



Civic Engagement Boot Camp
April 10, 2026 | 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Bates Law Building | Heritage Room | 2nd Floor

10 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	Welcome	Jessica Ruland O'Connor <i>Program Director</i> <i>Lecturer</i> <i>Hobby School of Public Affairs</i>
10:05 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	Introductions & Political Polarization Discussion	Sadie Webb <i>Associate Director</i> <i>College Debates & Discourse Alliance</i> <i>American Council of Trustees and Alumni</i>
<i>*During this session, students will be introduced to polarization and engage in meaningful conversation about its causes and impacts.</i>		
10:45 a.m. – 12 p.m.	Developing Topics for Debate	Sadie Webb
<i>*During this session, it will be a seminar style conversation and workshop where students discuss what they see as most salient social and political issues, and then develop such topics into debate or dialogue questions.</i>		
12:15 p.m. – 1 p.m.	Lunch Keynote Speaker	Council Member Julian Ramirez <i>City of Houston</i> <i>At-Large Position 1</i>
1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Debate Experience	Sadie Webb
<i>*During this session, students will use one of topics developed with the group during the morning session.</i>		
2:30 p.m. – 3 p.m.	CD&D Fellowship Overview Q&A	Sadie Webb

MEET THE SPEAKERS



**Jessica Ruland O'Connor, Program Director,
Hobby School of Public Affairs
Session Organizer**

Jessica Ruland O'Connor directs the undergraduate internship programs in Houston, Austin and Washington, D.C. at the Hobby School. She also leads civic engagement initiatives and student-centered special projects designed to expand access to experiential learning and strengthen democratic participation.

In 2025, O'Connor received national recognition for the Hobby School's nonpartisan voter engagement efforts through the Students Learn Students Vote Ask Every Student grant, which aims to increase college student participation in the democratic process. She earned a Master of Public Policy and a bachelor's degree in political science. Her public service journey began as a Civic Houston Intern and as a Leland Fellow on Capitol Hill, transformative experiences that inform her work with students today. Before joining the Hobby School, O'Connor worked on the public policy team at the Greater Houston Partnership, coordinating policy committees and supporting initiatives on issues critical to Houston's economic growth and quality of life.



**Sadie Webb, Associate Director,
College Debates and Discourse Alliance
Session Facilitator**

Sadie Webb is associate director of the College Debates and Discourse Alliance and has played a major role in driving the program's expansion and impact nationwide. She works extensively with students, faculty and administrators to implement debate and dialogue programming tailored for each campus. In 2024, Webb led the design of "A Braver Campus Dialogue," a new form of civil discourse programming that has garnered wide acclaim and been launched on campuses across the country. She oversees complex operations of the CD&D program, including training, research and student fellow support. She recently worked with four Hobby School classes in civic discourse, guiding students in discussing policy positions and counter-discussions grounded in national trends, research, data and other relevant evidence.



Julian Ramirez, Houston City Councilmember, At-Large 1
Featured Luncheon Speaker

Julian Ramirez was elected to the Houston City Council in December 2023 after a 34-year legal career. As an at-large council member, he serves the entire city. He chairs the Quality of Life Committee and serves as vice-chair of the Public Service Delivery Committee. Ramirez brings extensive experience in criminal justice and public safety matters, having served as an assistant district attorney for Harris County from 1989 to 2016, where he handled thousands of cases investigated by the Houston Police Department, tried hundreds of cases before judges and juries, and taught more than a thousand of our HPD officers at the HPD Academy on topics including search and seizure, procedure, and constitutional issues. He served as chief over the public corruption division and, later, the civil rights division.