

**Reclaiming Democracy:
Dialogue, Decision Making and Community Action**
Spring, 2008 Mondays 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Elon University School of Law

www.reclaimingdemocracy.us

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Course Description

Reclaiming Democracy: Dialogue, Decision Making and Community Action draws on the disciplines of communication, economics, philosophy, sociology, political science, psychology, and religious studies, to examine and attempt to model democracy. The course brings together faculty and students from Bennett College, Elon University, Greensboro College, Guilford College, North Carolina A & T State University, the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and the greater Greensboro community.

Along with exploring democracy in a theoretical way, we will learn, in-depth about specific issues in Greensboro. We will consider the city's rich history in civil rights and economic justice, as well as the even more powerful desire for civility that has often led to the unwillingness to have deep, community-wide discussion of the area's struggles. To set the tone for communal engagement, we will enhance traditional academic instruction with music, stories, and creativity of other sorts.

Participants in the class will work with a small group to study more deeply issues in one of three broad categories: *education, human rights, and economics.*

Education: Who Owns Public Education in the United States?

We will consider the extent to which American public education is 'democratic,' by examining the content of the dialogue and the nature of decision-making around issues of educational policy. We will focus on desegregation as it has played out in Guilford County and North Carolina schools.

Human Rights: Where Does Truth and Reconciliation Fit in a Democracy?

Here, we will explore the roles of truth and reconciliation in a thriving democracy. We will examine the public and private responses to human rights violations and how forgiveness as a special form of human compassion operates within the community. Of special interest is the work of this country's first truth and reconciliation commission that grew out of and operated in Greensboro, NC.

Society and Economics: "Black-owned Businesses of Greensboro."

We will explore what the 1960s widening of East Market Street did to the Black-owned businesses, how they survived and how they have grown since. We will also examine public policies toward minority-owned businesses and alternatives to "Black capitalism."

At the end of the term, your team will offer a presentation for the community at an all-day conference which will count as your final exam. We expect each team to weave the various theories we discuss in class into the issue group's specific topic.

Collaboration and group work can be challenging. Recognizing this, we will build into the course opportunities to discuss group processes, the synergy that's possible when people pool their talents and skills, and the tasks of keeping people motivated and accountable. Since a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy involves people working

together, we will pay close attention to those factors that contribute to positive, collective action.

Course Questions

- How do we reclaim our democracy as a humane, inclusive process that is responsible to all members of our community? What does this require of us?
- How did we come to hold the understandings of democracy that we have?
- How can we interrupt the decline of civic engagement, challenge corporate domination, embrace sustainable practices, and revitalize social capital?
- How do we talk about difficult subjects to expose hidden or unconscious biases?
- How do we organize our communities and their members to pursue just and ethical actions to address issues of concern?

Course Goals

- Develop an understanding of democracy that is responsible to all members of the community.
- Critically examine the theories and concepts that inform our contemporary and historical understandings of democracy.
- Identify barriers to democracy at personal, systemic, institutional, and cultural levels.
- Co-create a model of teaching and learning that embraces democracy.
- Create a vibrant and productive dialogue about community issues.
- Study the discourses, decision making and community action relevant to key community issues.
- Develop and deepen an understanding of what democracy requires of us.
- Explore the ways a person's social identity impacts his or her relationship to the issues and concepts we are studying in class.

Course Readings

Chafe, William H. (1980). *Civilities and civil rights*. New York: Oxford.
Articles available on the course website, www.reclaimingdemocracy.us.

Course Assignments

- **Discipline-specific meetings/projects** that take place before and during the collective class sessions will be assessed by the course instructor of record for your college or university. This assessment will account for **20% of your final grade**.
- **Weekly reflections on course readings** and class discussions to be maintained in a course portfolio. These will be due weekly in class and along with your in-class participation accounts for **30% of your final grade**. You will be given a score of \checkmark , \checkmark^- , or 0 for your work, along with feedback to deepen the insights of your future reflections.

