



Contacts: Linda Krebs/Doug Novarro  
G.S. Schwartz & Co. Inc.  
(212) 725-4500 ext. 339/315  
(646) 824-5186 (cell)/(631) 357-4390  
[lkrebs@schwartz.com](mailto:lkrebs@schwartz.com)/[dnovarro@schwartz.com](mailto:dnovarro@schwartz.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**COLLEGE SENIORS LACK KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICA'S PRESIDENTS**

*Intercollegiate Studies Institute Research Shows That  
Higher Education Is Failing To Teach Students About Our Nation's Presidents*

**Wilmington, Del., February 8, 2007** – Every February, Americans acknowledge past presidents with a day dedicated in their honor—Presidents' Day. Surprisingly, many of the nation's college students, including those at some of the most prestigious schools in America, know little about the men being celebrated. Data analyzed by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) shows that college seniors achieved less than 60 percent correct on a series of questions about U.S. presidents.

The students were asked 60 multiple-choice questions about our nation's history and institutions in surveys administered by the University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy on behalf of ISI. Among the questions were several on U.S. presidents: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Johnson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Ronald Reagan. The average score among seniors on questions related to our nation's presidents was 57.6 percent, which represents a failure on a traditional grading scale. College freshmen asked the same questions about these presidents scored 57.2 percent correct.

"These results are particularly disturbing as we celebrate Presidents' Day," said Mike Ratliff, senior vice president, ISI. "Most students enter college with little knowledge about America's presidents, and unfortunately they leave college with virtually no gain in knowledge about the individuals who have led our nation, many of whom—such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln—are among the greatest figures in American history. In our democracy only one person, the president, 'answers to all of the people.' Regretfully, most colleges and universities fail to effectively teach their students, our future leaders, about our presidents and the momentous decisions they often had to make."

**Sample questions and key findings related to student knowledge about America's presidents**

- Nearly 30 percent of seniors failed to recognize the correct answer when asked the question, *George Washington's role in America's founding is best characterized as: (**Correct answer is in bold**)*
  - a.) **prudent general and statesman**
  - b.) influential writer on constitutional principles
  - c.) leader of the Massachusetts delegation to the Constitutional Congress

- d.) a strong advocate for states' rights
- e.) social compact theorist
  
- More than 21 percent identified Washington as a leader of the Massachusetts delegation to Congress or a strong advocate for states rights.
  
- Overall, 36 percent of seniors failed to identify the correct answer to the question, *Abraham Lincoln was elected President during which period? (Correct answer is in bold)*
  - a. 1800–1825
  - b. 1826–1850
  - c. **1851–1875**
  - d. 1876–1900
  - e. 1901–1925
  
- Twenty-five percent of Harvard seniors answered the question about Lincoln incorrectly.
  
- Forty-three percent of seniors failed to recognize the correct answer when asked, *How did President Kennedy respond to the Cuban Missile Crisis? (Correct answer is in bold)*
  - a. **He imposed a naval blockade on Cuba**
  - b. He landed Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs
  - c. He sent troops to Cuba to destroy nuclear weapons
  - d. He went to Havana to meet with Fidel Castro
  - e. He ended all diplomatic communications with the Soviets
  
- Thirty-three percent of Yale seniors answered this question incorrectly.
  
- More than 70 percent of seniors failed to identify the correct answer to the question, *The idea that in America there should be a “wall of separation” between church and state appears in: (Correct answer is in bold)*
  - a) George Washington’s Farewell Address
  - b) the Mayflower Compact
  - c) the Constitution
  - d) the Declaration of Independence
  - e) **Thomas Jefferson’s letters**

### **Taking action to strengthen knowledge of America’s founding principles**

The lack of overall learning regarding America’s history is a growing concern on campuses across the country, according to Dr. Michael Andrews, director of the Jack Miller Center for the Teaching of America’s Founding Principles at ISI. Founded in 2005 by Chicago businessman and philanthropist Jack Miller, ISI’s Jack Miller Center has provided approximately \$1 million and a national staff for advice and support regarding the establishment of academic centers dedicated to teaching America’s history and essential institutions at several colleges and universities.

“We are seeing increased interest in academic centers dedicated to restoring the teaching of America’s founding principles,” Andrews said. “This is a critical step toward better educating our future leaders and strengthening their overall learning about our nation’s past leaders and history.”

For more information on ISI and the Jack Miller Center for the Teaching of America's Founding Principles, visit: [www.isi.org](http://www.isi.org).

**About the Intercollegiate Studies Institute**

The Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) was founded in 1953 to further in successive generations of American college youth a better understanding of the economic, political, and ethical values that sustain a free and humane society. With ISI's volunteer representatives at over 900 colleges, and with more than 50,000 ISI student and faculty members on virtually every campus in the country, ISI directs tens of thousands of young people each year to a wide array of educational programs that deepen their understanding of the American ideal of ordered liberty.

**About the University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy**

The University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in the field of public policy and public opinion research. The scope of the Department's projects ranges from national and international studies of public opinion and public policy to local community-based surveys. The Department is an outgrowth of the tremendous success of original survey research conducted under the aegis of the Roper Center/Institute for Social Inquiry formed in 1979.

###