



Letter to Fellows

How We Know What We Know

May 2025

Dear Rowland Fellows,

It sure is tough to be a teacher these days. I don't just mean the huge challenges facing public education and how schools are expected to cure all of society's ills, but even worse—that we are living in what some scholars call a [post-fact society](#), due in part to a *post-truth political environment*.

As teachers, many of us are wondering, *How can I teach when knowledge itself is under attack?*

If this seems like an exaggeration, you don't have to take my word for it. This intentional attack on knowledge is well established, and part of what [Ruth Ben-Ghiat](#) and [Anne Applebaum](#) call the *authoritarian playbook*. Authoritarians insist on being the sole authority to decide what is true or untrue, and so they attack all institutions that are responsible for our collective knowledge, from historians and scientists to universities at large, from the media, to lawyers, judges, and the legal system at large.

All of these institutions—the press, higher education, the judiciary— have developed processes for establishing the truth, from the scientific method, to court proceedings, to the journalist's code of ethics, and this gives these institutions authority over determining

what is true, an authority that authoritarian leaders deeply resent, and often deride as “alternative facts” or “fake news”.

It is important to note that these familiar institutions co-construct knowledge collaboratively—it’s never just one person saying that something is so. Researchers have peer-reviewed journals. Journalists have editorial teams and fact checkers. Plaintiffs have appeals courts. This is crucial because it creates bodies of knowledge that are socially constructed through strong processes, with ample opportunities to update, amend, and correct the facts over time. This too has given a lot of credibility to these traditional knowledge sources. At least until recently, that is.

In the early days of the internet there was great hope for “social knowing” (see [Weinberger](#) or [Shirky](#)), from Wikipedia to social movements on Twitter. However, it’s become clear that big companies’ algorithms have now taken over our online conversations. In addition to the conspiracy theories and disinformation that flourish online, “Enrage to engage” clickbait has divided us in ways that we still don’t fully understand. It is crucial to highlight that this widespread distrust has disrupted our ability to have a shared understanding of reality.

So, how do we know what we know? Well, even if our institutions fall short, teachers can still play a big role. Even as we see media companies, law firms, and universities compromise their processes, trade on their integrity, and “bend the knee” to the Trump Administration’s demands, we teachers can still make a difference. In fact, when our institutions fail us, we can only rely on ourselves, and the trust that comes from meaningful human relationships. This is when our little school communities are more important than ever.

For example, and more specifically, the [truth sandwich](#) is a useful strategy for keeping classroom instruction reality-based. The process is simple, clear, and powerful in its brevity. Linguist George Lakoff explains how it works this way:

1. Start with the truth. The first frame gets the advantage.
2. Indicate the lie. Avoid amplifying the specific language if possible.
3. Return to the truth. Always repeat truths more than lies.

So, in a classroom setting, a truth sandwich could go something like this.

Student: I heard the Secretary of Health hates vaccines—is that true?

Teacher: First, you need to know that vaccines have saved millions of lives around the world.. Some people believe that vaccines cause autism, but there is absolutely

no proof of that. What we do know is that vaccines have saved millions and millions of people from diseases like measles, polio, and COVID 19.

The writer M. Gessen was persecuted as a non-binary person in Putin's Russia and fled to the United States. "[Institutions will not save you,](#)" Gessen famously wrote in 2016, and it's sad to see now that they were right. Similarly, Eddie Glaude said in an [interview](#), about his new book, "We have outsourced our responsibility for democracy for too long. We have outsourced it to politicians, to community leaders, to so-called prophets and heroes, when in fact we need to take responsibility for it."

Thank you, friends & colleagues, for your ongoing work as teachers in this moment, for stepping up and taking responsibility. Your hard work to help our young people develop a strong knowledge base, to become critical thinkers, and to demonstrate a healthy respect for their peers makes all the difference. Your work with students is an important contribution to our democracy.

Take care and see you soon,

Mike

P.S. If, like me, you're still learning the U.S. history you were never taught in school, you may appreciate this recent interview of historian Steven Hahn talking about his recent book [Illiberal America: A History](#).

P.P.S. If you see "message clipped" at the bottom of this newsletter, please click through! Depending on how many photos we have, Gmail will sometimes truncate this newsletter.

Rowland Foundation Updates

The 14th Annual Rowland Conference

Super Early Bird is Open! Pre-register now!



Rowland Foundation affiliates can [pre-register for the Annual Conference now!](#) Early Bird pre-registration is filling briskly, so be sure to save a spot for your team, and save some money on registration, too! No payment or team information is required to pre-register.

We are thrilled that Baratunde Thurston will be our keynote speaker for the **14th Annual Rowland Conference, Thursday, October 30, 2025** at the University of Vermont's Davis Center. His [How to Citizen](#) framework invites us to rethink what citizenship should be in our day and age. A prolific writer, comedian, and podcaster, Baratunde is the author of the New York Times bestseller *How to Be Black* and the host of the podcast [Life with Machines](#), focused on the social impacts of AI. He previously wrote for *The Daily Show* and *The Onion* and hosted the PBS series [America Outdoors with Baratunde Thurston](#).

