



WASHU

ORDERED

LIBERTY

Project

FALL 2025

From the Desk of the Chancellor

WashU's Ordered Liberty Project is a universitywide effort grounded in a simple but profound conviction: that a healthy democracy depends on the free exchange of ideas — and that institutions of higher education must be active stewards of that exchange. We are not alone in this responsibility, but we are uniquely positioned to lead.

By ordered liberty, we mean something both old and deeply relevant: that individual freedom is most meaningful and most enduring when paired with the habits, institutions, and norms that give it structure and purpose. It is liberty not as license, but as a disciplined freedom shaped by mutual responsibility, law, and moral restraint. The freedom to speak — and to listen. To dissent — and to reason. To pursue our own good, but always in a shared civic space.

In that sense, the Ordered Liberty Project is not a departure from what we already do at WashU. It is a name for it. Across disciplines and programs, our faculty and students are wrestling openly and rigorously with the most pressing and contested questions of our time. We are investing in the conditions that allow that work to flourish: freedom of thought, diversity of perspective, and a culture of serious argument and mutual respect. With this project, we commit to deepening and elevating that work, and to bringing it into fuller view.

The phrase “ordered liberty” has a long intellectual lineage. Though he never used the exact phrase, Edmund Burke wrote of the importance of “liberty connected with order.” It has been attributed to George Washington and was given constitutional weight in Justice Benjamin Cardozo’s 1937 opinion in *Palko v. Connecticut*. But regardless of origin, the idea of ordered liberty captures the central tension and promise of the American experiment: freedom guided by responsibility, diversity held together by shared commitments, and a civic life sustained not by uniformity but by principled pluralism.

The mission of WashU is to “act in service of truth through the formation of leaders, the discovery of knowledge, and the treatment of patients for the betterment of our region, our nation, and our world.” We believe leadership belongs to anyone willing to step up, speak with conviction, and bring others along in pursuit of a common purpose, and we are working hard to empower everyone on our campus to discover how they can lead in their own way.

If we want a society that values liberty, we need institutions that teach how to use liberty wisely — to reason well, listen carefully, and act with integrity. That is what the Ordered Liberty Project is about. And WashU is committed to it.



Andrew D. Martin

Chancellor

About the Ordered Liberty Project

The twofold mission of a university is to produce knowledge and to educate the next generation, and both of these elements depend on the open exchange of ideas. Yet in recent years university campuses have shown a narrowing of the range of ideas under discussion, as well as a hostility to points of view that might help students, faculty, and the broader public understand society's most pressing problems. Too often, campus debate falls silent.

Diversity of thought is the sine qua non of the academy. Without diverse perspectives and approaches, scholarly ideas cannot be effectively tested via the crucible of intellectual engagement and critique. Viewpoint diversity enhances student learning, requiring students to engage with arguments that enable them to hone their own thinking about complex moral and political topics. As John Stuart Mill noted, the person “who knows only their own position knows little of that.”

Through the Ordered Liberty Project, WashU aims to promote an intellectual environment characterized by free speech, freedom of thought, and a robust engagement with varied perspectives and ideas.

The Ordered Liberty Project will encourage inquiry that values a well-ordered society as an important means of supporting and furthering human flourishing, while urging careful evaluation of whether government intervention strengthens that balance or risks eroding it.

We believe this project will enhance our campus culture and research excellence while furthering public discussion of the role of citizens in a free society.

