

GOVT 7.14 First Year Seminar

Does Democracy Work?
Winter 2022

Version: January 25, 2022

Professor:

Jennifer Jerit

Office: 112 Silsby Hall

Email: jennifer.l.jerit@dartmouth.edu

Phone: 646-2339

Class: Mon, Wed, Fri 8:50–9:55 am

X-period Thursday 9:05–9:55 am

Location: 215 Silsby Hall

Office Hours: <https://calendly.com/jerit>

Course description

Ordinary people are a crucial part of a democracy—in terms of their beliefs and attitudes as well as the political actions they do or do not take. Indeed, some scholars go so far as to describe voters as the *starting point* of a democracy. But are citizens up to the task? This first-year seminar investigates the topic of voter competence, which refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that support a functioning political system. We will consider what is required of citizens in a modern democracy and discuss the standards by which we evaluate how well people fulfill their democratic duties. Course readings focus on public opinion and political behavior in the American context. As part of the first-year writing program, this course involves analytical writing and small group discussions. Students will write and revise two 3-page papers with significant class time devoted to writing challenges and giving/receiving feedback in peer groups. The seminar also involves a final 6-page paper.

Learning Objectives

Using the theme of voter competence as our platform, participants in the class will:

Improve the content of their writing by learning how to make a clear argument.

Enhance the form of their writing through close attention to grammar and style.

Develop the ability to plan and write an analytical paper from start to finish.

Cultivate a critical perspective while reading their own work and the work of others.

Gain experience working in small groups and giving constructive feedback to peers.

Assignments and Grading

Below is a description of the components of your grade.

Paper 1 (3 pages, double-spaced)	15%	Due Jan 24 by 8:00 am (to Canvas)
Paper 1 Rewrite	5%	Due Jan 31 by 8:00 am (to Canvas)
Paper 2 (3 pages, double-spaced)	15%	Due Feb 7 by 8:00 am (to Canvas)
Paper 2 Rewrite	10%	Due Feb 14 by 8:00 am (to Canvas)
Paper 3 (6 pages, double-spaced)	30%	Due date TBA (~ March 11-14)
Reading Responses (3 @300 words)	15%	Dates noted in course schedule
Class and Group Participation	10%	

Papers. Paper topics are listed in the “Course Schedule” part of the syllabus. Additional information will be provided in class prior to the due date. Papers 1 and 2 will involve the opportunity for revision. The method for Paper 3 is slightly different. We will spend the final week course working together (in class) to develop your idea. Paper 3 will be due by 5 pm on the date of the regularly scheduled final exam for this class. You will have sufficient time for writing *and* revising Paper 3 between the end of the course and the due date.

Reading Responses. These are short writing assignments (300 words, max) that build a specific skill. There are three response assignments throughout the quarter (noted in the “Course Schedule”). Upload your assignment to Canvas *before* class on the day it is due.

Participation. The quality of the course depends on *each* student’s intellectual engagement with the material. Thus, I expect you to attend and be an active participant in all class meetings. The readings that are listed for a particular day should be read *before* class on that day.

Late Policy. It is important to turn assignments in on time, given that your peers and I will be reviewing your work for subsequent revision. Late work will be docked 15% per day late. Please contact me as soon as possible if you cannot turn an assignment in on time. A late paper will not receive higher than a B on the rewrite.

Attitude. Writing as a life-long habit, which means that you do not have to become great (or even good) at it quickly. This shift in perspective should alleviate any pressure you might feel in taking a “writing class” and allow you to enjoy the process of learning how to write.

DartWrite. There is an assignment that involves uploading your writing from this class to your digital portfolio. This is noted in the “Course Schedule” and counts toward your participation grade.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to the Course and Voters as the “Starting Point” in a Democracy

W January 5

Hoover Green, Amanda. 2013. “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps.”

Krippner, Greta. 2000. “How to Read a (Quantitative) Journal Article

Clawson Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. “Public Opinion in a Democracy.” Chapter 1 in *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. CQ Press. Read entire chapter, but you can skim pp. 1-12.

F January 7

Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, “Nuts and Bolts,” pp. 11-55.

Clawson Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. “Impact of Public Opinion on Policy.” Chapter 11 in *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. CQ Press.

