



Democracy Past and Present

University of Rochester

Fall 2020, TR 9-40-10:55

LeChase 148

Course Description

This course is meant to expose students, in the intimate environment of the seminar (characterized by a close-knit group of people who meet to discuss a particular topic in-depth), to the concept of democracy, with careful consideration of the concept and ideals of democracy. Democracy is one of those terms that is easy to define but hard to say what that would look like in the real world. We will simultaneously compare ancient democratic institutions (particularly as epitomized in 4th century Athens) with modern democratic institutions and discuss the principals necessary for a democratic society to thrive. Towards the end of the semester, we will examine various problems with democracy, both in the ancient world and in the modern world.

The general format of the course will consist of short lectures, readings from both ancient and modern writers, discussions of the readings and democracy, short writing assignments, and a final project in which you will draw up your own constitution, with careful focus on what principals you find most necessary for a democratic society to hold.

Learning Outcomes

The course learning objectives are:

- describe the various parts of a democracy (both ancient and modern) and how they interact and function together.
- be able to critically read ancient and modern sources.
- be able to discuss the principals that underpin democratic societies
- improve academic writing

Instructor

Nicholas Gresens
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Office Hours

via Zoom by appt.

Required Texts

Aristotle and Xenophon on Democracy and Oligarchy

A Different Democracy

Democracy in Classical Athens, by Christopher Carey



Course Instruction

As a hybrid class, students are expected to do partake of activities both online and in person (or via zoom). Students should budget a minimum of 8 to 12 hours per week to spend on this course between reading, writing, and class participation. The usual formula is something around one hour of class time and two hours out of class for each credit hour.

All students are expected to do well in the course and I will strive to help them achieve.

Students should also strive to help each other as best they can. The instructor expects everyone to be kind and courteous to each other and to ask questions, not only to the instructor, but

also to fellow classmates. This class will really lend itself to student collaboration and "co-construction" of knowledge. The instructor expects that students will take advantage of that. In addition, the instructor expects the work students submit in this course to be their own. This is consistent with the University of Rochester policy on Academic Honesty.

Find a place you can read, think, and write that you can call your own.

Course Requirements

Grading Policy

Your grade will be determined by the completion of three primary activities:

- 1) satisfactory preparation and participation in discussion (20% of your grade);
- 2) 4 short reflection papers (2-3 pages) based on readings and meant to prime you for discussion (as well as focus on different aspects of academic writing) (30%);

- 3) a critique of one of the presidential (or vice-presidential) debates, specifically as it pertains to issues of democracy (20%);
- 4) your final paper (30%). This final paper will also include various editing assignments.

By satisfactory preparation and participation, this means having looked at the text prior to class, thought seriously about it, and noted what your understanding of the text is. This does not have to be written down (although written notes are useful), nor do your readings have to be "right", but you do want to be able to support your readings from evidence in the text. Do your best, work hard, reach your full potential as a human.

The papers will be graded on an A-E scale, but if you receive a grade you don't like, you can work with me to improve it. I want all your papers to be A papers. The goal is to learn about democracy and become a better writer, after all.

How the Grades are calculated

Generally, we will discuss the criteria that will be used to evaluate each of the different assignments. With that said, there are a few things I do generally look for:

- Editing, proof-reading, and general professionalism
- Organization of your idea (and make sure you have a clearly articulated argument)
- Quality of your argument—if you make a statement, support it either with outside support (quality sources are better than questionable ones) or fully explain your logic (proper citation is expected)
- Depth of discussion: complex, original, and interesting ideas that integrate material from this course or others that you have taken are better than simple regurgitation.
- Note that I do not take into major consideration your “style.”
- An A Paper is clearly and concisely written, with original thought, fully supported with both outside sources and reasoned argument
- A B Paper is clearly written with original thought, most ideas are supported with outside sources or reasoned argument
- A C Paper contains some original thought, but mostly reiterates what someone else has said, and fails to support many of the ideas presented.

