The Study of Politics:
Democracy
Political Science 101
Williams College

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W 9-10:30, R 2:30-3:30, and by appointment

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MWF 11-12:15  
Griffin 2

Description.
Winston Churchill called it “the worst form of government, except for all the others.” H.L.
Mencken described it as “the art of running the circus from the monkey cage.” Dave Barry defined
it as a governmental system “in which you say what you like and do what you’re told.” Yet, for all
its critics (both serious and satirical), democracy—the once radical, now commonplace political idea
that governmental power should be vested in “the people”—lives and (in some cases) thrives in
every corner of the globe. What are the virtues of democracy as a political system, and what are its
limitations? How is it practiced in America, and how does it vary around the world? How—or how
well—does it balance bottom-up grassroots activism with top-down elite leadership? How does it
relate to economic development, social strife, and military conflict? Examining questions such as
these with both empirical analysis and normative theorizing and with reference to both history and
current events, this course will simultaneously serve as an introduction to the subject of democracy,
to the discipline of political science, and to the members of the Political Science Department, with
twelve different faculty teaching at least one class session.

Objectives.
Thinking Politically. Above all else, politics is about power—who wants it, who has it, how
they get it, and what they do, could do, and should do with it. As such, to think politically is to think
in terms of the sources, distribution, manifestations, uses, abuses, limitations, and ramifications of
power. Even as we focus on the debates about, determinants and dynamics of, and dilemmas
surrounding one particular vision of power, then, our more general goal is to uncover, interrogate,
and understand power as the fundamental “unit of analysis” in the study of politics.

Thinking Multi-Perspectivally.** As much as all students of politics share a substantive
interest in power, they bring a variety of conceptual and methodological frameworks to studying it.
To an extent rare among academic disciplines, then, political science lacks a clearly dictated
paradigm or commonly decreed posture. Rather than flee from, be ashamed of, or seek to dispute
this pluralist reality, we will wholeheartedly embrace it, consciously encouraging a range of
approaches and deliberately employing a variety of tools to help illuminate and make sense of the
complex political world that surrounds us.

* Three stellar senior political science majors—Cameron Nutting (cmn1@williams.edu), Chandler Sherman
(ces1@williams.edu), Stefan Ward-Wheten (spw1@williams.edu)—will join me as teaching assistants. They will each
hold weekly office hours on the second floor of Goodrich Hall on the following days and times: Cameron – Sunday 8-
10pm, Chandler – Tuesday 9-11pm, Stefan – Thursday 8-10pm. If you cannot make their respective office hours, all
three are also available to meet by appointment.

** Yes, I know that word sounds (and, in fact, may well be!) made-up; it also fits what we will be doing this semester, so
bear with me.
Format.

Classes will vary considerably depending upon the teaching style of the instructor for that particular day but, over the span of the semester (and perhaps even within individual sessions) will combine elements of lecture, discussion, and what is traditionally considered the “Socratic method” (targeted questioning of students). In order to facilitate broad participation, my colleagues and I will both accept volunteers and call on students directly. In either case, there will be ample opportunity for you to ask questions, share your views, and interrogate the course material.

Materials.

- PSCI 101 course packet (in three volumes)*

Contributions.**

Written Exercises (10% each for a total of 60%). Six 2-3 page written exercises. I will distribute nine such exercises, each due exactly one week later; you may, if you wish, submit a seventh, in which case I will drop the lowest of the seven when calculating your course grade. The precise nature of these exercises will vary substantially (with more specific instructions in each instance), but all will focus on mastering a different “tool” (or set of “tools”) of political science in the context of understanding democracy. Your challenge here is neither to embark upon outside research nor to summarize the views of others (unless specifically instructed to do so) but, rather, to deepen and build upon what you are learning from readings and in class through careful reflection on, reasoned analysis of, and articulate expression about the specific aspect of democracy under consideration.

Final Exam (25%). A twenty-four hour open-book, open-note take-home exam designed to synthesize what you have learned about both the subject of democracy specifically and the study of politics generally. More details will be provided at a later date.