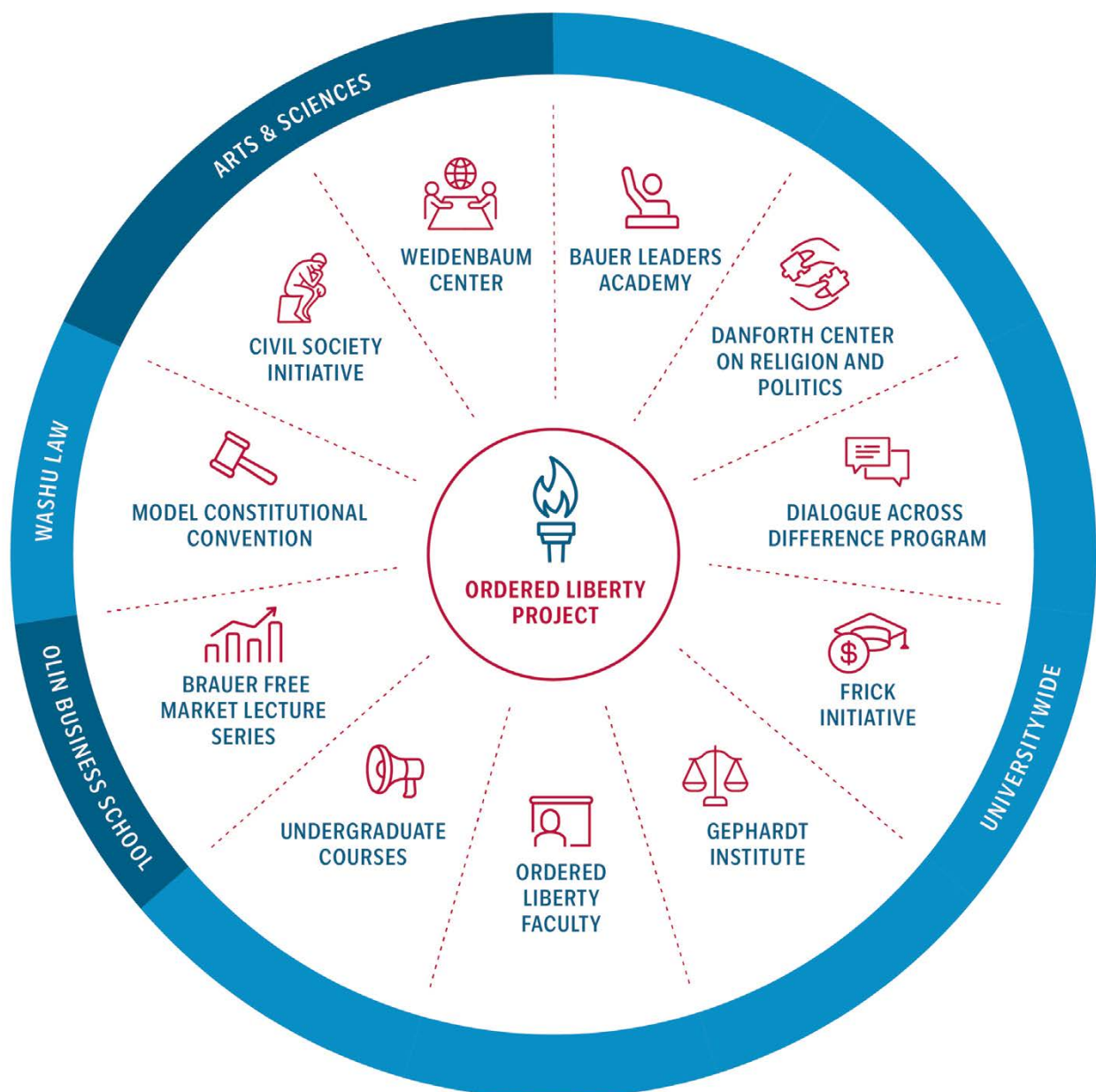
“Good public policy is arrived at, not by the uncritical adoption of the positions of a self-proclaimed ‘white hat,’ but by the competitive give-and-take among all of the interest groups in the marketplace of ideas.”

— MURRAY WEIDENBAUM
The Competition of Ideas

WashU Ordered Liberty Ecosystem

WashU has long embodied the principles of the Ordered Liberty Project — the conviction that freedom flourishes when rooted in responsibility, mutual respect, and the disciplined pursuit of truth.

