



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document

Why was this program created?

- The Civic Leadership Institute was created to provide high school students with meaningful opportunities to explore careers in civic and social studies-related fields. Rather than simply learning about careers in law, government, history, public policy, economics, international relations, social studies education, and public service, students will experience these professions firsthand through immersive, hands-on activities and real-world simulations.

The goal is for students to graduate not only with a deeper understanding of civic leadership, but also with a portfolio of experiences, projects, and accomplishments that will help distinguish them as they apply for college, scholarships, internships, and future careers.

Who is the target audience for this program?

- For the 2026–2027 academic year, the Civic Leadership Institute is open to high school sophomores and juniors. Beginning with the 2027–2028 academic year, students will also have the opportunity to continue in the program as seniors.

The Institute is designed for students who are passionate about leadership and interested in civic and social studies-related fields. It is ideal for students considering careers in law, government, history, political science, economics, public policy, international relations, social studies education, or public service, and who want to develop the knowledge and skills to become effective leaders in their communities and beyond.

How do I apply or enroll?

- Students can apply by completing the online application and submitting all required materials by the application deadline. Because the Civic Leadership Institute is a selective program, applications will be reviewed based on the student's academic achievement, interest in civic and social studies-related fields, leadership potential, and responses to the application questions. Selected students will be notified after the review process is complete.



When is the deadline to apply?

- Applications for the 2026–2027 Civic Leadership Institute are due by Friday, August 28, 2026. We encourage students to apply early, as admission is competitive. During the inaugural year, the Institute plans to enroll approximately 10 sophomores and 10 juniors, making space limited.

Are there any GPA or prerequisite requirements?

- Yes. Students should have a minimum 3.5 GPA and a genuine interest in civic and social studies-related fields. Ideal applicants are interested in areas such as leadership, law, government, history, economics, political science, public policy, international relations, social studies education, and public service. No prior coursework is required beyond a willingness to learn, participate, and grow as a leader.

Where will the Saturday session be held?

- Saturday sessions will be held on the campus of Western Kentucky University. Students will have the opportunity to learn in a collegiate environment while participating in engaging workshops, simulations, leadership activities, and other hands-on learning experiences.

Will there be transportation for students to get to campus for the Saturday sessions?

- No. Transportation to and from the WKU campus for Saturday sessions is the responsibility of each student and their family. Students are expected to arrange their own transportation for all Saturday program activities.

What is the expected time commitment?

- The Civic Leadership Institute is a yearlong commitment. Students will attend approximately six Saturday sessions throughout the academic year, participate in a four-day summer capstone experience, and complete occasional activities or projects between sessions.

Because each session builds upon the previous one, students are expected to make every effort to attend all Saturday sessions and actively engage in program activities. Consistent participation throughout the year prepares students for the summer capstone experience, which serves as the culminating component of the Institute.



What dates will this take place?

The tentative schedule for the 2026–2027 Civic Leadership Institute is:

- Saturday, September 26, 2026
- Saturday, October 17, 2026
- Saturday, November 21, 2026
- Saturday, February 13, 2027
- Saturday, March 20, 2027
- Saturday, April 24, 2027

Summer Capstone Experience:

The Civic Leadership Institute culminates with a weeklong experience in Washington, D.C., during June 2027. Final dates will be announced after they are coordinated with the congressional calendar to maximize opportunities for students to observe Congress in session, meet with legislative offices, and participate in authentic civic leadership experiences. This capstone experience is designed to bring together everything students have learned throughout the year and is a highly encouraged part of the Institute.

What will the Saturday sessions look like?

- Each Saturday focuses on a different theme related to leadership and civic life. Students participate in hands-on learning experiences such as mock trials, legislative simulations, public policy challenges, debates, leadership development activities, and discussions with professionals working in law, government, journalism, and public service. You'll work alongside a cohort of motivated students while building practical skills you can use in school, college, and future careers.

What topics or skills will I learn?

- You'll explore leadership, government, law, public policy, history, economics, and civic engagement while building skills in critical thinking, public speaking, collaboration, research, problem-solving, and persuasive communication through hands-on simulations and real-world experiences.



What will the summer capstone experience in Washington, D.C., look like?

- The summer experience in Washington, D.C., is designed to bring civic leadership to life. Students will visit historic landmarks, museums, government institutions, and national memorials while gaining firsthand exposure to the nation's political and civic systems.

In addition to sightseeing, students will participate in authentic civic experiences, including meeting with legislative staff, policy experts, and community stakeholders to learn how government works beyond the classroom. They will also engage in a hands-on advocacy experience, giving them the opportunity to research an issue, develop their message, and participate in meetings on Capitol Hill to better understand the legislative process and the role citizens play in shaping public policy.

The experience is designed to connect everything students have learned throughout the year to real-world leadership opportunities while inspiring them to become informed, engaged citizens.

Who will be leading this program?

- The Civic Leadership Institute will be led by Dr. Justin Mitchell, an award-winning social studies educator with more than 15 years of classroom experience. Dr. Mitchell has been recognized for his work in history and civic education and has served in leadership roles at the local, state, and national levels. He is passionate about helping students develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become the next generation of civic leaders.

Is there a cost for the program?

- There is no cost to participate in the Civic Leadership Institute's Saturday sessions during the academic year. However, students who choose to participate in the optional Washington, D.C., experience should expect a program fee of approximately \$800 to help cover travel, lodging, and related expenses.

Does this program last just for one year?

- No. While each year of the Civic Leadership Institute is a yearlong experience, students are encouraged to continue in the program from their sophomore through senior year. Each year builds on the previous one, with new topics, leadership opportunities, and increasingly advanced experiences that prepare students for college, careers, and civic leadership.



Do I have to re-apply every academic year?

- No. Students who successfully complete the program, remain eligible, and actively participate throughout the academic year will be invited to return for the following year's Civic Leadership Institute. There is no need to submit a new application each year as long as you continue to meet the program's expectations.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

- If you have additional questions, please contact the Center for Gifted Studies at gifted.studies@wku.edu. We'll be happy to assist you.

