

## Political Science 472: Problems of Modern Democratic Theory Spring 2010

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The concept of democracy has a long history, but never has it been invoked as frequently as it is today. Yet the very meaning of "democracy" is a matter of political and theoretical dispute, as is evidenced by the variety of social orders, governments, leaders, movements, and ideas that are referred to as "democratic." In this course, which focuses on the United States, we will take for granted the conceptual diversity and theoretical disagreement about what democracy means; in other words, we are not trying to define or discover the one right version of democracy and democratic theory. Rather, our purpose is to reflect critically on a particular set of problems, both at a philosophical level and in the specific ways we encounter them as citizens. The objective of this course is not to persuade you to accept any one particular perspective on democracy in the United States, but to offer you a variety of new ways of thinking about it.

There are two interrelated problems, or themes, that will appear and reappear throughout our work this semester. 1) We will examine the way in which **inequality** poses obstacles to democratic politics. One of the paradoxes of democracy in the U. S. is that citizens have formal equality in a context of actual social inequality. Specific forms of inequality that we will analyze are inequality of political power between elites and "ordinary" citizens, racial and gender inequality, and economic inequality. 2) We will investigate **citizen participation**. How much active participation on the part of citizens does democracy require, and what kind of participation should this be? What sorts of motives drive citizen participation? What prevents it? What sorts of knowledge do democratic citizens need in order to participate, and to make good judgments? How do social and political institutions shape participation and judgment? How does technology?

In our explorations, we will follow Tocqueville by considering not only formal institutions and laws, but also social habits and norms (what Tocqueville called "mores"). We will also be considering what actions, policies, or institutions can address specific dilemmas, and how efforts might be undertaken to build a more democratic polity.

### **Required Texts:**

Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*  
Gar Alperovitz, *America beyond Capitalism*  
Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Majority*  
Articles on Blackboard (BB)

**Always bring readings to class; you will need to have them for reference during class sessions.  
Bring hard copies – no laptops in class.**

### **Course Goals**

One goal of your liberal arts education is for you to develop your abilities of analytic thinking, writing, and speaking. I find useful the following definition of "analytic" or "critical" thinking: "a practical reflective activity that has reasonable belief or action as its goal" (Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice, ed. Joan Baron and Robert Sternberg, p. 10). In the context of this course, such thinking is "practical" in that it requires us to gain (through the readings) substantive knowledge about actual conditions and dilemmas in contemporary democratic society. It is "reflective" in that we will be evaluating the authors' descriptions and assessments of these dilemmas. And we will engage in deliberation about what is "a reasonable belief or action" with respect to particular dilemmas. Of course, there is likely to be more than one reasonable judgment to make about these dilemmas; thus we will probably not all end up in agreement. What is important is that we each practice the ability to make an argument for our judgments, in terms of identifying stated and unstated assumptions, offering textual or empirical evidence, considering counterarguments, and explaining and defending our reasons (including reasons for making particular value judgments, since that is also part of critical thinking).

You can probably tell that this work involves a lot of creativity and effort on your part. But I hope you will also experience -- at least occasionally! -- the exhilaration of doing this kind of practical intellectual work. Another goal of your liberal arts education (as a professor of mine once said) is to help you cultivate "a certain steady affection for examining the world and oneself." The aspiration here is that thinking and learning become a habitual and pleasurable activity for you, one that continues to play an important role in your life long after you leave college.

### **Course expectations and information:**

**All of your work in this class must comply with the UNC Honor Code**, which can be accessed at <http://honor.unc.edu>.

**E-mail:** Due to a temporary disability, it is difficult for me to work on the computer. Thus e-mail is not an effective way to communicate with me. Please call me instead, and leave a message on my voicemail if I'm not there.

**Laptops:** I find that laptops inhibit student interaction and diminish engagement, so please do not use them in class. This means you'll need to print out hard copies of all articles on Blackboard, and there are a lot of them, so budget accordingly.