Do You Know Future Rowland Fellows?

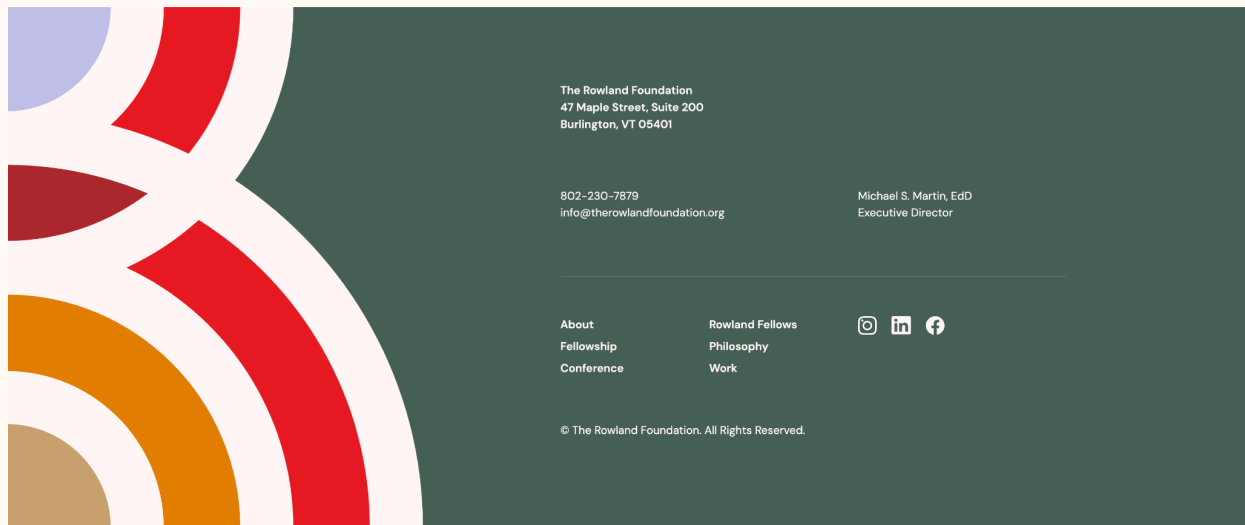
Summer is the time to dream.

Prospective Rowland Fellows have often found that the fall is a busy time to pull together their Rowland Fellowship proposal. So, thanks to an idea from **Senior Associate Jeanie Phillips (RF14)**, we now encourage teachers and principals to begin brainstorming early. [We send this flyer](#) with online resources to every principal in Vermont—feel free to share it! We encourage Rowland Fellows to “pay it forward” by spreading the word and encouraging colleagues to apply. Interested teachers can also register to meet with **Executive Director**

Mike Martin (RF09) at an upcoming Fellowship Info Session on either May 14th or June 18th at 4:00 pm. To sign up and receive the Google Meet invitation, teachers just need to [fill out this form](#).

New Website Updates

Rowland Foundation Website Updates



Check out this spring's updates to the Rowland Foundation website! **Senior Associate for Media & Technology Lori Lisai (RF15)** worked tirelessly with Mike, Abby, and our web developers to make some subtle but significant changes to the site. In addition to improved navigation, security, and performance, the overall look and content have been streamlined to make things easier to find. We're using Rowland Red specifically as an accent color now, to make our call-to-action buttons really pop. Also, check out the new "floating nav bar" feature—it comes with you when you scroll down the page!

2023 Rowland Fellows

Informal Gathering in Burlington



The 2023 Cohort of Rowland Fellows met in Burlington for lunch with Lindsay McQueen's Collaborative Work Group member Jordan Funke, followed by a special screening at the Rowland Foundation office of a TED talk by Elizabeth Placencia's brother-in-law. Seen here (left to right) Lindsay McQueen, Jordan Funke, Carrie Gilman, Elizabeth Placencia & Chris Sheehan.

School Redesign in Action

Rowland Fellows at Regional Education Conference



Rowland Fellows were a big, joyful presence at this year's School Redesign in Action conference in Boston, as both hosts and participants! Seen here (left to right) **Samantha Mundt (RF21)**, **Jeanie Phillips (RF14)**, **Bill Prue (RF24)**, **Melissa Bushey (RF24)**, **Beverly McCarthy (RF24)** **Emily Gilmore Hurwitz (RF17)**, **Erica Wallstrom (RF14)** & **Melissa**

Wyman (RF24). Jessica Kessler (RF23), Mike Martin (RF09) & Peter Stratman (RF14) also participated in this year's conference.

Celebrations



Andrew Jones, Ed.D. (RF15) recently attended the 50th anniversary conference for the Association for Education Finance and Policy (AEFP) in Washington, D.C. and he just finished his first year on the [AEFP Board of Directors](#) as a public school representative. The AEFP holds an annual conference that provides an opportunity for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to share their work in the realm of education finance and policy, with the ultimate aim of having these findings to improve schools. In the past, Andrew has presented papers and posters at this conference on a range of topics. Check out the recently published AEFP [Live Handbook](#), which provides a hub for important research on a wide range of topics that are applicable to both educators and school leaders.



