

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL
Fall, 2010

First-Year Seminar:
Citizenship and Society in the United States
(SOCI 66)

Section 001 Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30–10:45 Graham Memorial 210

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to give you a framework for thinking about the possibilities for, and the impediments to, effective democratic citizenship in the United States.

This course has 3 main goals and 2 secondary goals. The main goals are:

1. To acquaint you with ideas about citizenship and democracy in an American context;
2. To introduce you to the relationship between society and politics; and
3. To get you thinking about both the possibilities and the impediments to effective citizenship.

The secondary goals are:

1. To stimulate critical and sophisticated thinking about politics and democracy; and
2. To provide a gentle, exciting introduction to college.

READINGS AND RESOURCES

Required Books

Bill Bishop. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

James S. Fishkin. *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Sarah Igo. *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

Andrew J. Perrin. *Citizen Speak: The Democratic Imagination in American Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Will Saletan. *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (University of California Press, 2004).

Michael Schudson. *The Good Citizen* (Free Press, 1998).

Supplementary Readings

You should read one or more of the following newspapers on a **daily** basis:

- *The New York Times*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The Washington Post*
- *The Raleigh News & Observer*

All other readings are available either on the web or on the course website. Readings available on the course website are marked with the WWW symbol. Those available on the web are linked from the course website, available through <http://blackboard.unc.edu>.

Other Resources

Have a dictionary close at hand to look up words you don't know. You can find an adequate one at <http://www.dictionary.com> if you prefer using an online version.

The UNC Writing Center (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb>) can help you with writing clearly and correctly.

There is an astonishing amount of information available on the World Wide Web. A significant proportion of that information—though by no means all—is true and relevant. By all means, use the Web to supplement your reading and knowledge, but use it critically and make sure you know the source of the information.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

The requirements of this course are as follows:

Reading You must complete all the course readings. *You are responsible for understanding the readings—* make use of your fellow students, your dictionary, the Internet, and me to make sure you understand the readings. Course time is to be used for substantive discussion and further exploration of the implications of course readings, *not* for grasping the basic contents.

Participation You must attend, and participate in, all class discussions. *Class participation is the only graded measure of your understanding of the readings.* You must therefore be an *active* participant in *all* class discussions.

Small-Group Reading Presentations Your small group will be responsible for managing the discussion of the class reading during two class sessions. You should write and distribute a *seminar paper* to the rest of the class via **blackboard** (an example will be provided in class) no later than 12:00 noon the day before the class. You will then be responsible for running the discussion of the reading during class.

Blogging You will be responsible for evaluating and commenting on the accuracy and/or fairness of a current debate in the news media and/or blogs about the 2010 election in North Carolina. Our class blog, The Sixty-Six Ten, is at <http://unc6610.wordpress.com>. You may choose to post anonymously to the world, but in order to receive credit for your blogging you must tell me your posting identity!

Citizenship Interview You will conduct an in-depth interview with someone who has something interesting to say about good citizenship. You will write up the important sections of the interview and present them to the class.

Election Ethnography Along with your small group, you will observe the goings on at a polling site on election day, taking detailed notes and interviewing at least one voter. You will present your observations to the class.

Final Paper The final paper is **OPTIONAL**. It is your opportunity to synthesize what you have learned during the class. The paper should address some aspect of the topic: *How healthy is American democracy at the beginning of the 21st century?* It may do so by approaching any issue raised in class. If you choose to do the final paper it will be averaged with your team blogging grade for that segment of your grade.

Final Exam There will be a *take-home* final examination on the course's material and content. It will be handed out in class on December 7 and will be due via **blackboard** or in 159 Hamilton on Thursday, December 16, at 5:00 PM. You will be on your honor to take no more than three hours to complete the exam.

Completing these requirements adequately will earn you a **B-** in the course. Completing them *exceptionally well* will earn you a B+, A-, or A, depending on the quality of work. Completing them less than adequately will earn you a C+ or below.

