

Western University 2019-20  
**9504b: Critical Political Theory**

**Instructor:** Nandita Biswas Mellamphy **Office hours:** Mon. 1:30-2:20pm, or by appointment, SSC 4133  
**Contact:** nbiswasm@uwo.ca or 519-661-2111 ext. 81161 **Class location and times:** Mon. 11:30-1:20 PM, SSC 4105

**Course Description:** Does democracy still serve as a normative concept? Is the global digital revolution currently underway *enriching* or conversely, *impoverishing* democracy? This course explores how the internet and new media/communication technologies transform and constrain, as well as enable and disable democratic theories and practices. Attention will be paid to developing rigorous and critical interpretations and analyses of various democratic theories. The course is divided into 3 parts: the first examines critical approaches and methods in political theory; the second investigates selected theories of democracy, especially 'deliberative', 'agonistic'/'radical', 'cyber', 'queer,' 'decolonial'; the third explores some critical debates in democratic theory and politics.

**Course Texts:**

- *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton).
- *Theories of Democracy*, Frank Cunningham (Routledge).
- *The Democratic Paradox*, Chantal Mouffe (Verso).
- *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet*, Diana Saco (Minnesota).
- *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Jacques Rancière (Minnesota).
- *Red Skin, White Mask*, Glen Coulthard (Minnesota).
- *Pax Technica*, Philip Howard (Oxford)
- Other Required Course Materials will be available on the course website (OWL).

**Learning objectives:** By the end of this course, students will...

- Be familiar with a range of political theories of democracy, as well as develop critical and rigorous interpretations of these theories.
- Have gained an appreciation of the range of approaches and interpretations of democracy that are used in political research.
- Demonstrate an awareness of how power, culture and history condition/influence knowledge formation and be able to situate knowledge historically and contextually
- Demonstrate well developed, independent information literacy and research skills and be able to identify goals for their own professional development and further learning
- Work effectively with others, demonstrating the skills of giving constructive and critical feedback to peers, responding to feedback, and using active listening

**Breakdown of Evaluation:**

- Class Participation: this is not an attendance mark; you will be evaluated on your **weekly** in-class discussion and participation = 15%

- Presentation 1 on course themes, approaches, and methods to studying democracy in a digital era; due in class on **March 23**; includes 5 minutes oral presentation worth 10% and written outline worth 10%= 20%
- Presentation 2 on your final research essay topic; due in class on **March 30** or April 6 (depending on which day you are slotted); includes oral 10% and 10% written outline= 20%
- Final Research Essay: 45% Due by electronic submission **no later than April 20, 2019**.

**Assignment Deadlines and policies:** Please consider these deadlines 'sacred'! Only in cases in which the student has presented appropriate documentation to their Academic Counseling Officer will any extensions without penalty be considered. Late essay submissions are subject to a penalty deduction of 5% a day (from the due date until the day that the assignment is received by the instructor, including weekends and holidays). **To discuss these policies further, please feel free to meet with me.**

**Course Website (OWL):** Everything having to do with each component of the course will be available on the course website. *The website has not been developed to be a replacement for attending class.* Problems with accessibility to the course website cannot be used as a basis for missing deadlines or appealing your grades. This means that if you are having problems accessing the course website, you must notify your instructor as soon as possible and you will be directed to a computer technician.

**Computer, Cell-phone and Other Gadgets Policy:** You may use your computers to take notes during lectures, but I reserve the right to ensure that you are not text-messaging, surfing the internet, or distracting other students. No digital recording (either voice or image) of the lectures is allowed. All cellphones (and similar technologies) must be turned off, silent or on 'vibration' mode during the duration of the class and during tutorials.

**Communication Policy:** I encourage you to visit me during my weekly office hours to introduce yourself, ask questions, or seek clarifications about the readings. Otherwise you can also communicate with me through email (please allow up to two days for responses). You can always leave me a voice message on my campus telephone (extension 81161).

**Statement on Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Support Services:** Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health at Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

## **Weekly Reading Schedule (subject to modification):**

\* indicates that the reading is available on the course website.

### 1. Introductory Class: Course Themes, Mechanics, and Outline (Jan. 6)

Hamid Dabashi, "Can Non-Europeans Think?"