Congratulations to Tim O'Leary (RF20)! Tim has been named Principal of Charlotte Central School in the Champlain Valley School District. He will be working with Assistant Principal & Special Services Director Beth Slater, as well as **Julia Beerworth (RF25)**, Charlotte's first-ever Rowland Fellow!



Congratulations to Abby Paige! The Rowland Foundation's Executive Assistant is also a talented author, playwright, & actor who has been touring for the release of her new bilingual book [Piecework/Travail à la pièce](#), which was recently [featured in SevenDays](#).

Courtesy Posts



Collaborative Practices for Equity

Sign up now for this amazing course taught by Jeanie Phillips and Aimee Arandia Østensen! This unique course offers school leaders the opportunity to design impactful agendas, engage in feedback sessions, practice collaboration strategies, and apply their learning to the work they are doing in their schools. A fierce commitment to educational equity

and excellence will be at the core of all the learning participants will do. Priority is given to new Fellows and their Collaborative Work Group members, so space is limited. [More information here.](#) [Register here.](#)



Social Protest & Popular Music Course

Vermont-based jazz musician, composer & educator Geoff Kim is teaching an online graduate course called [Social Protest & Popular Music](#) through Castleton University Center for Schools this summer June 24 – August 5. Geoff’s Cuban music septet Guagua closed out the Annual Rowland Conference last fall. The course is especially well-suited for educators in Social Studies, Language Arts, Music, and Humanities. [Register here!](#)



Diversifying the Educator Workforce (DEW) Summit

Great Schools Partnership has partnered with DEW leaders across the state of Vermont to organize the Diversifying the Educator Workforce (DEW) Summit, which will take place on Friday, May 23, 2025, from 8:15 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Killington Grand Hotel.

This summit aims to advance the diversification of Vermont's educator workforce by gathering students, educators, higher ed leaders, state-level leaders, and community and professional organizations to explore strategies for building a more inclusive, supportive, and representative education system.

Through collaborative learning, partnership building, and action planning, we will focus on cultivating environments where educators from the Global Majority thrive and student voices are uplifted in shaping Vermont's educational future. Vermont has a substantial number of programs, initiatives, partnerships, and organizations underway to support increased educator diversification. We believe that coming together and fostering synergy across efforts will significantly impact student learning in Vermont.

[Please visit this link](#) to learn more information and to register for this FREE summit!

Socrates Cafe at CVU

Brad Miller (RF24) is pleased to announce a [student-led community discussion](#) on the question of: *How does our understanding of time influence how we live?* at the [2025 Socrates Cafe](#), to take place Monday, May 12, from 6:30–8:00 p.m. at Champlain Valley Union High School.

"Socrates Cafe is incredibly special in the way that it provides a rare opportunity to gather with a diverse group of community members and communicate in a safe and supported environment, allowing all participants to not only connect but find curiosity in possible new perspectives," says CVU junior Emma Jean Armstrong. "At the end of the discussion, every contributor walks away with an experience that has either shifted, added to, or confirmed their original thoughts."

Learn more and RSVP at: bit.ly/socrates2025



Holistic Restorative Education Certificate Program

Frequent Rowland Conference presenter **Elijah Hawkes** would like Rowland Fellows to know that it's not too late to apply to the Saint Michael's College [Holistic Restorative Education Certificate Program](#), where Elijah teaches alongside Dr. Rhiannon Kim & Annie O'Shaugnessey. For more information: annie@starlingcollaborative.org

YIP Civics Curriculum Pilot Program

Since 2022, the Education Department at the **Institute for Youth in Policy (YIP)** has been developing a nonpartisan, discourse-based high school civics curriculum to combat political polarization and a lack of youth civic engagement. We're an entirely student-led team from across the U.S., and we share the goal of improving civics education through resources that drive productive conversations among students about vital current issues.

We offer eight curriculum units spanning a range of policy areas and supplemental current events resources tackling some of today's most challenging societal issues. This program provides educators with stipends of up to \$500 to integrate innovative, research-backed resources developed by students to discuss polarizing topics for today's classrooms. As part of the program, educators will gain access to professional development workshops on discussing the 2024 election results and current events and direct insights from students and guest speakers on fostering critical thinking, media literacy, and civic engagement.

If you are interested in joining this cohort of educators, please complete this [5-minute application](#). Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis for educators to join in Spring, Summer, or Fall 2025. education@yipinstitute.org.



Wholehearted Schools Graduate Course

Looking for an immersive and supportive graduate course for next school year? Join Onward: A Yearlong Emotional Resiliency Immersion for Educators! In this immersive graduate course experience, educators will be provided the structure, knowledge, and guidance from August – May to reflect on their professional journey, contemplate change, practice new ways of being, and co-create a community of support. Throughout the school year, we will learn strategies and apply mindset shifts to manage stress and overcome the challenges of the teaching profession. Learn more [here](#) and/or contact Tara Cariano (RF18) directly at info@wholehearted-schools.com