

Problems and Progress in American Democracy
Political Science 309
Williams College

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T 9-11, F 2:30-3:30, and by appointment

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TF 1:10-2:25
Griffin 1

Description.

“I confess,” French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in the introduction to his *Democracy in America*, “that in America I saw more than America. I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its penchants, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to hope or fear from its progress.” What would Tocqueville see if he returned to America today, almost 200 years later? What types of institutions, dynamics, and processes animate American political life in the twenty-first century? With Tocqueville as a guide to thinking about political ethnography, this course investigates four central elements of political life—religion, education, difference, crime and punishment—that simultaneously pose problems for and represent (potential) sites of progress in American democracy. For each subject, we will ask several key questions. How has that particular aspect of political life changed in the recent past? How might it change in the near future? Does it conform to how American politics is designed to work? To how we want American politics to work? Approaching these questions from the joint perspectives of theory, practice, and (in your assignments) action, our focus, like Tocqueville before us, is on both teasing out the lived experience—the character and challenges—of American democracy and examining any disconnect between that experience and the ideals that undergird it.

Objectives.

Thinking Creatively. Democracy is frequently theorized, examined, and critiqued, but such exegesis usually occurs within a fairly narrow conception of not only what democracy is and how it works but also what makes it is worthy of attention and how exactly we should study it. Though these conventional frameworks are by no means “bad,” they may create boundaries around the subject of democracy and, thus, limit our ability to grasp it fully. Looking to avoid these pitfalls, we will not be afraid to step outside the traditional, eschewing what might normally be considered canonical in favor of (hopefully) imaginative inquiry and (potentially) innovative insight.

Thinking Experientially. Far from a mundane set of processes or procedures that have little to do with everyday existence, democracy is a way of life. Given that it occurs all around us, shaping how we think, how we feel, and what we do, the study of democracy can only be enriched with attention to the experience of it. Accordingly, we will seek to bring democracy into the classroom through not only intellectual tracts but also personal reflection, less posing one against the other than continually searching for synergy or dissonance between the two.

Format.

Class will combine elements of lecture, discussion, and various other forms of intellectual stimulation (including four workshop-style sessions to share and improve your projects). I prefer to accept volunteers, but, if necessary to facilitate broad participation, I will 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; indeed, the size, substance, and nature of the course positively *requires* you to do so.

Materials.

- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. Mansfield and Winthrop (2000) (Tocq)
- PSCI 309 course packet (in four volumes) (CP)[•]

Contributions.^{•••}

Democratic Observation (25%). An exploration of the depth of democratic action around you through visits to *six* distinct sites of democratic life, with each visit culminating in a reflection of approximately 3 pages.

Democratic Understanding (25%). An endeavor to capture and internalize the democratic experience of others through seeking out, listening to, and interpreting the views of a particular constituency, culminating in a report of 5-6 pages.

Democratic Expression (25%). An effort to make your voice heard in the democratic sphere through a campaign to persuade or educate fellow citizens about an issue of import, culminating in a report of 7-8 pages.

Class Participation (25%). A process of *active engagement* that entails more than simply showing up. In addition to your enthusiastic and incisive involvement in class discussions and constructive contributions to our workshops, you will, for one session, be responsible for selecting a newspaper or magazine article (or audio or video clip, if you prefer) relevant to that day's discussion and distributing it to your classmates—along with a paragraph describing its relevance—at least twenty-four hours prior to class. On occasion, I may also ask you to complete other brief assignments in order to enrich the day's discussion. Given these various elements, 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.

^{••} The first volume is available for pickup at the Class of '37 House (51 Park Street) from 9am to 3:30pm M-F; the subsequent volumes will be distributed in due course.

^{•••} I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—observation, understanding, expression, class participation—of the course.

^{••••} These are my general grading guidelines. For more specific guidelines relative to the assignments in this course, see the attached descriptions of your three projects.

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 (and any exercises) that occur in class will be 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 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 three projects—all of which require (in varying ways) substantial forethought, planning, and coordination with others not on academic calendars—it is absolutely imperative that you meet the proposal, submission, and revision deadlines as detailed for each assignment. In fact, you should consider all due dates *firm*: I will not grant extensions, nor will I accept late work. This policy is not meant to be punitive but, rather, to keep you on a workable timetable for completion of tasks that might otherwise be left to the last minute, when they will scarcely be able to be completed (let alone with the verve and gusto they deserve!).

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 American democracy.