**Reading assignments:** You are expected to have prepared the readings by the day for which they are assigned. By "prepared," I mean read them carefully, thought about them, and applied whatever notetaking system works for you. I will often pass out reading questions designed to help you think about the text, and I will expect you to work through these questions before class as part of your preparation. Remember that these readings are not like textbooks; they will probably take you longer than usual to read, and you may need to re-read sections, so plan accordingly.

**Note on Blackboard readings:** I suggest you set up a habit of printing out the Blackboard readings one week before the day on which they are due. This way you can avoid getting in a jam because of printer or downloading problems.

**Class participation:** This class may differ from some of your other courses in that it requires a considerable amount of active and sustained participation and engagement. Come to class ready to work actively on your understanding of democratic theory and politics, and on your ability to analyze arguments and examine complex issues. Your work for this class will involve both autonomous and collaborative learning. The idea of autonomy stresses your responsibility for your own learning, while collaborative learning stresses your responsibility for teaching and learning from one another. My responsibility as a teacher is to set up the conditions which encourage this learning and to engage in analytic thinking with you. So this class is not like a theater, where you come and watch me perform. It is more like a lab, where you come in to work with, examine, and enhance the knowledge gained from the readings and from your own experiences.

You will work in participatory learning groups for much of the semester, and you will remain in a particular group for several class periods in a row. (Please study the instructions for learning group interaction in Attachment A.) In addition to small group work, the class as a whole will work together to discuss and analyze issues. I expect everyone to participate in the larger discussions as well. (For those of you who may be uncomfortable speaking in public, this class is an ideal opportunity to practice and develop your communicative abilities. As Aristotle says, having courage doesn't mean you are fearless; it means you act in spite of feeling fear.) I have a very broad notion of "participation"; it includes active listening, asking questions of one another (including "what do you mean?" or "could you say that again?"), reading relevant passages aloud, helping another person find the right page, saying why you agree (or disagree) with what someone else has said, taking detailed notes, and other forms of facilitating collective and individual learning. I expect everyone to experiment with different ways of participating rather than always playing the same role.

Your participation grade will rely on both subjective and objective measures. Subjective measures include my evaluation of your participatory activities in the classroom, including group work, larger class discussion, and any in-class writing assignments. Objective measures include attendance, possession of readings, completion of reading responses (see below), and the quality of group reports (see Attachment A).

**Attendance: your attendance at each class session is required.** Since this is not a lecture course, getting someone else's notes is not a substitute for being here; missing class will affect your learning and thus your performance on the graded assignments. But I understand that life is not entirely under our control, so you will have one "free" absence. You do, however, remain responsible for all material and announcements discussed in class on the day you were absent. You will receive one attendance credit for each class you attend (we have 29 scheduled class meetings this semester). Regardless of the quality of your other participatory activities, attendance credits will operate as a "floor" for receiving a particular participation grade.

To receive an A for your participation grade, you must have at least 28 attendance credits.

To receive an A-, at least 27.

To receive a B, at least 26.

To receive a C, at least 25.

Absences will be excused only if: a) you have a medical or family emergency, AND b) you meet with another student in the class to replicate the participation that you missed, and affirm to me that you have done so. Excused absences will not count against your attendance credit total. Job interviews, work requirements, and family events do not count as excused absences; this is what your "free" absence is for.

NOTE: University officials have asked faculty members to excuse absences due to flu symptoms without requiring a doctor's note (primary flu symptoms are fever plus cough/sore throat). This will help limit the spread of seasonal and HINI flu. I rely on your integrity not to misuse this policy.

\*\*A sign-in sheet will be passed around at each class session, and we will use this to keep the official attendance record. It is your responsibility to make sure that you sign this sheet each day.

**Microthemes:** Instead of having quizzes, you will write four microthemes over the course of the semester (microthemes are described in Attachment B).

**Reading responses:** You will write three reading responses this semester. Reading responses are one-page "think pieces" responding to a day's readings. A reading response must include a paragraph summarizing the author's argument; what else it includes is up to you. You may want to explain your own reactions to the reading, or further elaborate the author's claims, or consider a counterargument, or examine connections between this reading and a previous reading, or suggest important questions for discussion, or... whatever shows your thoughtful engagement with the reading.

