating to others, and defining “the good” (e.g. religious beliefs, secularism, or atheism; guiding principles such as pacifism or utilitarian ethics; and overarching beliefs about structuring society, such as communism or free-market capitalism).

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Definition Civic knowledge refers to a body of key concepts and familiarity with diverse forces that shape political systems & the ability to take collective action. This knowledge prepares a person for well-informed and effective participation with others in civic and democratic life to address local, national, or global issues. Both academic and community-engaged learning provide contexts in which this knowledge is generated, applied, and evaluated and skills are developed, practiced, and refined.

Each cell assumes competence with the knowledge/skills in the previous cell. Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone (4)	Milestones (3)	Milestones (2)	Benchmark (1)
Key Concepts Underlying Democratic Societies <i>Knowledge of universal democratic principles, key texts, contested ideals, and methods of conflict resolution that shape democracy in the U.S. and other nations.</i>	Engages in generating an informed solution to a debated civic issue, accounting for the ways in which rights and interests come into conflict and applying the ways in which democratic institutions solve disputes.	Applies the knowledge of democratic principles to the resolution of conflicting rights and interests in a democratic society.	Examines key democratic institutions and texts and their attempts to resolve the ways in which rights and interests come into conflict in a democracy.	Identifies key democratic principles, institutions, and their textual sources that differentiate democracies from authoritarian alternatives.
Forces That Shape Civic Life <i>Knowledge of the diverse forces that have shaped civic life in the US and other nations.</i>	Envisions a position or action on a current civic issue that takes into account the parameters created by the forces at work on both the student and the issue.	Analyzes the forces that have set the stage and the historical context for the current reality in an ongoing civic issue.	Explains how some forces act on civic issues and how these forces interact with other forces.	Demonstrates an emerging awareness of how forces can shape civic issues.
Integrated Identity Concerning Civic Rights and Responsibilities <i>Knowledge of one's own sources of identity and of the influence of integrated identity on an individual's exercise of civic values, rights, assumptions, and responsibilities within wider local, national, and global communities</i>	Participates in a responsible civic life based on an integrated identity responsive to diverse local, national, and global societies.	Engages with others in order to gain additional understanding, acceptance, and valuing of how people with diverse personal, social, and civic identities approach civic life.	Examines connections between civic life and own and others' personal, social, and civic identities.	Describes awareness of the development of and elements of own personal, social, and civic identities.
Relationships Between Government and Systems of Belief <i>Knowledge of how legal frameworks & views about systems of beliefs shape relationships between governmental institutions & civic life in the US & other nations.</i>	Uses the knowledge of the relationships between government and systems of belief to analyze student's own political or social action.	Analyzes ways in which practices drawn from different systems of belief can be preserved and honored even when they contradict law or the customs of civil society.	Examines the formal and informal relationships that government has with freedom of belief and systems of belief.	Describes legal, formal relationships between government and systems of belief.
Political Systems and Levers of Power <i>Knowledge of political systems that frame constitutional democracies (as compared to other forms of government), as well as political levers for influencing change in the US and other nations</i>	Analyzes political roles student has played and integrates knowledge of political systems in order to envision moving levers to create changes that have impact.	Analyzes how using the levers of a political system creates both intended and unintended changes at local, national, and global levels.	Explains how the elements of at least one political system and society interact to produce societal change.	Describes basic political systems and how those compare in different societies.
Social Movements <i>Knowledge of social movements and collective actions that have shaped societies both in the U.S. and other nations.</i>	Evaluates how a current social movement or collective action in which student has participated is informed by the techniques of a past movement or action.	Analyzes connections between a past social movement or collective action and a current conflict or dispute.	Articulates the social and political conditions present in a social movement and its consequences.	Identifies how social movements and collective actions have created legislative action and social change.