

Political Science 5810
SENIOR SEMINAR
Political Engagement: Pathways to Democracy
Autumn 2007
DRAFT

Remember to Register to Vote

Instructor

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Office Hours: T, 2:45-3:45 p.m.
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American democracy requires a populace sufficiently skilled and empowered to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship. Absent a politically engaged and knowledgeable public, democracy is a hollow shell. Evidence of declining interest in and knowledge about government and politics, and increasing political cynicism, among the American public has rekindled scholarly interest in the correlates of political engagement. This course will explore these correlates, identify the factors and forces that explain low levels of political engagement, and examine ways to promote popular democracy.

The course is designed to fulfill the requirements of the senior seminar for political science majors. These requirements include becoming competent in the use and application of appropriate writing skills, demonstrating critical thinking, engaging in academic research, and delivering presentations orally. The initial weeks of the course focus on developing students' written, analytical and research skills in anticipation of the writing of a major research paper during the final weeks of the semester. In advance of the final project, weekly written assignments are required to encourage students to hone their writing and analytical skills as well as introduce you to the appropriate stages of research. The seminar designation of this course mandates active student involvement in weekly class meetings. Students are required to come to class having read and being prepared to discuss the readings.

Required Texts*

Theda Skocpol & Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (1999).*

Stephen Macedo, *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It* (2005).*

Diane E. Schmidt, *Writing in Political Science: A Practical Guide*. Any edition you can find cheaply.*

All of the books are available in the University of Utah bookstore. Discounted used copies of the books also may be purchased through the internet. This is an option you definitely should consider for the Schmidt book which is over-priced new but very cheap on Amazon.

Copies of the texts will be placed on reserve in Marriott Library during the 1st week of class. Additional readings have been placed on Electronic Reserve and are indicated by an asterisk.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Written (Typed) Assignments: 33%. Each week, students will respond to a specific question associated with the theme of the assigned readings. Your response must be at least one (but no more than two) typed page(s). Students are expected to write in accordance with the syntax and mechanics of edited American English. Assignments will be graded for both writing (spelling, grammar, sentence structure and organization) and content. Late assignments will be marked down one point per day.

Class Participation: 17%. **The class meets Tuesdays & Thursdays from 1-2:40 p.m. in OSH 208.** Each student is expected to attend class regularly. The ONLY valid reasons for not attending class are illness, a family EMERGENCY or an athletic commitment. Regular family or work commitments, including weddings, family vacations or job interviews out of town, are NOT valid excuses. If this course conflicts with your work schedule or family responsibilities, then drop the class. Only partial credit will be given to students who are late to or leave early from class.

Research Paper: 50%. Each student will identify a viable reform proposal to promote political or civic engagement as the basis for a major research paper (15-20 pages). The topic must be approved in advance by the instructor. The paper will require that you situate the reform proposal in the context of a scholarly review of the conditions for which your recommendation will correct. You are required to meet with the instructor on September 18th or 19th to discuss possible topics (2 points). A preliminary research hypothesis and outline are due during the time of your second individual appointment with the instructor on October 2nd or 4th. A research proposal is due at the time of your final individual appointment on October 30th or November 1st. Two+ weeks have been set aside to provide for independent research. During these research weeks you will prepare a rough (but as complete as possible) copy of the paper. During the last weeks of the semester, students will present their research findings orally to the class. A final version of the paper will be due on staggered dates depending upon the time of your oral presentation. The preliminary hypothesis and outline (3 points), research proposal (5 points), first draft (10 points), oral presentation (5 points) and final paper (25 points) will be graded *independently*. Both the draft and final copies of the paper must be

submitted in both written form to the instructor and electronic form to the University of Utah's plagiarism program *Turnitin*.

Everyone begins with 100 points. Your grade is determined by how many points you *lose* during the course of the semester. As an example, if you have one unexcused absence, fail to turn in an assignment on time and/or submit an incomplete or inadequate draft of your paper, you could lose as many as 9-16 points leaving you with a 91 or even an 86 for a final score (assuming all of your other assignments are perfect).

Weekly written assignments	33 points
Participation	17
Preliminary topic	2
Preliminary hypothesis & outline	3
Research Proposal	5
First Paper Draft	10
Oral Presentation	5
Final Paper	25

Course Outline & Reading Assignments

Week One

August 21st: Overview of the class.

August 23rd: What is civic or political engagement? Is political or civic engagement good? Why or why not?