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 democracy 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. *Defining American Democracy* (September 11)
no reading...yet

2. *Of Democracy and Ethnography, From Theory to Practice* (September 15)
 - Tocq: “Introduction” (pp. 3-15)
 - handouts: Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us”
 - Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”
 - Farrar, “Dinner with Democracy”
 - Glenn, “The Power of Everyday Life”
 - Schatz, “Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics”
 - Baiocchi and Connor, “The *Ethnos* in the *Polis*”

I. Religion

3. *What kind of religion—what kinds of conceptions and expressions of religiosity—has America’s democratic ethos wrought?* (September 18)
 - Tocq: “On the Point of Departure and Its Importance for the Future of the Anglo-Americans” (pp. 27-44)
 - “On the Principle Causes That Make Religion Powerful in America” (pp. 282-288)
 - CP: Morone, “A Nation with the Soul of a Church”
 - Heclo, “Is America a Christian Nation?”
 - Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”
 - Green, “American Religion: Complicated, Not Dead”
 - Lodge, “53% of Americans Convinced God Has a ‘Special Relationship’ With US”
 - MacDonald, “Who’s Filling America’s Church Pews”
 - O’Leary, “Building Congregations Around Art Galleries and Cafes as Spirituality Wanes”
 - Worthen, “Wanted: A Theology of Atheism”
 - Gray, “Alabama Town Gives Offenders a Choice”
 - Kazin, “I Love Christmas Kitsch, And I’m Not Afraid To Admit It”
4. *Are religious arguments a threat or support to democratic debate and discourse?* (September 22)
 - Tocq: “Indirect Influence That Religious Beliefs Exert on Political Society in the United States” (pp. 278-282)
 - “How, in the United States, Religion Knows How to Make Use of Democratic Instincts” (pp. 417-424)
 - “How the Americans Apply the Doctrine of Self-Interest Well Understood in the Matter of Religion” (pp. 504-506)
 - “Why Certain Americans Display Such an Exalted Spiritualism” (pp. 510-511)
 - “How Religious Beliefs At Times Turn the Souls of Americans Toward Immaterial Enjoyments” (pp. 517-521)
 - CP: Putnam and Campbell, from *American Grace*
 - McWilliams, “Religion, Morality, and Public Life”
 - Harris, from *The End of Faith*
 - Fradkin, “Does Democracy Need Religion?”
 - Carter, “Can Religion Tolerate Democracy? (And Vice Versa?)”
 - Shields, “Between Passion and Deliberation”
 - Eckholm, “Religious Protection Laws, Once Called Shields, Are Now Seen as Cudgels”
 - Wolterstorff, “An Engagement With Rorty”
 - Rorty, “Religion in the Public Square”

5. *Are there particular religious beliefs or practices that are incompatible with democratic values?* (September 25)
 CP: Blanshard, “The Catholic Church and Democracy”
 McWilliams, “Critical Rebound”
 Norris and Inglehart, “The True Clash of Civilizations”
 Feldman, from *After Jihad*
 Linker, “The Big Test”
 Bushman, “Have Faith”
 Krakauer, from *Under the Banner of Heaven*
 podcast: *This American Life*, “A Not-So-Simple Majority”
 CP: Worthen, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down?”
 Neuhaus, “Can Atheists Be Good Citizens?”

** 6. Workshop I ** (September 29)

7. *Does American religious pluralism do more to impede democratic cohesion or engender democratic tolerance?*
 (October 2 or 6)

- CP: Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”
 Wuthnow, from *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*
 Putnam and Campbell, from *American Grace*
 Rambachan, “The Future of Hinduism in America’s Changing Religious Landscape”
 Kaleem, “Buddhist ‘People of Color Sanghas’ Diversity Efforts Address Conflicts About Race Among Mediators”
 Kaleem, “Progressive Muslims Launch Gay-Friendly, Women-Led Mosques To Reform American Islam”
 Kaleem, “Southern Jewish Communities Recruit Newcomers, Offer Incentives As Populations Dwindle”

II. Education

8. *What—or how much—do Americans need to know in order to be democratic citizens?* (October 6 or 9)

- CP: Preston, “New Test Asks: What Does ‘American’ Mean?”
 Hayakawa, “English as Our Official Language”
 Bennett, “Education for Democracy”
 Muirhead, “Resuscitating Civic Education”
 Lane, “America 101”
 Liu, “How to Be American”
 Hanson, “The Civic Education America Needs”
 Damon, “Abandoning the American Tradition”
 Pew Research Center, “Teaching the Children”

9. *To what extent should public schools be inculcators of democratic ideals?* (October 9 or 16)

- Tocq: “Education of Girls in the United States” (pp. 563-565)
 CP: Ravitch, “Education and Democracy”
 Hochschild and Scovronick, “Democratic Education and the American Dream”

· The dates of the next three sessions will depend upon which Friday class is cancelled for Mountain Day. Whenever Mountain Day is announced, we will simply postpone consideration of the scheduled material until the next session, adjusting—but maintaining the order of—the subsequent classes accordingly.

