

PH317 Democracy and Power

Professor: Aaron Ancell

Time: M/Th 12:30 – 1:50

Office Hours: M/Th 2:30 – 4:00

Email: aancell@bentley.edu

Classroom: Smith 203

Office: Smith 108

Course Description

Is social media ruining democracy? Do corporations have too much political power? Is democracy doomed to disintegrate into discord and disorder? What exactly is democracy anyway and how is it supposed to work? Would some other political system work better? In this course, we will explore such questions from the perspective of political philosophy. We will examine different forms of political power, consider what makes political power legitimate, and ask how political power ought to be distributed. We will discuss arguments for and against democracy, and evaluate different visions of what democracy should look like. Finally, we'll use what we've learned to think through some of the problems plaguing contemporary democracies, and to critically reflect on the role of business in democratic politics.

Course Objectives

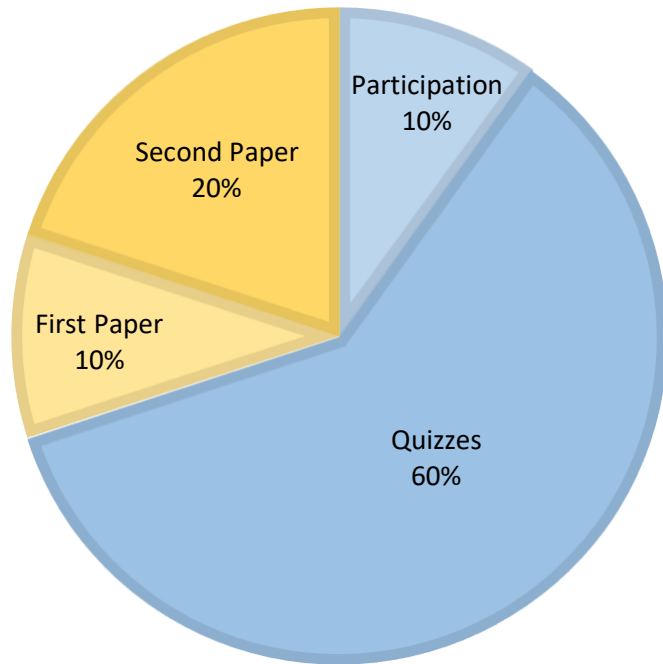
This course aims to improve your ability to...

- Identify and understand different forms of political power including different forms of both *de facto* power and *de jure* power
- Use normative theories of democracy and political legitimacy to critically evaluate how political power is possessed and wielded by different groups including governments, for-profit and non-profit enterprises, and ordinary citizens
- analyze and critically assess democratic ideals and competing normative visions of democracy
- understand and critically evaluate some problems facing contemporary democracies, such as political polarization and misinformation, using tools from political philosophy
- use normative theories of democracy and business ethics to critically assess the role of businesses in democratic politics

Course Materials

You are not required to purchase any textbooks. All course materials will be available via Brightspace. Some of the materials are provided via links to websites. If you have difficulty accessing any of the materials, please let me know and I will help you get access to them.

Assignments and Grade Distribution



10 points: Participation

60 points: Quizzes (12 x 5 points each)

10 points: First Paper

20 points: Second Paper

100 points total

Participation and Attendance

Participation: This is intended to be an interactive class with lots of opportunities for discussion and engagement. For that to work, you need to attend class and actively participate. To incentivize attendance and participation, I have made it worth 10% of your final course grade.

Beyond regular attendance, receiving a high participation score requires actively participating in class. Actively participating does not mean you have to say something every class, and you certainly should not try to talk as much as possible. I'll also do my part to make participating easy by inviting you to answer questions, discuss things with each other in small groups, and so on. **Ultimately, what I am looking for is evidence that you are keeping up with the readings and actively engaged in the class.**

Class Conduct: Class discussions will sometimes deal with controversial issues. Differing opinions and perspectives are encouraged, but everyone is expected to behave maturely and respectfully. Harassment and disrespectful conduct of any kind, whether directed to me or another student, will not be tolerated and may be subject to disciplinary action. **Students are expected to adhere to Bentley's standards of appropriate conduct, known as the Bentley Core Values. In-class conduct that is disrespectful toward me or your fellow students may result in a reduction in your participation grade.**

Attendance: Your participation grade will be based partly on your attendance. I expect you to attend class and be on time.