Through this project, we are building on that strong foundation to elevate and embed these values across every corner of campus. The Ordered Liberty Project provides a unifying force for these programs and additional affiliates and faculty that will bolster this ecosystem over time.



Ordered Liberty Faculty Affiliates

At the heart of the Ordered Liberty Project is a commitment to make WashU a beacon for viewpoint diversity and open debate, values that will define not just one department or center, but the spirit of our entire campus. To that end, the project is cultivating a distinguished community of scholars whose work exemplifies intellectual openness and rigorous inquiry. We will engage current faculty committed to free expression, freedom of thought, and the open exchange of ideas across a wide range of perspectives. We also will recruit new faculty whose heterodox viewpoints advance the university's scholarly ecosystem.

College of Arts & Sciences

Civil Society Initiative

The Civil Society Initiative promotes responsible democratic citizenship on the premise that individual and collective reasoning about value questions is an essential part of a flourishing democracy. The initiative brings faculty speakers from other campuses to hold student-facing talks and colloquia on theoretical questions of political theory, social epistemology, and moral psychology.

Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government, and Public Policy

The Weidenbaum Center's research and programming are foundational to Ordered Liberty, offering evidence-based insights and fostering intellectual engagement on critical issues that shape the relationship between citizens and government. By bringing together scholars from different disciplines, the center contributes to the university's broader mission of creating a space for thoughtful dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives. The center's work helps amplify Ordered Liberty's commitment to free expression, academic freedom, and democratic values, while also contributing to a national conversation on policy and governance.

Olin Business School

Stephen and Camilla Brauer Free Market Lecture Series

Geared toward students and community members, this endowed annual lecture explores and encourages dialogue on the American free enterprise system and its influence on economic growth, public policy, and world affairs. Leading scholars, artists, and business leaders present talks on how their values guide their daily lives while also highlighting the importance of free-market economics.

WashU Law

Model Constitutional Convention

Stefanie Lindquist, the Nickerson Dean of the School of Law, founded and convened the first-ever nationwide student-led model constitutional convention at Arizona State University in May 2024. She brings the model convention and funding with her to WashU, where it will be hosted as a program of the Ordered Liberty Project in 2026. The inaugural convention was a highly visible event that attracted 106 students and 22 mentors from more than 75 universities across the country.

Universitywide

George and Carol Bauer Leaders Academy

Through the Bauer Leaders Academy, we aspire to differentiate WashU as the premier institution for transforming people into purpose-driven leaders of character and capability. We believe everyone — regardless of formal status, position, or rank — has the capacity to lead by building trust and positively influencing others. By developing future-ready leaders, we will fulfill WashU's mission to have a positive impact on society. The signature of the Bauer Leaders Academy is a four-year leadership development program for undergraduates. This program is distinctive in its integration of experiential learning, coursework, and direct coaching. The Common Good Leadership Program of the academy caters to students who wish to lead in the context of civic and community engagement.

John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

The Danforth Center's focus on the intersection of religion and politics is essential for understanding the ways in which religious beliefs influence public life and policymaking in democratic societies. By studying religion's impact on political thought and action, the Danforth Center helps to shed light on how these forces shape American democracy and the role of citizens in governance. By studying these dynamics, the Danforth Center enriches Ordered Liberty's broader mission to explore and define the role of citizens and government in American society, ensuring that WashU remains a hub for critical discussions on the role of values in governance.

Dialogue Across Difference Program

Required for all first-year students, the Dialogue Across Difference (DxD) program builds students' skills in intergroup dialogue and encourages free expression on campus. It includes a facilitated one-credit course structured to foster communication and collaboration across sociocultural differences. By blending theory and experiential learning, participants are introduced to core social issues through reading materials and inculcating the key skills for dialoguing across deeply held value differences. The course strives to prepare students for living and working in an increasingly diverse world. Each section of the course consists of 18 students, who examine a single topic after establishing the characteristics of constructive dialogue and debate. Two trained facilitators then lead the class through a structured curriculum.