Barber, “Education for Democracy”
 Gutmann, “The Purposes of Primary Education”
 Macedo, “Crafting Good Citizens”
 Finn Jr., “Faulty Engineering”
 Botstein, “Are We Still Making Citizens?”
 Murphy, “Against Civic Education in Schools”

10. *How could we structure the education system to better foster democratic consciousness? To better enable democratic leadership?* (October 20)

Foster Wallace, 2005 Kenyon College Commencement Address
 Crowe, “Learning to Live a Life of Learnable Moments”
 Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, and Goodlad, from *Education for Everyone*
 Comer, “Development, Learning, and Democracy”
 Friere, from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
 Levinson, from *No Citizen Left Behind*
 Youniss, “How to Enrich Civic Education and Sustain Democracy”
 Westheimer and Kahne, “Educating the ‘Good’ Citizen”
 Meiklejohn, “Teachers and Controversial Questions”
 Simon, “Classroom Deliberations”

** 11. Workshop II ** (October 23)

12. *How might changes in higher education shape the contours of America’s democratic future?* (October 27)

CP: Bloom, “The Student and the University”
 Kronman, from *Education’s End*
 Brooks, “The Organization Kid”
 Deresiewicz, “The Disadvantages of an Elite Education”
 Mettler, from *Degrees of Inequality*
 Washburn, “Paying More for Less”
 Carey, “One Vision of Tomorrow’s College”
 Kors and Silverglate, “The Water Buffalo Affair”
 Jarvie, “Trigger Happy”
 McDonough, “Trigger Warnings on Campus”
 Shulevitz, “In College and Hiding From Scary Ideas”
 Letters to the Editor on Campus “Safe Spaces”

Interlude: Civic Participation

13. *How can we reanimate civic participation as the lifeblood of democratic vibrancy?* (October 30)

Tocq: “On Political Association in the United States” (pp. 180-186)
 “On Public Spirit in the United States” (pp. 225-227)
 “On the Use That Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life” (pp. 489-492)
 “Relations Between Civil Associations and Political Associations” (pp. 496-500)

: Yes, *that* (or, more precisely, *this*) Crowe. In discussing it, we will pretend I am not the author so that you may savage or ignore it as you please. (For the record, this marks the first time I have ever assigned something of my own in class; I would rather not do so, but it is especially on point following Wallace.) I am, of course, more than happy to discuss it privately if anyone has interest.

- CP: Schudson, “How People Learn to Become Civic”
- Putnam, “Toward an Agenda for Social Capitalists”
- Dagger, “Stopping Sprawl for the Good of All”
- Putnam and Feldstein, from *Better Together*
- Noah, “We Need You”
- Liu, “What Scandinavia Can Teach U.S. Teens About Coming of Age”

III. Difference

14. *When is ideological pluralism desirable for, and when is it dangerous to, democratic flourishing?* (November 3)
 - Tocq: “On the Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects” (pp. 235-249)
 - CP: Publius, *The Federalist* 2 and 10
 - Brutus, *The Anti-Federalist* I
 - Klein, “The Single Most Important Fact About American Politics”
 - Kazin, “A Kind Word for Ted Cruz”
 - Mann, “Admit It, Political Scientists”
 - Abramowitz, “How Polarization Benefits Democracy”
 - Draper, “The League of Dangerous Mapmakers”
 - podcast: *This American Life*, “Red State Blue State”
 - CP: Muirhead, “Can Deliberative Democracy Be Partisan?”
 - Rosenblum, from *On the Side of the Angels*

15. *Where does multiculturalism reinforce—and where does it imperil—democratic egalitarianism?* (November 6)
 - Tocq: “How the Americans Understand the Equality of Man and Woman” (pp. 573-576)
 - CP: Putnam, “E Pluribus Unum”
 - Gutmann, “Integrating Identity in Democracy”
 - McWilliams, “Democratic Multiculturalism”
 - Walzer, from *On Toleration*
 - Allen, from *Talking to Strangers*
 - Goldberg, “What is a Woman?”
 - Burkett, “What Makes a Woman?”
 - Bouie, “Is Rachel Dolezal Black Just Because She Says She Is?”
 - Reed Jr., “From Jenner to Dolezal”
 - Sullivan, “The End of Gay Culture”
 - Halberstadt, “Out of the Woods”