However, I also understand that things happen and you may need to miss class. So, **I will allow you to miss one class, for any reason, without negatively impacting your participation grade.**

If you need to miss more than one class, please email me to explain the situation and I will work with you to figure out an alternate form of participation. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to catch up by reviewing the recorded class session and ensuring that you complete any related assignments on time. If you miss more than one class session without a valid excuse, you will lose 1 point out of the possible 10 points for participation for each additional absence.

Attending via Zoom: Bentley's attendance policy requires you to attend class in-person. You can only attend via Zoom if you have a legitimate medical reason for needing to attend remotely, and, except in exceptional cases, **you may only attend via Zoom for a maximum of two classes. To receive a Zoom link to attend remotely, you must email me at least 30 minutes before class and explain your reason for attending via Zoom.**

Assignments

Quizzes: Instead of exams, you will be required to complete 12 open-book take-home quizzes. The quizzes will consist of a mix of different kinds of questions including multiple choice, matching questions, and short answer questions. The quizzes will usually become available on Brightspace after Thursday's class and will usually be due by the end of the day the following Monday. The due dates for all 12 quizzes are indicated on the course schedule at the end of this syllabus. Each quiz will be graded out of 5 points and work 5% of your final course grade.

Paper: You will be required to write two papers. The first will be approximately 800-1000 words and will be due on March 30. It will be worth 10% of your final course grade. The second paper will be approximately 1200-1500 words and will be due on the scheduled final exam date for our class, May 4. It will be worth 20% of your final course grade.

Getting Help From Me

Office Hours: I will hold office hours in my office, Smith 108, every Monday and Thursday from 2:30pm to 4:00pm. You do not need an appointment to see me during those hours—just come to my office. If you would like to meet with me outside of my office hours, please email me to set up an appointment.

Reading Drafts: I am happy to provide feedback on drafts of your papers. However, if you want me to read a draft and provide feedback you must: (1) send me your draft **at least three days before the deadline;** and (2) **meet with me to discuss my feedback on your draft.**

Late Work and Extensions

Late Policy: Assignments submitted after the deadline without an extension or documented excuse are subject to a penalty of 5% per day up to a maximum 40% penalty after 8 days lateness. For example, if an assignment is graded out of 20 points, you will lose 1 point per day that the assignment is late, and receive a maximum of 12 / 20 after 8 days.

Extensions: If you want an extension, you should request it as soon as possible. Do not email me the night before an assignment is due asking for an extension unless you have a very good reason for suddenly being unable to complete it on time. The farther in advance of the deadline you request an extension, the more likely I am to grant your request.

Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct

Do not cheat or plagiarize. Your work must be your own. I will report any cases of suspected academic misconduct—even *minor ones*—to the Director of Academic Integrity.

Plagiarism is representing another person's work or ideas as your own. It's fraud. And it's a serious academic offense. Note that plagiarism can be inadvertent. Something as simple as copying or paraphrasing from Wikipedia without citation is plagiarism. Good intentions or misunderstanding do not excuse plagiarism.

If you use the words of another person, or from an AI such as ChatGPT, those words must be enclosed in quotation marks and you must include an appropriate citation. If you use someone else's ideas, you must indicate it using an appropriate citation. Failing to do those things, whether negligently or intentionally, is plagiarism. In this course, you may either use parenthetical citations, e.g. (Author 2021), with a works cited section at the end, or footnotes that contain complete citation information. Either is acceptable. For more information on how to cite sources properly, please see the Bentley Library website (<http://libguides.bentley.edu/citingsources>). You will not be penalized for making small errors in the formatting of citations, but serious penalties may be imposed if you forget or intentionally omit needed citations.

Collaboration with other students inside or outside of class is encouraged. However, directly copying, or even paraphrasing, another student's answers or work is prohibited. You can and should discuss course materials and the assignments with your classmates, but the work you submit must be your own.

Students are permitted to seek tutoring help when they are struggling to understand course material. However, you must not ask or allow a tutor to complete any part of any assignment for you. Doing so constitutes a violation of Bentley's academic integrity policy.

Note that all course materials, including material uploaded to Blackboard, are for teaching purposes for this course during this term only. It is a violation of Bentley's academic integrity policy to reproduce or distribute these materials outside of class without the instructor's express written consent. Lectures and course materials, including presentations slides, outlines, tests, and similar materials are protected by copyright even if there is no copyright notice on the material. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use.

