

Enrollments in High School Government Classes: Are We Short-Changing Both Citizenship and Political Science Training?*

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For 30 years political scientists largely ignored high school education in civics and government. There are two explanations for this neglect. First, the prevailing view was that students learned nothing from civics courses (Langton and Jennings 1968). Second, social scientists increasingly saw themselves as members of scientific disciplines, so whatever interest they had in precollege education was devoted to augmenting disciplinary knowledge (Haas 1977; Janowitz 1983, ch. 6).

Now this has all changed. For one thing, recent work effectively undercuts the view that high school social studies classes have no effect on students (e.g., Niemi and Junn 1998; Smith and Niemi 2001). For another, a pervasive loss of confidence in governmental institutions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997) and youthful indifference toward politics (Astin et al. 1997, 28, 45, 57) have led to repeated calls for more citizenship education (e.g., National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998). Symptomatic of this concern is that APSA itself formed a Task Force on Civic Education in 1996 (Ostrom 1996), part of whose duty it is to look at precollege training.

Having turned our backs on secondary education for three decades, we have been ignorant of even the most basic information about social studies course work of high school students, including such elementary facts as the percentage of students who take a government class and whether that percentage is increasing or decreasing. Such data, it turns out, are widely available and increasingly

detailed. They show that: (a) enrollments in American government classes increased substantially in the last 20 years but still reached only three-quarters of all graduates in the mid-1990s; (b) very few students enroll in advanced classes in government; and (c) enrollments vary widely across types and locations of schools.¹

High School Course Work in American Government: An Historical Perspective

The American social studies curriculum—as it is commonly perceived—developed in the early 1900s. While history had long been part of secondary-level education for students anticipating entry into college or religious training, instruction in social studies for the majority of high-school-age students only began to be considered in 1916 with the report of the Social Studies Committee of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (Hertzberg 1981). At that point, the need to “Americanize” the many students coming from other countries, as well as the inclusion of teenagers newly prohibited from entering the labor market by child labor laws, became a concern for most high schools (Oakes 1985). To that end, the Commission report argued in support of courses in civics, government, and problems of democracy. About the same time, the American Political Science Association issued a report declaring its commitment to “education for citizenship and public service” (APSA Committee of Seven 1916, 2). These reports, along with a subsequent APSA report, helped set the pattern that persisted for more than four decades, a pattern that included civics courses, usually at the eighth or ninth grade, and government courses, usually at the twelfth grade (Patrick and Hoge 1991, 427–28).

There was, of course, a continuing concern for allowing divergent political views. This resulted in a multiplicity of goals, instructional methods, and topical emphases in the field—an absence of orthodoxy that remains to this day (Klie-

bard 1986), especially with respect to civics, but extending by the 1960s and 1970s much more broadly, such as to history. Disagreements continue over whose cultural history, what critical skills, and what types of moral outcomes might be legitimately considered part of “training one for citizenship” (Goodlad 1991) as well as appropriate for teaching about politics and history generally (Erickson 1998; “History Forum” 1998; “Symposium” 1996). In the midst of these debates, there remains a very strong tradition of decentralized decision making about the curriculum. This tradition has contributed to great diversity in the content of social studies education (Goodlad 1991).

The turmoil in education that began in the 1960s greatly reshaped the curriculum, making it much more difficult to describe. However, in 1982 updated information on curricular patterns was collected for a nationally representative sample of graduating high school students. This was followed by massive High School Transcript Studies (HSTS) conducted in 1987, 1990, 1994, and 1998. For information on enrollments prior to 1982, we draw upon good, but not entirely comparable surveys of course enrollments.²

In the HSTS, each course taken by a student was coded using a database of approximately 2,200 course codes, and then subdivided into 16 categories and 85 subcategories. In the social studies, the headings include American History, Economics, Sociology/Psychology, American Government and Politics, and International Relations. Despite some questionable coding decisions (see note a, Table 1), this categorization provides an excellent picture of the changing course-taking habits of high school students in the 1980s and early 1990s and, by comparison with earlier studies, in earlier decades (Table 1).