Frick Initiative

The Frick Initiative brings a multidisciplinary approach to Ordered Liberty, supporting a wide range of grants, events, and university initiatives that uphold four guiding principles: free speech, civil discourse, free and open markets, and personal responsibility. This initiative provides significant flexibility, allowing for creative and innovative projects that explore these principles in new and meaningful ways. As part of Ordered Liberty, the Frick Initiative helps to generate forward-thinking solutions that promote democratic engagement and societal progress.

Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement

The mission of the Gephardt Institute is to foster a vibrant culture of civic engagement throughout WashU by catalyzing student learning, participation, and impact in civic life. Through a series of programs and courses, the Gephardt Institute imparts the knowledge, skills, responsibilities, and habits of citizen engagement in democracy with the goal of preparing students to be civic leaders throughout their lives.

Featured Courses

While not a comprehensive list, the following undergraduate courses reflect the themes of the Ordered Liberty Project. Courses like these invite students to grapple with enduring questions about freedom, citizenship, morality, and democracy from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Together, they embody the spirit of the Ordered Liberty Project by cultivating the habits of mind and civic virtues that sustain a free and self-governing society.

1776, Then and Now (*Spring 2026 only*)

This course, being offered during America's 250th anniversary, will explore the origin of the United States through the lens of the American Revolution. The class will examine the founding of the U.S. from multiple perspectives and points of view, as well as the continuing relevance and consequences of those events. What happened, how did it happen, and why does it still matter? With lectures by renowned professors from WashU and around the country, we will invite students to investigate broad-ranging viewpoints on the American Revolution and independence.

Disagreement, Extremism, and Polarization

In this course, students will study disagreement, extremism, and polarization using insights and methods from philosophy, political science, and empirical psychology, with the aim of understanding these phenomena and the social and political challenges they pose. Questions will include whether it is possible for reasonable people to disagree, whether democratic deliberation requires a background of agreement or shared facts, how our moral psychology shapes our political beliefs, whether prejudice and bias can be eliminated from political thinking, and whether there are some political positions that are so extreme they should not be taken seriously.

Free Speech from Spinoza to Trump

This course introduces students to contemporary issues of free speech, including hate speech, the freedom to protest, and social media regulation, and provides a survey of the philosophical and legal history of the principle of freedom of expression. Students will study what Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and the U.S. Supreme Court have said about free speech over the years, before turning to contemporary debates about the validity and scope of free speech.

Free Speech on Campus

Co-taught by Chancellor Andrew Martin and Lee Epstein, the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor, this course, through a series of case studies, explores how the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and association play out in colleges and universities. Readings consist of court decisions, theories, and commentary on free expression, as well as background material on the real-world controversies we analyze.

History of Political Thought

This course offers a critical introduction to the main issues and debates in western political theory, including but not limited to the topics of justice, legitimacy, equality, democracy, liberty, sovereignty, and the role of history in the political and social world. This course is designed to be the first in a three-semester sequence on the history of political thought. The first semester begins with ancient Greek political thought and follows its development up to the early 16th century.

Morality & Markets

Co-taught by English and business faculty, this course uses literature, film, and television to examine and better understand the complex pressures that inform moral choices in a market society. By drawing on tools from modern psychology and business strategy, students learn to think more critically about the relationship between individual morality, free markets, and the societies they both inhabit.

Public Opinion and American Democracy

This course focuses on three key questions in the field of American political behavior: How do we measure public opinion? Which elected officials listen to public opinion? And how can we change public opinion? Students begin the semester by writing letters to each other explaining their political beliefs — a project inspired by Founding Fathers John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Adams famously wrote to Jefferson, “You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other.” Jefferson later echoed the statement.