You may choose which days you do reading responses, within the following guidelines: 1) you cannot do a reading response on a day that a microtheme is due, and 2) your first reading response must be done by February 16, your second by March 18, and your third by April 8. I have noted these dates on the schedule of readings below.

Reading responses will not be graded; they will be assessed on a full credit/no credit basis. Your reading response will receive full credit if it shows evidence of thought and effort, and adheres to college-level writing standards. If you complete all three reading responses on time and receive full credit for all of them, I will drop your lowest microtheme grade before I calculate your microtheme total.

**Essay Assignments:** Over the course of the semester, you will write 2 five-page analytic essays. I will hand out questions/topics at least a week in advance. The first essay will constitute 30% of your final grade, and the final essay will also be worth 30%. Late papers will be penalized. Since these essays will constitute a large part of your final grade, I urge you to consider very carefully

the instructions I hand out and the expectations I outline, and to leave yourself time to revise your drafts. For your first essay, there will be a required in-class peer review (I'll explain more about this when the time comes), after which you will revise your paper a final time before turning it in to be graded. All your written work for this course must represent original work not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course, unless this is done with the prior approval of all instructors involved.

Your final course grade will be based on the following:

Microthemes	20%
Class Participation (including group projects)	20%
First essay assignment	30%
Final essay assignment	30%

Since this is a 400-level course, I will expect "advanced undergraduate" work. I adhere to the guidelines below.

**University Grading Guidelines**

University Registrar Procedures Memo No. 8 provides the following (abbreviated) definitions of undergraduate grades:

**A** Highest level of attainment. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

**B** Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

**C** A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment. The C grade states that, while not yet showing unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

**D** A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment.

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**I. Introduction**

Tues Jan 12                      Course requirements, procedures, and expectations will be reviewed. All students are responsible for having (and remembering!) the information given during the first day of class.

Thurs Jan 14                    --Ruth W. Grant, "The Ethics of Talk: Classroom Conversation and Democratic Politics," 1-7 (BB)  
 --Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 1-33 (BB)

**II. Democracy in America**

Tues Jan 19                    Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, 9-12, 18-20, 50-57, 62-63, 66-70, 87-95, 189-195, 231-237, 240-245 (BB)

Thurs Jan 21                    Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, 247-263, 417-418, 433-436, 503-528 (BB)

Tues Jan 26                    Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, 667-673, 687-705 (BB)  
 --microtheme #1 due

### III. Contemporary Investigations of Tocquevillean Themes

#### Civic Associations:

- Thurs Jan 28 --Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone" 65-77 (BB)  
--Robert D. Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America" 34-48 (BB)  
--Schudson, Skocpol, and Valelly, "Controversy" (Responses to Putnam, and his reply) 17-28 (BB)
- Tues Feb 2 Iris Marion Young, "State, Civil Society, and Social Justice" 141-161 (BB)

#### Self-Interest Properly Understood?

- Thurs Feb 4 --Jane J. Mansbridge, "The Rise and Fall of Self-Interest" 3-22 (BB)  
--Jane J. Mansbridge, "The Relation of Altruism and Self-Interest" 133-141 (BB)

#### Freedom

- Tues Feb 9 Philip Pettit, "Republican Freedom and Contestatory Democratization" 163-190 (BB)  
--**microtheme #2 due**

### IV. Talking to Strangers and Other Practices of Citizenship

- Thurs Feb 11 Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chapters 1-3
- Tues Feb 16 Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chapters 4-5, 8  
--**reading response #1 due by this date**
- Thurs Feb 18 Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chapters 9-11

### V. Deliberative Democracy and Its Critics

- Tues February 23 Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy" 67-94 (BB)
- Thurs February 25 **First Essay Due  
Peer Review**

**\*\*Revised essay due Monday, March 1, by noon in my office (368 Hamilton)\*\***

- Tues March 2 Iris Marion Young, "Inclusive Political Communication" 52-80 (BB)
- Thurs March 4 Chantal Mouffe, "For An Agonistic Model of Democracy" 81-107 (BB)

SPRING BREAK

### VI. Democratic economy/economic democracy?

- Tues March 16 Charles E. Lindblom, *The Market System*, 19-27, 30-43, 52-60, 102-107 (BB)
- Thurs March 18 Charles E. Lindblom, *The Market System*, 111-122, 236-250  
--**reading response #2 due by this date**



## ATTACHMENT A: PARTICIPATORY LEARNING GROUPS

The following instructions may sound very formal, but in fact these practices contribute to having a lively and engaged class, in which everyone is learning, thinking, and making complex intellectual judgments.

