

# Current Events & Civic Engagement

Fall 2018, Friday mornings

## Course Overview:

Engaged and informed citizens are the cornerstone of democracy. Yet in an age of increasing political polarization, we seem less able to have informed and substantive discussions about important issues. This class will provide students with an overview of the most critical current issues, giving them a space to learn more about those issues, think critically and become more engaged and informed members of the community.

According to the [American Democracy Project](#), “Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” This course will explore and promote civic engagement.

## Course Objectives:

1. Learn about current issues in American and global politics.
2. Critically evaluate both sides of issues, form opinions, and engage in informed and effective arguments.
3. Improve writing skills, particularly in the form of persuasive writing.
4. Learn how to formulate and critique arguments through logic.
5. Understand the ways one can engage with our democracy.

## Course Format:

The class will be broken into units including topics such as voting policy, immigration, education, women’s rights & health care, and economics & trade. We will read news articles, persuasive essays and research briefs that provide an overview of the issue, and we will discuss the issue in class, often incorporating in-class activities such as debates.

Each class, one student will be assigned to give a three to five minute overview of the previous week’s news, based on what they have seen on TV or read in the past week. This will be supplemented with an instructor overview of current events.

## Course Policies:

We ask that all students are respectful of their classmates and foster a positive, safe learning space. Please focus on sharing constructive feedback: If you point out something that should be revised, brainstorm how revisions should be made. Feel free to disagree and to debate, but do so respectfully and with a focus on substance.

Active participation will ensure that you get the most out of your time in the classroom. Please come prepared to each class having done the assigned reading or assignments to your best

ability. We will work hard to give you feedback to improve your writing and arguments, but it's a two-way street.

If you have suggestions for the class or different topics that you would like to cover, please let us know.

**Course certificates and grading:**

Although this course is non-credit and students will not receive grades, this class still demands equivalent effort and time. In place of adhering to a typical A-F grading scale, students can attain certificates of completion. The scale follows:

- Certificate of Completion: No more than four classes missed and four assignments missed
- Passed with Distinction: No more than three classes missed and two assignments missed
- Passed with Honors: No more than one class missed and one assignment missed
- Passed with High Honors: 100% of classes attended and no missed assignments

**Schedule:**

Please note that the following schedule is a rough outline, and it may shift depending on how the class flows. Any schedule changes will be announced in class.

<b>Week &amp; Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
1: August 24	Class introduction and introduction to American government and politics	
2: August 31	Unit 1 overview: Education	Personal introduction and a paragraph on what you know about education, list of questions you have on the topic
3: September 7	Unit 1 activity: Education  Identifying logic and argumentation styles	
4: September 14	Unit 2 overview: Immigration	Paragraph on what you know about immigration, list of questions you have on the topic
5: September 21	Unit 2 activity: Immigration	Critically evaluate and annotate assigned article.

	Understanding media framing through a review of different news outlets' coverage of a central issue	Bring in a list of your observations and be ready to explain them.
6: September 28	Unit 3 overview: Women's rights & health care	Paragraph on what you know about women's rights and healthcare, list of questions you have on the topic
7: October 5	Unit 3 activity: Women's rights & health care  Persuasive writing practice and formulating arguments	
8: October 12	Unit 4 overview: Economics & trade	Paragraph on what you know about economics and trade, list of questions you have on the topic
9: October 19	Unit 4 activity: Economics & trade  Understanding numbers and using them to your advantage	Complete numbers worksheet passed out in class 10/12.
10: October 26	Unit 5 overview: Voting rights  Overview of debate format and strategies	Paragraph on what you know about voting rights, list of questions you have on the topic
11: November 2	Unit 5 activity: Voting rights  Class debate	Prepare materials for debate (refer to worksheet for details).
12: November 9	Election debrief — what happened, and why does it matter?	Watch the news on the election, and write a paragraph summarizing what happened
13: November 16	What are your rights? A look at state and federal constitutions	List the rights that are most important to you
14: November 23	No class -Thanksgiving Break	

15: November 30	Last day of class — closing activity & graduation	
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