Grading

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Course Participation	20%
Seminar Papers and Discussion Leadership	25%
Blog Posts	15%
Citizenship Interview	10%
Election Ethnography	15%
Final Exam	15%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

August 24 Introductions and discussion; course organization and ground rules for discussion. Discussion of bias and respect for individuals' political views; political self-introductions

Assignment for Thursday: Write brief answers, based on your knowledge and opinions, to these three questions:

1. What does "democracy" mean?
2. What does it mean to be a "good citizen"?
3. How healthy is American democracy today?

August 26 Discussion: What does "citizenship" mean? What do we think are the threats and opportunities to it?

- Presentation group sign-ups

Week 2: Introduction to Citizenship

August 31 Competing Views of Democracy

Federalist #10: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/federal/fed10.htm>

The Port Huron Statement: http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html

Schudson, Michael. "Why Conversation is Not the Soul of Democracy." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Volume 14, Issue 4 December 1997, pages 297 - 309. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a911338060>

September 2 The history of American citizenship. **Reading:** Schudson, Chapters 2 & 3

Week 3: Discussion: Epistemic Closure and Public Spheres

September 7: Reading:

Sanchez, Julian. “Epistemic Closure, Technology, and the End of Distance.” <http://www.juliansanchez.com/2010/04/07/epistemic-closure-technology-and-the-end-of-distance/>

Cohen, Patricia. “‘Epistemic Closure’? Those Are Fighting Words.” *New York Times* April 27, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/books/28conserv.html>

Saletan, William. “Bubble Think: How to Escape a Partisan Echo Chamber.” *Slate* May 3, 2010. <http://www.slate.com/id/2252685>

September 9: No Class: Rosh Hashanah Holiday

Week 4: Citizenship History and Practice

September 14: Schudson, Chapters 4 & 5

September 16: Reading and Writing Political Blogs: Quality and Coverage

Week 5: Development of the Modern Public and Public Opinion

Reading: Igo, *The Averaged American*

September 21: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

September 23: Chapters 3, 4, and Epilogue

Recommended:

- Andrew Kohut, Review of Igo, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72:1 (2008). <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/72/1/160> See also Perrin’s comment, <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2008/05/20/methinks-he-doth-protest-too-much/>
- Claude S. Fischer, Review of Igo, *Contexts* 8:1 (2009). <http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/ctx.2009.8.1.74> See also Perrin’s comment, <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2009/05/04/the-averaged-american-and-ontological-crisis/>

Week 6: What public?

September 28: Bishop, *The Big Sort*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 6

September 30: Discussion on Citizenship Interviews: Whom to Interview, What to Ask?

Week 7: October 5: Bishop, *The Big Sort*, Chapters 7 and 9

October 7: Blog Check Day

Week 8: Reading:

October 12: No Class: University Day

October 14: Presentations

Week 9: October 19: Presentations

October 21: No class: Fall Break

Week 10: October 26: Presentations

October 28: Election Day Observation Plans

Schudson, Introduction

Danielle S. Allen, from *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. Board*

Week 11: Election week

November 2: Election Day: all students must observe a polling station and interview one or more voters there

November 4: Excerpts from TV news coverage of the election, discussion

Week 12: The Power of Language

Reading: Large Group 1: Fishkin, *When the People Speak*; Large Group 2: Saletan, *Bearing Right*

November 9: Presentation by Large Group 1

November 11: Presentation by Large Group 2

Week 13: Election Week Wrap-up

November 16: Presentations

November 18: Presentations

Week 14: Theorizing Talk and Citizenship

November 23: Blog Review

November 25: No Class: Thanksgiving

Week 15: Theorizing Talk and Citizenship

Reading: Perrin, *Citizen Speak*

November 30: Chapters 1, 3, & 4 (Discussion: Prof. Perrin)

Assignment: Bring a one-page, *anonymous* discussion and/or critique of the chapters to class.

December 2: Chapters 5–8 (Discussion: Prof. Perrin)

Week 16: Synthesis and Connection

December 7: Discussion: Synthesizing ideas on democracy; course wrap-up and evaluation

December 17: Final Examination due, 8:00 am