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COURSE SYLLABUS - On (Reimagining) Democracy

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COURSE SYLLABUS

On (Reimagining) Democracy

UNST 111C, CRN 14209

Fall 2023

“Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.”

- John Lewis

Course Description

Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) is a year-long course that explores a particular theme (ours is Reimagining Democracy) from an **interdisciplinary** (incorporating two or more types of knowledge) perspective. In this course, we will explore how democracy functions, and evaluate its relevance in our time of political, economic, and environmental crisis. Over the course of the year, we will examine how the rise of digital media, polarization and extremism, and political paralysis in response to existential issues like climate change, pose critical challenges to democratic norms and ideals. We will consider how individual and societal interventions such as media literacy, atrocity prevention efforts, community building, and protest movements can address these fundamental challenges to democracy. Students will design and participate in community-based learning activities that increase civic engagement and address large-scale social and ecological issues.

This course is:

Writing Intensive—We will be doing lots of writing, both in and out of class. Much of the writing will be low-stakes, generative, and reflective: a way to process what you’re learning and generate ideas for discussion and assignments. Some of it will be high stakes, edited, and polished.

Discussion-based—Much of what and how you learn will take place from participating in discussions with your classmates. This is not a class where you study facts and take a test to see how well you memorized them. We are creating knowledge together by talking about and creating ideas.

Experiential—In addition to learning about democracy and democratic principles, we will be practicing those principles in our activities and assignments. We aren’t just reading about democracy; we’re going to “do” democracy, too.

Peer Mentor and Mentor Sessions

Each FRINQ course has a Peer Mentor, who facilitates mentor sessions and participates in the main class. This person is a trained upperclassman, and an “expert student” who supports you, connects you to resources, and helps you succeed in this course and at PSU. Mentor Sessions are one-hour, small group meetings, where you will work on assignments for the class, develop and practice skills, and build closer connections with your classmates. Participation in Mentor Sessions is mandatory and counts toward your grade for this course.

University Studies Learning Goals

All UNST courses focus on the following learning goals.

COMMUNICATION

Students will enhance their capacity to communicate in various ways—writing, graphics, numeracy, and other visual and oral means—to collaborate effectively with others in group work, and to be competent in appropriate communication technologies.

INQUIRY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Students will learn various modes of inquiry through interdisciplinary curricula—problem-posing, investigating, conceptualizing—in order to become active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Students will explore and analyze identity, power relationships, and social justice in historical contexts and contemporary settings from multiple perspectives.

ETHICS, AGENCY, AND COMMUNITY

Students will examine values, theories, and practices that inform their actions and reflect on how personal choices and group decisions impact local and global communities.

Course Outcomes/Learning Objectives (Fall Term)

In addition to the four UNST learning goals, students completing this course will be able to:

- Define the key characteristics of a democratic society.
- Critically examine the role that information and disinformation play in fostering a healthy democracy and creating an engaged and active populace.
- Evaluate how effectively democratic practices adhere to stated ideals.
- Apply lessons from historical events and processes to understand the challenges democracies face today.
- Understand how your own actions can contribute to strengthening democracy.
- Practice communicating across differences using multiple modes of communication, and having meaningful, civil dialogues on challenging topics.

Required Materials

In addition to the four UNST learning goals, students completing this course will be able to:

- Guzmán, Mónica. 2022. *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books. (We will be using this text all three terms)
- Snyder, Timothy. 2021. *On Tyranny Graphic Edition: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. New York: Ten Speed Graphic. (Feel free to purchase the original edition if it is cheaper.)
 - Note: Both texts are on reserve at the PSU Library, available to be checked out for two hours at a time.
- In addition, you'll have assigned course texts (readings, videos, etc.) available in Canvas, which you can view online and/or print.
- A notebook or journal you bring to each class, OR a laptop using an online journal app such as Penzu, Pebblepad, or Google docs.

Technology

We will use Canvas, an online learning management system, for this course:

- to post files and links to electronic copies of readings.
- to take attendance.
- for Assignment folders where you can turn in assignments.
- to post grades and give feedback on assignments.
- for updates from your instructor and mentor.
- for occasional asynchronous, online discussions.

Brief Descriptions of Course Assignments

(Subject to Change with Notice)

Assignment	Points	Brief Description
Attendance and engagement with “main” sessions	20	Attendance and participation in weekly main sessions and completion of any assigned activities. 2 points per week.
Attendance and engagement with mentor sessions	20	Attendance and participation in weekly mentor labs and completion of any assigned activities. 2 points per week.
Reading Responses (RR)	30	Responses to course readings submitted on Canvas prior to class approx. 250 words each (5 responses × 5 points each).
Course Journal & Journal Entries (JE)	30	A notebook or journal, OR a laptop with an online journal using Penzu, Pebblepad, Google docs, or other. Checked three times during the term; 10 points each time.
Creative Response & Artist statement	10	Students will create a Creative Response written assignment based on a primary text related to democracy/governance and write a 100–200 word artist statement describing their piece and process.
Dear Stranger Letter & Peer reviews	40	Students will participate in the Dear Stranger Project of Oregon Humanities, by writing a letter to an unknown person from a different zip code in Oregon. Letters offer the opportunity to practice written communication and to think more deeply about audience—the person you are communicating with.
On Tyranny Lesson	40	In On Tyranny, Timothy Snyder presents twenty lessons drawn from twentieth-century European history. His lessons provide timely warnings about the erosion of democracy and offer concrete actions that individuals can take to resist authoritarianism. In this assignment, you will create your own On Tyranny lesson or you will develop and revise one of Snyder’s lessons using examples from other parts of the world.
First Term Portfolio	10	A web-based presentation of your work from the first term and a written reflection on that work.
Total	200	(Final grades will be calculated based on this table.)