Social Identity and Democratic Deliberation

In this course, students will be exposed to theories of democratic deliberation, standpoint theories in epistemology, and theories of epistemic injustice, and they will be asked to explore several ameliorative theories. Democracy is committed to citizens’ status as political equals, including the right to have an equal say in determining our joint political future. But many core deliberative practices, including argument and testimony, are distorted by individuals’ social identities. The class will proceed according to the following questions: How should argument and testimony work in a democracy? How does social identity, including gender, race, and class, impact us as political agents within a deliberative context? How does our social identity affect our practices of knowledge acquisition, maintenance, and transmission?

The Good Life Between Religion and Politics

This course considers the way religious and political thought has shaped considerations of the classical ethical question of how we should live, and the ways that ethics have often served to connect religion and politics in thought and practice. Do we need a religious basis to answer ethical questions, or can we determine how to live without religious sources of authority? On what basis, and with what capacities, can we imagine new answers to ethical questions — in community or on our own? Taking a philosophical approach through both classic and modern texts, we will consider a range of answers to the question of how we should live, and a range of strategies for imagining the inquiry.

The Practice of Citizenship

This course examines citizenship as both a practice of democratic life and a solution to cooperation problems. It integrates political theory, American political voices, and empirical political science to ask the following questions: What civic capacities sustain democracy, and what obligations do citizens and institutions share in cultivating them? Students engage with classic political thinkers from Aristotle to Martin Luther King Jr., analyze modern empirical studies on trust, polarization, and civic education, and reflect on WashU’s role in preparing citizens.

Philanthropic Opportunities

WashU has long embodied the principles of the Ordered Liberty Project — the conviction that freedom flourishes when rooted in responsibility, mutual respect, and the pursuit of truth. Through this project, we are building on that strong foundation to elevate and embed these values across campus. By investing in programs that promote freedom of thought, diversity of perspective, and civil debate, we aim to strengthen the conditions that allow liberty to endure. We welcome your support in this effort.

Chancellor's Restoring Trust Fund

In fall of 2024, Chancellor Martin co-signed a statement of principles with Vanderbilt Chancellor Daniel Diermeier affirming free expression, academic freedom, and institutional neutrality. Soon after, they launched the Restoring Trust in Higher Education Initiative to address the challenges that higher education institutions are facing in an era of heightened public scrutiny. This fund supports this ongoing effort, which includes the Ordered Liberty Project.

Endowed Professorships & Faculty Recruitment

We are building our classical liberal faculty bench through the Ordered Liberty Project. Seeking out scholars across a range of disciplines, we are currently searching for candidates to fill two endowed professorships, the Laurel and Cliff Asness Distinguished Professorship and the Earl H. and Suzanne S. Harbison Distinguished Professorship. We hope to attract support for additional endowed professorships (\$3 million) and endowed distinguished professorships (\$4 million).

WashU Ordered Liberty Index

With the launch of the Ordered Liberty Project, Chancellor Martin plans to invest in creating and publicizing an annual survey called the WashU Ordered Liberty Index. The index will provide an annual barometer of First Amendment rights and issues related to American governance and liberty. The survey will comprise 10 questions: a standard set of recurring questions, developed in consultation with Chancellor Martin and other constitutional scholars on our faculty, and five timebound questions that change from year to year and address current societal issues and events.

Visiting Scholars

The Ordered Liberty Visiting Scholars Program will bring distinguished faculty and public figures to WashU for short appointments and visits to teach a course, give lectures, and interact with our faculty and students.

Ordered Liberty Lecture Series

This lecture series will host speakers, debates, and panels that demonstrate and directly address challenges related to academic freedom and free expression in a variety of contexts, providing venues for interaction with students and faculty as well as the practical application of thinking and behavior rooted in the values of free expression and open discourse.

“Free expression is a core tenet both of our nation and of this university. I aspire for WashU to become known both as a training ground for thoughtful leaders who can engage with people from a wide range of perspectives and as a site of productive scholarly dialogue not only across disciplines but also across ideological differences.”

ANDREW D. MARTIN, CHANCELLOR

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