

# Department of Political Science

## The University of Oklahoma

### Norman Campus

**Course Title: Civic Engagement in America**

**Course Number: PSC 3970 (Honors Seminar)**

**Professor Ron Peters**

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Office Hours: T,R 1:00-3:00 by appointment

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Office Hours: M, 11:30-12:30 T, 1:00-3:00 W, 10:30-11:30 And by Appt.

**Day and Time:** T,R 10:30-11:45

**Classroom:** Monnet Hall, Rm. 101

**Course Description:** Over the past decade there has arisen increasing concern among public leaders, scholars, and commentators about the level of citizen activism and involvement in America. This course will examine the problem of civic engagement in the United States. By “civic engagement” we mean the propensity of Americans to become involved in the community of which they are a part. This can take the form of political participation, community activism, involvement in groups and associations, volunteerism, and other such activities. The course will explore several aspects of civic engagement. These include the historical and constitutional roots of civic activity in America, the various forms that civic engagement has taken in the American experience, the factors that effect levels of civic engagement, and the effects of civic engagement on community life and the lives of individual citizens.

The course will primarily involve reading and discussion of important theoretical and empirical work. The theoretical groundwork will be established, first, by a consideration of passages from Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville is generally regarded as the leading theoretician of American democracy and he gave particular emphasis to the role of civic involvement in America. Building on our consideration of Tocqueville, we will consider the interesting argument of Lawrence Goodwyn in his book *The Populist Moment*. Goodwyn develops a historical thesis about the role of populism in shaping American democracy, from which he draws lessons about the nature and role of civic mass movements. A major focus of the course will address a recent book edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. This collection of essays offers important evidence and interpretation about its topic and will enable the class to consider the problem of civic engagement from alternative theoretical and substantive perspectives. Finally, we will read and discuss *Habits of the Heart*. *Habits* is a study of American political culture. It draws on extensive participant observation and interviews over an extended period in the early 1980s. Written explicitly in the tradition of Tocqueville, the book offers unique insights into the character of the American people and their attitudes toward each other and toward the communities in which they live.

In addition to the focus on these readings, the course will involve one other component. During the week of October 25, Professor Theda Skocpol, one of the editors of *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, will be on campus to deliver the 1999 Rothbaum Lectures. Students are asked to attend her lectures (there are three) and Professor Skocpol will attend our class on Thursday, October 28 to answer questions and engage in a general dialogue. She is a preeminent scholar and is jointly appointed in the departments of political science and sociology at Harvard University.

**Requirements:** The course grade will be based on five components. Students are asked to write three, 4-6 page papers. Tentative due dates are listed in the course outline below. The topics will be given to you at least one week before the papers are due. These papers will focus upon the assigned readings and will require no further research. A final examination will be given during the regularly scheduled final examination period for this class. It will be a comprehensive final and will call upon students to integrate what they have learned in the course. Attendance and participation will be factored into the grade as well. This will include regular class sessions, the Rothbaum lectures, and the field experience. Students who have unavoidable scheduling conflicts or who have other valid reasons for non-attendance should consult with the instructors. Each of these five components (the three papers, the final, and attendance/participation) will count for 20% of the course grade.

**Policy on Withdrawals and Incompletes:** You will only be allowed to withdraw from this course with a passing grade if you are in fact passing. You are passing if your grade average on completed work is at or above a "D" on the date of proposed withdrawal. If you are ill or have some personal situation that prevents you from attending class, your obligation is to contact us as soon as you start missing class in order to discuss your situation. Exceptions to this policy will be made only in cases of complete withdrawal from the University approved by Student Affairs and the Dean's office.

Incompletes will be given only upon request and for good cause. Incompletes will not be given if a student has missed so much of the course that it is in a practical sense impossible to make up the work. If an incomplete is given, the student will be asked to sign an agreement specifying the work to be completed and the date the work will be due. The student will participate in the determination of the deadline. Extensions will be given only under exceptional circumstances.

**Policy for Physically Challenged Persons:** If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities you should contact me personally as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunity.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's work as if it were your own. It can take many forms. The most obvious form is to turn in a paper that someone else wrote over your signature. Or, you might copy material from a book or an article and present it as your own work. When you use words that are directly copied from a source, you *must* place them in quotation marks and cite the source. A person might make a few changes in the text, and then think that it is permissible to present the material without using quotation marks or without citing the source. This is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is still plagiarism, unless you explicitly say that you are paraphrasing and cite the source from which the original material comes. Plagiarism is academic misconduct and is severely penalized. Do not plagiarize. If you do, expect that if you are caught you will face disciplinary procedures that can include expulsion from the University and will almost certainly result in your receiving an F in this class.

**Required Texts:** The following books have been ordered at the OU Book Store.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Harper and Row.

Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in America*. Brookings.

Robert Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Heart*. California.

## Outline and Readings Assignments:

The following outline is tentative and may (and probably will) be changed along the way. We do not list specific reading assignments for each class session, but we intend to announce each class the readings for the next class.

August 24- September 2: Introduction to the problem of civic engagement.

Readings - Packet available at King's Copy

1. League of Woman Voters. *Making Democracy Work*
2. League of Woman Voters. *Working Together: Community Involvement in America*
3. National Commission on Civic Renewal. *A Nation of Spectators*
4. La Jolla Institute. *Civic Participation, Social Capital, and Leadership*
5. Robert Putnam, *Tuning in, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America*
6. Newspaper articles

September 7-30: Theoretical and Historical Foundations

Readings -

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Author's Introduction, pp. 9-20; the Township, pp. 66-70; Social State of the Anglo Americans, pp. 50-57; Political Associations, pp. 189-95, 231-261; Equality, Liberty, and Individualism, pp. 503-528; Concentration of Power, pp. 667-79, 690-705.
2. Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, introduction, chapters 1 and 2.

October 5-28: Evidence and Argument.

Readings -

1. Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in America*. We will announce which chapters of this book will be discussed, but it is likely to include 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

October 26, 27, 28. Rothbaum Lectures.

The lectures will be held from 4:00 until approximately 5:15 in Meacham Auditorium in the Union. If you are unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict, please notify us in advance. There will be an opportunity for you to listen to tape recordings of the lectures you miss.

October 28. Professor Skocpol will visit the class.

November 2-23. *Habits of the Heart*.

Readings.

1. *Habits of the Heart*: Introduction, pp. 3-54; chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 11; Introduction to the Updated Version, pp. vii-xxxix.

November 30-December 9. We have reserved the period after Thanksgiving vacation for general discussion and review of the course themes and materials. Also, it is likely that we will fall behind the announced schedule so this will give us a chance to catch up.

## Tentative Due dates for papers and the final exam.

First Paper: October 5

Second Paper: November 2

Third Paper: November 30.

Final Exam: Friday, December 17, 8:00-10:00 a.m.