In 1980, one could have painted a bleak picture of the extent to which American government and politics were being taught. No more than 62 percent of graduating seniors had taken an “American government” course. Not only is this percentage less than over-

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TABLE 1
High School Students Taking Selected Social Studies Courses in Grades 9–12, 1900–1994 (percent)

Course	1900	1910–1911	1915–1916	1922–1923	1928–1929	1934–1935	1948–1949	1960–1961	1972–1973	1982	1987	1990	1994
American Government										62.2 ^a	72.0 ^a	77.4 ^a	78.1 ^a
Civics & government	86.6 ^b	62.2 ^b	62.9 ^b	77.3 ^b	26.6	23.9	32.0	38.0	38.9	—	—	—	—
Civics (grade 9)	—	—	—	—	53.6	41.5	—	29.0	13.4	—	—	—	—
Problems of Democracy	—	—	—	—	4.2	13.9	21.0	18.5	8.9	—	—	—	—
Economics ^c	—	—	—	19.2	20.3	19.7	18.9	14.3	17.6	27.4	33.7	47.1	43.8
Sociology/Psychology										32.4	33.6	32.6	31.9
Sociology	—	—	—	9.5	10.6	9.9	13.8	14.1	23.7	14.0	15.0	17.0	16.0
Psychology	9.5	3.8	4.7	3.5	4.1	1.3	3.4	6.8	17.6	21.0	25.0	24.0	23.5
U.S. History ^d	—	—	—	61.2	71.4	69.3	91.2	97.0	100.0	81.5	89.5	91.2	94.9

Note: “—” indicates not available. For 1982 and beyond, entries are the percentage of graduating seniors who have had one semester or more (for U.S. History, one year or more) of the indicated course. For 1900–1973, entries are approximations. The numerator is the enrollment in a given course in the indicated year; the denominator is overall enrollment in grades 9–12 in that year divided by 4. By not accounting for dropouts, entries underestimate the percentage of graduating seniors having had each course. With respect to government classes, however, it is likely that some students had ninth grade civics and, later, a government or Problems of Democracy class. Because of this unknown overlap, summing the percentages in the three subcategories of American Government overestimates the percentage of seniors having had some form of American government course.

^aTaken from published tables that include comparative politics and international relations under American Government. This biases the count upward by a few percentage points. We present more narrowly tailored data for 1994 in subsequent tables.

^bCombined civics and government and civics (grade 9).

^cHome economics courses were categorized separately and are not included in this count.

^dAnother 11.5 percent in 1922–23 (declining to almost zero by 1948–49) had a course in English history.

Source: 1900–1973: Osterndorf (1975, 18); 1982–1994: Legum et al. (1998, A-199, 506, 510).

whelming, it represents a significant decline from the past. Ninth grade Civics classes, having already lost ground to Problems of Democracy and other courses, suffered a further decline in the 1960s and early 1970s; Problems courses, having increased for a time, also dropped precipitously. Overall, though the overlapping nature of the subcategories makes it impossible to determine exact numbers of graduates who had some form of American government class, there is little doubt that there was a substantial erosion in the proportion of students studying American government in a stand-alone course.³

Alongside the decrease in government classes was an increase in classes devoted to other social sciences. In 1982, some 27 percent of graduating seniors had taken a course in economics; 21 percent had taken a course in psychology, another few percent had anthropology, and a substantial number (about 16 percent) had taken a general introduction to social science (Table 1; Legum et al. 1998, A-506). In earlier decades, only one-half to two-thirds as many were enrolled in economics (Table 1; Bach and Saunders 1965, 337), psychology was barely on the radar screen, and anthropology and general social science courses were nonexistent, as were, generally, newer courses such as Filing Your Income Tax or Personal Adjustment

(most common were simply-classified courses such as economic theory and psychology).⁴

Fueling these changes were reductions in the number of social studies courses required for high school graduation and an increase in the availability of local exceptions to state requirements. Both a cause and effect of these changes was a rise in the proportion of social studies time devoted to electives—not only economics and psychology, but area studies, ethnic studies, and so-called law-related education. Many of these offerings were designed for the senior year and thus were an explicit alternative to the traditional government class.

