

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, SUNY

POS 496Z
Great Ideas in Political Science

Bruce Miroff
Fall 2010

COURSE SYLLABUS

The focus of this honors seminar will be democracy. We will read and discuss “great ideas” about democracy drawn from a number of approaches and subfields in political science: political theory, American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political economy. The objective of the course is to stimulate you to wide-ranging and deep thinking on democracy in all of its facets.

Recurring questions will guide our discussion of different topics:

1. How is democracy to be defined and understood?
2. What political, social, economic, and cultural elements are necessary for democracy to be established and maintained?
3. What are the institutions most conducive to the successful functioning of a democracy?
4. How does democracy in the political order affect other spheres of social, economic, and cultural life?
5. How do democratic polities relate to other polities in the international system?
6. Is democracy the “best” political system or simply preferable to the alternatives?

This is a seminar and not a lecture course. All students are expected to come to class having completed the assigned reading and prepared to engage in a thoughtful discussion of it. To facilitate reading and discussion, each student must submit three questions suitable for class discussion for each reading assignment. The questions are due via email no later than 8 am on the day the class meets.

POS 496Z is a writing-intensive course and fulfills the upper-division writing requirement. Students will write three 10-page papers based upon the assigned readings and seminar discussions.

The following paperback books should be purchased:

Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (Yale University Press)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Hackett Publishing Company)

Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public* (Johns Hopkins University Press)

Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press)

Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (Henry Holt)

Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton University Press)

John Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery* (Princeton University Press)

Additional readings are on e-reserve

COURSE OUTLINE

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| Aug. 31 | Introduction to the course |
| Sept. 2 | NO CLASS |
| Sept. 7 | Democracy: History, Theory, and Practice
Reading: Robert A. Dahl, <i>On Democracy</i> , pp. 1-80 |
| Sept. 14 | Democracy (continued)
Reading: Dahl, pp. 83-141 |
| Sept. 16 | Democracy (continued)
Reading: Dahl, pp. 145-188 |
| Sept. 21 | America and Democratic Theory
Reading: Alexis de Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> , pp. 1-62 |
| Sept. 23 | America and Democratic Theory (continued)
Reading: Tocqueville, pp. 62-67, 73-146, 162-168 |
| Sept. 28 | America and Democratic Theory (continued)
Reading: Tocqueville, pp. 201-233, 239-258 |

- Sept. 30 America and Democratic Theory (continued)
Tocqueville, pp. 268-270, 281-319
- Oct. 5 The Development of American Democracy
Reading: Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Downsizing Democracy*,
pp. 1-46
First Paper Due
- Oct. 7 The Development of American Democracy (continued)
Crenson and Ginsberg, pp. 47-151
- Oct. 12 The Development of American Democracy (continued)
Reading: Crenson and Ginsberg, pp. 152-244
- Oct. 14 Democracy and Civil Society
Reading: Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, pp. 3-82
- Oct. 19 Democracy and Civil Society (continued)
Reading: Putnam, pp. 83-185
- Oct. 21 Democracy around the Globe
Reading: Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, pp. 1-87
- Oct. 26 Democracy around the Globe (continued)
Reading: Diamond, pp. 88-168
- Oct. 28 Democracy around the Globe (continued)
Reading: Diamond, pp. 171-262
- Nov. 2 Democracy around the Globe (continued)
Reading: Diamond, pp. 263-370
- Nov. 4 Democracy and International Relations
Reading: Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, pp. 3-62
- Nov. 9 Democracy and International Relations (continued)
Reading: Russett, 72-138
- Nov. 11 Professor Victor Asal on Research Design
No assigned reading
Second Paper Due

- Nov. 16 Democracy and political economy
Reading: articles on e-reserve by Milton Friedman; Samuel Bowles, Frank Roosevelt, and Richard Edwards; Charles Lindblom
- Nov. 18 Professor Asal on Research Design (2)
No assigned reading
- Nov. 23 Democracy and Political Economy (continued)
Reading: John Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph's Pretty Grocery*, pp. 21-56, 99-133
- Nov. 30 Democracy: The Minimalist View
Reading: Mueller, pp. 137-191
- Dec. 2 Democracy: The Minimalist View
Reading: Mueller, pp. 192-242
- Dec. 7 Thinking about Democracy
No assigned reading
(Three propositions on democracy to be presented in class)
- Dec. 17 **Third Paper Due**

Grades for the course will be computed as follows:

Each paper is worth 25%. Participation is worth 25%. Your grade for participation will be based upon attendance, active participation in seminar discussions, and the quality of your email questions on the course readings.

I will hold office hours at the Political Science contact office in Humanities 16 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:45-12:45, and in Milne 216 on the downtown campus on Wednesdays, 2-3:30. If you need a different time than these, please let me know. My email is miroff@albany.edu