

**[COURSE #]: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION**  
**[Semester, Year]**

**Course time:** [ ]

**Course Location:** [ ]

**Course Website:** [ ]

**Office Hours:** [ ], and by appointment

**Instructor:** Abigail Fisher Williamson

**Office:** [ ]

**Phone:** [ ]

**E-mail:** [ ]

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Active participation in American civic life often extends beyond the ballot box, to contacting public officials, commenting on their plans, joining associations, and volunteering assistance in a variety of ways. Over the last fifteen years, one of the most prominent social science debates has focused on civic participation. Is it declining? If so, what is responsible? And why should we care? In this course, we will engage with this debate and consider whether recent innovative participatory experiments offer a promising path forward for civic engagement in the twenty-first century.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

The course will consist of three units, each concluding with a writing assignment that asks you to reflect on what you have learned. In the first unit, we will review classic and contemporary theories of civic participation in democratic societies with the aim of understanding what civic participation is and why it matters. During the unit, you will be asked to attend a public participation event, such as a hearing, City Council comment session, or on-line deliberation. At the end of the unit, you will submit a paper evaluating the degree to which the event approximated the ideals of democratic participation identified in class readings and discussions. In the second unit, we will consider the debate over the decline of civic engagement in the United States. The writing assignment will ask you to make an argument about the extent to which we should be concerned about declining civic engagement. Finally, in the third unit, we will read about innovations in civic participation and consider whether these experiments offer a promising avenue for future development. Your final writing assignment will ask you to draft a memo to the White House Office for Public Engagement in which you recommend how the U.S. government should (or should not) involve Americans in civic participation.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS**

The following assigned texts can be purchased at [the university bookstore]. Additional readings will be available on-line via the course website at [URL] and in the course packet, which can be purchased at [ ].

- Hodgkinson, Virginia A. and Michael W. Foley, eds. 2003. *The Civil Society Reader*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Skocpol, Theda and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. 1999. *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press and the Russell Sage Foundation.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

## ASSIGNMENTS

The course requires regular submission of discussion questions prior to each class and three papers.

**Discussion Questions:** Prior to each class session, I ask that you submit two discussion questions that demonstrate that you have read and thought about the assigned work for the upcoming class. Discussion questions should focus on items from the assigned readings that you find interesting and worth discussing with your colleagues. They may relate the readings to current events, question/criticize the conclusions authors draw, consider the policy solutions offered by the authors, and/or some other line of relevant questioning. The discussion questions need only be a couple of sentences each, but they should be written formally and proofread. You should expect that I may call upon you to explain why your question arose and how you might answer it. ***Discussion questions are to be submitted by e-mail to me by [ ] p.m. on the day before class.*** If, in addition to the discussion questions, you have clarifying questions regarding points of confusion from the readings, please also send these so that I can prepare responses.

All three papers must be type-written, double-spaced, in a traditional 12-point font, with one-inch margins, page numbers, proper citation, and a list of sources on the final page. Printed copies of papers are due prior to the start of class on the assigned due date. Please arrive a few moments early to submit your paper.

**Paper #1: (4-5 page essay)** – In this paper, you will observe a public participation event or on-line dialogue and reflect on the extent to which this opportunity for public input lived up to the ideals of democratic participation identified in class readings. Your first task will be to synthesize the information from class readings to identify the theoretical and practical goals of public participation. Next, you will describe the ways in which the event you observed measured up to or fell short of these goals. Early in the unit, I will provide a list of upcoming local public meetings and on-line deliberation events. You may also identify your own event in consultation with me.

**Paper #2: (5-7 page essay)** – In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam argues that U.S. civic participation is in decline and identifies the causes and consequences of this transformation. In this unit, we also read a series of authors who object to some of Putnam's conclusions or offer alternative explanations. Drawing evidence from assigned readings and class discussions, make an argument about whether we should be concerned about declining civic participation. Why or why not? If we should be concerned, which factors driving the decline should be addressed? If we should not be concerned, why should we discount concern about the various factors that scholars claim are responsible?

**Paper #3: (5-7 page policy memo)** – In May 2009, President Obama announced the establishment of the White House Office for Public Engagement, which aims to increase citizen participation in government. Drawing on class readings about trends in civic participation and innovative experiments in engagement, advise the office on how they should and/or should not involve the American public. You need not be supportive of Obama or the Office of Public Engagement in your memo. Rather, offer recommendations based on your assessment of course readings and your view of the role of government in this sphere.

## **GRADING**

Grades will be based on final drafts of the three papers and class participation, including submission of discussion questions.

Paper #1 – 20 percent  
Paper #2 – 30 percent  
Paper #3 – 35 percent  
Participation – 15 percent

Students will have ample opportunity to consult with me and their classmates on their paper ideas and writing prior to submission of final versions. Therefore, grades on these versions will be considered final.

Class participation will consist of submission of discussion questions prior to class and regular, active participation in class discussions. Students should aim to speak up at least once per class period. If you find spontaneous participation in classroom discussions challenging, please see me to discuss techniques and alternatives. Discussion questions will not receive individual grades, but I will e-mail you once a unit about the quality of your questions and whether any improvements are necessary to receive full credit.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Class Discussion Norms**

A key goal of this course is employ class discussions to engage one another on public issues, consider alternate views, marshal evidence to support positions, and hone our persuasion skills. In order to ensure that all members of the class can participate, I suggest two guiding principles for our classroom discussions:

- *Respect for differing views:* We will discuss some sensitive issues about which reasonable people disagree. Class will be more interesting and rewarding if we allow room for respectful disagreement. I ask that you respond to the content of statements, rather than commenting on the character of individuals who hold those views. I will do my best to play both sides of the fence in order to keep discussions challenging and interesting. I will not be grading people on whether their politics match up with mine.
- *Sharing “air time”:* Ideally, classroom discussion will be a give and take in which you engage one another in conversation, rather than directing your comments solely to me. While I am requesting your active participation, we should all be mindful of ensuring that the discussion is balanced, rather than allowing a handful of students to dominate.