Flexibility Statement

The instructor reserves the right to modify course content and/or substitute assignments and learning activities in response to institutional, weather, or class situations.

Course Attendance and Make-up Policies

PARTICIPATION

Please come to class on time, prepared (with books or assignments, a notebook, and pen) and ready to participate (having read the texts for that day, and completed any reading responses or homework). In this class, we will be engaged in discussions and other forms of active learning where every student's contribution matters. Your questions, insights, and ideas will help us build our collective knowledge base. If you are in class and are not participating and/or are disruptive, you will not receive credit for that day's work.

TECHNOLOGY ETIQUETTE

To foster a positive environment that is free of distractions there is a zero-tolerance cell phone and earbud policy. We expect all phones to be turned off and put away during all class sessions and no use of headphones or earbuds, including mentor labs. Connection and collaboration are essential for learning. Research shows that even when laptops or tablets are being used for an academic purpose, they can distract from class discussions. ***Please do not use laptops, tablets, or cell phones during class unless the professor or mentor has explicitly instructed you to do so.***

LET'S TALK

No matter how much time and effort you devote to your schoolwork, sometimes life just gets in the way. If something unexpected comes up that prevents you from attending class or completing an assignment, please come and talk to me. If you find yourself struggling to stay motivated or to get work done, let's chat. If you don't understand an assignment or can't make sense of a reading, let me know. FRINQ courses are designed to be supportive. Our goal is to help you develop the skills you will need to be successful in higher education. We don't expect you to be a stellar college student right away, but we also won't necessarily know that you are struggling if you don't talk to us. Your mentor and I are both available to talk to you. You can chat with us before or after main or mentor sessions or during the class break. I also hold regular student drop-in hours. Feel free to drop in at those times, or make an appointment if those hours don't work for you. You can also send me an email. I make an effort to promptly (within 24 hours on weekdays) respond to email. If you have a question about course assignments or grades, come talk to me. If you need support in this or any of your other classes, you might chat with your mentor. Mentors are trained to help students navigate campus resources. But don't worry about who to go to with which question. If your mentor or I don't have an answer, we will refer you to someone who does. So, if you have questions or need some support, just reach out to either one of us. That's what we are here for.

Weekly Topic	Course Texts	Assignments
1. What is Democracy?	<p>Taylor, Astra 2018. <i>What is Democracy?</i> National Film Board of Canada. https://www.nfb.ca/film/what-is-democracy-2018/.</p> <p>Summers, Juana. 2021. “Young Americans are raising the alarm about democracy in a new poll.” NPR.org</p>	Contribute to Course Discourse Contract
2. Reimagine Democracy	<p>Smith, Danez. “My President.”</p> <p>Limón, Ada. “A New National Anthem.”</p> <p>Ameli, Yasmine. “I Pledge Allegiance to the Republic.”</p> <p>Guzmán, M. 2022. <i>I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times</i>. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books. Introduction and chapter 1.</p>	Imagine Your Democracy Creative Writing Response and Artist’s Statement
3. Democracy Perspectives	<p>Seeley, Thomas Dyer. 2010. <i>Honeybee Democracy</i>. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Epilogue: 233–37.</p> <p>Bower, Bruce. 2022. “Early American Democracies.” <i>Science News</i> (Vol. 2, Issue 208).</p> <p>Mounk, Yascha. 2018. “AMERICA IS NOT A DEMOCRACY.” <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i>. (Vol. 321, Issue 2): 80–87.</p>	Responses to course readings submitted on Canvas prior to class approx. 250 words each (5 responses × 5 points each).
4. Citizenship and Citizen Power	INTOITW. Chapters 2 and 3.	Dear Stranger Letter 1st Draft and Peer Review.
5. On Tyranny	Snyder, Timothy. 2021. <i>On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century</i> (Graphic edition). New York: Ten Speed Graphic Chapters 1–7.	Dear Stranger Letter finished draft
6. Atrocity Prevention	United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights .	Visit Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education
7. Research and Inquiry		Library visit and tutorial for Lessons on Tyranny Assignment

(CONTINUED)

Weekly Topic	Course Texts	Assignments
8. Conversation and Traction	INTOITW. Chapters 6 and 7.	1st Draft of Lessons on Tyranny assignment
9. Thanksgiving and Democracy	Anderson, Brett. 2020. "The Thanksgiving Myth Gets a Deeper Look This Year." November 19, 2020. <i>The New York Times</i> Barney, Megan. 2020. " Disrupting Public Memory: National Day of Mourning ." November 24, 2020. Facing History, Facing Ourselves. Jeffries Warfield, Zenobia. 2018. "Don't Trash Thanksgiving, Decolonize It!" Nov. 21, 2018. <i>Yes! Magazine</i> .	Imagine Your Democracy Creative Writing Response and Artist's Statement
10. New Lessons for the 21st Century	https://poets.org/poems-about-democracy	Finished draft of Lessons on Tyranny assignment