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/01/2013114142638797542.html>

\* Sheila Jasanoff, "Future Imperfect: Science, Technology, and the Imaginations in Modernity" in *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, eds. S. Jasanoff and S-H. Kim, 1-33.

### **Part I: Critical Approaches and Methods in Political Theory**

### 2. Understanding Normative and Critical Approaches (Jan. 20)

\*Richard Rorty, "Idealization, Foundations, and Social Practices" in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib.

\*Amy Gutman, "Democracy, Philosophy, and Justification" in *Democracy and Difference*.

\*Benjamin Barber, "Foundationalism and Democracy" in *Democracy and Difference*.

\*Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), p. 1-77.

### 3. Critical Political Theory: Some Thoughts on Research Design and Methods (Jan. 13)

\*Mark Salter and Can Mutlu (eds.), "Introduction" and "Part I: Research Design" in *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies*, Routledge (2012), p. 1-45.

\*Lene Hansen, "Theorizing the Image for Security Studies: Visual Securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis"

\*Sarah Marie Wiebe, "Affective Terrain: Approaching the field in *Aamjjiwinaang*" in *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies*.

### 4. Comparing Normative and Critical Approaches (Jan. 27)

\*Seyla Benhabib, Introduction, "The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference" in *Democracy and Difference*, p. 3-18.

\*Anne Phillips, 'Dealing with Difference', in *Democracy and Difference*, p. 139-152.

\*Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic and Other Subjects*, introduction and chapter 1, p. 1-42.

\*Timothy W. Luke, "Finding New Mainstreams: *Perestroika*, *Phronesis*, and Political Science in the United States" in *Making Political Science Matter*, Schram and Caterino (eds.), p. 252-268.

### **Part II: Theories of Democracy**

### 5. Normative Theories of Democracy: Deliberative Democracy and Its Critics (Feb. 3)

\*Frank Cunningham, "Introduction", "Problems of Democracy", "Liberal Democracy," in *Theories of Democracy*, p. 1-51.

\*Jurgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, p. 21-30.

\*Seyla Benhabib, "Towards a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy" in *Democracy and Difference*, p. 67-94.

\*Iris Marion Young “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy” in *Democracy and Difference*, p. 120-135.

\*Frank Cunningham, “Liberal Democracy and the Problems,” in *Theories of Democracy*, p. 52-72; “Democratic Pragmatism” in *Theories of Democracy*, p. 142-162; “Deliberative Democracy,” in *Theories of Democracy*, p. 163-183.

6. Critical Theories of Democracy: Agonism and Its Critics (Feb. 10)

\*Chantal Mouffe, “Democracy, Power, and the Political” in *Democracy and Difference*.

\*Chantal Mouffe, “For an Agonistic Model of Democracy” in *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 80-107.

\*Jacques Rancière, “Does Democracy Mean Something?” in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p. 45-61.

\*Frank Cunningham, “Radical Pluralism” in *Theories of Democracy*, p. 184-197.

\*Jodi Dean, ‘Politics Without Politics’ in *Reading Rancière*, p. 73-94.

(Happy Reading Week! Feb. 17)

**Part III: Critical Debates on Democracy: Does Digitality Strengthen or Weaken Democracy?**

7. On Democratic Dissensus (Feb. 24)

\*Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (whole book).

8. Decolonizing Democracy (Mar. 2)

\*Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (whole book).

9. Cybering Democracy (Mar. 9)

\*Diana Saco, *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet*, p. xi-74.

\*Jodi Dean, “Why the Net is Not a Public Sphere” in *Constellations*, vol. 10, number 1, 2003, 95-112.

10. Endangering Democracy: Technology and Capitalism (Mar. 16)

Philip Howard, *Pax Technica*

11. **Student Presentations on course themes and concepts (Mar. 23)**: Round table discussion from class members about takeaways on research design, concepts and conceptual definitions and mapping; discussion should include reflection on normative vs. critical approaches: when to use them? Which course concept are useful or not in studying democracy and why? Why history, power, culture matter and how we can build this into the research process? Why decolonizing methods and approaches to studying democracy are important? How to study democracy and technology or digital culture?

12. **Student Presentations on Your Research Question and Research Design (Approach, Methods and Material (Mar. 30 and Apr. 6)**