

**POSC 212 (HOW DEMOCRATIC IS THE UNITED STATES?)**

**Spring 2015**

**TTh, 9:30-10:45**

**SSPA 209**

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**Regular Office Hours (SSPA 251): W, 11:00-12:30; 2:15-3:45**  
**(book appointments here: [www.CSULBPOSCWHITEHEAD.clickbook.net](http://www.CSULBPOSCWHITEHEAD.clickbook.net))**

*Is it not the glory of the people of America, that, whilst they have paid a decent regard to the opinions of former times and other nations, they have not suffered a blind veneration for antiquity, for custom, or for names, to overrule the suggestions of their own good sense, the knowledge of their own situation, and the lessons of their own experience? . . . Happily for America, happily, we trust, for the whole human race, they . . . accomplished a revolution which has no parallel in the annals of human society. They reared the fabrics of governments which have no model on the face of the globe. They formed the design of a great Confederacy, which it is incumbent on their successors to improve and perpetuate.*

James Madison, Federalist #14

**Course Description & Goals.** This course explores one of the most discussed but least understood concepts related to American politics – “democracy.” We often take for granted that democracy is the best form of government, and that our system of government is or should be democratic. We even fight wars, in part, to establish or support democratic governments in other countries. But what does it mean to have a democratic form of government? However defined, is democracy the best form of government? Is the United States government supposed to be democratic? Does the practice of American government and politics live up to democratic ideals? In this course, we will explore these questions and many more.

In the first part of the course, we will examine the various definitions and critiques of democracy that have been advanced by various thinkers over the years, from classical antiquity down to the present. We will also explore whether or not the United States Constitution – the blueprint of the American governmental system – sets up a democratic form of government. In the second part of the course, we will study two major social issues that have created controversy over the democratic nature of our system, including the roles of religion and socio-economic inequality. Finally, in part three of the course, we will dig a little deeper into the actual practice of American democracy by exploring the institutional structure of voting and elections, the legislative process, presidential power, and judicial review.

By engaging these questions, which go to the heart of the American ideals of liberty, self-government, and the rule of law, I hope that you will become a more informed and sophisticated citizen and student of politics. Above all, this means understanding *both sides* of the issues. Toward this end, throughout the course, you will be exposed to various ideological positions,

such as liberalism, leftist and progressive thought, as well as neo-conservatism. This will challenge you to develop your own answers to the difficult questions asked in the course.

### **Course Texts:**

- Robert A. Dahl. *Democracy and its Critics*. Yale University Press. 1991.
- Robert A. Dahl. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Yale University Press. 2003.
- Other readings posted on BeachBoard.

### **Course Assignments:**

- **Democratic Foundations Paper (15%) – Due Online Mar. 8, 11:59 PM:** This is a 5-7 page paper focusing on whether the United States government was intended to be a democracy. See separate instructions posted on BeachBoard.
- **Mid-Term Exam (25%) – Mar. 26:** This is an in-class, closed-book, essay exam. I will post a study guide on BeachBoard before the exam, and we will spend the entire class period before the exam discussing it.
- **Democratic Reform Paper (25%) – Due Online May 3, 11:59 PM:** This paper analyzes whether one particular un-democratic aspect of American government should be reformed, abolished, or altered in some way. See separate instructions posted on BeachBoard.
- **Final Exam (25%) – Tuesday, May 12, 10:15 AM-12:15 PM.** This is an in-class, closed-book, essay exam. I will post a study guide on BeachBoard before the exam, and we will spend the entire class period before the exam discussing it.
- **Class Participation and Overall Improvement (10%):** I will grade you on your general engagement in the course, including your willingness to participate in class discussions and your willingness to ask and answer questions related to class material. I will also grade you on your overall effort in the course. Students who are on the borderline between one final grade and another will receive a “bump” to the higher grade if they are making every effort to succeed.

### **General Course Expectations:**

*Class Structure.* This is both a lecture and a discussion course. I will do my best to provide you with the proper context for understanding the readings and topics under discussion. However, the only way to really understand the issues is to talk through them together. Thus, much of our class time will be devoted to discussion. You will need to take good notes on the readings, as well as good notes on the lecture and class discussions. I will not take attendance. However, your attention to both the lecture and the discussions will naturally be reflected in your exam and participation grades.