Week 2: Early Perspectives on Citizen Competence

M Jan 10

Converse, Philip E. “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” (Excerpt from Jost & Sidanius; Chapter 10; pp. 181-196).

W Jan 12

Krosnick, Jon A. 1990. “Government Policy and Citizen Passion: A Study of Issue Publics in Contemporary America.” *Political Behavior* 12: 59-92.

Th Jan 13 (X-hour) Setting up your Dart Write portfolio. See Week 10 for preview.

F Jan 14

Class discussion of the themes raised in the Converse and Krosnick readings. What is the implicit or explicit standard that each author uses to evaluate the performance of citizens? Both readings are challenging (in different ways), but you will realize that you can get the thrust of the argument even if you cannot follow all of it.

Reading Response Assignment #1: This assignment will give you practice at identifying an author’s claim. In 300 words or less, identify the one (or two) most important claims/empirical findings in the articles by Converse and Krosnick. Your response is due before class (by 8 am).

Week 3: Political Knowledge as a Prerequisite to Citizen Competence

M Jan 17 No class—MLK holiday. We will have mandatory session in X-period instead.

W Jan 19

Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Read pp. 3–9, 49–61.

Lupia, Arthur. 2006. “How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence.” *Critical Review* 1–3: 217–232.

Th Jan 20 (X-hour)

Popkin, Samuel. 2006. “The Factual Basis of ‘Belief Systems.’” *Critical Review* 1–3: 233–254.

Bartels, Larry. 2004. “Unenlightened Self-Interest” *American Prospect*: A17–A19.

Paper 1 Topic: Identify one of the standards for citizen competence that we have discussed in class and evaluate the contemporary U.S. public. Do citizens meet the standard? In answering this question, you are expected to draw upon the readings we have discussed to this point in the class (no external reading is required). Your paper should be 3 pages, double-spaced. Additional details will be discussed in class.

F Jan 21

Tarshis, Barry, *How to Write Like a Pro*. Read pp. 24–38 (Making Connections); 46–49 (Focus Control); 71–73 (Umbrella Thoughts); and 137–152 (Polishing Up).

Discuss citation practices and formats.

Week 4: Paper 1 Due + Workshopping and Revising

M Jan 24

Paper 1 Due by 8 am on Monday January 24.

Upload paper to Canvas and bring hard copies to class for your peer group.¹

Before class: find a contemporary example from U.S. politics that supports the argument you made in your paper. We will discuss each student’s example in class.

During class, we also will discuss tips for giving constructive feedback to your peers.

Before Wednesday: come up with feedback for your peers.

¹ Contact me *before* Jan 24 if you anticipate having a problem printing copies of your paper.

W Jan 26

Peer Feedback Groups

Come to class with feedback for the students in your peer group. Students will discuss feedback but prepare a written version of your comments. Feedback should consist of 3–5 specific, actionable comments.

F Jan 28

Workshop session on Paper 1 (discuss common writing challenges/problems).

Week 5: The Effect of Information Citizens

M Jan 31

Paper 1 Rewrite Due by 8 am on Monday January 31.

Sides, John. 2016. "Stories or Science? Facts, Frames, and Policy Attitudes." *American Politics Research* 44 (3): 387-414.

W Feb 2

Taber, Charles S., and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):755–769.

Reading Response Assignment #2: This assignment will give you practice at identifying the effectiveness of a scientific study. In 300 words or less, focus on *one* of the readings for this week and indicate the specific aspects of the article that make it convincing. You may focus on the design of the study (e.g., how the study was set up) or some aspect of the data analysis (e.g., the empirical findings). Your response is due before class (by 8 am).

F Feb 4

Class discussion of the broader themes and questions raised in the Sides and Taber/Lodge readings (with an eye toward brainstorming for Paper 2).

Paper 2 Topic: To what extent are citizens influenced by information from the political world versus being beholden to prior attitudes or dispositions (e.g., partisanship)? In answering this question, you are expected to draw upon the readings we have discussed to this point in the class (no external reading is required). Your paper should be 3 pages, double-spaced.

Week 6: Writing and Workshopping Paper 2

M Feb 7

Paper 2 Due by 8 am on Monday February 7.

Upload paper to Canvas and bring hard copies to class for your peer group.