Participatory learning is the classroom use of structured small group interaction so that students work together to solve problems. There is considerable research which demonstrates that participatory learning works better than traditional lecturing for developing students' higher-level reasoning capacities, increasing comprehension of the material, and fostering positive relationships among students. Explaining answers, restating information, and formulating questions in your own words engages critical thinking faculties and embeds information and insights in memory.

Participatory learning rests on two main principles. 1) **Group interdependence**, which means organizing tasks so that members must work together to succeed. We will achieve this by having role differentiation within the group (see below) and by having the "class participation" portion of the final grade include group work. 2) **Individual accountability**, which is achieved through individualized measures of participation and achievement (such as essays, microthemes, and individual participation in class discussion).

There are two kinds of participatory learning strategies that we will employ in this class. The first is **paired note-taking**. When I lecture, we will break periodically for you to explain to each other the main points of the lecture thus far. During these short breaks (5 minutes or so) you will work in pairs to identify significant elements of the lecture, share insights, and clarify any confusion you might have.

The second kind of participatory learning strategy we will use quite frequently is **structured learning groups**. These are not the same as small discussion groups. Learning groups will consist of 4-5 students, and will be focused around particular analytic and interpretive projects that I design. You will remain in one group for several class periods. At the beginning of a class period, each group will decide which member will be primarily responsible for playing a particular role. The required roles consist of the following. 1) **Reader**: this person will be responsible for reading aloud the question/project, and for helping the group stay on task (watching the time, etc.). 2) **Encourager**: This person is responsible for encouraging all members to participate, and making sure participation is shared among all members. 3) **Checker**: This responsibility involves checking to make sure that all members of the group can explain the group's analysis, or how the group arrived at a particular conclusion. Periodically asking members of the group to summarize or articulate the group's analysis or conclusion will lead to higher levels of comprehension for everyone. It also provides a pause in which those who don't understand can ask further questions. 4) **Recorder**: this person is responsible for writing down the group's analysis in a clear and detailed manner, and for turning this report into me at the end of the class period. Once I return the report, the recorder should make a copy for each group member.

The point of having these explicit roles is to ensure that all group members are contributing to the group's work. Each day that we meet in learning groups, you should think about helping with all of these roles. However, you will be primarily responsible for one particular role. You must take a different primary role in each class meeting. You will feel silly and artificial at first, but I want you to make a sincere and consistent effort to perform these roles. When we have larger class discussions, I will call randomly on group members to explain their group's analysis, share their group's insights, and respond to the reports of other groups. This practice is designed to encourage both group interdependence (you are responsible for one another's learning) and individual accountability.

**Political Science 472**  
**ATTACHMENT B: MICROTHERMES**

Microthemes have a dual purpose. Like quizzes, they provide a way for me to give credit for careful class preparation. But in addition (and unlike quizzes) they give you the opportunity to clarify your thinking by practicing analytic writing.

**Your microthemes must be turned in on a HALF-SHEET of paper, using 1 inch margins and a font size of 11 or larger.** They should be single spaced, with an extra blank line between paragraphs. I will give you the assignment for each microtheme the class period before they are due. There are two kinds of microthemes: summary-writing microthemes and thesis-support microthemes.

**Summary-Writing Microthemes**

A "summary-writing" microtheme has two objectives. One is for you to build analytic reading skills by concisely re-stating the argument of part of the readings. To do this successfully, you must be able to differentiate between the main ideas and less important points of a section of the argument. Then you must condense the argument by linking the main points and omitting the secondary ideas that you can leave behind without losing the sense of the argument. Writing a good summary means more than just having all the relevant points on the page; it means showing how those points are connected.