As bleak as things might have looked in 1980, elementary and secondary education would soon undergo major changes. Sparked by a stinging report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), graduation requirements were gradually tightened in a movement that continues today. The New Social Studies (which emphasized political behavior, comparative politics, community action courses, and courses on a variety of substantive themes; Haas 1977) that had dominated the 1960s and 1970s began to fade (Hahn 1985, 221; Patrick and Hoge 1991, 428), and while Civics classes per se remained on the decline, enrollments in American Government classes quickly expanded. By 1987, 72 percent of graduating seniors

had taken an American government course. By 1990 the figure stood at 77 percent, and in 1994 it was at 78 percent (according to the same, inclusive definition).

High School Course Work in American Government: A Contemporary View

How Many Students Take Government Classes, and When?

A comprehensive, recent picture of course taking by high school students is shown in Table 2 for government courses and in Table 3 for other social studies courses. History is clearly the dominant field. Nearly all students take a full year of American history, mostly in eleventh grade, and two-thirds take an additional semester of world history, chiefly in tenth and eleventh grades. Next most prevalent is government, chiefly American government. Three-quarters of 1994's graduating seniors had at least one semester (and rarely more) of American government. Economics was well behind, although it was taken by over 40 percent of the students, with sociology or psychology taken by about a third.

How satisfactory is this situation? Do students now receive enough teaching about American government? The an-

TABLE 2
High School Students Taking a Semester or More of American Government, International Relations, or Comparative Politics in Grades 9–12, 1994 (percent)

Grade	American Government ^a	International Relations	Comparative Politics	Any government class ^b
9 th grade	17.4	0.5	c	17.9
10 th grade	6.1	1.3	c	7.1
11 th grade	9.8	1.1	c	11.0
12 th grade	49.9	3.7	0.6	53.2
Any grade	76.0	6.4	0.7	79.5

Note: Because students may take multiple courses under a given heading, percentages for grades 9–12 sum to more than the percentage for any grade. *N* = 23,080.

^aIncludes courses called American Government (51% of seniors), Civics (9%), American Government and Economics (12%), government internships (<1%), Contemporary American Political Issues (4%), and specialty courses such as The Presidency and State and Local Government (<5%).

^bIncludes a few courses (e.g., Political Turmoil) not included under the other three headings.

^cLess than 0.1 percent.

Source: The 1994 High School Transcript Study.

swer is not clear. First of all, the situation could rapidly change again. True, many states require teaching in the area of civics or American government, offering a partial safeguard against its disappearance. Yet the number of states requiring specific courses is small⁵; most simply specify that civics topics be taught at some time during the high school years, and it is likely that constitutional history, taught in virtually every American history class, meets the requirements. Recent calls for an increase in civic education also make it unlikely that there will be a downturn in the teaching of government in the near future. History, however, demonstrates just how quickly changes can occur.

Whether students have had enough exposure to a subject also depends on how much they have learned. While some recent studies have emphasized that students and adults are relatively knowledgeable about certain political topics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, ch. 2; Niemi and Junn 1998, ch. 2), the dominant emphasis in journalistic work (e.g., Morin 1996) as well as in scholarly literature, both in political science (e.g., Ferejohn 1990, 3) and history (Ravitch and Finn 1987), has been on how little adults know about politics. This makes it at least arguable that there should be more, rather than less teaching about government.