*Readings.* This is a reading-intensive course. You need to keep up with the assigned readings in order to do well. Even if you do not understand them at first glance, you'll want to at least make an attempt at doing so before coming to class. Often-times, it will also be worth your while to look at the readings again after we discuss them in class. There is too much reading to wait until the last minute, so make sure to discipline yourself and keep up.

*Outside Research.* You must spend a significant amount of time outside class working on the papers. I will give you as much feedback as I can, if you come to see me during office hours. I will also give you detailed written instructions on how to write both papers. However, it is *your responsibility* to find appropriate scholarly sources in the library and on-line, digest the information contained in those sources, and put that information together in a persuasive, analytic way.

*Classroom Behavior.* You must be prompt, prepared, and respectful of your fellow students. Among other things, this means: being in your seat promptly when class starts and making the least amount of disruption if you happen to be late; putting phones on silent; and being attentive during class -- either taking notes, listening, or engaging in class discussion, and *not* texting, surfing the internet, sleeping, listening to music, or talking to other students. I reserve the right to remove inattentive or disruptive students from class for that particular class session.

*E-mail and Office Hours.* I will make every reasonable effort to help you understand the material better outside of class. The best way to reach me is almost always through e-mail (address noted at beginning of syllabus). I enjoy discussing these issues with you via e-mail, and I encourage you to take advantage of that opportunity. I will make every effort to reply to class-related e-mails within 24 hours, EXCEPT on weekends. Also, I generally have a huge number of e-mails to answer immediately before exam dates or paper deadlines. Thus, I cannot guarantee a timely reply within 48 hours of these events. So, it is in your interest to start studying and working on your papers early so that you can take maximum advantage of my advice and help. I am also available during scheduled office hours, or by appointment when necessary. I love when students come by and chat about course-related issues – it's one of the most significant things you can do to improve your college experience!

*Grade-Related Communication –24-hour Cooling-off Period.* I am always happy to review your exams and papers with you in order to help you improve for the future. However, if you are unhappy or dissatisfied with your grade, I require you to wait for at least 24 hours before e-mailing or talking to me in person. The reason for this delay is to allow you time to re-read the exam or paper, read and understand my comments, and otherwise consider your performance in a deliberate, thoughtful way. After 24 hours have gone by, if you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me. Always remember, this is not a game or a competition – it is a learning process. Grades are designed to help you learn the material. If your focus is only on getting a better grade, you are missing the point. I am committed to helping you grow and develop as thinkers and writers, but that will only happen if you approach class the same way.

*Problems.* Come and see me as soon as possible if you are having problems understanding, keeping up, or if there is any reason you cannot be effectively engaged in the course. I will not

provide any accommodations for these issues at the last minute, but if you talk to me in advance, we can almost always work something out.

*Specific course policies* regarding paper submission, exceptions, makeups, late assignments, cheating and plagiarism, students with disabilities and course withdrawal can be seen in the appendix at the end of this syllabus.

## Course Outline and Reading Schedule

**Jan. 20:** Introduction to the course

### I. Theoretical Foundations of American Democracy A. What is Democracy?

**Day of Jan. 22 &**

**Week of Jan. 27:** Dahl (*Democracy and its Critics*):  
Introduction;  
Ch. 1, especially 18-19  
Ch. 2  
Ch. 15  
Archon Fung, “Democratic Theory and Political Science,” pp. 448-50  
(*link on BeachBoard*)

### B. Is Democracy a Good Form of Government?

**Week of Feb. 3 &**

**Day of Feb. 10:** Plato, “The Allegory of the Cave” (*link on Beachboard*)  
Dahl (*Democracy...*):  
Ch. 4  
Ch. 5  
Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist #9” (*link on BeachBoard*)

