

Civic Education in America
Political Science 410
Williams College

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W 9-11 and by appointment

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TR 8:30-9:45
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Description.

Despite the fact that, according to a recent poll by the National Constitution Center, 8 in 10 Americans believe that democratic government requires an informed and active citizenry, fewer than 4 in 10 can name the three branches of the federal government. Whether or not we regard this particular encyclopedic fact as especially important, few disagree with the idea that, when it comes to politics and citizenship, Americans are an ill-informed people. But what exactly would we want Americans to know more about? And how exactly might we get them to learn it? Taking these questions as its starting points, this senior seminar will tackle the state of civic education in America—its promise and its pitfalls, its past iterations and its practice in contemporary times. In the first third of the semester, we will look closely at a series of debates about the political-historical context, goals, and substance of civic education as well as the various approaches we might take to it. In the middle third of the semester, we will seek to put what we have learned into action, with students developing a civic education curriculum around a particular subject for introduction at several distinct grade levels in local schools. In the final third of the semester, we will debate the value of civic education with an eye toward its inherent tensions, the practice of it in other nations, and the evidence of the effects it may have on citizens individually and the polity at large. Embodying the idea that you never know something as thoroughly and meaningfully as you might until you have taught it, this seminar will seek simultaneously to deepen our own civic commitments and to cultivate more meaningful commitments in others.

Objectives.

Thinking Civically. With both its attendant rights and its accompanying responsibilities, citizenship is nothing less than the lifeblood of collective governance in the modern (democratic) world. Despite its importance, our considerations of citizenship are all-too-often one-sided, emphasizing the status and privileges of being a citizen while ignoring the demands and requisites of acting like one. Far from assuming them away, we will explicitly foreground precisely those sorts of questions about the development and exercise of civic virtue that are frequently taken for granted, thereby forcing ourselves to sketch out and debate the varied, potential, and most desirable contours of the civic experience in twenty-first century America.

Thinking Educationally. Even as public opinion polls consistently show that most Americans value education, relatively few think especially carefully about how exactly we (as educators) should do it and what exactly we (as a national community) should we want from it. But, of course, both the substance and style—to say nothing of the success!—of an educational system has ramifications for the lives we live and the world we inhabit on a daily basis. In both our classroom work and experiential work, then, we will pay careful attention to not only what the content of education should include but also what sorts of approaches to education seem most likely to resonate with young (and even old!) Americans coming of age at this particular moment in time.

Format.

Although class will primarily consist of seminar-style discussion, we will also engage in various other forms of intellectual stimulation, including tutorials for two weeks and several more informal sessions to brainstorm, workshop, and debrief. (We may also have a class visitor or two—perhaps in person, perhaps via Skype—at some point.) I prefer to accept volunteers, but, if necessary to facilitate broad participation, I will call on students directly. Needless to say, there will be ample opportunity for you to ask questions, share your views, and interrogate the course material; indeed, the size, substance, and nature of the course positively *requires* you to do so.

Materials.

- Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (2012)*
- PSCI 410 course packet (in two volumes)**

Contributions.***

Experiential Project (45%). A multi-part, experiential group project culminating in presentations in three local classrooms and a 12-15 page analytic reflection.

Tutorials (30%). A 5-7 page essay (20%) on a theme of your choosing and a 2-3 page response to your partner's essay (10%).

Class Participation (25%). A process of *active engagement* that entails more than simply showing. More specifically, it includes contributions to discussions, performance in tutorials, feedback offered to peers during collective workshops, and the completion of any brief, ungraded exercises or assignments aimed at enriching class discussion. Accordingly, participation grades are not a “free 25%” but, rather, a reflection of my holistic assessment of your performance in class.

Evaluation.

Written Work.**** Good writing is good thinking—that is to say, writing well first requires thinking well. The manner in which and the depth with which you approach writing and thinking will be the determining factors in your grade. More specifically, I base grades for written work on the following three factors: the extent to which you make a clear, compelling, and original *argument*; the extent to which you support that argument through close analysis and consideration of primary and secondary source *evidence*; and the extent to which you organize and articulate your thoughts in a logical and sophisticated *structure*. Needless to say, proper mechanics of writing—including features such as grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and so forth—are assumed; be sure to proofread your work in order to catch any errors along these lines.