It is equally important, though much more difficult, to judge the sufficiency of *what* students have learned, especially in the realm of attitudes. The decline in civic qualities—summarized by the wide-

spread view that young people are distrustful, disengaged, and lacking an interest in politics—suggests a failure of civic education. It is unlikely, of course, that anyone believes the decline can be turned around only through changes in schooling, yet it is worth noting that recent calls for action have included a greater emphasis on civic education.

One can also look at the question of sufficiency by considering the timing of courses. Traditionally, a government course had been a kind of capstone class. Seniors, having just completed a year of U.S. history, were introduced to the theory and structure of American government and to their responsibilities as citizens just as they were about to become adults. The origins of this pattern go back nearly a century, as previously noted, and research on political socialization suggests good theoretical reasons for it. Researchers have found that many political concepts are beyond the level of comprehension of young children or are simply outside their sphere of interest (Greenstein 1965; Jahoda 1963). At about 13 to 15, however, youths become remarkably adult-like in their capacity to understand and critically evaluate political processes (Adelson and O’Neil 1966).⁶ Recent work also suggests that teaching about government in the twelfth grade may be more effective than in earlier grades (Niemi and Junn 1998, 67–70).

How common is it to have a senior year course in American government? The chances are only 50–50 (Table 2); the remaining half generally had their

last civics/government class in ninth grade, or not at all. Explanations for the relatively low rate at which seniors take a government class are readily available. Social science electives, especially Economics and Psychology, also tend to be taken during the final year. Advanced Placement courses in history, as well as courses in world history, offer still other alternatives for the senior year. In any event, while the initial picture is encouraging in that nearly 80 percent of high school students have a government class at some point in the four years of high school, it looks much less encouraging when one notes that only 50 percent have a senior year course in American government.

It is also relevant to ask how many students take more than one semester of government, especially advanced study such as an honors class or the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) course in U.S. Government and Politics. While the number taking the AP exam in government doubled and then doubled again between 1987, the first year in which it was offered, and 1994, the percentages of seniors taking advanced work in government remain very low. Only about two percent of the graduating seniors took any advanced course. Indeed, only about one in seven students took an advanced course in any area of social studies.⁷

Finally, the matter of sufficiency should take into account what is actually taught in high school government classes. Student reports in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that course content leans heavily on the structure of U.S. government—the Constitution, Bill of Rights, the three branches, and “how laws are made” (Niemi and Junn 1998). This focus takes on more significance when one contrasts it with various recommendations for coverage. The last time APSA weighed in on the subject, it recommended that political science education in elementary and secondary schools emphasize: (a) “knowledge about the ‘realities’ of political life . . .”; (b) “knowledge about political behavior and processes . . .”; (c) “skill in the process of social science inquiry”; (d) “knowledge about . . . the international system”; and (e) “skills needed to participate effectively and democratically in the life of the society” (Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education 1971, 434–37). None of these categories was reflected in the questions asked of students in the 1988 NAEP about what their courses emphasized, and the tiny number of items about any of these topics in the

TABLE 3
High School Students Taking a Semester/Year or More of Selected High School Social Studies Courses, 1994 (percent)

Grade	U.S. History (one year)	World History ^a (semester)	Economics (semester)	Sociology/ Psychology (semester)	Any social studies (semester)	Any social studies (one year)
9 th grade	12.5	9.9	2.3	1.0	77.7	66.5
10 th grade	14.9	37.9	2.6	2.5	76.8	69.0
11 th grade	65.7	18.0	5.1	9.8	92.2	85.5
12 th grade	6.9	6.8	33.3	20.6	83.6	71.4
Any grade	93.8	65.7	43.0	31.1	99.5	99.5

Note: Because students may take multiple courses under a given heading, percentages for grades 9–12 sum to more than the percentages for any grade. $N = 23,080$.

^aIncludes World History courses and a variety of specialized courses on western and nonwestern history. Excluded are area study and cultural studies courses.

Source: The 1994 High School Transcript Study.

