Democracy is premised upon twin commitments: to the possibility that through political action we can direct our collective lives, and to the equality of citizens. The first is an old vision of political life, one that conceives of politics not as a struggle over position, power, and wealth, but as a form of human freedom. In the Laws Plato complained "that no human being ever legislates anything, but that chances and accidents of every sort, occurring in all kinds of ways, legislate everything for us" (709a). So much of what happens in our lives is a result of what we do, that is to say a result of human activity – think global warming or the economic crisis that began in 2008 – but is not intended by anyone, and is often something that (almost) no one wants (again, think global warming or the economic crisis). Plato envisioned a form of political activity that would not leave our collective fates to chance, but would enable us to self-consciously direct our affairs in accordance with the aspirations and commitments we have deliberately accepted. At least as an ideal, the political sphere can be a realm of human freedom, one in which we use our energies and wit not simply as separate individuals to adapt to our fate, but consciously to shape it through collective action.

As democrats we share Plato's vision of politics in the service of human freedom, but we reject his view that politics must be the preserve of an elite of philosopher-rulers. For us the qualities necessary to act effectively in politics – the insight to discern the proper direction of public life, to call to account those charged with responsibility for our common affairs, and to recognize those qualities of character and judgment required in our leaders – are not the result of specialized, technical training that presupposes an unusually high level of native intelligence, but are available to ordinary men and women. Not every citizen will actively participate in governance, and many will prefer to lend their support to others whose skills and ambitions enable them effectively to advance one’s viewpoint and interests. But for democrats every citizen is entitled to an equal voice, at least in choosing representatives, and each citizen should have the opportunity both in normal life and in political activity to develop the practical judgment necessary for deliberation on public affairs.

But how can this ideal be realized? Considering the obstacles we face as individuals, isn’t it utopian to think that we can somehow act in such a way as to deliberately control the conditions of our collective lives? The purpose of this course is to examine that question, to study and critically assess the ways in which citizens, through political and social engagement, might be able to self-consciously affect their destiny.

This is also the “foundations” course of the Certificate in Civic Engagement, which is a structured program designed to enhance students’ understanding of citizenship and the sources and limits to their agency as citizens, and to provide experience in civic engagement that will enable students to develop the skills and practical mastery necessary to act on that understanding. A description of the Certificate may be found at [http://www.wesleyan.edu/civic/index.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/civic/index.html).

Course Structure and Expectations:
All university classes are cooperative endeavors, in which participants work together to explore and enhance their understanding of a subject, but that is especially true of a class in civic engagement, whose central question involves understanding how a collectivity can be self-directing, a question that raises difficult and often controversial issues. Each of us brings a unique background and perspective to this class, and each contributes by engaging with one another and with the readings and other class material. We need to listen sympathetically and respectfully in order to understand each other’s concerns and points of view. At the same time, we need to engage critically, raising questions to clarify and deepen the discussion. That will only work if everyone comes to class prepared to listen thoughtfully to others. We all have the responsibility to make class discussions fruitful, which means that everyone must do the reading and think about the issues prior to class. Thinking about the readings means being prepared to state and explain the key concepts used by an author, to outline the main thesis or theses in two or three concise sentences, to set out the core argument(s) of the text(s), and to present your own evaluation of its persuasiveness.

I have listed the readings for each meeting of class in the syllabus, though we may not adhere strictly to that schedule since the course of our discussions cannot be predicted. If you have any question about what you should have read before a particular class meeting you should get in touch with me. I have ordered a number of books that will be available in the bookstore and on reserve at Olin. Please note that we only read selections from most of these books, so you may want to consider that when deciding whether to purchase a copy. Many are available at a discount from the regular retail price at various online sites. If you do decide to rely on the reserve room you will still be responsible for reading the assignment before the class in which it is discussed, so you should make arrangements accordingly. There will only be a limited number of copies on reserve. Journal articles are available through the library, and chapters from printed texts are on e-reserve.

In addition to readings and class participation, each student will write four “reaction” papers (1-2 pp), three 6-8 page papers, and do a field exercise (including a short (no more than 3 pp) write-up). The reaction papers are designed (inter alia) to provide an opportunity for critical reflection on the material before the class meets, thus encouraging class discussions. They will be distributed across the semester; the class will be divided into three groups, and one group will do a reaction paper for each unit of the class beginning with I.B; a copy of the paper is due by noon on the day before we begin discussing that unit. Five papers will be assigned for each group, of which four must be done. Late reaction papers will not be accepted under any circumstances. Longer essays will be due Saturday, October 3, Wednesday, November 11, and Friday, December 18. The field exercise assignment will be discussed in class; a brief statement of what you will be doing is due by October 19, and the final write-up will be due no later than the last day of class, December 10. All papers are to be submitted as e-mail attachments in Word or Rich Text Format.