Written work in the **A** range is characterized by a strikingly creative, perceptive, and persuasive argument; comprehensive synthesis and trenchant analysis of an abundance of course material; straightforward yet sophisticated organization of thoughts; and clear, cogent, fluid, and error-free prose. Written work in the **B** range is characterized by a sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument; competent analysis of various course material; logical and intelligible organization; and clear, cogent, and error-free prose. Written work in the **C** range is characterized

* Available for purchase at Water Street Books.

** Available for pickup in Hollander 026.

*** I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—civic education project, tutorials, class participation—of the course.

**** These are my general grading guidelines, which can be easily applied to your tutorial contributions and generally applied (even if in slightly modified form) to your final analytic reflection. For more specific guidelines relative to experiential work, see the attached descriptions of the civic education project.

by a relatively underdeveloped, simplistic, or derivative argument; partial, inconsistent, or faulty analysis of course material; convoluted organization; and awkward, stilted, or otherwise distracting prose. Written work in the **D** range is characterized by an incoherent or extremely confusing argument; superficial or fleeting engagement with the course material; chaotic or irrational organization; and distorted, error-riddled prose. Written work that lacks any argument or analysis, fails to engage the course material, or is any way incomprehensible earns an **F**.*

Participation. Three factors contribute to class participation grades: the degree to which you demonstrate analytic or critical understanding of the course material, the degree to which you articulate thoughtful or original questions and arguments in response to the course material, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said. The emphasis here is on *quality*, not *quantity*. Select insightful offerings are infinitely more valuable than a multitude of derivative or mediocre ones. Worry not: provided you attend class, complete the reading, and think carefully about the themes of the course, you will be in an excellent position to contribute thoughtfully to discussion.

Participation grades in the **A** range are reserved for those students who consistently come to class with questions and comments, engage others in a respectful manner, and generally elevate the level of discussion. Participation grades in the **B** range are earned by those students who participate but do not stimulate discussion, adequately listen to their classmates, or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation. Participation grades in the **C** range are for those students who are infrequent or unwilling contributors to discussion. Participation grades of **D** and **F**, respectively, are for those students who do not arrive adequately prepared for class and for those who disrupt and detract from the overall quality of the course.

Responsibilities.

Attendance. Put simply, I expect you to be in class *each and every day*. (This is true in all my courses, but, given our intimate number, it is especially and emphatically true here.) I do not formally call roll, but it would be impossible not to notice—and make a subsequent mental note!—when you are absent. Besides avoiding my undying wrath, you should plan on full attendance for four reasons. First, participation, which counts for 25% of your final grade, is impossible if you are not present. Second, the discussions that occur in class will be one of the crucial elements of your learning in this course. Third, the brainstorming, workshopping, and debriefing in which we will occasionally engage are intended to make your experiential work easier, more successful, and more enjoyable. Fourth, and most importantly, by choosing to take this class, you are making a commitment to me, to your classmates, and to yourself that you will be an active and engaged participant in our academic community. Class will go on without you, but everyone's learning will suffer as a consequence of your absence. If you know in advance that missing class will be unavoidable, please have the courtesy to let me know.

Punctuality and Preparedness. As part of your aforementioned commitment to me, your classmates, and yourself, you are expected to arrive in class on time, prepared, and *without technological distractions*. This means, first, that you have thoroughly and carefully read the material before class and, second, that you have thought about that material and are willing and ready to contribute your thoughts to discussion. Of course, I recognize that students lead busy lives, have commitments (both academic and otherwise) in addition to this course, and may occasionally be affected by unforeseen events and unpredictable circumstances that make adequate preparation difficult. Even

* The following adjectives capture the essence of what individual grades mean in this course: truly exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), excellent (A-), very good (B+), good (B), satisfactory (B-), fair (C+), sub-par (C), poor (C-), seriously deficient (D+), minimally acceptable (D), borderline unacceptable (D-), completely unacceptable (F).

in those instances, I still urge you to come to class and encourage you to let me know—either through an email in advance of class or a quick comment upon entering class—that you were unable to prepare as fully as you had hoped. Not only will you not be penalized for your disclosure, but I agree not to call on you for that period. I trust you not to abuse my generosity by availing yourself of this option more than once or twice.