- **Issue Group Work Activity**
 - Your issue group will be working throughout the semester toward completion of a conference project (described below). You may be summarizing a reading for the rest of your group, interviewing a community member, going to a meeting or some other task as determined by the group. Your work ethic and products, such as writing assignments, will be evaluated by the instructor, with input from your fellow group members to account for **40% of your final grade**. Individual contributions to the group's effort will be evaluated periodically during the semester. During your issue group's first meeting, we will discuss group expectations and criteria for evaluation.
 - **Team proposal for final project report.** This proposal will serve two purposes. First, it will reflect by way of a draft final report your scholarly research to date as it connects to a pressing community concern. Secondly, this proposal will be shaped into the form of a letter to invited stakeholders to our all-day conference. You will detail what you have learned so far, the issues that your team sees as worthy of discussion, and the position you want to advance in your presentation. At the same time you are providing an argument for the necessity of community discussion on this topic, you will need to provide a rationale for why you are reaching out to the invitees you have selected. (Note: You will need to consult with the faculty on your invitation list in advance of any contact to be sure other teams are not also contacting the same people.)
 - **Conference Project: *Reclaiming Democracy: A Conference as Community Conversation*.** Together, we will plan a conference and conversation about important issues about Greensboro. At our Saturday conference, your group will offer a 10-12 minute presentation of some sort (power point, performance, discussion, etc.) based on your final report. After the presentation, you will moderate a discussion with your invited responders. To do this well, you will need to know enough about the issue in its Greensboro particularities, and in a way that clearly shows that your understanding is informed by the class readings and discussions. **This conference is scheduled for Saturday, April 26. Clear your calendars now so you can attend all day. For anyone unable to attend the conference, an alternative writing assignment will be assigned.**
- **Final Reflections** paper will be an individually-crafted paper of approximately 750-1000 words documenting your reactions to the conference project. This assignment will comprise **10% of your final grade**.
- Students seeking graduate credit for the course will also write a 15-20 page paper detailing his/her group issue, drawing on additional readings connected to his/her disciplinary training.

Course Grading

All faculty will abide by a common grading rubric. Students wishing to contest any grade will follow a process that includes providing a written argument with ample evidence to persuade a team of not less than three faculty members why a grade should be modified. The instructor of record (the one affiliated with the student's home institution) will be the final arbiter.

Late Assignments

Late work may be penalized. You are expected to finish your work early enough to combat the troubles of “disk errors,” “printing problems” or other technological difficulties. Assignments are due when called for in class. Assignments handed in after class will be considered late.

Be sure to keep electronic and hard copies of everything you turn in for a grade—this is a good habit to get into that will save you time and trouble.

Course Policies and Expectations:

1. Do not expect this course to be easy. The readings and the discussions are designed to challenge you. To be prepared for this experience, you will need to read the required text and/or articles in advance of each week's discussion.
2. Attendance is necessary to ensure rich discussion in small groups and in the larger class. We value the learning that occurs from interaction, and recognize that democracy itself depends upon collective engagement. Any time you are absent, you will need to stay up with the readings in order to keep up with the class.
3. Ask questions, be curious, and share your inquisitiveness in the form of questions in class. Faculty are also available during office hours to address specific questions and concerns.
4. Watch for email announcements and updates about the course.
5. BE ON TIME. We have a lot of people in this class and a lot of ground to cover. We will be taking breaks during the evening, but we expect to start and finish on time. Also, PLAN TO STAY until the end of each session out of courtesy to your colleagues.
6. As you'll note on the course calendar, schools have different spring breaks during the semester and thus we recognize that some students may not attend class while on their designated break.
7. We ask that everyone leave laptops at home or closed during class as these devices have a way of separating people from one another.
8. All assigned readings should be downloaded and copied onto paper to encourage the kind of active reading (circle things, highlight main points, express outrage and agreement on the paper itself) that leads to successful learning.

Course Schedule

- January & February 4 Class meetings with host instructors at pre-designated locations.
- February 11 Introduction of class members and instructors. Overview of the course. Where are we? Initial discussion of democracy, leading to a provisional definition. Introduction to issue groups in Education, Human Rights, and Economics.
Musical Guest: Cakalak Thunder
Read: Readings on economics, education, and human rights
News & Record, Carolina Peacemaker, YES! Weekly, and Rhinoceros Times
Guest Speaker: Lewis Brandon, Local Grass Roots Historian, Beloved Community Center
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings—Newspaper Analysis (see Reading Responses directions)
- February 18 Where are we? An examination of underlying concepts, concerns, and questions our democracy must address. Who makes decisions? How are they made? How to read for understanding. Presentation by Guilford Discipline Group on Small Group Democracy
Musical Guest: Logie Meachum (to be confirmed)
Read: *Civilities and Civil Rights to p. 70*
 Preamble to the United States Constitution
 Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings—See Reading Responses directions
- February 25 How did we get here? A look at Greensboro’s history from the inside, out.
Musical Guest: Ed Whitfield & Company
Read: *Civilities and Civil Rights to p. 152*
 Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings
In class assignment: Issue group work assessment
- March 3 How did we get here?
Read: *Civilities and Civil Rights to p. 254 (end)*
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings

