



ILLUSTRATION // Forrest Meng

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Objectively taught civic education may alleviate, but not eliminate, misinformation and political polarization

Knowledge is power, but from where should it be conceived?

As political discourse inflames the world, the extent to which civic education can help with mounting misinformation and political polarization comes into question. Although all generations play a role in this 'fake news' plight, younger generations specifically contribute to the issue with well-intentioned, yet frequently harmful, social media activism. Though proper civic education does not eradicate this problem, it can certainly help mitigate it by giving students the most basic and relevant knowledge. Similar to the step-by-step process used to learn mathematics in schools, we can build upon our civic education knowledge as time progresses.

Typically, students first take civics in eighth grade; the subject, for most, is not revisited in schools again until twelfth grade with the AP United States Government course. Having extra required civics classes in between those grade levels may not necessarily be beneficial because students may not take the classes seriously, a lack of appeal that

is perhaps further spurred given that Jefferson is a STEM school.

Civics seminars taught in a structure akin to the periodic Social Emotional Learning lessons, however, are a viable solution. Moreover, it is vital to address civics in the framework of other courses such as science or computer science because all fields of study are vulnerable to misinformation.

To instill civil and thought-provoking discussion, all civics-involving courses should be taught from an objective viewpoint, offering both sides of the story. For instance, journalism teacher Ms. Erinn Harris addressed the events that occurred at Capitol Hill on Jan. 6, 2021, in her class not by inserting her own perspective, but rather by sharing the accurate ways that media outlets should refer to those events.

Likewise, AP Government teacher Ms. Jennifer Hitchcock created a lesson about the Capitol Hill insurrection based on legal documents and Supreme Court cases to provide background. She allowed for students to create their own opinions and write down their thoughts through journaling as a part of the

lesson. However, while it is important to maintain an objective viewpoint, lessons should be taught within reason; 'progressive' or 'conservative' sides should always be defined and appropriately applied in the context of the conversation.

Take climate change, for example. We do not need to debate whether climate change is real, but we can contemplate the most efficient solutions for it. Furthermore, teachers should provide room for students to form their own opinions, but never at the expense of facts. Students should have a solid and unbiased understanding of the facts before being encouraged to form their opinions.

Though the existing rampant political polarization is unlikely to decrease drastically as a result of civic education, if taught appropriately and objectively, it can serve as a diving board into other educational opportunities and raise awareness to better digest and analyze current events. Nonetheless, regardless of where we gain this awareness, knowledge is power—wield it wisely.