

**HONORS 300S—Spring 2020**  
**American Democracy: Problems and Prospects**  
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### **Course Objective**

Clearly, 1989 was a watershed year for democracy. The Tiananmen Square uprising in Beijing, Nelson Mandela's imminent release from prison in South Africa, and the fall of the Berlin Wall all signified that democratic impulses were beginning to triumph around the world. The next couple of decades saw incredible progress toward democracy in many countries that were formerly governed by authoritarian regimes. However, more recent trajectories point to a reassertion of authoritarian, populist, and anti-liberal parties, movements, and regimes that seriously threaten democracy at home and abroad. Sadly, however, many Americans have drawn the mistaken conclusion that the United States can't succumb to these kinds of anti-democratic impulses based on a notion that is predicated on the perceived perfection of our own political system. Many Americans have failed to see that in spite of all our progress toward democratic ideals in the United States, our system has still fallen short of achieving them. In the midst of post-9/11 fallout, the Great Recession, and the recent foreign threats to our electoral processes, it's even more important to take a critical look at the problems and prospects of our democratic system.

This course's central premise is that Americans should take seriously several fundamental challenges to our democracy. Challenges such as radical individualism, citizen participation, trivialized and polarized elections, the privileged position of business, and rising inequality suggest that our position as the "democratic model" for the world is at risk. The principal course objective is to explore deeply these and other challenges in order to assess the prospects for American democracy.

### **Course Structure**

The course will be conducted primarily in seminar discussion format. Some lecturing will occur in order to lay contextual groundwork, and to help frame discussions, but the bulk of the sessions will be oriented toward a close, critical examination of required readings. Additionally, students as part of presentations will lead some of the discussions. It is assumed that students have prepared the readings prior to coming to class in all cases, so that they may actively participate. Directed questioning by the professor will help form the parameters of discussion, as well as help determine the preparedness of the students. Although a set of assignments have been set forth in the syllabus at the outset, I reserve the right to modify, augment, or change them as necessary to take advantage of other timely material that may contribute to the course.

Finally, the class will design, advertise, and conduct a "Deliberative Poll" the last week of class during which various viewpoints about how to address 1-2 key issues will be presented and debated for the community at large.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students will have achieved the following learning outcomes.

1. Gain a critical understanding of 8 challenges to American Democracy through readings and discussions.
2. Improve ability to give oral presentations.
3. Improve ability to analyze and present empirical data through assigned papers.
4. Learn what a deliberative poll is by helping to conduct one as a final class project.

## **Required Texts/Readings**

Books

Core Text: Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition.

Theme Books:

Hulse, *Confirmation Bias*.

Austin, *We Must Not Be Enemies*.

Winkler, *We the Corporations*.

## **Diversity in American Politics**

Since this course fulfills general education requirements, one of the emphases will be to get you to identify and wrestle with the role of diversity in American politics. As already noted, the central thesis of the course argues that American democracy is facing some serious challenges that according to your central author may substantially reverse, in the next few decades, the degree of democracy we have attained. This view is not universally held, and in fact, may seem fairly controversial to you. In order to help you more clearly understand the diversity of thought about the health of the American political system, the assignments have been prepared to help you assess the central thesis for yourself.

## **Ways of Knowing in Political Science**

How do we “know” political reality? This question gets to the heart of how politics is studied, and needs to be considered seriously. In short, by what method can we seek to understand the political world around us? As a general education course, part of our concern will be to get you to understand the dominant method of studying politics—the empirical approach. This objective will be met in the context of at least two components of the course. First, certain lectures and presentations by the professor will emphasize and help explain the empirical approach. Second, as part of your assignments, you will be asked to engage in the empirical approach as a way of critically analyzing the challenges to American democracy which are suggested by the readings. At a minimum, this will involve some collection and presentation of data in a fashion that will help you complete some web-based assignments.

## **Academic Integrity**

It is assumed that all work turned in is your own, and that you have abided by the set of rules and guidelines noted in the University’s new Academic Integrity policy. All work turned in must have the following statement attached to it along with your

signature: *“I affirm that my work upholds the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity at Wittenberg, and that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance.”* Please refer to the following web site for a complete description of the [University’s Policy on Academic Integrity](#).