Before class: listen to this podcast on political divisions in the United States. “Not at the Dinner Table” Interview with Political Scientist Yanna Krupnikov at <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/not-at-the-dinner-table/>

Before Wednesday: come up with feedback for your peers.

W Feb 9

Peer Feedback Groups

Come to class with feedback for the students in your peer group. Students will discuss feedback but prepare a written version of your comments. Feedback should consist of 3–5 specific, actionable comments.

F Feb 11

Roy Peter Clark *Writing Tools*, “Tool 43: Read for Both Form and Content” (pp. 210–213).

Week 7: Social Transmission of Information *We meet in X-hours instead of Friday

M Feb 14

Paper 2 Rewrite Due by 8 am on Monday February 14.

Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler. 2020. “Exposure to Untrustworthy Websites in the 2016 US election” *Nature Human Behavior* 472–480.

W Feb 16

Anspach, Nicolas M. and Taylor N. Carlson. 2020. “What to Believe? Social Media Commentary and Belief in Misinformation.” *Political Behavior* 42: 697–718.

Th Feb 17

Reading Response Assignment #3: This assignment will give you practice at thinking about scope conditions and extensions. In 300 words or less, describe 1–2 ideas that the readings leave untested but would be important for future researchers to explore. Your response is due before class (by 8 am) so that we can discuss these ideas in class.

Week 8: Motivations for Citizen Behavior

M Feb 21

Druckman, James N., Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, et al. 2020. "How Affective Polarization Shapes Americans' Political Beliefs: A Study of Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Experimental Political Science*: 1–12.

W Feb 23

Goldberg, Dan and Alice Ollstein. 2021. "The Partisan Divide in Vaccinations is Starker Than you Realize" *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/06/05/partisan-divide-vaccinations-491947>

Gollwitzer, Anton, Cameron Martel, William J. Brady, Philip Parnaments, Isaac Freedman, Eric Knows, and Jay Van Bavel. 2020. "Partisan Differences in Physical Distancing are Linked to Health Outcomes During the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Nature Human Behaviour* 4 (November): 1186–1197.

F Feb 25

Mason, Lilliana and Nathan Kalmoe. 2021. "What You Need to Know about How Many Americans Condone Political Violence — and Why." *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/11/what-you-need-know-about-how-many-americans-condone-political-violence-why/>

Ucinski, Joseph et al. 2021. "American Politics in Two Dimensions: Partisan and Ideological Identities versus Anti-Establishment Orientations." *American Journal of Political Science* DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12616.

Paper 3 Topic: If voters are the "starting point" of representative democracy, how would you assess the health and functioning of the U.S. political system? Make your case by drawing upon the course readings and identifying 3–5 academic publications not on the syllabus (e.g., a journal article or book from the library). Your paper should be 6 pages.

Week 9: The Sloppy Copy and Other Writing Strategies

The goal for this week is to have ~3 pages of a "sloppy copy" or your initial writing on Paper 3. Some, all, or none of this writing may appear in the final version of the paper. The objective is to get thoughts out of your head and onto a piece of paper. As Roy Peter Clark advises in this week's reading: "Discount nothing...the poor words may be the necessary path to the good words."

M Feb 28

Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, “Tool 41: Turn Procrastination into Rehearsal” (pp. 200–203).

Roy Peter Clark, *Help for Writers*, Excerpts on “Finding Focus” (pp. 93–103) and “Fast Writing” (pp. 177–78).

In class: write for 15-20 minutes. You will compose ideas on both sides of paper prompt. We will discuss what this impromptu writing felt like.

W Mar 2

Herrera, Tim. 2019 (January 13). “How to Actually, Truly Focus on What You’re Doing.” *New York Times*. (This is an interview with writer/Dartmouth alum, Cal Newport, ’04).

Before class: Develop a 2-page outline of what your paper might look like, with references to specific content claims. The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about the beginning, middle, and end of your paper. This will give you a sense for the logic of the whole paper (e.g., what are you trying to say?). As the final part of your outline, note the most difficult part of this assignment. Bring a hard copy of your outline to class to facilitate discussion.

Before Friday: commit to spending one hour writing where you fill out any part of the outline. Work where you feel the most momentum and do not feel constrained to start at the beginning. The most important aspect of this task is to write without distraction for one hour—by which I mean, no access to the internet, your smart phone, or any form of electronic media. This may be difficult to do, but please give it a serious try.