Discourse and Decorum. You are responsible for conducting yourself appropriately—both in your own comments and in your responses (verbal or otherwise) to the comments of your peers. As respectful discourse is the norm, criticism should be reserved for ideas, arguments, and opinions rather than for people; ad hominem comments will not be tolerated.

Submitting Work. Because of the specific nature of your assignments—an experiential project that requires substantial forethought, planning, and coordination with others both in class and outside it and a tutorial that places you and a partner in a position of mutual dependence—it is absolutely imperative that you submit work on time. (For the experiential project, this means not only final submission but also the sequencing benchmarks along the way.) To the extent that tardiness in executing your assignments has the real potential to inconvenience others (including the teachers and students of the classes you will be visiting), all deadlines are *firm*.

Academic Honesty. I hope—frankly, I *expect*—this will not be an issue, but it is worth repeating that all work you do in this course is governed by the College’s Honor Code. (If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies, do not hesitate to ask!) I take scholarly integrity very seriously, and any suspected violations will be pursued to the fullest extent. *No exceptions.*

Contact Information.

Email. The most efficient way to reach me is via email. As a general rule, emails received before 9pm will usually receive a reply that day; emails received after 9pm will likely receive a reply on the following day.

Office Hours. For my regularly scheduled office hours, no sign-up or prior notice is necessary, nor is a specific course-related question or concern. (If you wish to schedule an appointment for another time, you should let me know a few days in advance.) Although I am obviously available to discuss any issues that may arise in class or in the reading, you are also more than welcome to stop by and join me for some friendly conversation. Indeed, I encourage you to do so; really—come see me. I am interested in learning about you and your thoughts, and I never (well, ok, hardly ever) tire of talking about civic education.

Phone. Though email is, as noted above, the easiest way to reach me, you should feel free to call me in the office at any time. If, between the hours of 8am and 6pm, you have a question that requires urgent attention, you may also contact me at home.

Some Final Thoughts.

I take teaching seriously, and I hope you will reciprocate by taking learning seriously. That said, I intend for our classes to be enjoyable—both for you and for me. This course revolves around rich, interesting, and controversial debates that help to animate the puzzles and promise of citizenship, education, and civic education in twenty-first century America. So expect to teach each other and to learn from each other, but also expect to enjoy yourself; for my part, I promise to do the same.

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Introduction

1. Are You Smart Enough to Be a Citizen? (January 30)

I. Principles

2. Civic Visions: The Us We Want to Be (February 5)
 - Fouts and Lee, “Concepts of Citizenship”
 - Musil, “Educating for Citizenship”
 - Westheimer and Kahne, “Educating the ‘Good’ Citizen”
 - Schudson, from *The Good Citizen*
3. Civic Obstacles: Information, Engagement, and Capacity (February 7)
 - Delli Carpini and Keeter, from *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*
 - Niemi, “What Students Know About Civics and Government”
 - Levine, from *The Future of Democracy*
 - Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America”
 - Skocpol, “The Narrowing of Civic Life”
 - Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, from *Stealth Democracy*
4. Civic Remedies: Education? Education. Education! (February 12)
 - Ravitch, “Education and Democracy”
 - Pangle and Pangle, “What the American Founders Have to Teach Us About Schooling for Democratic Citizenship”
 - Barber, “Education for Democracy”
 - Hochschild and Scovronick, “Democratic Education and the American Dream”
 - Johanek, “Preparing Pluribus for Unum”

II. Pedagogy

5. Civic Facts—or, What Do We Need to *Know*? (February 14)*
 - Intercollegiate Studies Institute, “Our Fading Heritage”
 - Lane, “America 101”
 - Muirhead, “Resuscitating Civic Education”
6. Civic Values—or, What Do We Need to *Believe*? (February 19)
 - Goodlad, Bromley, and Goodlad, “Democracy, Education, and the Human Conversation”
 - Appiah, “Liberal Education”
 - Bennett, “Education for Democracy”
 - Liu, “Sworn-Again Americans”
 - McWilliams, “Democracy and Mystery”