### **Need for Accommodations**

Wittenberg University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision and neurological, or temporary medical conditions, etc.) please, let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, you must register with Accessibility Services by contacting Gwen Owen, the Director of Accessibility Services at 937-327-7870 or by email at [oweng@wittenberg.edu](mailto:oweng@wittenberg.edu). Please note that services are confidential and may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. The Accessibility Services Office is located in the Office of Academic Services COMPASS Sweet Success Center, Thomas Library on the first floor. Walk-in appointments are welcome 8 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday.

### **Deliberative Polling Exercise**

As a culmination of the semester’s work, the class will organize, advertise, and administer a deliberative poll on 1-2 issues that have been identified as the most significant ones to discuss with a larger audience. This exercise will be modeled on the National Issues Forums and previously-conducted deliberative polls in the U.S. and elsewhere. More information about this form of democratic debate can be found at the National Issues Forum website (<http://www.nifi.org/>), as well as the following sites: (<http://participedia.net/en/methods/deliberative-polling>); and (<http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/dpolling/>)

### **Article Summary/Presentation**

During a designated seminar session, each student will be assigned a relevant journal article/book chapter to be prepared to lead discussion on during the session. You should prepare a 2-3 page (single-spaced) typed summary of the article that includes a brief biography of the author, a discussion of the sources/data used, an overview of what the author says, his/her methodology, etc., as well as a short reaction on your part. This will be due at the end of the class session in which it is presented. The key aspects of your grade for this assignment will be how well you present the article to the class, and how well you connect its substance to the class topic for the unit. You should use PowerPoint, or Prezi as the platform for the presentation. A sample article summary is on Moodle, please use this format (including single-spacing).

### **Grades**

Grades will be based on the following: a midterm, WEB-based research assignments, 1 article presentation/summary, reading quizzes, a “Letter to the Editor” of a paper of your choosing, participation in the Deliberative Polling exercise, and class

participation. Grade breaks at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile. The breakdown of the points is as follows:

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Midterm Exam                       | 100       |
| Web-based Research Assignments     | 250       |
| Article Summary/Presentation       | 50        |
| Quizzes                            | 100       |
| Participation in Deliberative Poll | 50        |
| Letter to the Editor               | 25        |
| Participation in Class Discussions | <u>50</u> |
| Total                              | 625       |

### **Course Outline (Readings in parentheses)**

#### **WEEK 1(1/13-1/17)**

- M Introduction to the course and the Main Thesis (Syllabus; Hudson, Preface)
- W Precursors to Modern Democracy—Greeks, Locke, and Hobbes (Hudson, pp. 1-8); & Models of Democracy (Hudson, pp. 8-23)
  - Protective v. Developmental Democracy
  - Pluralist Democracy v. Participatory Democracy
- F Discussion: The Models Compared (H pp. 18-19; Baker, “Does Our Democracy Measure Up?”—Article 1)

#### **WEEK 2 (1/20-1/24)**

- M The First Challenge to American Democracy--Separation of Powers
  - The Founders’ Work (Hudson, pp. 25-33)
  - Responsiveness and Accountability (Hudson, pp. 33-49)
  - The Parliamentary Alternative (Hudson, pp. 49-63)
- W Impeachment and the Separation of Powers—Discussion of current events (Baker, “Can We Americans Overcome Ourselves?”—Article 2)
- F Article Presentations (Baker, “Taking Stock of the Power of the People”—Article 3)

#### **WEEK 3 (1/27-1/31) Theme Book: Hulse**

- M 2<sup>nd</sup> Challenge--The Imperial Judiciary
    - Bush v. Gore* (2000) and the Argument Articulated (Hudson, pp. 65-71)
    - Judicial Review and Constitutional Construction (Hudson, 71-94 and Roberts’ Incremental Approach to Overruling Precedent?)
  - W The “Judicialization” of American Politics as a Challenge (Hudson, 94-101 and “The Wages of Stealth Overruling”)
- \*\*First Web-based paper assignment due in class: Discussion of Findings\*\*\***
- F Confirmation Bias? Theme Book #1 (Hulse, Ch. 1-13)

#### **Week 4 (2/3-2/7)**

- M Individual Reflection on Readings
- W Confirmation Bias? (Hulse, Ch. 14-24)
- F Confirmation Bias? (Hulse, Ch. 25-34).

