The Democracy Lab is a project-based course designed to provide you with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to create systemic change in a democracy. The premise of Democracy Lab is that we learn by doing as well as reading and reflecting. Some of the most important starting points for learning about democracy begin with reflection on what works – as well as what does not work – when we seek to make political change. Democracy does not exist solely as a set of ideal or abstract principles, but as particular kinds of work that citizens and residents generate in the name of democracy. As practitioners, we learn by doing democracy work as well as by studying and researching it. The primary goal of the Democracy Lab is to improve your capacity to collaborate with individuals and groups of people around common goals and to rethink what you think democracy is and can be.

Learning how to foster democracy has never been easy. Democracy remains an aspiration, perhaps a necessary fiction for how citizens agree to be governed. Doing so means confronting directly and honestly the vast differences that religion, culture, sexism, racism, inequality, and history have generated between groups of people, whether or not they are citizens of the same nation. Some of the most important work of this course will be your reflections on the experience and meaning of these differences and the value conflicts they have generated. In so doing, you will also investigate how and why deeply-held personal values have historically impeded public problem-solving as well as fostered energy for confronting systemic challenges.

Course Objectives:

- Become a more effective and powerful citizen, capable of performing democracy work in an arena of your choosing.
- Have a keener understanding of how you see and realize your capacity for leadership in democracy.
- Use history effectively to ask the right questions to help you construct an impactful political engagement project.
- Create a deliverable good for the How To Citizen Project and your Community Partner.

Course Principles: Learning, Teaching, Being in the Time of Covid-19
(*with gratitude to Professor Brandon Bayne; to be finalized collectively in class)

1) We will foster intellectual nourishment, social connection and personal accommodation.
2) We will be flexible and check in with one another as the course progresses to see if changes need to be made.
3) We will take care of each other and ourselves.
4) During this historic moment, we will offer kindness and look towards resilience when we can.

**Technology, Honor Code & Community Standard**

(1) If and when this class meets in person: Laptops, smartphones, tablets and other computing devices are not allowed. Because this class requires active discussion and engagement of the reading material, these devices end up being a distraction. If you have a condition that requires usage of such devices, please consult with me. For some analysis on reasons to ban devices in the classroom, see [http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away](http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away) and [http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom](http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom)

(2) When this class meets online: You will be expected to attend class with the video feature on. If this presents a problem, please consult with me. During class you may not be on other websites, check your email, or be on your phone or any other devices. Recording of this class is prohibited unless you have received the instructor’s permission.

(3) Accessibility and Accommodation: In addition to accessibility issues experienced during the typical academic year, I recognize that remote learning may present additional challenges. Students may be experiencing unreliable wi-fi, lack of access to quiet study spaces, varied time-zones, or additional responsibilities while studying at home. If you are experiencing these or other difficulties, please contact me to discuss possible accommodations.

(4) Honor Code: All work for this class is governed by the Duke Community Standard. You are responsible for reviewing the following materials:

- [https://plagiarism.duke.edu/](https://plagiarism.duke.edu/)
- [http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/](http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/)

(5) Duke Compact: The Duke Compact recognizes our shared responsibility for our collective health and well-being. Please be reminded that by signing your name to this pledge, you have acknowledged that you understand the conditions for being on campus. These include complying with university, state, and local requirements and acting to protect yourself and those around you. For complete language and updated please visit: [https://returnto.duke.edu/compact](https://returnto.duke.edu/compact).

**Course Requirements:**

**Class Attendance and Participation = 20%**

Attendance in-person or online is mandatory. All absences need to be excused by email in advance and include a doctor’s note when relevant. With one exception, unexcused absences from class will affect your grade. Covid-19 exception: Due to the mental stress of this pandemic, you may take one self-care mental health day at any point during the term. I need to be notified before class that this is your intention however. You will also still be responsible for any assignments or readings due that day however. Attendance accounts for 10% of your final grade.
The other 10% is for your active engagement in class discussions. This does not necessarily mean having to speak a lot, but rather speaking and listening to your peers in a respectful, curious, and sincere manner. If we only talk and don’t listen, others are less likely to listen to us. Learning is, like democracy work, collaborative by nature. I ask that you do two things to foment powerful dialogue and conversation: 1. *Listen carefully and respectfully to your peers with an open mind and an open heart.* Listening with an open mind and heart means being prepared to be wrong on an issue, and to be vulnerable in a given discussion, a starting point for genuinely transformative learning. 2. * Cultivate trust with one another by being willing to disagree.* We should not avoid conflicts but learn from them. Consensus that is coerced or apathetic promotes the opposite of democratic thought or engagement. Disagreeing with one another, passionately but always respectfully when conflicts emerge, is what builds trust.

**Writing = 40%**

There are a variety of writing assignments in The Democracy Lab, some personal and reflective, others more public facing and also academic.

- **Reactions to the Readings:** 20%. Your reactions to the readings for class discussion should do two things: first, summarize the main takeaways or points of a given reading and second raise a question that highlights a line of inquiry that you would like to pursue in the class discussion. These should be type-written and no more than one page in length and uploaded to your dropbox *no later than midnight the evening before our class discussion*. You will upload a minimum of five over the course of the semester, but may upload more. Each submission should have the date in the title.

- **Reflection on Democracy Work:** 10%. A personal reflections on engagement work that you have done and what you have learned thus far from it. No more than 1000 words.