Assessment itself further suggests how little emphasis they receive. Not that this is surprising, inasmuch as most teachers had evidently rejected these emphases by the late 1970s (Patrick and Hoge 1991, 428).⁸

In the end, determining whether current practice is sufficient calls for a judgment from all levels of our educational system. What is clear from data on contemporary course taking is that there is room in the social studies curriculum for more teaching of American government in the senior year of high school. Despite the senior year's added pressures—brought about by the increase in other social studies courses and by honors and AP courses—nearly 30 percent of graduating seniors in 1994 had less than a full year of *any* social studies (Table 3). Pressure from the natural sciences, English, and so on, might make it difficult to take up this apparent slack with government classes, but at least it does not appear that an effort to increase government teaching would lead to immediate degradation in the teaching of our sister social sciences.

Who Takes Government Classes?

A strong case can be made that classes in civics and government should include students of all interests and ability levels. We are all equal as citizens, and the structure of civics, it is argued, should reflect that maxim (Bower 1997, 117). Though there may be significant variations in the proportions of students having government in twelfth grade, that three-quarters of graduating seniors have had an American government course suggests that the proportions having such a class should not vary greatly from one group to another. In fact, there is considerable variation in both proportions, but the differences reflect

state requirements and administrative decisions of school boards more so than individual choices.

The evidence supporting these conclusions comes from logistic regressions in which the dependent variables are whether a student had a government class: first in any grade of high school, and then in grade 12 (Table 4). The independent variables include individual, school-level, and locational characteristics. The results vary somewhat from one equation to the other, but they both indicate that: (a) gender, grade point average, and academic track, though sometimes statistically significant, are only minor predictors of government course taking; (b) other things being equal, African-American and Latino/a students usually take *more* government classes than non-Latino/a white students; and (c) students in public schools, in schools outside the big cities, and in the West are especially likely to have government classes while students in private schools, in big-city schools, and in the Northeast are least likely to have such courses.⁹

Calculation of estimated probabilities for students with specific characteristics greatly aids interpretation of the results. This is done in Table 5, which shows the estimated probabilities of having a course in American government for white, black, and Latino/a students in private and public schools in the Northeast and in the West. Consider first the racial/ethnic differences. They are often small: at a maximum, they are on the order of 13–14 percent (for twelfth grade classes in public schools in the Northeast). In most instances, white students are least likely to have a government class; the exceptions—whites compared to blacks in twelfth grade classes in private schools in both regions—are

of trivial size. In contrast, private school–public school differences are anywhere from 10 percentage points (for twelfth grade classes among whites in the West) to as much as 25 percentage points (for classes in any grade among whites in the Northeast), with students in public schools consistently more likely to study government.¹⁰ Similarly, regional differences are often fairly substantial, with even greater extremes (39 percentage points for twelfth grade classes among whites in private schools).

It is important to reiterate that these differences stem largely from locational characteristics rather than from varying interests of individual students or groups of students.¹¹ That is, the largest differences can be attributed to the type of school (public or private) and the school's location (type of place and region). This observation means that if schools encourage students to take more government courses (even without requiring them), the results are likely to be relatively evenly spread across students in different school programs and of varying gender and racial and ethnic backgrounds. A higher rate of course work in government, even in the absence of enforced enrollment, is not likely to lead to greater inequalities across social or racial lines.

Conclusion

Our findings may be summarized as follows: (a) high school enrollments in American government classes have increased substantially since their low point in the 1970s and early 1980s; (b) three-quarters of all graduates in the mid-1990s had an American government course in grades 9–12; (c) half of the mid-1990s graduates had an American

TABLE 4
The Relationship between Individual, School, and Locational Characteristics and Enrollment in American Government Classes, 1994 (Logistic Regression)

