DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Course Code: POLS*4710.6540 01 Topics: Western Democracies and Democracy in Practice

Credit Weighting: 1.0

Pre-/Co-Requisites: (POLS*2080 or POLS*2100) and 1.00 credits at the 3000 level in the Comparative Politics stream.

Restrictions: NA

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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GENERAL DETAILS

What is liberal democracy? What are its principles, institutions and practices? What is the relationship between liberalism and democracy? How is that relationship manifested in contemporary Western liberal democracies? How democratic are the institutions of Western liberal democracies when we focus on how they work in practice? Is popular sovereignty defined by majority rule or is the sovereignty of the people more complex than that, requiring more participatory practices? What is the ethic of liberal democracy? How does populism and polarization affect the function of liberal democracies? What are the particular challenges for settler societies in their relationship with Indigenous peoples? How do 'the people' participate? How do electoral systems and legislative institutions shape participation? What is the role of political parties? What is the role of the courts? What is the role of multiculturalism? How do activists affect liberal democracy? How do young people relate to democracy in practice? Seminar participants will examine in comparative perspective the principles, institutions and practices of Western liberal democracies as they meet the complex political challenges of the early 21st Century.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will
-gain familiarity with contemporary academic debates about democracy in theory and practice;
have the ability to identify and evaluate academic arguments and evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, about a variety of issues from a variety of perspectives;
-identify, analyse, and evaluate how diverse political and cultural environments shape people's values, perceptions, behaviours, and experiences and adapt their own behaviour to bridge these differences;
-describe, categorize, and synthesize ideas associated with political concepts using discipline-specific and clear language;
collaborate effectively by listening to and understanding the perspectives of others in discussion groups;
-work collaboratively by sharing ideas, formulating strategies, completing group assignments or presentations, delegating responsibilities, and taking personal responsibility for the achievement of group outcomes in conducting the seminar;
-gain skill in writing a review paper in a clear, effective and concise manner.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

Seminar participants are required to actively participate in both small and large group discussions on course readings on a weekly basis. Participants will also take turns leading the seminar and facilitating discussions for their chosen week. Participation is an important part of the seminar and the substantial participation mark is broken down into three categories: 1) individual weekly participation in small and big group discussions (35%); 2) leading the seminar, along with three or four other students, and facilitating discussion for one week (25%); and, 3) class performance overall (5%) (mark determined by the course participants). Participants will also complete a written component by submitting a minimum of three review papers, each based on the questions and course readings for that particular week, to the dropbox on CourseLink (35%). Participants may also turn in as many discussion papers as they wish and the three highest marks will be counted.

REQUIRED READING

All required readings are available in electronic form on course reserves linked to CourseLink.