Papers will be evaluated according to the following criteria: analytical rigor (logic, precision, clarity of argument, consideration of counterarguments, etc.); originality or creativity; scholarship (accurate representation of authors cited, other works engaged with when appropriate, quality of research if a research paper, etc); mechanics (quality of prose, grammar, spelling, citation of sources, etc.). A paper in the “B” range is a good paper: it will be well argued with a clear thesis, showing a strong command of the materials of the class, and will be well written. An “A” paper is an excellent paper: it will have the strengths of a “B” paper but to a
higher degree, and it will reflect original and creative thinking about the issues. A paper in the “C” range is one that does not adequately meet one of the first three criteria listed above.

All work is to be done in accordance with the Honor Code. In computing the final grade the four reaction papers and the field exercise taken together as a group and the field exercise and each of the three 6-8 page papers will receive equal weight; class participation will be used to raise the final grade by up to 2/3rds of a letter grade, or to lower it by 1/3rd.

I am committed to being accessible in and outside of the classroom. I will hold regular office hours and am available to meet at other times by appointment; you should feel free to contact me by e-mail, and I will get back to you within a reasonable amount of time. I will also make every effort to read your papers quickly and to provide constructive feedback on your work. I am happy to meet or correspond with you about your ideas before you write a paper, and to read outlines and drafts, time permitting.

**Disability Resources:** Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

**Books:** The following titles have been ordered at the bookstore, and will be on reserve at Olin. They are listed in the order they will be used.


**Syllabus:** Readings must be done by dates shown. Items marked by asterisk (*) are available through the library e-reserves; articles in journals are available through the library; all books assigned for the course will be on reserve in Olin except as noted above. The e-reserve password for this course is cspl201.

I. Conceptions of democracy and citizenship


A. Procedural democracy and competitive elections
Class 02, 9/10: *J. Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, Part IV (235-302).
*John Plamenatz, Democracy and Illusion, 180-203.

B. Deliberative and participatory democracy

Group A reaction paper due by noon, 9/16

Class 04, 9/17: *Carole Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory, ch 2, pp. 22-44.

C. Communitarian and civic republicanism

Group B reaction paper due by noon, 9/23


First 6-8 pp paper due by Saturday, October 3, at noon by e-mail attachment

II. Civil society as a condition of democracy

Group C reaction paper due by noon, 9/30

Class 08, 10/1: *Alexis de Tocqueville, from Democracy in America, vol 1, ch 12, reprinted in V.A. Hodgkinson and M.W. Foley, eds., The Civil Society Reader, 113-32.
Robert Putnam et al., Making Democracy Work, chs 1, 4 (3-16, 83-120)
Class 09, 10/6: Putnam, chs 5, 6 (121-85).

III. The Decline of Civil Society in America Today?

Group A reaction paper due by noon, 10/12

Class 11, 10/13: Center for Democracy and Civil Society Report, “American Civic Engagement


Field Exercise I due 10/19

IV. Civil Society and Political Equality I: Power

Knowledge

Group B reaction paper due by noon, 10/19

*Gaventa, “The powerful, the powerless, and the experts,” in Peter Park et al., Voices of Change, 21-40.

Race, exclusion, and domination

Group C reaction paper due by noon, 10/21


Fall Break 10/27

Class and civic engagement

Group A reaction paper due by noon, 10/28

*Schlozman et al., The Unheavenly Chorus, ch 9, “Political Activism and Electoral Democracy,” 232-62.

V. Civil Society and Political Equality II: citizen influence on public policy

Group B reaction paper due by noon, 11/2

Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence*, “Introduction,” chs 1, 3, 8


**Second 6-8 pp paper due by Wednesday, November 11 at 9 AM by e-mail attachment**

VI. Looking Ahead

A. The Internet and Democracy

Group C reaction paper due by noon, 11/9


B. What is to be Done?

Group A reaction paper due by noon, 11/11

Class 19 (11/12): *Theda Skocpol, Diminished Democracy*, ch 7 (254-93).

Group B reaction paper due by noon, 11/16

Class 20 (11/17): *Scholozman et al., The Unheavenly Chorus*, ch 17, “What, if Anything, is To Be Done?” 534-73.

Group C reaction paper due by noon, 11/18

Class 21 (11/19): Harry C. Boyte, *The Citizen Solution*, chs 1, 6-10 and Afterword.

VII. A Skeptical Note

Group A reaction paper due by noon, 11/23


VIII. How civil society can undermine democracy

Group B reaction paper due by noon, 12/2


**Field Exercise II due 12/10**

IX. Civic engagement, volunteerism, and the university (12/5):

Group C reaction paper due by noon, 12/9

Kate Otto, *Everyday Ambassador*, “Preface and Introduction” (ix-xxiii), chs 1, 2, 8 and “Conclusion” (1-21 and 133-46).

**Third 6-8 page paper due by 5 PM, Friday, December 18.**