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## **Current Social and Political Issues Gain Little Currency in Schools, History and Government Classes Tend to Emphasize Traditional**

## Research Shows Differences in Class Content and Instruction Among Ethnic Groups, College and Non-College Bound

Washington – Government and civics classes continue to focus on traditional themes such as "the Constitution and great American heroes" rather than current political and social issues such as racism and economic injustices, according to new research released by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland.

The survey asked students between the ages of 15 and 25 to name two themes emphasized in their middle and high school civics or social studies classes. Just over 40 percent reported "the Constitution or how the U.S. government works." The second most chosen was "wars and military battles," at 32 percent, a seven point rise from 2004. "Great American heroes" was listed third at 26 percent. Lastly, only one in 10 students reported studying "problems facing our country today" and "racism and other forms of injustices."

The research also found differences in civics class content and instruction depending on a student's ethnic group, and whether or not a student attended or planned to attend college. The statistical breakdown showing these and other trends on U.S. civics instruction and content and teaching strategies can be found at <a href="https://www.civicyouth.org">www.civicyouth.org</a>.

"Our research finds that the traditional topics are being emphasized in history and civics classes," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "This is an important factual basis for debates about the curriculum. We also found serious disparities in both the content and instruction depending on students' ethnicity and if they are college-bound."

Nearly 20 percent of African-American young people between the ages of 15 and 25 reported taking a civics class that covered "racism and other injustices," while only eight percent of White youth recalled taking such a course. In addition, Asian and White students were more likely to report traditional themes such as "the Constitution" and "great American heroes" in their civics classes than their African-American and Latino counterparts.

The research also showed differences among ethnic groups in classroom discussion of political and social issues. Latino students were least likely to attend civics classes that encouraged them to make up their own minds, while African-American students were more likely to attend classes that encouraged discussion of political and social issues than Caucasian, Asian and Latino students.

College and college-bound students were 10 percentage points more likely to recall an emphasis on traditional civics topics than non-college students. That same trend could be found in classroom discussion of political and social issues. The college and college-bound were more likely to be encouraged to make up their minds on political and social issues than the non-college bound.

The research is based on The 2006 National Civic and Political Health Survey, which was conducted from April 27 to June 11, 2006. The survey sampled 1,700 young people ages 15 to 25, and 550 ages 26 and older. The Pew Charitable Trusts funded this survey.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and other foundations