You may also want to listen to this podcast, where Tuck Professor Syd Finkelstein interviews Cal Newport about productivity and success in school:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cal-newport-what-you-thought-you-knew-about-school/id1453232081?i=1000463749932>

F Mar 4

I will ask everyone to report honestly on their progress with the “one hour task.” Were you successful? What was the hardest thing about this task? How close did you come to developing 3 pages of writing across the week?

Week 10: Wrapping Up and Drawing Connections

M Mar 7

We will talk about how to identify themes across a series of reading. We also will discuss techniques for extracting this information from your notes and the readings.

Complete at least one DartWrite Assignment from the list below:

DartWrite Assignment #1: Remediation. Transform one of your completed assignments from this class (either a paper or reading response) into a 500-word opinion essay about some aspect of contemporary democracy. Imagine that your audience is readers of *The Dartmouth* or *Valley News*.

DartWrite Assignment #2: Show Off. Post your favorite writing from the course (e.g., Paper 1, 2, or 3) and share it with family members, former professors, and friends. Does this action spark any interesting conversations with your audience?

DartWrite Assignment #3: Reflection. How did your writing change across the quarter? What aspect of the course did you enjoy the most? The least?

Other Class Policies

Academic Honor Principle

As a Dartmouth student, you have agreed to abide by the College's [Academic Honor Principle](#). In this class, you will be writing original essays and papers, which means you should be aware of the proper citation practices. Ignorance about what constitutes plagiarism will not excuse a violation. Please make use of available campus [resources](#) to educate yourself on the proper use of outside sources. If you are confused about how to attribute sources, speak with me or make use of the [Peer Writing Center at Dartmouth](#).

Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a phone/video meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This conversation will help to establish what supports are built into my online course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with Student Accessibility Services (student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu or 603-646-9900) and to email their SAS accommodation form. If students have questions about eligibility, they should contact the SAS office.

Learning Differences

If you experience a significant challenge with reading, writing, or another aspect of your academic work in this course, let me know. You can also make an appointment with Carl P. Thum, Ph.D., Director of the Academic Skills Center: <https://calendly.com/carl-p-thum>

Research, Writing and Information Technology (RWIT)

The Student Center for Research, Writing and Information Technology (RWIT) is a free service dedicated to helping members of the Dartmouth community develop more effective strategies for

generating and organizing their ideas, finding and evaluating research sources, and presenting and revising compositions in a variety of media. Students may schedule an appointment with a RWIT tutor by going to: <https://rwit.dartmouth.edu/>.

Religious Observances

If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Diversity & Inclusion

If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official college records, please let me know. As a participant in course discussions, you should also honor the identities and diversity of your classmates.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

The academic environment is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to you on campus to support your wellness, including: your undergraduate dean (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~upperde/>) the Counseling Center (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~chd/>), and the Student Wellness Center (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/>). The student-led [Dartmouth Mental Health Union](#) and their Peer Support Program in Collis (and other programs) may additionally be helpful to you. The student-led Sexual Assault Peer Alliance (SAPAs) <https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/counseling/outreach/sexual-assault-peer-alliance-sapas/active-sapas>.

Please communicate with me if you are facing a challenge that hinders your success in this course. I will help, and I will put you in touch with others who can help. The earlier I am aware of issues, the more I can do to assist you.

Title IX

Dartmouth is dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe and inclusive campus where all have equal access to the educational and employment opportunities. We strive to promote an environment of sexual respect, safety, and well-being. In its policies and standards, Dartmouth demonstrates unequivocally that sexual assault, gender-based harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking are not tolerated in our community.

The Sexual Respect Website (<https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu>) at Dartmouth provides a wealth of information on your rights with regard to sexual respect and resources that are available to all in our community.

Please note that, as a faculty member, I am obligated to share disclosures regarding conduct under Title IX with Dartmouth's Title IX Coordinator. Confidential resources are also available, and include licensed medical or counseling professionals (e.g., a licensed psychologist), staff members of organizations recognized as rape crisis centers under state law (such as WISE), and ordained clergy (see https://dartgo.org/titleix_resources).

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dartmouth's Title IX Coordinator or the Deputy Title IX Coordinator for the Guarini School. Their contact information can be found on the sexual respect website at: <https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu>.