- Assignment #1 due in class.
- Macedo, et al., Preface & Chapter 1.
- Skocpol & Fiorina, Chapter 11 (Fiorina).

Week Two

August 28th: What are the theoretical foundations of political engagement? Select one philosopher or philosophical movement discussed in the Ellis reader. From your reading, deduce the position of the philosopher or movement on civic and/or political engagement.

- Ralph D. Ellis, et al., *Foundations of Political Engagement: Rethinking Social & Political Philosophy* (on reserve). * Read only the chapter relevant to the philosopher/ movement about whom/ which you have selected to write.
- Assignment #2 due in class.

August 30th: What are the indicators of political engagement? What do these indicators tell us about the level of political engagement in the U.S.? What factors explain current levels of political engagement in America?

- Assignment #3 due in class.

- Macedo, et al., Chapter 2.

Week Three

September 4th: Does it matter that civic engagement varies by socioeconomic status & group variables? Why or why not? The case of income.

- Assignment #4 due in class.
- Skocpol & Fiorina, Chapter 12 (Schlozman, et al.)

September 6th: What is the nature of the structural context of political engagement? The case of elections.

- Assignment #5 due in class.
- Skocpol & Fiorina, Chapter 4 (Rahn, et al.)

Week Four

September 11th: What are the implications of 9/11 for political engagement?

- Ask ten (10) people you know this question and record the answers. We will discuss student findings in class.

September 13th: A discussion of the mechanics of doing political science research.

- Schmidt, Chapters 1, 2, 4 & 5.
- Meet in Marriott Library, Room 1745 at 1 p.m.

Week Five

September 18th and 19th: one-on-one consultation with the instructor to discuss possible research topics.

- Schmidt, Chapter 3.

September 20th: What is social capital? Why does Putnam argue that it is central to civic engagement, civic trust, and American democracy?

- Assignment #6 due in class.
- Robert D. Putnam, 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January): 65-78. Electronic Reserve.

Week Six

September 25th: Why does civic engagement occur more readily at the local level? What are the features of the metropolitan landscape that shape civic engagement?

- Assignment #7 due in class.
- Macedo, et al. Chapter 3.

September 27th: What are the civic and/or political benefits of associational life? In what ways does our government encourage or constrain associational life (volunteering, nonprofits and/or philanthropy)?

- Assignment #8 due in class.
- Macedo, et al., Chapter 4.

Week Seven

October 2nd: One-on-one consultation to discuss preliminary hypothesis & outline.

- Schmidt, pp. 197-205.

October 4th: One-on-one consultation to discuss preliminary hypothesis & outline.

October 9th & 11th FALL BREAK- NO CLASSES.

Week Eight

October 16th: How does the U.S. compare with foreign nations on measures of civic engagement? Pick one country to report on. Identify levels of civic engagement in that country and what factors might have explanatory value.

- Assignment #9 due in class.

October 18th: How does one become politically engaged? Can political engagement be taught? How?

- Assignment #10 due in class.
- William A. Galston, 2001. "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (June): 217-233. Electronic Reserve.

Week Nine

October 23rd: What, if anything, are the policy consequences of low political engagement? The case of citizen groups.

- Assignment #11 due in class.
- Skocpol & Fiorina, Chapter 10 (Berry).

October 25th: What can be done to promote greater political and/or civic engagement? The mechanics of political science research, II.

- Macedo, et al. Chapter 5.
- Schmidt, Chapters 6, 7, 8, 14 & pp. 233-241 & 276-305.

Week Ten

October 30th: One-on-one consultations with the instructor. Research proposal due at meeting.

November 1st: One-on-one consultations with the instructor. Research proposal due at meeting.

Week Eleven (November 6th & 8th): Be sure to vote. INDEPENDENT RESEARCH: NO CLASS.

Week Twelve (November 13th & 15th): INDEPENDENT RESEARCH: NO CLASS.

Week Thirteen

November 20th: Oral Presentations.

November 22nd: THANKSGIVING DAY: NO CLASS.

Week Fourteen

November 27th: Oral Presentations.

November 29th: Oral Presentations.

Week Fifteen

December 4th: Oral Presentations.

December 6th: Oral Presentations.

Persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations to meet the expectations of this course are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible. Written documentation of the disability must be submitted during the first full week of the semester along with the request for special accommodations. Please contact the Center for Disabled Student Services, 160 Union Building, 581-5020.

Any student found guilty of plagiarism will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Two episodes of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.