- ** 16. Workshop III ** (November 10)

17. *Is socio-economic inequality inescapable in a democratic meritocracy?* (November 13)
 - Tocq: “On the Principal Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic in the United States” (pp. 264-274)
 - “How the Americans Combat Individualism By the Doctrine of Self-Interest Well Understood” (pp. 500-503)
 - “How Equality Naturally Divides the Americans into a Multitude of Particular Little Societies” (pp. 577-578)
 - CP: Benn-Michaels, “Against Diversity”
 - Lasch, “Opportunity in the Promised Land”

Reich, "Secession of the Successful"
 Hayes, from *Twilight of the Elites*
 Parenti, "Wealth and Want in the United States"
 APSA Task Force, "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality"
 Bartels, from *Unequal Democracy*
 Karl, "Economic Inequality and Democratic Instability"
 Continetti, "About Inequality"
 video: "Wealth Inequality in America"
 CP: Ariely, "Americans Want to Live in a Much More Equal Country (They Just Don't Realize It)"

18. *Do certain modes of living and kinds of social organization inspire greater democratic hopes? Or kill more democratic dreams?* (November 17)

Tocq: "Necessity of Studying What Takes Place in the Particular States Before Speaking on the Government of the Union" (pp. 56-66)

CP: Kemmis, "The Art of the Possible in the Home of Hope"

Young, "The Need for Regional Democracy"

Hanson, "Democracy without Farmers"

Duany and Plater-Zyberk, "The Second Coming of the American Small Town"

Oliver, from *Democracy in Suburbia*

Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, selections from *Place Matters*

Katz, Muro, and Bradley, "Miracle Mets"

Senior, "Alone Together"

IV. Crime and Punishment

19. *What is the proper role of law enforcement in a democratic society?* (November 20)

Tocq: "Reasons For Some Singularities That the Laws and Customs of the Anglo-Americans Present" (pp. 44-45)

"On the Idea of Rights in the United States" (pp. 227-229)

"On Respect for the Law in the United States" (pp. 229-231)

CP: Wilson and Kelling, "Broken Windows"

Skolnick, from *Justice Without Trial*

Jackall, *Street Stories*

Simon, from *Homicide*

Conlon, from *Blue Blood*

Goffman, from *On the Run*

Balko, "SWATed"

** 20. Workshop IV ** (November 24)

21. *Does the jury system encourage or preclude democratic justice?* (December 1)

Tocq: "On the Jury in the United States Considered as a Political Institution" (pp. 258-264)

CP: Publius, *The Federalist* 83

Gastil and Weiser, "Jury Service as an Invitation to Citizenship"

film: Rose, *Twelve Angry Men*

CP: Burnett, from *A Trial by Jury*

Rosen, "Democracy in Action"

Barkan, "Luck of the Draw"
Sleeper, "Daily Life and the Jury System"
Walzer, "Waiting to Serve"
Mills, "See You in Six Years"
Cavanaugh, "Run Away, Jury!"
Ferguson, "The Joy of Jury Duty"
Abramson, from *We, the Jury*
Butler, "Jurors Need to Know That They Can Say No"

22. *Should democratic punishment aim for vengeance, protection, or improvement?* (December 4)

CP: Ferguson, from *Inferno*

Beaumont and Tocqueville, from *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France*

Binelli, "Inside America's Toughest Federal Prison"

Benko, "The Radical Humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison"

Bazon, "The Shame of Solitary Confinement"

Moskos, "Bring Back the Lash"

Tullis, "Can Forgiveness Play a Role in Criminal Justice?"

Anderson, "Greg Ousley Is Sorry for Killing His Parents"

Wright and Gehring, "From Spheres of Civility to Critical Public Spheres"

Miller, "Democracy and Education Behind Bars"

Sarat, from *When the State Kills*

Berns, from *For Capital Punishment*

23. *How does the "carceral state" pose an existential threat to America's democratic survival?* (December 8)

CP: Liptak, "1 in 100 U.S. Adults Behind Bars, New Study Says"

Gopnik, "The Caging of America"

Schlosser, "The Prison-Industrial Complex"

Williams, "The Community's Story"

Clear, from *Imprisoning Communities*

Lerman and Weaver, from *Arresting Citizenship*

Gottschalk, from *Caught*

Conclusion

24. *Debating American Democracy* (December 11)

Tocq: "General View of the Subject" (pp. 673-676)

handouts: TBD