

### **030:134 Problems of Democracy**

Class Time: 10:30-11:20AM MWF  
Classroom: 14 Schaeffer Hall  
Office Hours: 2-3 MWThF  
Office: 351 Schaeffer Hall

We are so accustomed to celebrating democracy that we ignore its numerous problems. When democracy works as it should, we then turn around and complain about “politics.” The purpose of this class is twofold. First, I want to look at some of the important criticisms of democracy. What is the worst that can be said about it? Second, I want you to understand the recent theoretical work that has been done to understand democratic politics. How does this work confirm/alter/refute these criticisms?

#### **Requirements**

1. Midterm Examination, to be worth 40% of your final grade, scheduled for Friday, October 10. Individuals with a university-approved excuse for missing the midterm will be assigned a 20 page research paper.
2. Final Examination, to be worth 40% of your final grade. The final exam is scheduled to take place in this room at 9:45 A.M. on Wednesday, December 17 2008.
3. Paper, to be worth 20% of your final grade. Details forthcoming, but I plan to give you options to self-select into maximum grades. Paper will be due in class on Friday, November 21. Papers turned in after class but before 5:00PM Friday will receive a letter grade deduction. Papers turned in before 10:30 Monday December 1 will receive two letter-grade deduction. Papers turned in after that point will receive a score of 2.

#### **Grading**

Grades are based on final averages only. Everyone is guaranteed a minimum of their straight-scale grade, which is

93-100 A	90-92 A-	88-89 B+	83-87 B	80-82 B-
78-79 C+	73-77 C	70-72 C-	60-69 D	0-59 F

If the class curve looks too low, I curve up according to the CLAS recommended grade distribution for advanced courses

22% A	38% B	37% C	3% D	1% F
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There is one exception to this: if your final average is below 60, you will be assigned an F.

#### **Texts**

My plan is to have all texts for this class available either online or on our class ICON website. You may need to purchase a book for your paper, and I reserve the right to add a required book if class interest and need seems to demand it.

#### **Parameters of the Course**

Before deciding to take this class, there are a few things you should know.

1. I have a very traditional style. I lecture and use the chalkboard. I tend not to have class discussion. I do like people to come up after class to ask questions, to email, or to come to office hours. Please, though, ask in class if something I write is not clear (I have bad handwriting.)
2. This course involves abstract thinking and mathematics. If you hate math, you shouldn't take this class.
3. Here is the deal: I do not take attendance. In return, if you come to class, I expect you to be civil. Just to be clear, my pet peeve is behavior that signals to others that you aren't interested in what I am saying (e.g., checking out email, texting, reading the newspaper, talking to others).
4. If you do miss a class, copy the notes from someone, and then come to see me. We can go over my notes from lecture to make sure you didn't miss anything.
5. If you are a jerk, alienated from university life, convinced that classes are a complete waste of time, and believe that the purpose of college is to get zozzled and make "valuable contacts," please find another class.
6. A lot of the arguments I present in class will be strongly anti-democratic. Please distinguish between arguments I make in class and my own personal beliefs. I am not here to make you a liberal or a conservative or a democrat or an anti-democrat. For the record, I am an ultramontanist.

### **Schedule of Topics**

To be discussed in class. My plan is to begin the semester with a discussion of what democracy is, and its history. We will then go on to consider democracy from a social choice perspective. I then plan to consider particular topics. The schedule, then, depends partially on your interests (a final syllabus will be available online Wednesday).

On Wednesday I will start discussing what democracy is. There are two readings, both to be placed on ICON

Sen, Amartya. 199. Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy* 1(3): 3-17.

Homer, *Iliad*, Bk 2, <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.2.ii.html>. Read until line "till we take the city of Priam."

A general note on readings:

1. Be able to provide a short (2-3 sentence) summary of the reading.
2. Look up words you do not know.

### **Adding the Course**

We have space in this class for 42 students. It is currently filled. If you want to add, get on the wait list; I will add students as other students drop.

## Schedule of Topics

### I. KNOW YOUR ENEMY

- Aug. 25      **Introduction**  
Hand out syllabus
- Aug. 27      **Defining Democracy**  
Homer, *Iliad*, Bk 2, <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.2.ii.html>. Read until line “till we take the city of Priam.”
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy* 1(3): 3-17.
- Aug. 29      **Measuring Democracy**  
No reading
- Sep. 1        **NO CLASS** (Labor Day)
- Sep. 3        **Democracy in Athens**  
Thucycides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Benjamin Jowett [1881].  
Read Pericles’ Funeral Oration [2.34-2.46.]
- Sep. 5        **Structure of Athenian Politics**  
No reading
- Sep. 8        **Why Athenian Democracy / Trial of Socrates**  
Plato, *Apology*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett.  
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.1b.txt>.
- Sep. 10      **Why Athenian Democracy / Trial of Socrates**  
No reading.
- Sep 12.      **Wrapping Up**  
No reading. You might want to reread the readings in view of the issue raised in class.

