UHON 351
DEMOCRACY and the 2020 ELECTION

Fall 2020 – *Sample Syllabus*

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Course Description

The 2020 election season will be a momentous time for American democracy. The election will play out in the wake of a likely presidential impeachment and with the understanding that the past election was at least tainted by foreign influence. The choices – both in policy and in character – likely will be stark. In this course, we will examine the 2020 election as a current political and social event. We will also examine the 2020 election in the larger context of democratic theory and comparative democratic practices. As such, we will focus on the process of the 2020 election season and the substance of the main policy issues to be decided.

Democracy – or rule by the people – is generally seen as a normatively good outcome for society, and elections are perhaps the key part of democracy. At the same time, the path of China, Singapore and other countries also make us consider: is democracy always a normative good for society? And, given the rise of populist and illiberal democratic movements within Western democracies, we must also consider during this election season: does liberal democracy always provide the best outcomes for society? Is liberal democracy always what 'the people' want?

It is my intention to make each of the sessions as engaging as possible for as many as possible. To accomplish the study of this topic, I will employ a mix of lectures, discussions and group simulations. We will also practice clear written communication, which is an essential skill in evaluation and explanation of political phenomena

Student Learning Objectives

1. Better understand the American political process
2. Better understand the Presidential election process
3. Develop understanding of the nature of democracy broadly
4. Develop writing skills through short- and long-form writing
5. Develop appreciation of different points of view

Required Texts

This course will be readings based, both from the textbook and supplementary materials, which will posted on the course's Desire2Learn page.

Larry Sabato and Kyle Kondik. 2019. *The Blue Wave*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Michael Nelson. 2019. *Trump's First Year*. Univ. of Virginia Press.

Caitriona Perry. 2018. *In America: Tales from Trump Country*. Gill & Macmillan.

Learning Experiences, Projects, Assignments.
1. You must complete the readings in a timely fashion and participate actively in class discussions. Please note that, although the readings are often not very long, they often require careful attention. **Class participation counts for 20 percent of your grade.**

2. Over the course of the semester, you will write at least **six (6) weekly response papers**, which should be clear, concise, and thoughtful. The paper should be one single-spaced page (normal font, normal margins), and it must be turned in to me at the end of class.

Your paper should accomplish three things. First, you should summarize one of the most important claims advanced by the author or authors whose work we are reading. You should paraphrase this claim, and also explain how the author advanced and supported it, and why you think it is important. Second, you should respond to this claim, for example by endorsing or critiquing it, comparing it to claims advanced by another scholar whose work we have read, or applying it to some political issue that interests you. Third, and perhaps most important for class discussion, you should write several questions that you have about the reading. These can be critiques of issues raised in our readings, issues you do not understand, issues you would like to be discussed further, etc.

You will have the opportunity to write a response paper each week. **Your top six count for 30 percent of your grade**.

3. We will have a *short* midterm exam and final exam. **The midterm and final will account for 20 percent of your grade (10 percent each)**.

4. You will write **either** a **policy paper** (10 pages, double-spaced) describing in depth one of the important policy areas in the 2020 election **or** a substantive **experiential project** involving the 2020 election. This second option would be more "hands-on" approach to democratic participation, and would involve working to advance democratic ideas and principles in the 2020 election season. Further details will be provided during the second week of class. **The paper/ project will account for 30 percent of your grade**.

For the policy paper, please choose one of the following policies: abortion, campaign finance, health care, the environment, gun rights/control, income inequality, or another topic with my permission.

Late policy: Barring an extraordinary excuse, all late assignments will be marked down a third of a grade (i.e., from A to A-) for each day following the due date.

<u>Schedule and Outline of Topics</u>

PART I: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Week 1: What is Democracy? Are elections necessary for all societies?
    Readings:
    Robert Dahl. *On Democracy*. pp. 35-43.
    Phillippe Schmitter & Terry Karl. 1991. "What Democracy is … And is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2(3): 75-88.
    Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*. Excerpts.

Week 2: The origins of democracy in the United States. Why did democracy start in the United States and other areas? Why did democracy not spread throughout the world in the 18th century? Was America a true democracy in the 18th and 19th centuries?

    Readings:
    Jack Rakove, *Original Meanings*, excerpts.
    Others.

PART II: THE 2020 ELECTION.

Week 3: The 2020 Election in Context
    Discussion: The context of the 2020 election. America Today.
    Readings:
    Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America – "the Election of the President" and "Re-Election of the President."
    Michael Nelson. Trump's First Year.
    Perry. In America.
    Blue Wave, ch. 2. The Trump Effect.

Week 4: The Primary Season

    Readings: Topical readings based on the 2020 primary season.

Week 5: Congressional Elections and the Presidential Election

    Readings: *The Blue Wave* excerpts.

Weeks 6 and 7: The Stakes: Discussions of the major issues in the 2020 election.

    Readings: Topical readings, including The Blue Wave, chs. 8 and 9.

Week 8: The Role of the Supreme Court in Elections, and how the Supreme Court factors in to the 2020 election.

Reading:
Robert Dahl. 1957. The Supreme Court as a National Policy Maker.
James Gibson and Greg Caldeira. 2009. *Citizens, Courts, and Confirmations*. Excerpts.

PART III. HOW ELECTIONS WORK.
The main topics will be: Electoral Systems and Populism

Week 9: How the U.S. electoral system works, and how other models of electoral systems operate.

Reading:
Cusack, Iverson, and Soskice. 2007. "Economic Interests and the Origins of Electoral Systems." *American Political Science Review*.
Others.

Week 10. Populism.

Possible readings:
Bakker, Roodijun, and Schumaker. 2015. "The psychological roots of populist voting: Evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. *European Journal of Political Research*.
Perry. In America. Excerpts.

Week 11: Election Week!

PART IV. How Does Democracy Rise and Fall, and the Future of Democracy.

Readings:
Fareed Zakaria. 1997. The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*.
Levistky and Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Excerpts.
Ozan Varol. 2018. *The Democratic Coup d'Etat*. Excerpts.
Others.