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The Role of Schools and Universities in Sustaining Democracy

Across democratic societies, civic education has reemerged as an urgent field of policy and practice. In the United States, initiatives such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics and the American History and Civics Education Program have drawn attention to both the promise and inequities of civic learning. Drawing on findings from the federally funded CREATE Project (Civic Renewal through Education for Agency, Tolerance, and Engagement), Dr. Roof will examine how national policy translates into classroom practice, particularly within Title I districts serving historically underserved students. His recent CREATE research documents significant gains in civic knowledge and dispositions across grades, along with teacher collaboration and leadership in promoting democratic engagement (Roof, 2025).

Dr. Sarah M. Surak will then discuss the evolving role of civic education in U.S. higher education, focusing particularly on changes since the 1990s, as universities expand civic education opportunities for students inside and outside the classroom. Dr. Surak will discuss how universities today incorporate, track, and assess civic education and engagement, as well as what changes might occur given the shifting relationship between the university and the federal government under the Trump administration. Building on her work with the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, Surak will discuss how universities strive to foster a democratic culture through intentional pedagogy, general education requirements, and extracurricular activities.

Together, Dr. Surak and Dr. Roof will frame civic education as a shared democratic enterprise that links K–12 schools and universities through research, policy, and practice, highlighting the importance of cross-context collaboration in sustaining democracy.