Failure to adhere to Bentley's Academic Integrity policy can have serious consequences, including course failure, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

Bentley Resources

Library: The Bentley Library supports the research and learning needs of the Bentley community through our spaces, technology, collections, teaching, and expertise. Open 99 hours per week during the semester, the Library provides spaces for quiet study and group collaboration, as well as computers, printers and other equipment. Research assistance is available until 9:00 p.m. most nights in-person at the Reference Desk and via email (refdesk@bentley.edu), phone (781.891.2300), text (781.728.0511), and live chat (<https://www.bentley.edu/library/research/help>). Reference Librarians can help you develop research questions and topics, select databases and other resources, evaluate information, and properly cite sources. Research consultations for individuals and small groups are available in-person and via Zoom by appointment. For more information about the Library's hours, services, and resources visit our website library.bentley.edu.

ESOL Center: The ESOL Center offers online appointments for helping undergraduate and graduate students strengthen their writing and English language skills. Our ESOL faculty tutors specialize in working with international and multilingual students to provide one-on-one support for all courses writing at any stage in the writing process. Along with individualized help for writing, the ESOL tutors provide guidance and feedback for documenting sources, oral presentation practice, and pronunciation/fluency enrichment. The ESOL Center offers real-time video appointments Monday through Friday between 7:30 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. These can be reserved through our website: <https://bentley.mywconline.net/>. The complete information about booking appointments and uploading papers is clarified on the website's announcement page.

Writing Center: The Writing Center offers one-on-one tutoring for writing and presentations. We help students of all years and skill levels. Located on the lower level of the Bentley library (room 023), the Writing Center provides a welcoming and supportive environment in which students can work on writing or presentations from any class or discipline. Students are encouraged to visit at all stages of the process; they can bring a draft of a paper or come get feedback on a practice presentation. They can come in to brainstorm, work on an outline, or just discuss some initial thoughts and questions. Staffed by highly skilled student tutors, the Writing Center is open six days a week. Our conferences are available online or in-person. We take walk-ins, but we encourage students to make appointments in advance. Hours and additional information are available on the [Writing Center SharePoint site](#). Appointments can be made at bentley.mywconline.net.

Counseling Center: The Counseling Center is available for all students who are struggling and seeking mental health support. The Counseling Center staff are available for an initial consultation, which will be used to assess and determine the best course of action to help a student. If appropriate, staff can schedule students for short-term therapy. Should it be determined that more long-term, intensive, specialized or local support is necessary, Counseling Center staff will assist with connecting students with those resources. Please call our main number ([781-891-2274](tel:781-891-2274)) to make an appointment. For students in crisis, we also offer mental health support outside of regular business hours. Should you need to connect with one of our afterhours clinicians, please call our main number and follow the prompts.

Bentley Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to attend every class session. For full semester courses, students (whether currently registered in the course or not) must start attending classes by the first class meeting after the add/swap period ends.

If you become ill (Covid or otherwise) this semester, are injured, or have another serious personal or family issue that warrants you missing a class, please contact your faculty members individually. Faculty are generally accommodating in making alternative arrangements for students on a short-term basis.

Going to an internship, attending family celebrations, or taking a vacation are not good reasons for missing classes.

Religious Accommodations: Bentley University is committed to supporting a diverse and inclusive campus culture. We recognize the diversity of religious traditions represented in the campus community and affirm the rights of students to receive accommodations for academic absences due to religious observances in accord with Massachusetts state law and Bentley core values.

Non-Discrimination and the Bias Incident Report Team:

Bentley University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, marital status, age, national origin, citizenship status, disability, genetic information, military or veteran status. Bentley University's policies and practices reflect the university's commitment to nondiscrimination in all areas of employment. The university complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Revenue Procedure 75-50 prohibiting such discrimination. The Bias Incident Response Team (BIRT) provides students affected by bias or bias-related incidents with access to appropriate resources. More information about BIRT and how to file a bias incident report can be found at <http://www.bentley.edu/offices/student-affairs/birt>.