Class Participation (15%). A process of active engagement that entails more than simply showing up. Accordingly, participation grades are not a “free 15%” but, rather, a reflection of my holistic assessment of your performance in class—both our twice weekly sessions together and (roughly) monthly discussion sections that the course’s teaching assistants will ably lead for you and a smaller group of your classmates.

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

* Available for pickup in Hollander 026.

** I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—written exercises, final exam, class participation—of the course.
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 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. One or two insightful offerings are infinitely more valuable than several 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. I do not formally call roll, but I notice—and make a mental note!—when you are absent. Besides avoiding my undying wrath, you should plan on full attendance for three reasons. First, participation, which counts for 15% of your final grade, is impossible if you are not present. Second, the lectures and discussions that occur in class will be crucial elements of your learning in this course. Third, 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

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* 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).

** This includes discussion sections, for which attendance is decidedly not optional. TAs will take attendance and report any absences back to me.
(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 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 will excuse you for taking a pass if whatever professor may be visiting us happens to call on you during that period. I trust you not to abuse my generosity by availing yourself of this option more than 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.** Since there is already moderate flexibility built into the schedule of course assignments, and since the written exercises themselves are quite short, I expect you to hand in work on time. More precisely, I will neither grant extensions nor accept late work; moreover, I will only accept written exercises submitted *in class and in person*. These policies are not meant to be punitive but, rather, to help ensure fair and equitable treatment to all students as well as to prevent assignments (which will rapidly follow one after another for most of the semester) from piling up on you suddenly.

**Friday Flexibility.** Most of our “core” class meetings will take place on Mondays and Wednesdays, but both to accommodate our assorted visitors’ schedules and to enrich your educational experience with discussion sections and (in one instance) a film screening, we will meet on Friday several times throughout the semester. As a result, you should not schedule any other business—a campus job or volunteer opportunity, a physical education class or informal study group, a lunch date with your JA or jogging date with your roommate—during class time on Fridays. You will only sometimes have a class during that slot, but, for planning purposes, you should pretend that you always do.

**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 democracy.

**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 9am and 7pm, 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, many (if not all) with direct connection to the political events unfolding all around us. 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. Democratic Unpacking (September 10 – Justin Crowe)

I. Debates

2. Democratic Allegiances (September 15 – Mark Reinhardt)
   Plato, *Apology* and *Crito*

3. Democratic Statesmanship (September 17 – James McAllister)
   Thucydides, excerpts from *History of the Peloponnesian War*
   Kennedy, “Courage and Politics” from *Profiles in Courage*

4. Democratic Individualism (September 20 – Justin Crowe)
   The Constitution of the United States of America*
   Publius, *The Federalist* 10 and 51
   Tocqueville, excerpts from *Democracy in America*
   Emerson, “Self-Reliance”
   Dewey, “Creative Democracy”

5. Democratic Collectivism (September 22 – Sam Crane)
   Nathan, selections from *Chinese Democracy*

   → film screening: Guzman, *The Battle of Chile – Part II: The Coup d’Etat* (September 24) ←

6. Democratic Reassessment (September 27 – Jim Mahon)
   Castaneda, “The Democratic Imperative” from *Utopia Unarmed*

II. Determinants

7. Democratic Preconditions (September 29 – Michael MacDonald)
   Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy”
   Tocqueville, excerpts from *Democracy in America*

* Quite remarkably, the College owns original copies of the nation’s founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, *The Federalist*, and the Bill of Rights. With the Chapin Library in construction limbo, the documents are currently on display at WCMA; I strongly encourage you visit.
8. Democratic Disorder  (October 4 – Sam Crane)
   Huntington, “Political Order and Political Decay” from *Political Order in Changing Societies*

9. Democratic Process  (October 6 – Michael MacDonald)
   O’Donnell and Schmitter, “Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies” from *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*

