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## Hemphill: Ignorance not limited to just politics

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By Alan Hemphill  
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There is a study of the low political knowledge level of voters being passed around the Web, on YouTube and in articles, but it is not limited to just voters in general.

A recent study by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute indicates that Americans are just too stupid to vote — and that includes “college graduates.” In their survey of 2,500 people at random, the worst news was not the high school graduates, or even the college graduates, but the elected officials. Twenty-seven percent of elected officials could not identify one right in the First Amendment to the Constitution!

And, alas, this ignorance is not limited to just politics.

As a computer science professor, I devised a “Cultural Quiz” of what I thought an “educated person” should know without looking it up. It was difficult getting the proper balance of questions, so it took weeks before I published it for my students.

It had questions like: Who wrote “God Bless America”? Who painted the Mona Lisa? What is the Quadratic Equation? Who wrote the “1812 Overture”? Who is the mayor of San Diego? Name one California senator. What is the Pythagoras Theorem? Who is the Secretary of State? Who is the VP of

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the U.S.? Who painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Who plays defensive right tackle for the Chargers? Who owns the San Diego Padres? Who owns the San Diego Union? etc...

There were 82 questions. I gave the quiz to my wife and my then newspaper editor (among others), but my wife and editor both tied with the highest scores I was ever to find — 72. I considered that an A+.

I then asked the university if I could give the quiz to my computer science students — the brightest in the university — and they said only voluntarily and during class breaks. Those who volunteered, about 20 percent of the classes at most, were those who thought of themselves as really knowledgeable.

Their average score was 9. The best was 12.

The general lack of knowledge, even among the otherwise very bright university students, is astonishing.

Now admittedly, the quiz was personal. I did not convene a balanced university committee of various disciplines. It was hardly scientific, but it was at least representative of general knowledge — music, art, math, politics and sports. It was not a multiple-choice test, because none of my tests were.

The definition of “literacy” changes. At one point in our history, we determined literacy by the ability to read and translate multiple languages, including “dead languages.” Today, a working knowledge of computers would be considered a necessity. I did not include that in my test because it was assumed of computer science students.

Jay Leno often conducts “Man on the Street” interviews to permit people to display their ignorance. Cliff Franklin does the same thing on local morning radio. The popularity of “Jeopardy” demonstrates a thirst for knowledge that is not provided in public schools

Inspiring students is a skill neither taught nor required of teachers.

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