Political Theory 4314
Contemporary Democratic Theory
SPRING 2026

Dr. Paul A. Labedz
Telephone: (407) 582-2227
Office Hours: TBA
Email: Paul.Labedz@ucf.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Study of democratic theories, emphasizing liberal democracy and its critics, elitist theories, participatory democracy, citizen participation, and relevance of empirical research to democratic theory.

READINGS

The following texts are assigned for this course and are available for purchase at the University of Central Florida bookstore:

Held, David. *Models of Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006) 3rd edition. ISBN: 0-8047-5472-1

Dahl, Robert, Shapiro, Ian, and José Antonio Cheibub. *The Democracy Sourcebook* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) ISBN: 0-262-54147-5

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- Three (3) exams (50 points each)
- Class participation (10 points)

EXAMINATIONS

Three (3) essay-style examinations will be given throughout the semester. The first exam will cover reading and lecture material from part 1 of the course (see course outline below); the second exam will cover reading and lecture material from part 2; the third exam will cover reading and lecture materials from part 3. For an overview of the subjects contained within each of the segments/parts of the course, please consult the course outline below. Each exam is worth a maximum of 50 points. The dates for the exams will be announced in class and via email.

GRADING

The overall grade for the course will be based on the student's performance on each of the above assignments. The maximum number of points a student can acquire is 160.

The grading scale is based on the following point distributions: 144-160=A, 128-143=B, 112-142=C, 96-111=D, 0-95= F.

Grades will not be based on a curve and will reflect the quality of the work submitted.

No extra credit opportunities will be available for this course.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is strongly recommended. Due to the uncertainty associated with the Covid-19 virus, there needs to be flexibility built within attendance policy. Keep in mind, though, that a significant amount the material used for assessments in this course comes directly from what is introduced during classroom instruction/discussions.

As of Fall 2014, all faculty members are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. To document that you began this course, please complete the following academic activity by the end of the first week of classes, or as soon as possible after adding the course. Failure to do so will result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

The assigned activity for this course requires students to access UCF webcourses and complete the assignment labeled "Student Data Sheet." The completed data sheet must be submitted to the instructor via UCF webcourses prior to **deadline on 16 JAN**.

MAKE-UP EXAMS:

All students will be expected to take each of the examinations on the scheduled dates. If a student has an excused absence on the date of the exams, he/she will have to take a make-up examination on a date and at a location selected by the instructor. Failure to take the make-up exam on the rescheduled date will result in a score of 0 for the examination.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

All forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited at the University of Central Florida whether courses are taught online or on campus. Academic dishonesty in any portion of your coursework (such as plagiarism on written assignments or cheating on an examination) will result, at the very least, in your being assigned a failing grade for the course. Students are prohibited from cheating

by including, but not limited to: 1) attempting to use, possess, or disseminate unauthorized materials for academic assignments; 2) presenting material obtained through the effort of someone other than the student for the student's assignment credit; 3) buying and selling course materials such as class notes or assigned work to other students; 4) falsifying or misrepresenting one's academic work; and 5) plagiarism, including but not limited to: a) using another's work without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own, b) submitting work for more than one class without the instructor's approval, or c) use of tools related to Artificial Intelligence (AI). If you're uncertain as to what constitutes cheating or plagiarism or if you have any other concerns related to academic dishonesty, be sure to discuss the matter with the instructor. "Better safe than sorry" is good advice in matters involving academic integrity.

EXPECTED STUDENT CONDUCT:

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is dedicated not only to the advancement of knowledge and learning but is concerned with the development of responsible personal and social conduct. By enrolling at UCF, a student assumes the responsibility for becoming familiar with and abiding by the general rules of conduct. The primary responsibility for managing the classroom environment rests with the faculty. Students who engage in any prohibited or unlawful acts that result in disruption of a class may be directed by the faculty member to leave the class. Violation of any classroom or university rules may lead to disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from UCF. Disciplinary action could include being withdrawn from class, disciplinary warning, probation, suspension, expulsion, or other appropriate and authorized actions.

COURSE OBJECTIVE & FORMAT:

The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with some of the key concepts in the study of contemporary democratic theory. The course will be organized around three central themes: the varied meanings of democracy, the theoretical approaches to understanding democracy, and the institutions and practice of modern democracy.

In general, the class will be conducted as a mixture of lecture and discussion and will provide the student with a forum to raise any questions he/she may have concerning the material covered in lectures and in the assigned readings.

COURSE OUTLINE

Here is a week-by-week list of topics, examination dates, and associated readings.

The schedule is subject to change if certain topics prove to require more or less time.

PART 1: VARIANTS OF DEMOCRACY

A. Democracy as "process"

Readings: Held, Chapters 1-3, pp.141-157; Dahl, et al., pp. 5-12, 29-39

PART 2: DEMOCRACY AS "RIGHTS, VALUES, ECONOMICS & THE MODERN PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY

A. Democracy as "rights"

Readings: Dahl, et al., pp. 123-133;

B. Democracy as "values"

Readings: Dahl, et al., pp. 157-190

C. Democracy as "economics"

Readings: Held, Chapter 4, pp. 172-179; Dahl, et al., 436-453

D. The Institutions of Democracy

Readings: Dahl, et al., pp. 191-217, Chapter 5

E. The Electoral Systems of Democracy

Readings: Dahl, et al., Chapter 6

PART 3: THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY

A. Pluralism

Readings: Held, pp. 158-169; Dahl, et al., pp. 118-122, 207-216, 364-371

B. Consociational Democracy

Readings: Held, pp.158-172; Dahl, et al., pp. 142-151

C. Rational Choice Theory

Readings: Dahl, et al., pp. 372-380; pp. 393-397

D. Participatory Democracy

Readings: Held, pp. 209-216; Dahl et al., pp. 40-47

E. Deliberative Democracy

Readings: Held, Chapter 9, Dahl, et al., pp. 18-28

I hope you enjoy the class and feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

SPECIAL RULES:

In accordance with state and federal law, instructors at the University of Central Florida cannot release information relating to the academic performance of students to persons other than the staff without the student's written consent. For this information to be given out at request of a third party, the student must first sign a consent form to release their educational records.