Disability Services: Bentley University abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which stipulate no student shall be denied the benefits of an education solely by reason of a disability. If you have a hidden or visible disability which may require classroom accommodations, please call Disability Services within the first 4 weeks of the semester to schedule an appointment- **781.891.2004, Jennison 336**. Disability Services is responsible for managing accommodations and services for all students with disabilities

Schedule			
Day	Topic	Reading	Deadlines
Mon. Jan. 23	Welcome to PH317		
Thur. Jan. 26	What is democracy?		
Mon. Jan. 30	What is political power?	Watch: "How to Understand Power" by Eric Liu Read: "The Nature of Political Power" by David Hubert	Quiz 1 Due
Thur. Feb. 2	Power, Authority, and Legitimacy	Read: "The Problem of Political Authority," by Michael Huemer	
Mon. Feb. 6	Why do we need a political authority?	Read: Excerpts from <i>Leviathan</i> by Thomas Hobbes	Quiz 2 Due
Thur. Feb. 9	What makes political authority legitimate?		
Mon. Feb. 13	Why democracy? Mill's Argument	Read: Excerpt from <i>Considerations on Representative Government</i> by John Stuart Mill	Quiz 3 Due
Thur. Feb. 16	Why democracy? Equality, Freedom, and Autonomy	Read: Excerpt from "Democracy: Instrumental vs Non-Instrumental Value" by Elizabeth Anderson	
Mon. Feb. 20	Why democracy? Epistemic Arguments	Read: "Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and Why it Matters," by Hélène Landemore	Quiz 4 Due
Thur. Feb. 23	Voter Ignorance and Irrationality	Read: "Ignorant, Irrational, Misinformed Nationalists" by Jason Brennan	
Mon. Feb. 27	Alternatives: Epistocracy and Meritocracy	Watch: "A Tale of Two Political Systems," by Eric X. Li Read: "The Right to Vote Should Be Restricted to Those with Knowledge" by Jason Brennan	Quiz 5 Due
Thur. Mar. 2	Who really has power?	Read: "Who has power in US politics?" by David Hubert	
Mon. Mar. 6	Money as Power, Money Speech	Read: "Money in Politics" by Thomas Christiano Read: "Citizens United Explained" by Tim Lau Read: "Citizens United Was a Triumph for Free Speech" by Floyd Abrams	Quiz 6 Due

Thur. Mar. 9	Alternatives: Lottocracy	Watch: What if we replaced politicians with randomly selected people?" by Brett Hennig Read: "The Lottocracy" by Alex Guerrero	
Spring Break March 13 - 17			
Mon. Mar. 20	Parties, Partisanship, and Polarization	Read: "What do political parties do?" by David Hubert Read: "Federalist No. 10" by James Madison Read: "America is Living in James Madison's Nightmare," by Jeffrey Rosen	Quiz 7 Due
Thur. Mar. 23	Group Polarization	Read: "The Law of Group Polarization" by Cass Sunstein	
Mon. Mar. 27	The Roots of Political Tribalism	Read: Excerpts from <i>Uncivil Agreement</i> by Liliana Mason	Quiz 8 Due
Thur. Mar. 30	Political Identity and Expressive Politics	Read: "Disagreement or Badmouthing? The Role of Expressive Discourse in Politics" by Michael Hannon	First Paper Due
Mon. Apr. 3	Social media and Democracy	Read: "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy," by Joshua Tucker, Yannis Theocharis, Margaret Roberts, and Pablo Barberá	Quiz 9 Due
Thur. Apr. 6	Should we regulate misinformation?	Read: "Regulating the Spread of Online Misinformation" by Etienne Brown	
Mon. Apr. 10	Corporate Citizenship	Read: "Can Corporations Be Citizens? Corporate Citizenship as a Metaphor for Business Participation in Society," by Jeremy Moon, Andrew Crane, and Dirk Matten	Quiz 10 Due
Thur. Apr. 13	Corporate Political Activity as Corruption	Read: "Corporations, Politics, Democracy: Corporate Political Activity as Political Corruption," by Daniel Nyberg	
Mon. Apr. 17	NO CLASS: Patriots Day		
Thur. Apr. 20	Lobbying	Read: "The Law and Ethics of K Street: Lobbying, the First Amendment, and the Duty to Create Just Laws," by Daniel Ostas	

Mon. Apr. 24	Corporate Political Speech	Read: "Corporate Political Speech and Moral Obligation" by Mary Lynn Stoll	Quiz 11 Due
Thur. Apr. 27	Where do we go from here?	Read: "The Business Case for Saving Democracy" by Rebecca Henderson	
Mon. May 1	NO CLASS: Instead of having a class session on the final Monday, we will use the time for extra office hours for the final paper.		Quiz 12 Due
Thurs. May 4	EXAM PERIOD	We will not have an in-person final exam. The only thing you need to do this day is submit your final paper online.	Final Paper Due