

Documents of Freedom Evaluation

The 2014-15 school year featured an opportunity for the Bill of Rights Institute to partner with Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) for an evaluation of the Institute's newest resource, *Documents of Freedom*.

Documents of Freedom is a completely free, comprehensive digital course on history, government, and economics that is:

- Written for teachers by teachers
- Focused on primary sources
- Accessible to everyone on any device
- Easily searchable by topic or key word
- Aligned with state standards
- Designed to be used as a course or by accessing individual units and lessons

Over 300 students participated in the study, with teachers in the treatment group using *Documents of Freedom* and the control group using a traditional textbook and classroom resources. Participants took identical pre and posttests to compare gains in knowledge, affinity for civic virtue, and commitment to virtuous and responsible civic actions.

Students using *Documents of Freedom* scored 18.3 percentage points higher than the control group in knowledge of history, government, and economics, and 8.3 percentage points over the control group with a gain in affinity for the importance of civic virtue and constitutional principles. In addition, 88.5 percent of the educators using the resource stated that they would incorporate civic virtue into their future lessons.

In addition to improvements in student understanding of knowledge, educators especially enjoyed the ease of aligning *Documents of Freedom* to standards and existing curriculum, with more than 90 percent stating it was easier to do than with past resources. One teacher commented, "*Students were able to take primary documents and personalize the ideas, and thus take ownership of those Founding ideas and virtues.*"

Comments from students reflected the increase in affinity for civic virtue and understanding of civic engagement, as evidenced by comments such as:

- "*I believe that the most important thing that I learned was that we need to be virtuous and responsible in order to look after our country and hold our leaders responsible for protecting our rights.*"

- *“I think that the most important thing I have learned is that we are so fortunate to live in a country where our freedoms are valued and are important to the leaders of the United States.”*
- *“I think the most important thing that I learned from the Documents of Freedom online textbook is that we should not rely strictly on the government for creating a just society. While the government is very important in this regard, the citizens also have large influence on the outcome of society. Instead of putting all blame into the government for things that we think are wrong, citizens should first look at themselves.”*
- *“It has made me look at the U.S. Constitution and system of government from a whole new perspective because now I know so much more about how they affect our society today and what roles they play as far as the rights of citizens go.”*
- *“It has showed me that it is important to use the rights of a citizen because they were so fiercely fought after.”*
- *“It has sparked a new interest in overall law and how our government functions.”*

At the conclusion of the study, CIRCLE determined that *Documents of Freedom* is a “strong source of foundational education about history, government, and economics in grades 8 through 12.” The Bill of Rights Institute will use these findings to support our commitment to providing quality content and activities to classrooms across the country.

For more information or to utilize *Documents of Freedom* in your home or classroom, visit DocsofFreedom.org.