Variable	American government course, any grade ^a		American government course, 12 th grade ^b	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
Intercept	.505**	(.124)	.669**	(.112)
Individual characteristics				
Grade point average	.0003	(.0003)	-.002**	(.0003)
Academic track	.279**	(.063)	.138*	(.055)
Both academic and vocational	.388**	(.067)	.162**	(.058)
Neither track	-.180*	(.084)	-.191*	(.076)
Female	.059	(.034)	.071*	(.030)
Black	.475**	(.060)	-.044	(.048)
Latino/a	.363**	(.077)	.533**	(.064)
Asian	.039	(.096)	-.235**	(.083)
Native American/other	.170	(.176)	.265	(.147)
School characteristics				
Public school	1.049**	(.060)	.566**	(.063)
Locational characteristics				
Big city	-.435**	(.052)	-.484**	(.047)
Fringe area	-.142**	(.045)	.442**	(.040)
Medium city	.226**	(.056)	.031	(.043)
Northeast	-1.394**	(.053)	-1.654**	(.047)
Midwest	-.567**	(.051)	-.928**	(.041)
South	-.571**	(.054)	-1.507**	(.043)

Note: Excluded categories are: vocational track; male; white; private school; rural; West.
 *p<.05; **p<.01; N = 21,865.

^aDependent variable: 1 = student had an American government course in any grade; 0 = student did not have an American government course.

^bDependent variable: 1 = student had an American government course in twelfth grade; 0 = student did not have an American government course in twelfth grade (but may have in an earlier grade).

Source: The 1994 High School Transcript Study.

government class in twelfth grade; (d) few students enroll in government honors or AP classes; (e) enrollment differ-

ences vary widely across type of school (public or private) and the school's location (type of place and region), but rela-

tively little because of academic, gender, or racial differences.

These simple data provide the groundwork for asking more theoretically interesting and challenging questions, both normative and positive, about high school training in civics and government. Perhaps the most basic questions involve the very reason for having high school government classes: are they an introduction to political science or are they citizenship training? And are the two antithetical?

If secondary instruction is to be "a 'behavioral science' analysis of contemporary society" (Janowitz 1983, 145), a variety of changes need to take place. Teachers have to be better trained in political science, and new and different kinds of texts have to be introduced. If, on the other hand, instruction is intended to "prepare the student for responsible social and political obligations" (145), the "critical" or "realistic" outlook on political life and institutions that pervades political science research and instruction needs to give way to a greater emphasis on values. It is political scientists who would then need to retool, at least if they are to provide the training for teachers who are to convey a renewed civic instruction to high school students.

Indeed, should we refer to Civics classes or to Government (or even Political Science) classes? Civics better conveys the idea of broad citizenship training, and it has a relatively nonpartisan, non-ideological connotation. But the term civics is to a large extent discredited among political scientists; it conveys uncritical, low-level subject matter that is not at all descriptive of what most of us teach at the college level and, by im-

TABLE 5
Estimated Probabilities of Having an American Government Course in Any Grade or in Twelfth Grade, 1994

Region: West												
In any grade						In 12 th grade						
Private school			Public school			Private school			Public school			
White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	
74	82	81	89	93	92	71	70	81	81	81	88	
Region: Northeast												
In any grade						In 12 th grade						
Private school			Public school			Private school			Public school			
White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	White	Black	Latino/a	
42	54	51	67	77	75	32	31	44	46	45	59	

Note: For purposes of this table, other variables are set to: Gender, female; Type of place, medium city; Track, academic; Grade point average, B.

Source: Derived from Table 4.

plication, what might be taught in an introductory fashion at the secondary level. At the same time, the term government introduces unwanted connotations of various sorts, often suggestive of indoctrination.

Still other questions remain. When should students receive civics/government instruction? Are separate courses necessary, or is instruction in history classes sufficient? What classroom and extraclassroom methods are best suited to teaching about government? How much training should there be in research methods? Are the skills needed

for citizenship the same as the skills needed for political analysis? What kind of instruction, if any, will make young people less cynical about (yet appropriately skeptical of) politicians?

