

POL228: DEMOCRACY AND ITS CRITICS
LEHMAN COLLEGE, Carmen Hall 342
Spring 2018, Thursday 2 - 4:40 pm



LEHMAN
COLLEGE

Instructor: Sally Sharif
Office: Carman Hall, 364
Office Hours: Office Hours: Thursday, 4:40 - 6 pm
E-Mail: sallysharif@law.cuny.edu

Course Description

This is an undergraduate level course in democratic theory, which will cover both classic and contemporary literature in political theory and political science. We will ask questions such as: What is democracy? What reasons are there, if any, to prefer democracy to other forms of government? Can democracy avoid the “tyranny of the majority”? Is democracy compatible with capitalism? Is the United States a democracy? Is democracy even possible? The purpose of this class is to examine the historical development of and contemporary debates about democracy and democratic theory. By the end of the course you should have a better understanding of the possibilities, and limitations of democracy and democratic theory, and be able to articulate and defend your own views on the topic based on our work in the course.

Course Objectives: This course has three main pedagogical objectives:

- 1) To become acquainted with the key concepts, problems, and debates in democratic theory.
- 2) To practice and improve the ability to think critically and rigorously, and express that thinking in oral and written form.
- 3) To practice and improve the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to concrete, real-world problems and issues, whether you will be doing so as a political science student or in any other capacity.

Grading: The following scheme, although subject to change under extraordinary circumstances, will be used for grading:

A: 100-96, A-: 95-91,
B+:90-86, B: 85-81, B-: 80-76,
C+:75-71, C: 70-66, C-: 65-61,
D+: 60-56, D: 55-51,
F: 50-0

Attendance: (6%) To attend the classes is the very initial step to learn and eventually get a good grade. Hence, I expect all students to attend every class. Students **MUST** attend at least 11 classes (out of 14) in order to pass. Failing to comply with this will result in a fail grade (F).

Participation: (24%) Mere existence in the classroom does not guarantee learning. Students need to listen to the lectures carefully and take advantage of the ample opportunities I will provide to discuss the course material. This will include listening to and understanding the lecture, providing insightful comments, and proving a mental existence in the classroom along with the physical existence. You will have to submit your reading reviews on the course weblog every week. This will also count as your class participation. I believe in continuous assessment: not participating in class discussions and not submitting reviews will be detrimental to your final grade.

Midterm and Final Exam: ($2 \times 20\% = 40\%$) For the midterm, I will prepare 6 questions. On Week 7 (15 March), I will randomly draw 3 questions that you will have to answer. The questions in the midterm are meant to test your knowledge of the material we will have read until this week. On week 14 (3 May) there will be another exam on the topics covered between weeks 8 and 14. Studying for these two tests and the feedback you receive from me will prepare you for the final paper.

Final Paper: (30%) Students have to write a 7-8 page (double-spaced) argumentative paper on a topic of their choice about the issues covered in class. Details will be discussed in class. Although the final paper counts as 30% of the grade, not submitting one would qualify you as a Fail.

You will need to provide an outline to me in class on Week 12 (26 April) and present your main findings and claims in front of the class on Week 15 (10 May). Failure to comply with each of these tasks will take your grade down one sign. The final paper is due on 17 May. Papers should be sent to me via email by midnight.

Plagiarism Policy: It is very simple. DO NOT try to take credit for the work of others. I can guarantee that consequences of plagiarism will be worse for you than being late for your paper or getting a very bad grade for your paper. Not only will you fail the class, but you will also face disciplinary charges, risking your education completely.

If you are having trouble with assignments, feel free to email me and come to my office to ask for help concerning the material. We have an online database that compares your work with not only all the papers in the pool, collected from all over the world with participating universities, but also compares with the work on the Internet. Moreover, I hold the discretion to question you on your work if I suspect it is not authentic.

Reading Material: All the reading material will be provided on Blackboard. Reading the material listed below is compulsory. Coming to class without having read the material would not only undermine your ability to learn, but it would also reduce your chances of participation in the class discussion, thus lowering your grade.

Week 1 Introduction

1 February

- Introduction. Review of the syllabus.

Week 2 Origins of Modern Democracy

8 February

- Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). [pages 13-36, 213-225]
- Robert N. Bellah, "A Hot Streak for Democracy," *The New York Times* (12 November 1989), <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/12/books/a-hot-streak-for-democracy.html?pagewanted=all>.

Week 3 Ideal Democracy and its Principles

15 February

- Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). (pages 35-73)
- Gerald F. Seib, "The Varied-and Global-Threats Confronting Democracy," *The Wall Street Journal* (21 November 2017), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-variedand-globalthreats-confronting-democracy-1511193763?mod=e2tw>.

Week 4 Democracy and Human Rights

22 February

- Beetham, David. "Human Rights and Democracy." In Axtmann, Roland. *Understanding Democratic Politics: An Introduction* (SAGE Publications, 2012).
- Blanton, Shannon Lindsey. "Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the Developing World: U.S. Rhetoric versus U.S. Arms Exports." *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 1 (2000): 123-31. doi:10.2307/2669298.

Week 5 Adversarial Critics

1 March

- Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) (pages 37-83)

Week 6 Economic Conditions of Democracy

8 March

- Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson (2006), *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press: New York. Chaps. 1-3.

Week 7 Midterm Exam

15 March

- Lecture on multivariate regressions: No readings required

Week 8 Killer Democracy

22 March

- Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) [pages 1-34, 55-111]

Week 9 Violent Democratization

29 March

- Paige, Jeffery (1998). *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge.

Week 10 No class Scheduled: Spring Break

5 April

Week 11 No class Scheduled: Professor Attending Conference

12 April

Week 12 Insurgent Paths to Democracy

19 April

- Wood, Elisabeth J. (2001), "An Insurgent Path to Democracy: Popular Mobilization, Economic Interests and Regime Transition in South Africa and El Salvador." *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(8), pp. 862-888.

Week 13 Breakdown of Democracy

26 April

- Cohen, Youssef (1987) "Democracy from Above: The Political Origins of Military Dictatorship in Brazil," *World Politics*, 40(1): 30-54.

Week 14 Final Exam

3 May

- Lecture on writing a review essay: No readings required

Week 15 Paper Presentations

10 May

Week 16 Final Papers Due Date

17 May