### C. Is the United States a Democracy?

**Day of Feb. 12 &**

**Week of Feb. 17:** United States Constitution (*link on BeachBoard*)  
James Madison, “Federalist #10” (*link on BeachBoard*)  
James Madison, “Federalist #39” (*link on BeachBoard*)  
James Madison, “Federalist #51” (*link on BeachBoard*)  
Cass Sunstein, “The Enlarged Republic – Then and Now” (*link on BeachBoard*)  
Dahl (*How Democratic is the American Constitution*):  
Ch. 1  
Ch. 2

## II. The Social Practice of American Democracy

### A. Does the Decline in Civil Society Threaten Democracy?

- Feb. 24:** Peter Dobkin Hall, “DeTocqueville, Democracy, and the Crystallization of American Civil Society” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

### B. Does Inequality Threaten Democracy?

#### Day of Feb. 26 &

#### Week of Mar. 3:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Ch. 3 ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Moshe Halbertal, “The Ideal and the Real” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Dahl (*Democracy...*):

pp. 83-88

Ch. 9

U.S. Constitution, Amendments 13-21 ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Woodrow Wilson, “What is Progress?” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Progressive Party Platform of 1912 ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Students for a Democratic Society, “The Port Huron Statement” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Dahl (*How Democratic...*), Ch. 6

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**Mar. 8, 11:59 PM: Democratic Foundations Paper Due Online**

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### B. Does Religion Threaten Democracy?

#### Week of Mar. 10 &

#### Week of Mar. 17:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, Ch. 17 ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Thomas G. West, “The Great Separation” ([link on BeachBoard](#) – Read pages 91-97)

Dennis Prager, “The Case for Judeo-Christian Values” parts 1, 2 & 3 ([links on BeachBoard](#))

Barack Obama, Speech on Faith and Politics ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Nathaniel J. Klemp, “The Christian Right: Engaged Citizens or Theocratic Crusaders?” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

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**Mar. 24: Mid-Term Review Session**

**Mar. 26: Mid-Term Exam**

**Week of Mar. 31: No Class – Spring Break**

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**III. The Institutional Practice of American Democracy**  
**A. How Democratic Are American Elections?**

**Week of Apr. 7:** Dahl (*How Democratic...*):  
pp. 55-62  
Ch. 4  
Ch. 5  
Dahl (*Democracy...*): Ch. 10

**B. How Democratic is the American Legislature?**

**Week of Apr. 14:** James Madison, “Federalist #56” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
James Madison, “Federalist #63” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Dahl (*How Democratic...*), pp. 45-54  
Dahl (*Democracy...*):  
Ch. 11  
pp. 185-86

**C. How Democratic is the American Presidency?**

**Week of Apr. 21:** Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist #69” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Dahl (*How Democratic...*), pp. 62-72  
Gene Healy, “The Cult of the Presidency” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Ilya Somin, “Obama, Immigration and the Rule of Law” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Scott Gerber, “Why Obama Can’t Declare Himself King” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

**D. How Democratic are the American Courts?**

**Week of Apr. 28:** Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist #78” ([link on BeachBoard](#))  
Dahl (*Democracy...*), pp.187-91  
Dahl (*How Democratic...*), pp. 54-55  
Russell Hittinger, “The End of Democracy? A Crisis of Legitimacy” ([link on BeachBoard](#))

Adam Liptak, "Tea-ing Up the Constitution" (link on *BeachBoard*)  
Erwin Chemerinsky, "In Defense of Judicial Review: the Perils of Popular  
Constitutionalism" (link on *BeachBoard*)

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**May 3, 11:59 PM: Democratic Reform Paper Due Online**

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**IV. Conclusion: the Prospects and Perils of More Democracy**

**May 5:** Dahl (*Democracy...*), Ch. 23  
Dahl (How Democratic...), Chs. 7 & 8

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**May 7: Final Review Session**  
**Tuesday, May 12, 10:15 AM-12:15 PM: Final Exam**

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**Appendix: Miscellaneous Course Policies**

***Paper Submissions.*** You must upload your paper to the appropriate electronic "dropbox" on BeachBoard in one of the following formats: .doc, .docx, .txt, or .pdf. *I will not accept papers submitted in any other way.* You must save a copy of the electronic notification you receive when you successfully upload your paper to BeachBoard. In the event of a discrepancy as to whether or when you submitted your paper, this electronic notification is the only proof I will accept. You must also keep an electronic or paper copy of your paper.