#### **WEEK 5 (2/10-2/14) Theme Book: Austin**

- M 3<sup>rd</sup> Challenge-- Radical Individualism  
Sources of Individualism, Flaws of Libertarianism, and The Decline of Social Capital (Hudson, Chapter 3)
- W Article Presentations—Putnam and Bledsoe (Baker, “Independents and the Value of Political Talk”—Article 4)  
Assessment of 3<sup>rd</sup> Challenge—Discussion (Has the Libertarian Moment Arrived?)
- F No Class—Senior Conference Presentations

#### **WEEK 6 (2/17-2/21)**

- M We Shouldn't be Enemies, but Are We? (Austin, Ch. 1-3)
- W The Great American Outrage Machine (Austin, Ch. 4-6; Baker, “Resuscitating Democracy in America”—Article 5)
- F Agreeing to Disagree? (Austin, Ch. 7-10; Baker, “Individuals Can Change Incivility in Politics”—Article 6).

#### **Week 7 (2/24-2/28)**

- M 4<sup>th</sup> Challenge--Citizen Participation (Hudson, Chapter 4)
- W Article Presentations: TBA
- F 2<sup>nd</sup> Web-based paper assignments due in class: Discussion of Findings (Baker, “Should We Consider Mandatory Voting?”—Article 7)

#### **WEEK 8 (3/2-3/6)**

- M Review for Midterm Exam
  - W Midterm Exam
  - F Individual Reflection on Readings
- SPRING BREAK: March 9-13 (Enjoy!)

#### **Week 9 (3/16-3/20)**

- M Organize and Plan Class Project: Deliberative Polling Event
- W 5<sup>th</sup> Challenge--Trivialized Elections (Hudson, Chapter 5)
- F Electoral College—Should We Allow Electors to be Faithless? (Baker, “All Hail the Faithless Elector(s) from Texas”—Article 8; Baker, “Can the Nomination Process be Fixed?”—Article 9; Baker, “Time to Deflate Some of Iowa's Importance”—Article 10)

### **WEEK 10 (3/23-3/27)**

- M Alternative Election Systems (Baker, “What About Congressional Term Limits?”—Article 11; Baker, “To Grow Democracy, Start Small, Think Big”—Article 12)
- W Article Presentations
- F **3<sup>rd</sup> Web-based paper assignments due in class: Discussion of Findings**

### **WEEK 11 (3/30-4/3)—Theme Book: Winkler**

- M 6<sup>th</sup> Challenge: Privileged Position of Business (Hudson, Ch. 6 and The New Power Elite?)
- W Watch 2<sup>nd</sup> part of *Roger and Me*
- F Watch 1<sup>st</sup> part of *Roger and Me*

### **WEEK 12 (4/6-4/10)**

- M Are Corporations People?: (Winkler, Intro and Ch. 1-2)
- W Pushing for Corporate Rights: (Winkler, Ch. 3-4)
- F No Class: Good Friday

### **WEEK 13 (4/13-4/17)**

- M Corporate Property Rights: (Winkler, Ch. 5-6)
- W Corporate Liberties: (Winkler, Ch. 7-8)
- F The Triumph of Corporate Rights: (Winkler, Ch. 9-10, and Conclusion; Baker, “If Corporations are People, Tell Us Who They Are”—Article 13)

### **WEEK 14 (4/20-4/24)**

- M **Interest Groups and Business Privilege Continued: 4<sup>th</sup> Web-based paper assignments due in class—Discussion of Findings.**  
(Web Sites as Assigned)
- W Article Presentations—TBA); wrap-up discussion of Business Privilege
- F 7<sup>th</sup> Challenge—Economic Inequality (Hudson, Ch. 7, and The Super Rich)