The second objective is for you to learn how to follow and accurately give an account of arguments that you may not necessarily agree with. In effect, you have to "listen" to the authors you read and explain their arguments in your own words but without misrepresenting their points.

Write your summary as if it were for a reader who has not read the text, although she has heard of it. She has a pretty good vocabulary but will not understand overly technical terms. Make sure to provide page numbers in parentheses for all quotes and paraphrases.

**Criteria**

The criteria for a summary are (1) accuracy of content, (2) comprehensiveness and balance--i.e., do you include the central points and omit secondary claims? (3) clarity of writing, including sentence structure and transitions, (4) adherence to usual rules of grammar, punctuation, and page citation.

**\*\*Although this is not an essay, it should sound polished and the points should flow smoothly if read aloud (in fact, it is always a good idea to read this kind of assignment aloud to yourself as a way of checking your work).**

**Scoring**

**12** Outstanding. Meets criteria of accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, clear sentence structure and grammar. It is clear that you understand the text well and can explain its main points to a reader who has not read it.

**11** Excellent. Meets all criteria of above but is weaker than a "12" in one area. E.g., it may have excellent accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance but show occasional problems in sentence structure. Or it may be well written but have some difficulty balancing main points with secondary ones.

**9** Above Average. It reveals a generally accurate understanding of the reading with a clear sense of the main points but is either noticeably weaker on one criterion than a "12" or "11" (did not provide page number citations, for example) or somewhat weaker on two criteria.

**8** Meets Basic Requirements. Must have strength on at least two of the criteria and it should still be good enough to give a reader a fairly clear and accurate overview of the reading. A summary rates an "8" because it overemphasizes secondary points at the expense of the main argument, is unclear and has problems with sentence structure.

**6** Worthy of Credit. A summary rates "6" because it is weak in all criteria. It would not serve to explain the text to an unfamiliar reader, it may be inaccurate, and is disorganized.

**4** Fails to meet any of the criteria for an effective summary.

**(over)**

### **Thesis-Support Microthemes**

In a "thesis-support" microtheme, I will ask you a question about the assigned reading and you will write a short composition that supports your answer to the question. To do this successfully, you must be able to support your answer with textual evidence, and to articulate your reasoning clearly. The main objectives of this assignment are to develop your skills at a) thinking through complex problems that do not always provide simple answers, and b) writing a focused argument.

### **Criteria**

There will often be more than one persuasive answer to the question I ask. Thus the criteria for a thesis-support microtheme are (1) clarity--do you make your supporting points clear? (2) precision and accuracy--do you draw your supporting points from specific places in the text, using quotation marks and page numbers appropriately, and do you make correct assertions about the text? (3) comprehensiveness and balance--have you identified the textual passages important to this question? (4) organization--do you present your arguments in a coherent order with smooth transitions and grammatical sentences?

### **Scoring**

**12** Outstanding. Meets criteria of clarity, precision and accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, and organization. You have considered the texts carefully and creatively and made a persuasive argument in support of your thesis.

**11** Excellent. Meets all criteria of above but is weaker than a "12" in one area. E.g., it may have excellent clarity, comprehensiveness, and precision and accuracy but show occasional problems in organization or may ignore a passage that needs to be explained.

**9** Above Average. It is generally persuasive and offers fairly specific evidence to support the argument but is either noticeably weaker on one criterion than a "12" or an "11" or somewhat weaker on two criteria.

**8** Meets Basic Requirements. Must have strength on at least two of the criteria and it should still be good enough to put forward a fairly clear line of argument. It rates an "8" because it does not use specific examples from the text, or does not anticipate the objections of a rival view, and has problems with sentence structure.

**6** Worthy of Credit. A thesis-support theme rates a "6" because it is weak in all criteria and would not serve to persuade an audience familiar with the text. It may also be inaccurate or disorganized.

**4** Fails to meet any of the criteria for effective support of an interpretive thesis.