

Instructor

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Office Hours

Thursdays: 3-4PM

One Bow Street

Room 234

Expos 20: Democracy in Action

Fall 2019

CGIS Knafel K107

Tuesdays & Thursdays

12:00 PM -1:15 PM,

1:30 PM – 2:45 PM

“We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken’d, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted.”

- Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (1870)

Winston Churchill famously quipped that democracy is the worst system of government except for all of the others that have been tried. These days, it sometimes seems like democracy is just the worst. This year, Pew reported that 58% of Americans are dissatisfied with the way their democracy is working, and that around the world more citizens are dissatisfied with their democracies than are satisfied. The complaints tend to be the same: politicians are corrupt and out of touch, government is unresponsive, and elections fail to offer meaningful choices. Amidst a climate of cynicism and disillusionment, this course invites you to consider the proposal that the cure for what ails democracy is more democracy: a stronger, deeper form of democracy that gives the word’s original meaning – rule by the people – a new lease on life.

Throughout the semester, we will explore the theory and practice of “**participatory democracy**,” a vision of political life that emphasizes active citizenship, public deliberation, and direct self-government. Advocates of participatory democracy insist that we can save our democracies, but that in order to do so, we’ll have to reinvent them by finding new ways to engage and empower citizens. Though we will first encounter this vision of democracy on the page, we’ll spend much of our time together pursuing its potential in the real world by meeting with proponents and practitioners in the classroom, observing and assisting with Cambridge’s innovative Participatory Budgeting process, and eventually hosting our own Democracy Forum for the Cambridge and Harvard communities.

Course Format and Assignments

Democracy in Action is an Engaged Scholarship Expos course. That means that it was designed in collaboration with the Mindich Program from Engaged Scholarship (MPES) with the intention to “challenge students and faculty to integrate scholarship with community perspectives, knowledge, and expertise to have impact within and beyond the academy.” As such, it entails unique opportunities, among them the chance to pursue writing projects with real-world stakes; to learn through observation, experience, and service; and to communicate your findings with a tangible audience. However, the course will also require that you take on some unique responsibilities. The Engaged Scholarship components of the course include two in-class sessions (September 17th, October 3rd) as well as the following **mandatory** out-of-class components:

- In October, you will coordinate with classmates to observe aspects of the PB Process in pairs or small groups. Options for observation will be provided at the beginning of Unit 2.
- In late November or early December, you will be required to volunteer one time to assist Cambridge PB with Get out the Vote (GOTV).
- You will be expected to contribute to planning, publicizing, and of course, presenting at our capstone event (date and time to be decided democratically).

For more information about our community partner, Cambridge PB, visit:

<https://pb.cambridgema.gov/>

Unit 1: The Promise of Participatory Democracy

For our first unit, we will examine participatory democracy as an ideal. Our sources will include *The Public and its Problems*, a masterwork of political philosophy by John Dewey, arguably the greatest American philosopher of any generation. Dewey wrote against a turbulent political backdrop not too different from our own, one where economic depression and rising authoritarianism pressed on democracy from without while technological distractions, a sensationalistic media, and oligarchic special interests hollowed it out from within. And yet he remained committed to an ideal of democracy that was cooperative, inclusive, and intelligent. We will evaluate his proposal for a democratic “way of life” with reference to contemporary works on participatory democracy by Benjamin Barber and Peter Levine – and Professor Levine will even join us for a special discussion of his work.

For your first assignment, you will write a **4-6 page** essay in which you use Dewey’s concept of democracy as a lens for examining Barber’s notion of “strong democracy” or Levine’s notion of “civic engagement.” This essay will count for **20%** of your final grade.