- **Project Description of Your Political Engagement Project:** 10%. That description should be no more than four pages, due at the end of the term, that identifies the democracy challenge you will be engaging in over the summer and ensuing year, the question you hope to ask and answer, and a brief description of the deliverable you hope to create before you graduate. Due 4/22.

**Group Projects = 40%**

- **A Public Facing Deliverable = 30%**, for the “How to Citizen” class project. (See below for details of what it include and how it will be organized) In teams, students will work together and in consultation with a community partner to create a democracy guide for young citizens that explains, exemplifies, and inspires (ideally) others to engage in democracy work. Students may work on a particular theme they are most passionate about but should have the goal of creating a deliverable that will be ready to “go public” by the end of the semester.

- **Story Telling Work = 10%**. You will also work together to tell your story – and that of others – in compelling and empowering ways, finding ways through experimentation and trial and error to find ways to link your personal values to larger democracy work that you are passionate about. This will involve public speaking, web and social media work, as well as creativity in finding ways to make the stories you tell powerful.
How to Citizen, Class Project, Spring 2021

Students will collaborate first in teams to define a particular challenge within democracy work that they wish to engage. The challenge might be expanding student voting rights, creating more access to voting for citizens, bridging the partisan and the urban-rural divide, expanding rights for the disfranchised, stopping misinformation, or rebuilding trust in democracy. Once you have defined your democracy challenge, we will connect you to a community partner or organization that shares your interest and with whom you can collaborate in creating a public facing deliverable that benefits them as an organization and our larger “How To Citizen” Class Project simultaneously. Here are some of the community partners that you might choose to work with this semester.

1. **Bull City Votes**: A Non-partisan civic and voter education organization, dedicated to expanding voting rights and participation in Durham.
2. **Democracy NC**: A Non-partisan voting rights organization dedicated to expanding access to voting across the state of NC.
3. **North Carolina for Clean Elections**: A non-profit dedicated to passing comprehensive democracy reforms across the state of NC.
4. **Poder-NC Action**: A Non-profit dedicated to expanding the power of Latino people across North Carolina.
5. **North Carolina State Board of Elections**: The public servants who administer our elections and work to secure the accuracy and consistency of voting, whether in person or by absentee.

Students will brainstorm their preferences first and then be paired into teams before meeting with the most appropriate community-based organization. Each group will have the opportunity to present their work in progress formally to the class on March 4.

**Schedule of Meetings**

**Thursday, January 21:** Introduction

**What is Democracy?**


**Thursday, January 28:** bell hooks, “Love as the Practice of Freedom.”* What inspires you about democracy? Upload a short text, speech, poem, video, or song to the Forum page that has inspired you when you think about democracy.

Submissions should be no more than five pages or ten minutes in length if a song or video, and must be uploaded to the Sakai Forum site by *Wednesday morning, January 27th, at 9 am.*

**Democracy in Practice**

**Tuesday, February 2:** Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, pp. 130-188.*

**Thursday, February 4:** What depresses you about “democracy?” Upload a short text, speech, poem, video, or song that best captures your disenchantment with or skepticism of democracy.
Submissions should be no more than five pages or ten minutes in length if a song or video, and must be uploaded to the Sakai Forum site by Wednesday morning, February 3rd, at 9 am.

Friday, February 5: Noon to 3:00 pm: Meetings to determine teams and community partners.

Losing Democracy?

**Tuesday, February 9**: Authoritarianism

**Thursday, February 11**: Populism and Conspiracy

Friday, February 12, 5 pm: 1000 word reflection on your personal history with Democracy Work.

Democracy Challenges: Inequality (I)

**Tuesday, February 16**: Democracy and Racism: Ibram Kendi, *How to Be An Anti-Racist*, excerpt.

**Thursday, February 18**: Organizing Anti-Racism: Speeches and Stories:

Democracy and Inequality (II)

**Tuesday, February 23**: Democracy and Sexism: Rebecca Solnit, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women’s Anger*, excerpts.

**Thursday, February 25**: Organizing Democracy against Sexism: Speeches and Stories:

Democracy and Generations

**Tuesday, March 2**: Low Youth Voter Turnout
- [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/)

**Thursday, March 4**: Class presentation of your plans for a public facing deliverable for the “how to citizen” project, including its connection to your community partner.
Prescriptions for Democracy
Tuesday, March 9: Midterm Break

Thursday, March 11: No Class: Collaboration with Community Partners in Creating a “How to Citizen” Guide.

Building Campaigns
Tuesday, March 16: Partisan vs. Non-Partisan Campaigns

Thursday, March 18: Workshopping Your Campaigns: Story Telling

Leadership in Democracy
Tuesday, March 23: Leaders vs Leadership


Democracy Work and Health
Tuesday, March 30: Covid, the 2020 Election, and the Future of Democracy

Thursday, April 1: Strengthening Democracy: What’s your Plan?

To Citizen 2021

Tuesday, April 6: Group A: Public Facing Deliverable Presentations

Thursday, April 8: Group B: Public Facing Deliverable Presentations

Living Your Values: Democracy Work in the Future, 2021

Tuesday, April 13: Story-Telling: What make democratic stories powerful?

Thursday, April 15: Story-Telling: What makes your story powerful?
Democracy Work for the Future

Tuesday, April 20: PEP Summer Project Presentations

Thursday, April 22, 10 am: Political Engagement Project Descriptions Due.

Thursday, April 22: Class Discussion of how to Project the “How to Citizen” Project

Thursday, April 29, 5 pm: Final Submission of each team’s Public Facing Deliverable to community partners and the How to Citizen Project.