NOTE: UNCG, Guilford College meet with Community Class members. NC A & T, Greensboro College, Bennett College have spring break. Elon University students to meet on disciplinary contributions.

- March 10 How did we get here?
Read: *Civilities and Civil Rights* to p. 254 (end).
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings
- NOTE: NC A & T, Greensboro College, Bennett College, Elon University meet with Community Class members. UNCG & Guilford College have spring break.
- March 17 Where do we go from here? Movement Building and Community Organizing
Read: *Community Organizing in a Democracy*
Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings
In class assignment: Issue group work assessment
- March 24 Democracy
Read: *Boyte, Reframing Democracy: Governance, Civic Agency, and Politics*
Article on Democratic Thinking
Due: Weekly Reflection on Course Readings
Issue Group Proposal for Conference Project (report and presentation)
- NOTE: All schools to meet separately (in different locations—so know where you are to meet) per instructor’s schedule to discuss disciplinary contributions. Elon University has spring break.
- March 31 Human Rights: Truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
Read: Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Executive Summary available at greensborotrc.org
Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly reflection on Course Readings
- April 7 Economics and Society
Read: *The Social Responsibility of Business to Pursue Profits*
Due: Weekly reflection on Course Readings
In class assignment: Issue group work assessment
- April 14 Education
Read: Up to two articles assigned by education facilitators
Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly reflection on course readings
Issue Group Conference Project Reports

- April 21 How do we engage with others to bolster a community-wide democratic sensibility? A reexamination of democracy and democratic practices to refine our definition of how to live in ways that meet all of our community's needs.
Read: Barber, The Lost Art of Cooperation
Diamond, What is Democracy?
Assigned reading for your issue group
Due: Weekly reflection on course readings
- April 26 ***Reclaiming Democracy: A Conference as Conversation (all day, Required)***
Due: Issue Group Conference Presentations
Conference Day Assignment: Interest group work assessment
- April 28 Concluding remarks, reflection and celebration by entire class
Evaluating our progress. Democracy defined, again.
- FINAL To be scheduled with your host instructor.
MEETINGS *Due:* Final reflection paper
Evidence of conference thank you notes and other conference follow-up items.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

READING RESPONSES

These assignments are designed to prompt your critical reflection on the reading and to prepare you for informed class discussions. Each response should be about 300-450 words long, typed and double-spaced. You should be prepared to hand in a hard copy when called for in each class for which a response is assigned.

Your grade for this portion of the course will be based on the number of assignments that you successfully complete. Success will be measured by evidence that you have read and wrestled with the readings. You may demonstrate your mastery of the text by providing a brilliant analysis and critique, but thoughtful questions that you might have about the author's intent or meaning will also count as evidence.

Each response will be given a check if it is adequate. If your response is judged to be less than adequate, though it also shows that you at least made an effort, it will be given a check-minus. In this instance, you will be given an opportunity to revise and resubmit your work by Thursday of the week in which the assignment is graded and returned to you. If we judge that you have not made a good-faith effort, your work (or lack thereof) will be awarded a zero, and there will be no opportunity to resubmit.

Newspaper Analysis, February 11

Look over at least three of the following: the *News & Record*, the *Rhinoceros Times*, *Yes! Weekly*, or the *Carolina Peacemaker*. This can be done online, or you can find hard copies all over the city. Look for articles or opinion pieces on the "issue areas" of the class. Respond to what you find according to one of the prompts listed below (300 to 450 words):

- Briefly summarize the biggest stories for each of the issue areas – education, human rights, and economics – that you find represented. Speculate a bit: would these have been the same areas of concern for Greensboro 200 years ago?
- Is there a story that is covered differently by different papers? Briefly describe the story and explain the differences.
- If a story is missing from one or more of the publications, summarize the story, and then provide a possible reason that the publication(s) in question ignored it.