→ Discussion Section I  (October 8)* ←

10. Democratic Prospects  (October 13 – Jim Mahon)
    Diamond, excerpts from *Squandered Victory*

III. Dynamics

11. Democratic Standards  (October 18 – George Marcus)
    Marcus, excerpts from *Doing Political Psychology*
    Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal”
    Zaller, “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science”

12. Democratic Deliberation  (October 20 – George Marcus)
    Marcus, excerpts from *Doing Political Psychology*
    Marcus and MacKuen, “Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote”

13. Democratic Participation  (October 25 – Justin Crowe)
    Tocqueville, “On the Use That Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life” from *Democracy in America*
    Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America”
    Skocpol, “The Narrowing of Civic Life”
    Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, “The Big Tilt”
    Sunstein, “The Daily We”
    Jonas, “The Downside of Diversity”
    Fiorina, “Extreme Voices”

14. Democratic Partnerships  (October 27 – Alex Willingham)
    Irons, “Demetrio Rodriguez v. San Antonio” from *The Courage of Their Convictions*
    Dobkin Hall, “Abandoning the Rhetoric of Independence”
    Ravitch, “The Billionaire Boys’ Club” from *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*

→ Discussion Section II  (October 29) ←

15. Democratic Leadership  (November 1 – Nicole Mellow)
    Article II of The Constitution of the United States of America [from session 4]
    Publius, *The Federalist* 69 and 70
    Skowronek, selections from *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*

* If October 8 is Mountain Day, we will simply postpone the discussion section until October 15.
16. Democratic Deviance  (November 3 – Justin Crowe)
   Articles III and VI of The Constitution of the United States of America [from session 4]
   Marbury v. Madison (1803)
   Engel v. Vitale (1962)
   West Virginia v. Barnette (1943)
   Reynolds v. Sims (1964)
   Romer v. Colorado (1996)
   Bickel, “The Counter-Majoritarian Difficulty” from The Least Dangerous Branch
   Rostow, “The Democratic Character of Judicial Review”

IV. Dilemmas

17. Democratic Reconciliation  (November 8 – Neil Roberts)
   Gooding-Williams, “Douglass’s Declarations of Independence and Practices of Politics”
   from In the Shadow of DuBois
   Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”
   Balfour, “Act and Fact”

18. Democratic Authority  (November 10 – Nicole Mellow)
   The Declaration of Independence
   1st-10th Amendments to The Constitution of the United States of America [from session 4]
   Weber, “Bureaucracy”
   Morone, “Introduction” from The Democratic Wish
   Barstow, “Tea Party Lights Fuse for Rebellion on Right”

19. Democratic Accountability  (November 15 – Darel Paul)
   Blinder, “Central Banking in a Democracy”
   Stiglitz, “Central Banking in a Democratic Society”
   Blinder, “The Fed’s Political Problem”
   Buiter, “Auditing the Central Bank”

→ Discussion Section III  (November 17) ←

20. Democratic Deficit  (November 19 – Cheryl Shanks)
   Moravcsik, “Is There a ‘Democratic Deficit’ in World Politics?”
   Glenn, “Global Governance and the Democratic Deficit”

21. Democratic Peace  (November 22 – Darel Paul)
   Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum, “Causes of Peace”
   Rosato, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory”

22. Democratic Illiberalism  (November 29 – Jim Mahon)
   Zakaria, excerpts from The Future of Freedom
23. Democratic Promotion  (December 1 – James McAllister)
   Bush, Speech at the National Endowment for Democracy
   Zakaria, “The Islamic Exception” from *The Future of Freedom*
   Zegart, “The Legend of a Democracy Promoter”
   Hirsh, “Bernard Lewis Revisited”
   Gause, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?”

→ Discussion Section IV  (December 3) ←

24. Democratic Discontents  (December 6 – Mark Reinhardt)
   Wolin, excerpts from *Democracy Incorporated*

Conclusion

25. Democratic Unknown  (December 8 – Justin Crowe)
   TBD (handouts)