

PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

PSCI 4731.003
SPRING 2010
234 KETCHUM
T&TH 2-3:15 P.M.

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OFFICE HOURS: T 10 A.M. – 12 P.M.
& BY APPOINTMENT

This course is about the role of the public in the maintenance of democratic politics in the United States. Debates over the importance of citizen involvement in government can be traced to the constitutional founding of the country, and persist in various forms in contemporary debates about politics. We will consider how well people meet the demands of citizenship and the explanations for why people engage and participate in politics. We will also study how lessons from this kind of empirical research inform normative goals of influencing civic competence and civic engagement. Finally, we will spend time exploring whether civic engagement is necessary to maintain representative democracy.

course outline

- We begin by considering theories of citizenship and democracy, and the extent to which the maintenance of democracy depends on the actions and involvement of individual citizens.
- We then turn to the capacities of citizens in the United States, and the degree to which people possess both the motivation and resources to engage in politics. We will consider patterns of knowledge and preferences among the public and the explanations for these differences.
- Next, we explore patterns of political engagement, including how and why people participate in politics and in their communities.
- In the fourth section, we investigate various threats to citizen competence, from elite manipulation to the influence of the news media.
- Finally, we investigate the role of institutions and environments in affecting civic competence and engagement.

CULearn is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at culearn.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

about the readings for the course

This class will follow a seminar format, with more focus on discussion than lecture. Each week we will address one topic related to civic engagement. While some class sessions will be devoted to lecture, most class sessions will be spent discussing that week's topic. Thus keeping up with the assigned readings is an essential part of the class. Many of the readings come from academic journals, and often can be challenging given their level of detail and complexity. When you have questions about what the authors mean or how a passage should be understood, you are encouraged to bring these to class.

textbooks and reading assignments

- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2010. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. 3rd edition. New York: Longman.
- The other course readings include a set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the links on CULearn.
 - Some are available in the library's e-reserves: libraries.colorado.edu/search/r
 - Some are articles from journals available online through the library's e-journal archives.
 - *Note:* In some cases, you may be blocked from accessing online journals from off-campus computers. See information on the website of the University Library for instructions on remote access from off-site: ucblibraries.colorado.edu/research/offcampusaccess.htm

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will also be responsible for the following:

participation, in-class assignments, and quizzes *(worth 25% of your final grade)*

This is a critical thinking course, so your frequent attendance and active participation is essential. Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade. We will have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade, and many weeks we will have short quizzes on the readings. We will have a few short homework assignments as well.

three papers *(first paper is 10% of your final grade, second paper is 15%, third paper is 20% of your grade)*

In the first paper, you will identify a problem you see in politics – one where at least part of the responsibility lies with average citizens. In the second paper, you will review the academic research that speaks to this concern – how have political scientists explained the roots of this problem? In the third paper, you will combine your efforts from these first two papers to suggest policy solutions for the political problem you have raised. Additional details will be provided in separate handouts.

two exams *(each worth 15% of your final grade)*

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

some important comments on academic integrity

Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism, citation style, and writing in political science is posted on CULearn. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Council for additional non-academic sanctions.

All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).

PSCI 4731: class schedule

Defining citizenship

1. An introduction to the course and political science

Tuesday, January 12 and Thursday, January 14

2. What does it mean to be a good citizen?

Tuesday, January 19 and Thursday, January 21

- Berelson, Bernard. 1952. "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16:313-330.
- Conover, Pamela Johnston, Ivor M. Crewe, and Donald D. Searing. 1991. "The Nature of Citizenship in the United States and Great Britain: Empirical Comments on Theoretical Themes." *The Journal of Politics* 53(3):800-832.

Citizen capacities and motivation

3. What do people know about politics and why does it matter?

Tuesday, January 26 and Thursday, January 28

- Schudson, Michael. 2000. "America's Ignorant Voters." *The Wilson Quarterly* 24(2):16-23.
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 6.

Tuesday, February 2: Paper 1 due.

4. How do people organize their beliefs? How stable are attitudes?

Tuesday, February 2 and Thursday, February 4

- Jost, John T. 2006. "The End of the End of Ideology." *American Psychologist* 61:651-70.

5. Are Americans polarized by partisanship?

Tuesday, February 9 and Thursday, February 11

- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2010. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. 3rd edition. New York: Longman.

6. Why do people trust or mistrust politicians and government?

Tuesday, February 16 and Thursday, February 18

- Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, Chapters 4-6.

7. Are citizens rational decision-makers?

Tuesday, February 23 and Thursday, February 25

- Kuklinski, James H., and Paul J. Quirk. 2000. "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion." In Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Midterm exam

Tuesday, March 2

Translating attitudes into political action

8. Why do people participate in politics (or choose not to)?

Thursday, March 4

- Beck, Michael S., William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 5.

9. Why do people participate in civic and community life?

Tuesday, March 9 and Thursday, March 11

- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* New York: Simon & Schuster. Chapters 1, 3, 8, 10, and 15.

10. What are the consequences of political talk?

Tuesday, March 16 and Thursday, March 18

- Jacobs, Lawrence R., Fay Lomax Cook, and Michael X. Delli Carpini. 2009. *Talking Together: Public Deliberation and Political Participation in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 4.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2002. "On a Danger of Deliberative Democracy." *Daedalus* 131(4):120-124.

Thursday, March 18: Paper 2 is due.

Spring break! Class does not meet.

Tuesday, March 23 and Thursday, March 25

Threats to civic competence

11. Do campaigns promote voter engagement?

Tuesday, March 30 and Thursday, April 1

- Patterson, Thomas E. 2002. "The Vanishing Voter: Why Are the Voting Booths So Empty?" *National Civic Review* 91(4):367-377.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon, and Nicholas Valentino. 1994. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88:829-838.

12. Do people learn what they need to know from the media?

Tuesday, April 6 and Thursday, April 8

- Graber, Doris A. 1994. "Why Voters Fail Information Tests: Can the Hurdles Be Overcome?" *Political Communication* 11:331-346.
- Prior, Markus. 2002. "Liberated Viewers, Polarized Voters. The Implications of Increased Media Choice for Democratic Politics." *The Good Society* 11(3):10-16.

13. Do politicians lead public opinion or follow?

Tuesday, April 13 and Thursday, April 15

- Wahlke, John C., Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan, and LeRoy C. Ferguson. 1967. "The Trustee Orientation is Most Realistic." In Neal Riemer, ed., *The Representative: Trustee? Delegate? Partisan? Politico?* Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Arnold, R. Douglas. 1993. "Can Inattentive Citizens Control Their Elected Representatives?" In Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, eds., *Congress Reconsidered*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Role of institutions in civic competence

14. How can informed decision-making be facilitated?

Tuesday, April 20 and Thursday, April 22

- Lupia, Arthur. 2002. "Deliberation Disconnected: What It Takes to Improve Civic Competence." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 65(3):133-150.

15. How can political involvement be promoted?

Tuesday, April 27 and Thursday, April 29

- Lijphart, Arend. 1997. "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma." *American Political Science Review* 91:1-14.
- Mettler, Suzanne. 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(2):351-365.

Thursday, April 29: Paper 3 is due.

Final exam

Saturday, May 1, 4:30 – 7 p.m.