All of these questions could be profitably addressed—not in the least by doing research related to them—but that is not likely to happen unless political scientists have an interest in secondary teaching and believe that precollegiate instruction is of some importance. In recent years there has been greatly increased interest in civic education both in the United States and abroad (Crick

1998; Ichilov 1998; Kennedy 1996), providing an opportunity for political scientists to be involved in possible educational reform closely related to their discipline. Yet most of the profession has abandoned any leadership in or even interest in the subject. It is our prerogative to do so, of course. But ignoring the matter will not make it go away. Rather, it means turning this aspect of education over to others who may not share our interests or, one vainly hopes, our level of knowledge. It is hard to see how this will help turn out better citizens or better students for our entering classes.

Notes

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1. When our historical sources distinguish between Civics and other “government” courses (e.g., Problems of Democracy), we report them separately. Since the 1980s, Civics courses have declined substantially in favor of American Government classes, and we have combined them. Otherwise, we use “civics” and “government” interchangeably. Civics classes, in general, were probably more uncritically supportive of good citizenship and of U.S. government, while other courses were, and are, somewhat more analytical and sometimes more critical of U.S. politics and government.

2. Results for the 1998 study are not yet available. Here we rely most heavily on the 1994 study, which involved the collection of more than 25,000 transcripts from graduating students in 340 schools. Published tables are based on 24,844 students who remain after eliminating students with Special Education diplomas and limited numbers of credits. Our analysis begins with the same set, but some additional students drop out because of incomplete data. For details about the sampling and course coding procedures, see Legum et al. (1998).

3. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the length of

many government classes declined as well, from a full year to one semester. It is also likely that attention to social studies in the elementary grades dropped precipitously over the same period (Gross 1977, 198).

4. The increasing percentages of students taking a U.S. History class through the 1970s (Table 1) is somewhat misleading inasmuch as total enrollment in history classes was declining (Osterndorf 1975, 18).

5. Only 11 states have statutes that mention specific courses, and even they are relatively vague (Tolo 1999, 16–21).

6. This does not mean that civics lessons cannot begin early. Teaching respect for authority, that there is a difference between legitimate, limited authority and unlimited, arbitrary power, and so on, are time-honored traditions in elementary education. Yet formal classes in civics/government have typically not occurred until eighth grade, when research tells us that students are just beginning to have an adult-like understanding of politics.

7. The percentages of students taking AP courses are, in turn, greater than the percentages taking AP exams. In government, for example, some 36,000 students took the AP exam in U.S. or Comparative Politics in 1994 while about 53,000 took an AP course.

8. The 1998 Civics Assessment placed somewhat greater emphasis on categories (d) and (e) and, to some extent, category (c). This shift was due to use of the voluntary *National Standards for Civics and*

Government (Center for Civic Education 1994) in creating the new Assessment. The thrust of the *Standards* is what students *should* know and what schools *should* teach, not what they *do* teach (*Civics Framework* 1996, 61).

9. Jennings and Niemi (1974, 186) reached similar conclusions about course taking in the mid-1960s, except that the difference they found between public and private schools was in whether students took American Government or Problems of Democracy.

10. This is not to say that students in private schools ignore social studies. They much more often take World History, Western History/Civilization, and AP history courses. They slightly less often take Economics, Geography, and Sociology/Psychology (Legum 1998, A205).

11. It is true, however, that because African Americans often live in big cities, where government courses are infrequent, while Latinos/as often live in the West, where such courses are frequent (Table 4), “uncontrolled” racial and ethnic differences are quite large, with 42 percent, 49 percent, and 71 percent of blacks, whites, and Latinos/as, respectively, having had a twelfth grade government class. Other evidence suggesting that these differences are not a result of student interest comes from the 1988 NAEP (Niemi and Junn 1998, 105, 178). Latinos/as expressed the most interest in studying government, but blacks were next most interested even though they took the fewest courses. Girls expressed less interest in studying government but took slightly more government courses.

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