Unit 2: Empowering Participation: PB in Cambridge and Beyond

For the second unit, we will consider how the participatory ideal can be brought to life through innovative forms of governance that delegate real decision-making power to the people. The City of Cambridge’s sixth annual Participatory Budgeting (PB) process will provide you with an opportunity to observe and, yes, participate in a real-world case study. As our course reaches its conclusion, citizens of Cambridge aged 12 and older will get to vote on how to spend \$1,000,000 of the city’s budget, selecting from a menu of proposals submitted by citizens and crafted by volunteer delegates. We’ll complement our examination of the PB process with readings on PB initiatives around the world, and when it’s all over, you’ll even have the opportunity to provide feedback on the process to the city.

For your second assignment, you will write a **6-8 page** essay in which you compare the course readings on PB with your own observations on the Cambridge PB process. This essay will count for **30%** of your final grade.

Unit 3: Frontiers of Participatory Democracy

For the third and final unit, we'll look to the future of participatory democracy by conducting independent research into challenges, best practices, and further innovations. Together, we'll plan, publicize, and host a culminating Democracy Forum, where you'll take on the role of educator as you present your findings to the public. Dewey's vision of democracy was one in which citizens learned from their experiences and from each other, where they sought always to communicate, educate, and cooperate in solving society's greatest challenges – and in that sense, our capstone event will provide one final opportunity to bring his vision to life.

Your **6-8 page** research essay, which you will write independently, will count for **30% of your final grade**. Your contribution to the Democracy Forum, which will can be an individual *or* group presentation, will count for an additional **10%** of your final grade. (The remaining 10% of your grade will be determined by your participation throughout the semester).

Course Policies

The following portions of the syllabus describe the course policies on matters related to **attendance, completion and submission of work**, as well as **collaboration and academic honesty**. Please familiarize yourself with the course policies and let me know as soon as possible if any of these policies need to be clarified.

Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. **If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.** On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. **Absences because of extra-curricular events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.** If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, in which case you should notify me in advance. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Participation

Because the goal of Expos is to help students improve as individual writers through conversation with both their instructors and their peers, it will only yield its greatest rewards for students who participate actively in all exercises, discussions, and workshops. Though the vast majority of your grade in the class will be determined by the quality of your final papers, participation is a graded component of this course. Only students who contribute actively to class discussions and workshops, and who complete all response papers, class exercises, and revisions thoughtfully and thoroughly will receive full credit for participation. **Your participation in class discussions and workshops will determine 10% of your final grade.**

Note that you will have opportunities to write and revise during class, and you may want to bring your computer/device for this purpose. **However, laptops, tablets, phones, and other electronic devices should remain unseen and unheard, except when being used for a class activity (you will know when this is happening).** This is for your own good 😊¹

Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course. **Late essays**

¹ See Mueller, Pam A. and Daniel M. Oppenheimer (2014), "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*. 25 (6): 1159-1168.

will be penalized by one third of a letter grade for each day past the initial deadline (so a paper that would have earned an A would get an A- if it is one day late, a paper that would have earned an A- would get a B if it is two days late, a paper that would have earned would get a C if it is three days late, etc.). Extensions may be granted with my approval, however, in the absence of an emergency, extensions must be requested no less than 24 hours before the deadline, no extension of more than 48 hours will be granted, and no student will receive more than one extension during the semester. In the event that you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by its posted due date, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and establishing a final deadline. The letter will be copied to your Resident Dean. **If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by the final deadline, and you have not documented a medical problem or other serious emergency, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.**

Electronic Submission of Work

You will submit at least some of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

Collaboration

This course will provide opportunities for you to improve your work through collaboration with your peers. At the same time, you are responsible for completing your own writing and revision exercises on your own. **All written work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.**

On the other hand, the following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.”

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. **All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment and are acknowledged appropriately.** Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action. You will be required to affirm that your work meets the standards of the Honor Code when you submit each of your drafts and graded essays.

Final Grade

As has been noted in the individual sections of the syllabus, your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Unit 1 Essay (Final draft):	20%
Unit 2 Essay (Final draft):	30%
Unit 3 Essay (Final draft):	30%
Unit 3 Project:	10%
Participation:	10%