



The American Semiquincentennial Undergraduate Poster Competition

Presented by the **Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society**



As part of the Center's 2026 Conference on Civic Thought, this competition will give undergraduate students in the humanities the opportunity to present their research examining the ideas and principles surrounding the American founding. The conference will take place on Wednesday and Thursday, September 23-24, 2026 at The Ohio State University.

Interested Students Should:

1. Write a 250-word abstract proposing or describing your research project
2. Complete necessary research examining the concept of natural rights
3. Present your work in poster form at the 2026 Conference on Civic Thought

Competition Theme

"What are rights, and where do they come from?"

The Declaration of Independence famously asserts that Americans are endowed with rights that are "unalienable," while also being governed by the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." At the same time, the document seeks to unite the American people in a common cause, appealing to shared principles and mutual responsibilities (e.g., the importance of the "consent of the governed"). In this context, consider the relationship between natural law, the Declaration of Independence, and the concept of civic friendship. Does the Declaration of Independence reflect principles of natural law, and if so, how? In what ways might natural law provide a foundation for civic friendship in a political community, and especially in America's political community? How might civic friendship help sustain a republic founded on natural law principles, especially in times of division or conflict?

Projects should examine the philosophical and historical meaning of the Declaration's claim that human beings are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." Through research grounded in history, philosophy, political thought, and related humanities disciplines, participants will explore the foundations of rights in the American tradition.

Potential Research Topics:

- ◆ Natural law traditions influencing the Declaration of Independence
- ◆ Philosophical origins of natural rights in the American founding
- ◆ The relationship between natural rights and constitutional government
- ◆ Liberty, equality, and consent in the American political tradition
- ◆ The role of shared principles and civic friendship in a republic founded on rights

Awards & Prizes

Top 5 Posters: \$200 each

Next 5 Posters: \$100 each

Hotel funding available for presenters traveling from outside central Ohio

How to Apply

Submit the following by July 31, 2026:

- ◆ A 250-word abstract describing your research
- ◆ A written recommendation from a faculty mentor
- ◆ A resume or curriculum vitae (CV)

Eligibility:

- ◆ Must be currently enrolled as an undergraduate at a U.S.-based institution of higher ed
- ◆ Must major or minor in a humanities discipline

Email all application materials to Assistant Professor Wes Siscoe at siscoe.3@osu.edu. Applicants will be notified of decisions by Friday, August 7.



CELEBRATING 250 YEARS ↗ 1776-2026

This poster competition is made possible by the generous support of the Jack Miller Center.