This course is about the role of the public in the maintenance of democratic politics in the United States. Debates over the importance of citizen involvement in government can be traced to the constitutional founding of the country, and persist in various forms in contemporary debates about politics. We will consider how well people meet the demands of citizenship and the explanations for why people engage and participate in politics. We will also study how lessons from this kind of empirical research inform normative goals of promoting civic competence and civic engagement. Finally, we will also spend time exploring whether civic engagement is necessary to maintain representative democracy.

**course outline**

- We begin by considering theories of citizenship and democracy, and the extent to which the maintenance of democracy depends on the actions and involvement of individual citizens.
- We then turn to the capacities of citizens in the United States, and the degree to which people possess both the motivation and resources to engage in politics. We will consider patterns of knowledge and preferences among the public and the explanations for these differences.
- Next, we explore patterns of political engagement, including how and why people participate in politics and in their communities.
- In the fourth section, we investigate various threats to citizen competence, from inequalities in citizen participation to elite manipulation to the influence of the news media.
- Finally, we investigate the role of institutions and environments in promoting civic competence and engagement.

**WebCT is your friend**

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at webct.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

**about the readings for the course**

This class will follow a seminar format, with more focus on discussion than lecture. Each week we will address one topic related to civic engagement. While some class sessions will be devoted to lecture, most class sessions will be spent discussing that week’s topic. Thus keeping up with the assigned readings is an essential part of the class. Many of the readings come from academic journals, and often can be challenging given their level of detail and complexity. When you have questions about what the authors mean or how a passage should be understood, you are encouraged to bring these to class.
textbooks and reading assignments


- A number of other journal articles and book chapters, which can be linked to from WebCT.
  - Some are accessible on JSTOR, an archive of social science journals: www.jstor.org
  - Some are available in the library’s e-reserves: libraries.colorado.edu/screens/coursereserves.html
  - Some are articles from journals available online through the library’s e-journal archives.
  - Note: In some cases, you may be blocked from accessing online journals from off-campus computers. See information on the website of the University Library for instructions on remote access from off-site: uclibraries.colorado.edu/research/remote.htm

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will also be responsible for the following:

participation, in-class assignments, and quizzes (worth 20% of your final grade)

This is a critical thinking course, so your frequent attendance and active participation is essential. Part of this will include keeping up with the readings. We will have short quizzes on the readings most weeks. Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade. We will also have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade.

short paper on citizenship (worth 5% of your final grade)

This paper will be due early in the semester, and details are discussed in a separate handout.

discussion questions (worth 10% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will select three topics from the syllabus for which you would like to prepare a set of questions for class discussion. You should prepare six to eight questions and e-mail these to wolakj@colorado.edu by Tuesday at noon. Additional details and suggestions on preparing questions are elaborated on a separate handout.

three short papers (each worth 5% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will select three additional topics from the syllabus (that differ from those for which you prepare discussion questions), and respond to the readings for that week in a two to three page essay. Papers should not be summaries of the readings, but should instead analyze and discuss more critically the issues at hand. Response papers are due at the beginning of class on the Wednesday we discuss that topic. Additional guidelines are detailed in a separate handout.

research project (worth 30% of your final grade)

More details about this assignment will be forthcoming later in the semester, but the central project for this course will be to develop a proposal on how to improve an aspect of civic competence.

midterm and final exam (each worth 10% of your final grade)

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.
some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).

class schedule

1. An introduction to political science, citizenship, and democracy
Monday, August 28 First class
Wednesday, August 30 How to read and analyze political science research
Friday, September 1 Writing day. Work on paper assignment. Class does not meet.
Monday, September 4 Labor Day. Class does not meet.
Wednesday, September 6 Paper assignment due.
Friday, September 8 What does it mean to be a “good citizen”?

2. Political knowledge
What do people know about politics and why does it matter?
Monday, September 11 – Friday, September 15
   - Nie, Norman H., Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry. 1996. Education and Democratic Citizenship in

3. Ideological reasoning
How do people organize their beliefs?
Monday, September 18 – Friday, September 22
     Opinion Quarterly 56:419-41.
   - Green, Donald Philip, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Shickler. 2002. Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political
4. Party polarization

How divided is the American public? What are the consequences?

Monday, September 25 – Friday, September 29


5. Trust in government

What do people dislike about government? What are the consequences for public negativity about government?

Monday, October 2 – Friday, October 6


### Translating attitudes into political action

6. Social networks and political discussion

The importance of political discussion. The pros and cons of deliberation.

Monday, October 9 – Friday, October 13


Midterm exam

Friday, October 13

7. Why people participate

Why do people vote? Why do they volunteer for campaign activities?

Monday, October 16 – Friday, October 20


8. Social capital and its consequences

Why do people participate in their communities? Social capital, civic culture, and the consequences.

Monday, October 23 – Friday, October 27

9. Inequalities in participation

How does knowledge and engagement differ according to class, gender, race, and other individual differences?

Monday, October 30 – Friday, November 3


10. Campaigns

Do campaigns educate citizens? Do negative ads demobilize voters?

Monday, November 6 – Friday, November 10


11. Media and civic journalism

What is the role of the media in providing political information?

Monday, November 13 – Friday, November 17


12. Manipulation

Do politicians lead public opinion, or follow? How vulnerable is the public to persuasive appeals?

Monday, November 27 – Friday, December 1

Role of institutions in civic competence

13. Knowledge and decision-making

What are the ways to promote political learning? How can informed decision-making be facilitated?

Monday, December 4 – Friday, December 8


14. Engagement and participation

What are the ways to encourage political action and electoral participation?

Monday, December 11 – Friday, December 15


Final exam

Wednesday, December 20, 1:30-4 p.m.