### **Attendance Policy**

Students should plan to attend every class and should contact me in advance when attendance is not possible. Absences will be excused in the case of medical or family emergency (with documentation from health services or the appropriate house tutor/dean) or religious observation. After more than two unexcused absences, your participation grade will decline by a full letter grade for each additional absence. If you do miss class, you are responsible for the material you have missed.

## **Late Work Policy**

Late papers will be penalized. If a paper is submitted on the due date, but not in hard copy prior to the start of class, it will be marked down by a half-grade (A → A-). For each day late past the due date, the paper will be marked down an additional full grade (A- → B-). Extensions will be granted only in the case of documented medical or family emergencies.

## **Academic Honesty**

Students must abide by university policies on academic honesty, as stated here: [ ]. Violations will be addressed in accordance with these policies. Prior to each assignment, we will discuss proper methods of citing sources and acknowledging assistance or contributions from others. Students are welcome to discuss ideas, but all writing should be organized and executed independently.

## **Accommodation of Disabilities**

Any student who needs accommodation for a disability may contact me to discuss your needs. I will provide accommodations in line with the recommendations of the [university disability office].

## **Contacting the Instructor**

The best way to reach me outside of class, whether to arrange appointments or ask questions, is via e-mail at the address listed on the first page. I endeavor to respond to messages within 24 hours, but do not always check my e-mail after 6:00 pm in the evening or on the weekends.

## **OUTLINE**

An outline of course topics and readings follows. I reserve the right to make changes to this schedule, but will provide students with notice of changes well in advance of due dates.

### **Unit I: Theories of Civic Participation**

*(Selections from the following to be determined – c. 60 pages per class)*

Sherry R. Arnstein. 1969. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *American Institute of Planning Journal*. July: 216-224.

Bellah, Robert N., et al. 2008. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cohen, Joshua. 1989. "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in Hamlin, Alan, and Philip Pettit, eds. *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State*. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Dahl, Robert. 1989. *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hodgkinson, Virginia A. and Michael W. Foley, eds. 2003. *The Civil Society Reader*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. *(Selections from Gabriel Almond & Sidney Verba, Benjamin Barber, Jean L. Cohen & Andrew Arato, John Dewey, Michael Walzer, etc.)*

Mansbridge, Jane J. 1983. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Olson, Mancur. 1971. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Schumpeter, Joseph. 1967. "Two Concepts of Democracy," in Quinton, A., ed. *Political Philosophy*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1863. *Democracy in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Sever & Francis.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

\*\*\* Paper #1 Due on [date] \*\*\*

## **Unit II: Trends in U.S. Civic Participation: The Collapse of American Community?**

*(Selections from the following to be determined – c. 60 pages per class)*

Greeley, Andrew. 1997. "The Tocqueville Files: The Other Civic America – Religion and Social Capital." *The American Prospect*. 8(32).

Hall, Peter Dobkin. 2006. "A Historical Overview of Philanthropy, Voluntary Associations, and Nonprofit Organizations in the United States, 1600-2000," in Richard Steinberg & Walter W. Powell, eds. *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Heying, Charles H. 2001. "Civic Elites and Corporate Delocalization: An Alternative Explanation for Declining Civic Engagement," pp. 101-111 in Edwards, Bob, Michael W. Foley, and Mario Diani, eds. *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Macedo, Stephen, et al. 2005. *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Mettler, S. 2002. "Bringing the State Back in to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans." *American Political Science Review* 96: 351- 365.

Norris, Pippa. 2000. "The Impact of Television on Civic Malaise," pp. 231-251 in Pharr, Susan and Robert D. Putnam. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Norris, Pippa. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Skocpol, Theda and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. 1999. *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press and the Russell Sage Foundation.

Skocpol, Theda. 1996. "Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files – Unraveling from Above." *The American Prospect*. 7(25).

Skocpol, Theda. 2003. *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Valelly, Rick. 1996. "Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files – Couch Potato Democracy." *The American Prospect*. 7(25).

\*\*\* Paper #2 Due on [date] \*\*\*

### **Unit III: Innovations in Civic Participation: The Revival of American Community?**

(Selections from the following to be determined – c. 60 pages per class)

Ackerman, Bruce and James S. Fishkin. 2002. "Deliberation Day." *Journal of Political Philosophy*. 10(2): 129-132.

Creighton, James L. 2005. *The Public Participation Handbook: Making Better Decisions through Citizen Involvement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Dionne, E.J., Kayla Meltzer Drogosz, Robert E. Litan. 2003. *United We Serve: National Service and the Future of Citizenship*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press.

Fishkin, James. 1997. *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fung, Archon and Erik Olin Wright, eds. 2003. *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*. London: Verso Press.

Gibson, Cynthia. 2004. "Thinking Outside the (Ballot) Box." *National Civic Review*. Summer: 20-30.

Hindman, Matthew. 2009. *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jennings, M.K. and Zeitner, V. 2003. "Internet Use and Civic Engagement: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 67: 311-334.

Norris, Pippa. 2001. *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schiff, Stacey. "Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise?" *The New Yorker*. July 31, 2006.

Sirianni, Carmen and Lewis Friedland. 2001. *Civic Innovation in America: Community Empowerment, Public Policy, and the Movement for Civic Renewal*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Stolle, D., M. Hooghe, and M. Micheletti. 2005. "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation." *International Political Science Review*. 26(3): 245-269.

\*\*\* Paper #3 Due on [date] \*\*\*