Course Schedule

This is a sketch outline of the semester, including topics and activities. Specific readings will be found on Blackboard. It is possible, particularly at the end of the semester, that topics will change, depending on your interests and the direction the course takes.

Wk 1—Important Terms; Ancient vs. Modern Democracy
Wk 2—Political Engineering and the US Constitution; Freedom
Wk 3—Constitutions; Justice
Wk 4—Federalism and Division of Power; Reverence
Wk 5—Elections and the Electoral Systems; Courage
Wk 6—Political parties, Election Campaigns, and Interest Groups; Equality
Wk 7—Legislative Power; Rule of Law
Wk 8—Executive Power; Education
Wk 9—Judicial Power; Individual and Collective Rights
Wk 10—Election Discussion; Harmony
Wk 11—Problems with Democracy: Cancel Culture; Tyranny
Wk 12—Problems with Democracy: Separation of Church and State; Living in a Pluralistic Society
Wk 13—Representative vs Radical Democracy **Thanksgiving—last on campus session**
Wk 14 and 15—Final Paper discussions, editing sessions, both group and individual.

Attendance/Late Work Policy

Attendance is required, whether you are in person (either A group or B group) or via Zoom. As a seminar, your input is necessary, and although I do plot out where I think the discussion will go, few class sessions ever goes as planned. For this reason, if you do have to miss class, you are responsible for finding out what was discussed and covered. All sessions will be posted to Blackboard. Additionally, if you are not feeling well enough to attend in person, but can Zoom in, you are expected to.

You are also expected to submit homework on time for full credit. Excessive absence (more than three missed classes) will result in a reduction of your final grade. If you have an extenuating circumstance, please talk to me. I know that you are taking other classes and have lives outside of

this course, but I also know that developing good study habits/time-management skills is part of what you are learning here, so I am doing my best to encourage that, too.

If you must miss a class due to a school sanctioned activity, such as religious observance, academic conference, or sporting event, you must make arrangements for this before the class.

Academic Honesty Policy

You will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity in this course. The university cannot function fully without maintaining this standard. I assume that all work submitted for this class will be your own, honestly completed, and that you will not do anything to prevent your classmates from doing their best work. Anything less, including, but not limited to, plagiarism and fabrication of information, copying someone else's work, or learning what is on an exam prior to the exam period (except what I provide) will be considered a violation of the University Academic Honesty Policy and will be dealt with quickly and appropriately. If you are unfamiliar with the policy, which has recently been updated, you can read it here:

<http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>

A word on collaboration: In the words of the Board on Academic Honesty Website, "You are encouraged to discuss course readings and assignments with your fellow students. However, all written work must be done independently and not in collaboration with another. In order to make appropriate help available for your essays, I encourage you to consult with me and with the College Writing, Speaking and Argument Program. The term research paper will require citations and 'Works Cited.'" The exact format of these citations and works cited page is up to you. It must, however, be consistent throughout. If you have questions, please consult with me.

Statement of Inclusivity

The University of Rochester, this course, and I are committed to inclusion and welcome students of all backgrounds and abilities. Services and reasonable accommodations are available to students with temporary and permanent disabilities, to students with DACA or undocumented status, to students facing mental health issues, other personal situations, and to students with other kinds of learning needs. Please feel free to let me know if there are circumstances affecting your ability to participate in class or your full participation in this course. Some resources that might be of use include:

- Office of Disability Resources at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.
- Undocumented/DACA Student Support Contacts
<https://www.rochester.edu/college/ccas/undergraduate/daca/index.html>
- University of Rochester CARE Network <https://www.rochester.edu/CARE/index.html>

Course Credit Policy

This course follows the College credit our policy for four-credit courses. This course meets twice weekly for 3 hours per week. The time you spend researching, writing and editing your final paper makes up the fourth hour. Note that this does not include time needed to complete other regular course assignments or studying. Most courses assume about 2 hours per credit hour per week of supplementary work.

It has always been my belief that learning takes place on one's own, in the quiet of their mind. While instruction and reinforcement may take place in the classroom, thinking and learning takes place while studying.