***Exceptions, Make-ups, and Late Assignments.*** Exam Dates and Paper Deadlines are firm! It is your responsibility to arrange your schedule around your academic responsibilities. In general, **exceptions will only be made for the following reasons, for which satisfactory documentation must be provided:** (1) Illness or injury to the student; (2) Death, injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member or the like; (3) Religious reasons (listed in California Education Code section 89320); (4) Jury duty or government obligation; or (5) University sanctioned or approved activities, such as artistic performances, forensics competitions, participation in research conferences, intercollegiate athletic activities, student government, required class field trips, etc.. **To be excused under #1 or 2, you must provide BOTH satisfactory documentation as soon as possible AND evidence of work completed on the assignment at the time of sickness or illness. To be excused under #s 3-5, however, you must provide me with satisfactory documentation at least 1 week prior to the exam or deadline.** If you have a legitimate excuse for missing an exam, I will arrange for an appropriate make-up exam. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing a paper deadline, we will work out an appropriate alternative deadline AS LONG AS you can demonstrate that you have already completed an appropriate amount of work on the assignment.

***Grade Reduction for Late Papers.*** Written assignments are due at the *beginning* of the class period on which the deadline falls. **In the event of an unexcused late paper, I will**

**immediately mark it down by a third of a grade for being late on the day it is due. I will then mark it down another third of a grade for every 24-hour period in which it is late.** For example, a paper due on Tuesday but not turned in until Thursday will be reduced by two-thirds of a grade -- a "B" paper would receive a "C+." Note, however, that this does not apply to the required case briefs, which will only receive credit if they are turned in by the deadline. *You will not receive any credit for late briefs.* Make the most of the time you have to complete written assignments; no allowances will be made for last-minute problems with computers, networks, etc..

***Cheating and Plagiarism.*** It is my policy to deal with any form of cheating and/or plagiarism by immediately giving a failing grade on the assignment and reporting you to the department and other administrative authorities for other possible sanctions. If you are having problems with the course material, please come and see me before doing something that could put your academic career in jeopardy.

Please note that "plagiarism" includes *any use* of the ideas or work of others as if they were one's own, without giving appropriate credit. That means that *failing to cite your sources* is more than just a technical glitch -- it is plagiarism and will be handled as such. See separate paper instructions for citation guidelines and please see me if you are having difficulty understanding what is required in this area.

***Students with Disabilities.*** I am completely committed to providing reasonable accommodations for any student with a verifiable physical or other disability. This may include alternative testing or note-taking arranged through Disabled Student Services. However, it is your responsibility to notify me in advance of the need for such an accommodation.

***University Withdrawal Policy.*** It is your responsibility to withdraw from class if you wish to do so. I have no obligation to withdraw registered students who stop attending or completing assignments. **The deadline to withdraw from a class without a "W" for this semester is Feb. 2, 2015.**

Withdrawal from a course after that date requires the signature of the instructor and the department chair, and is permissible only for serious and compelling reasons. For example, severe or extensive medical problems would be serious and compelling, but fear of receiving a final grade lower than desired, or a change in one's work schedule would not be considered serious and compelling. If withdrawal is allowed, a "W" will appear on your transcript.

**DURING THE FINAL THREE WEEKS OF INSTRUCTION (AFTER April 17, 2015) WITHDRAWALS ARE NOT PERMITTED EXCEPT IN CASES SUCH AS ACCIDENT OR SERIOUS ILLNESS WHERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSING THE WITHDRAWAL ARE CLEARLY BEYOND THE STUDENT'S CONTROL. THE CAUSE MUST BE DOCUMENTED. ORDINARILY, WITHDRAWALS IN THIS CATEGORY INVOLVE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY. YOU WILL NEED THE APPROVAL OF THE COLLEGE DEAN AS WELL AS THAT OF THE CLASS INSTRUCTOR AND THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON FOR EACH CLASS YOU DROP.**