Reading Reflections, February 18 – April 21

Write a paragraph on each of the following (300-450 words, total):

- Summarize the main claims and arguments of the reading(s).
- Choose one topic or argument from the reading(s) on your issue group's area of interest and explain it in more detail. If your issue group's area of interest is not treated directly, describe how one or two of the subjects from the reading might relate to it.
- Highlight one aspect of democracy found in reading(s), focusing on either positive or negative notions and/or practices that influence democracy's functions or failures.

TEAM PROPOSAL FOR FINAL CONFERENCE PROJECT REPORT—Due March 24

As your interest group prepares for *Reclaiming Democracy: A Conference as Community Conversation*, you will be engaged in a host of activities designed for you to learn enough about your issue(s) and the Greensboro particularities, in a way that clearly shows your understanding is informed by the class readings and discussions.

Your first task is to prepare a proposal for your final project report that sets out the direction of your collective thinking and plan of action. Additionally, this proposal will serve as a letter (500-750 words) to stakeholders and guests you would like to invite to the end of class conference.

In this proposal, you will detail the issues your group sees as worthy of discussion, the tentative position you want to advance in your conference presentation, and an argument for why community discussion of this topic is necessary.

As you tailor your proposal to each invited guest, you'll need to provide a detailed rationale on why you decided to invite selected individuals. Be sure to indicate how each person you invites contributes to the larger conversation, how s/he is connected (or not) to the larger issues you are exploring, and what you hope the conference audience will learn or gain from the speaker's comments.

For each invitation, you will need a group member responsible for continued conversation to provide additional information to the speaker and to arrange logistics surrounding presentation times, parking, etc. associated with the conference day.

CONFERENCE REPORT PROJECT—Due April 14

In advance of the conference, your group will prepare a 2500-5000 word final report that details the following:

- The community issue(s) you are exploring within the frame of democracy, dialogue, decision making and community action.

You may find it helpful to start with the initial, brief description provided in the syllabus and then expand upon that core concern to present the multiple questions that the issue provokes and the democratic values necessary to address them.

- Synthesis of the relevant literature.

You will be provided with some readings to guide your learning. Your group members may identify other readings (academic and otherwise) to explore your interest group issue. In this section, you should provide a clear understanding of these readings as related to Greensboro-specific practices and concerns. You will need to cite the literature in your discussion and provide a complete reference list at the end of your paper.

- Conference Organization

In this section, your group will detail the people who you invited to the conference, along with a rationale for your choices (see details from team proposal above). You will also want to discuss how your group discussed various speaker possibilities, what factors contributed to your group's decision making process, and the comfort level you experienced with your subsequent action(s).

- Analysis of the Interest Group Issue

This section details the journey of your learning obtained from reading, discussions, attendance at community meetings, interviews, and other research. You are not expected to "solve" the issue you are studying, but rather to comment on how we as a community can reclaim our democracy surrounding this topic. In other words, what is required of each one of us, and of our institutional structures to ensure that the needs of all our citizens are met? We expect that this section will be lengthy and detailed, with considerable effort displayed in struggling over philosophical questions, democratic values, cultural norms, and individual responsibilities.

- Conference Presentation Plan

Outline of your proposed plan of action for the conference. You'll have 10-12 minutes to present your ideas from the final report in some creative way (power point, performance, panel discussion, etc.). Then, you'll need to allocate time for

your invited speakers to respond or engage with you on the topic. Provide the vision you have for the conference day in as much detail as you can.

- Tentative Conclusions

As democracy is provisional, always open to revision, it provides the opportunity for collective action and incremental change. Likewise, your conclusion may be best organized as an attempt to influence the public (and yourself) as you assert a measure of collective group wisdom. What, based on your analysis of the issue, should we offer as a step in the direction of asserting our democratic impulse? How can we ensure wide participation? Who should be involved in the effort? What work is still needed on this issue and in what form(s)? Why would people want to engage with others to addressing this issue?

- Reference List

Listing of readings cited in your report, prepared in APA citation style.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION—Due April 26

At our April 26 conference, all members of your issue group will be responsible for preparing and delivering the following:

- 10-12 minute polished presentation based on the conference project report.
- Structure for engaging invited speakers as respondents.
- Format for creating the conditions for dialogue.