### II. SOCIAL CHOICE THEORY

- Sep 15.      **Introduction to Social Choice Theory**  
No reading.
- Sep 17.      **Positional Rules: Plurality, Antiplurality, Borda Count**  
No reading.

- Sep 19.       **Condorcet Winners and Condorcet Losers**  
No reading.
- Sep 22.       **Instant Runoff Voting**  
No reading.
- Sep 24.       **Cycles**  
No reading. You might want to reread the readings in view of the issue raised in class.
- Sep 26.       **Sequential Pairwise Voting**  
No reading.
- Sep 29.       **Arrow's Theorem I: Basics of Axiomatic Approach**  
Optional Reading: Hansen, Paul. 2002. Another Graphical Proof of Arrow's Impossibility Theorem. *Journal of Economic Education* 33(3):217-235.
- Oct 1.        **Arrow's Theorem II: Dictatorship**  
No reading.
- Oct 3.        **Arrow's Theorem III: Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives**  
No reading.
- Oct 6.        **Avoiding Arrow: Two Alternatives, Ostrogorski and Anscombe Paradox**  
No reading.
- Oct 8.        **Avoiding Arrow: Single-Peaked Preferences.**  
Optional Reading: Black, Duncan. 1948. On the Rationale of Group Decision-Making. *Journal of Political Economy* 56(1):23-34.
- Midterm review sheet placed on ICON.
- Oct 10.       **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**
- Oct 13.       **RETURN MIDTERM, GO OVER ANSWERS.**

### **PART III IGNORANCE AND DEMOCRACY**

- Oct 15.       **Threats to Democracy from Ignorance and Evidence of Ignorance**  
Shenkman, Rick. 2008. *Just How Stupid Are We?* NY: Basic Books. Chapters 1-3.
- Oct 17.       **Reconsideration of Ignorance**  
No reading. You might want to reread the readings in view of the issue raised in class.

- Oct 20.       **Condorcet and His Model of Juries**  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Bk I and II ((entire). Available at <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon.htm>.
- Oct 22.       **Condorcet Jury Theorem**  
Rousseau, *The Social Contract* Bk III (entire), Bk IV (Chapters 1-3,8-9). Available at <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon.htm>. Vocabulary and reading questions posted on ICON.
- Oct 24.       **How many people for the CJT to work? Condorcet Diagrams**  
No reading.
- Oct 27.       **Implications of the CJT**  
No reading.
- Oct 29.       **When CJT Does not Apply: Statistical Dependence**  
Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, Book I, III. Available at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/BonCrow.html>. Vocabulary and reading questions posted on ICON.

#### **IV. DROPPING INDEPENDENCE: INFORMATION, SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE**

- Oct 31.       **Introduction to Herd Models**  
No reading.
- Nov 3         **Overview of Le Bon**
- Nov 5         **Herd Model Applications**
- Nov 7         **Anderson/Holt Experiment (In Class)**
- Nov 10        **Class Cancelled**
- Nov 12        **Bhakchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch (BHW) Model**  
Bikhchandani, Sushil, David Hirshleifer and Ivo Welch. 1992. A Theory of Fads, Fashion, Custom, and Cultural Change as Informational Cascades. *Journal of Political Economy* 100(5): 992-1026.
- Nov 14        **Bayes Rule: Introduction**
- Nov 17        **BHW Model and Bayes Rule**
- Nov 19        **Tyranny of the Majority**

Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1835. *Democracy in America*, Book I Chapter 15.  
“Unlimited Power of the Majority in the United States, and its Consequences.”  
[http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/detoc/1\\_ch15.htm](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/detoc/1_ch15.htm)

Nov 21      **Preference Falsification**  
In-Class Experiment

Nov. 24      **Thanksgiving Break**

Nov. 26      **Thanksgiving Break**

Nov. 28      **Thanksgiving Break**

Dec 1.        **Kuran Diagrams**

## **PART V RIGHTS**

Dec. 3        **Social Choice View of Rights**

Dec 5.        **Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal**  
Sen, A.K. 1970. The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal. *Journal of Political Economy* 78(1): 152-57. Available at ICON.

Dec. 8        **Assignment of Rights**

Dec. 10      **Majority Rule and Minority Rights**

Dec. 12      **Summary: Last Day of Class**  
Final Exam Review Sheet placed on ICON.

**Final Examination:** 9:45 A.M, Wednesday, December 17 2008, 14 SH.