* Paula Consolini, Jen Swoap, and Kaatje White—the first the coordinator of experiential education, the second and third our liaisons to the elementary and secondary schools, respectively—will join us at the start of class to introduce themselves and briefly discuss what they can do to help you flourish this semester. All three have been extremely helpful in orchestrating this course and can be invaluable resources to you in your experiential work.

7. Civic Skills—or, What Do We Need to *Do*? (February 21)
Youniss, “How to Enrich Civic Education and Sustain Democracy”
Gutmann, “Democratic Disagreement and Civic Education”
Simon, “Classroom Deliberations”
Foster Wallace, 2005 Kenyon College Commencement Address
Liu, “Why Civics Class Should Be Sexy”

III. Preparation

8. Envisioning the Classroom (February 26)*
Youniss and Levine, “A ‘Younger Americans Act’”
Comer, “Development, Learning, and Democracy”
Loewen, from *Lies My Teacher Told Me*
Hess, “Controversies about Controversial Issues in Democratic Education”
9. Visiting the Classroom (February 28)
no class—school visits
10. A Sample Lesson—For You, By Me (March 5)
reading TBD
11. A Sample Lesson—For Them, By Us (March 7)
no reading
- 12-13. Some Preliminary Plans—For All of Us (March 12 and 14)**
peer memos and lesson plans

IV. Praxis

14. Teaching and Learning *About* Citizenship (April 2)
Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*, 1-166
15. Teaching and Learning *Through* Citizenship (April 4)***
Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*, 167-296

V. Performance

- 16-17. Game On (April 9 and 11)
no class—classroom presentations/project implementation
18. Debriefing and Deconstructing (April 16)
no reading

* It is my hope that Susan Engel of the Psychology Department will join us to discuss teaching and learning.

** We will meet in workshop format for these two sessions and likely be joined by one or more of Paula Consolini, Jen Swoap, and Kaatje White.

*** Meira Levinson of Harvard University Graduate School of Education will join us via Skype to discuss her book, her experiences teaching public school, and her views on civic education more broadly.

VI. Problematics*

- 19-20. Pluralism: Mixing Bowls or Melting Pots, Pluribus or Unum? (April 18 and 23)
Murphy, "Against Civic Education"
McLaughlin, "The Burdens and Dilemmas of Common Schooling"
McDonough, "Multinational Civic Education"
Levinson, "Diversity and Civic Education"
- 21-22. Patriotism: A Patriot's History or a People's History, In the Nation's Service or In the Service of All Nations? (April 25 and 30)
Ravitch, "Celebrating America"
Hanson, "The Civic Education America Needs"
Damon, "Abandoning the American Tradition"
Merry, "Patriotism, History, and the Legitimate Aims of American Education"
Brighouse, "Should We Teach Patriotic History?"
Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism"

VII. Perspectives

23. From Abroad (May 2)
Hahn, "Citizenship Education"
Hooghe and Claes, "Civic Education in Europe"
Fuller and Rasiah, "Schooling Citizens for Evolving Democracies"
Finkel, "Can Democracy Be Taught?"
Lee, "Cross-national Comparisons and Conclusions"
24. From Experience (May 7)
Niemi and Junn, from *Civic Education*

Conclusion

25. Civic Alternatives (May 9)
Noah, "We Need You"
Farrell, "Can Partisanship Save Citizenship?"
Dagger, "Stopping Sprawl for the Good of All"
Elshstain, "Civil Society, Religion, and the Formation of Citizens"
Levine, "Institutional Reforms"
Schudson, "How People Learn to Be Civic"

* Since we will meet in tutorials in lieu of seminar for this unit, each session will effectively count (in the scheme of the course) as two classes. We will arrange precise days and times according to the availability of each tutorial pair, aiming for April 22 or 23 for the first session and April 29 or 30 for the second.