### **WEEK 15 (4/27-5/1)**

- M Measuring Economic Inequality: Gini Coefficients and Income Quintile Shares
- W Article Presentations: TBA
- F **5<sup>th</sup> Web-based paper assignments due: Discussion of Findings; Wrap-up of Economic Inequality Challenge: Is the 99% a realistic metaphor?** (Baker, “Still Believe in the American Dream?”—Article 14)  
Final Preparations for Deliberative Polling Event

## WEEK 16 (5/4-5/6)

M 8th Challenge--The National Security State (Hudson, Chapter 8)

**\*\*Tuesday: “Deliberative Polling Event—7-9 p.m., Bayley Auditorium**

F Debrief Deliberative Polling: Final Assessments

### Suggested Readings

- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. “Striking A Responsive Chord,” in *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*. New York: Free Press, pp. 63-98.
- Avella, Joseph R. 1996. “Whose Decision to Use Force?” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (Spring): 485-95.
- Bennett, Stephen Earl, Richard S. Flickinger, John R. Baker, Staci L. Rhine, and Linda L.M. Bennett, 1996. “Citizens’ Knowledge of Foreign Affairs,” *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2 (Summer): 10-29.
- Bledsoe, Timothy, et al., 1995. “Residential Context and Racial Solidarity Among African Americans,” *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (May): 434-58.
- Cupp, D. Stephen. 1977. “Emerging Problems of Citizen Participation,” *Public Administration Review* 37 (September/October): 478-87.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1961. “The Ambiguity of Leadership,” in *Who Governs?*, pp. 89-103.
- Douglas, Andrew. 2014. “The Effect of Fair Representation Voting on 2013 Cambridge, Massachusetts Municipal Elections,” *FairVote Research Report*.  
<http://www.fairvote.org>.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1995(a). “Democracy’s Precarious Present,” in *Democracy on Trial*, pp. 1-36.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. 1995(b). “Democracy’s Enduring Promise,” In *Democracy on Trial*, pp. 117-138.
- Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (September): 564-581.
- Glendon, Mary Ann. 1991. “The Illusion of Absoluteness,” in *Rights Talk*, pp. 18-46.
- Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. 2014. “Who Passes Business’s ‘Model Bills’? Policy Capacity and Corporate Influence in U.S. State Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (September): 582-602.

- Hudson, William E. 2008. "The Libertarian Illusion in Contemporary Public Policy and the Case for a Communitarian Alternative," in *The Libertarian Illusion*, pp. 1-30
- Kawachi, et al. 1997. "Social Capital, Income Inequality, and Mortality," *American Journal of Public Health* 87: 1491-1498.
- Lynch, John W., et al., 1998. "Income Inequality and Mortality in Metropolitan Areas of the United States," *American Journal of Public Health* 88: 1074-1080.
- Parenti, Michael. 1995. "Democracy for the Few," in *Democracy for the Few*, pp. 312-325.
- Peterson, Mark. 1993. "Political Influence in the 1990s: From 'Iron Triangles' to 'Policy Networks,'" *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law* 18 (Summer): 395-438.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in the America," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28 (December): 664-683.
- Sabato, Larry. 1981. "The Media Masters," in *The Rise of Political Consultants*, pp. 143-179.
- Schneider, William. 1992. "The Dawn of the Suburban Era in American Politics," *Atlantic Monthly* (July): 33-57.
- Solt, Frederick. 2010. "Does Economic Inequality Depress Electoral Participation? Testing the Schattschneider Hypothesis," *Political Behavior* 32:285-301.
- Soros, George. 1997. "The Capitalist Threat," *The Atlantic Monthly* (February): 45-58.
- Sundquist, James L.. 1988. "Needed: A Political Theory for the New Era of Coalition Government in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 103: 613-635.
- Warren, Mark E. 1996. "Deliberative Democracy and Authority," *American Political Science Review* 90 (March): 46-60.
- Wilson, James Q.. 1987. "Does the Separation of Powers Still Work?" *Public Interest* 37-52.
- Wolff, Robert Paul. 1970. "Beyond the Legitimate State," in *In Defense of Anarchism*, pp. 69-82.