AS.196 (AGORA INSTITUTE)

AS.196.300. Getting to Truth: How to Navigate Today’s Media Jungle. 3 Credits.
Our democratic system depends on an informed public, but media today are polarized along ideological lines, undercut by economic and technological change and sometimes polluted with bogus stories written for profit or spin. In this course, taught by a veteran journalist, we will discuss the evolution of news, examine the current challenges and assess what citizens can do to get a fair understanding of what’s going on. We’ll use many concrete examples and students will have multiple writing assignments.
Area: Writing Intensive

AS.196.301. Social Entrepreneurship, Policy, and Systems Change: The Future of Democracy. 3 Credits.
This course will explore the dynamics and interplay between social entrepreneurship, social change, and policy. Students will explore frameworks for social transformation and systems change, and explore whether stable governance and effective policies are necessary for sustainable change. The course will examine the intersection between social change and policy change, examining how the two concepts intersect while focusing on the end goal of systems change. Students will examine different case studies of social transformation (or proposed social transformation) from across the United States and world. Guest speakers will include diverse practitioners of social entrepreneurship who think about long-term pathways to transformative social change, and dynamic policymakers. While the course will include case studies on broader domestic and international challenges and models of social transformation, a larger focus will be on specific local social problems and solutions. This will manifest through class discussions and a final project based on the surrounding community.
Area: Writing Intensive

AS.196.302. Science and Democracy. 3 Credits.
What role does scientific expertise play (or not play) in American democracy? What role should scientific expertise play (or not play) in American democracy? These are the key questions we’ll address in this class, focusing on a wide range of examples such as government responses to public health crises, environmental crises, and war. We’ll tackle these questions from multiple angles, drawing on ideas from across the social sciences, including political science, psychology, sociology, economics, history, and communication. We’ll focus largely on the United States, though in some cases compare the US experience with other democracies to understand how unique aspects of our democratic institutions influence the link between science and democracy.

AS.196.303. Democratic Challenges. 3 Credits.
Modern democracies like the U.S. are undergoing severe challenges from within and elsewhere. Internally, many of their citizens are newly skeptical of democracy, believing for example that elections are rigged. Outside, they face new competition from authoritarian systems such as China’s government, which show no signs of converging towards democracy, and offer a possible alternative system of rule. Finally, democracies also have to engage with new policy challenges, such as racial justice and climate change. In this course, we will draw upon the collective wisdom of faculty at Johns Hopkins’ new SNF Agora Institute, to understand better the political challenges that democracy faces, and the policy challenges that it has to respond to. We will put modern democratic challenges in their appropriate historical context. Has America really been a democracy in the past? We will ask about the social and political conditions under which democracy does well, and under which it fails. Finally, we will look at the new agenda of questions that democracy faces, and the means that it can draw on to confront them.
Area: Writing Intensive

AS.196.304. Democratic Erosion. 3 Credits.
It is often assumed that once a country achieves a certain level of economic and political development, democratic consolidation is permanent. Recent trends in American and European politics have led some commentators to question this assumption. In this course, students will explore the causes and consequences of democratic erosion in comparative and historical perspective, with a focus on better understanding our own unique political moment. This course is not intended as a partisan critique of any particular American politician or political party. Rather, it is designed to provide an opportunity for students to engage, critically and carefully the state of democracy in the US and elsewhere; to evaluate whether those claims are valid; and, if they are, to consider strategies for mitigating the risk of democratic erosion here and abroad. Readings will address both empirical and normative questions and will be gleaned from a combination of academic and media sources.
Area: Writing Intensive

AS.196.305. Democracy by the Numbers. 3 Credits.
How is democracy doing around the world? This course will help students to answer this question and ask their own questions about political systems by examining a variety of quantitative measures of facets of democracy in the U.S. and internationally. We consider general indices as well as those that focus on specific normatively-appealing aspects— the absence of fraud in and broader integrity of the electoral process itself, the guarantees of fundamental human rights to all, governments’ effectiveness and accountability to the public, the equity of both representation and policy outcomes for minority groups and those historically disadvantaged or excluded, and the possibility and extent of civic engagement in non-government institutions. Wherever possible, the course will present evidence about the kinds of institutions and policies that seem to bolster democracy. Students can expect to gain hands-on experience with publicly-available subnational and national indicators of electoral and democratic quality.

AS.196.311. Democracy. 3 Credits.
 Democracies around the world are under threat. This course introduces students to the philosophical foundations of democracy as well as the history of democratic revolutions, institutions, and principles. How can we defeat the most important contemporary challenges to democracy, including populism, authoritarianism and disinformation? And how can we revive the “democratic spirit” - in America and around the world?
AS.196.364. This is Not Propaganda. 3 Credits.
We live in an era of disinformation, mass persuasion and media manipulation run amok. More information was meant to improve democracy and undermine authoritarian regimes; instead the opposite seems to be happening. This course will take you from Russia to South Asia, Europe to the US, to analyze how our information environment has been transformed, why our old formulae for resisting manipulation are failing, and what needs to be done to create a model where deliberative democracy can flourish.
Area: Writing Intensive

AS.196.500. Independent Study. 1 - 3 Credits.
You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration > Online Forms.

AS.196.505. Internship - Disinformation. 1 Credit.
This course requires instructor approval. There will be administrative work to complete with some hands-on field research.
You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration > Online Forms.

AS.196.506. Research - Disinformation. 2 Credits.
This is a research opportunity around disinformation for undergraduate students. This course requires instructor approval.
Area: Writing Intensive
You must request Independent Academic Work using the Independent Academic Work form found in Student Self-Service: Registration > Online Forms.

AS.196.600. Data-analysis for Social Science & Public Policy I.
We will gain experience with data-analysis geared towards understanding the social world. Our scope ranges from simple descriptions and predictions under strong assumptions to intervention analyses that provide a more trustworthy foundation for quantifying causal effects. The course will be offered in a hybrid modality and will have a heavy focus on computation. We will alternate between discussion sessions devoted to fundamental concepts, and lab sessions devoted to a combination of web- and instructor-led data-analyses. Whenever possible, examples using both R and Stata and using a range of national and cross-national data-sources relevant to the study of democracy will be provided.

AS.196.601. Data-analysis for Social Science & Public Policy II.
We will gain experience with data-analysis geared towards understanding the social world. Our scope ranges from simple descriptions and predictions under strong assumptions to intervention analyses that provide a more trustworthy foundation for quantifying causal effects. The course will be offered in a hybrid modality and will have a heavy focus on computation. We will alternate between discussion sessions devoted to fundamental concepts, and lab sessions devoted to a combination of web- and instructor-led data-analyses. Whenever possible, examples using both R and Stata and using a range of national and cross-national data-sources relevant to the study of democracy will be provided.

AS.196.801. Independent Study.

AS.196.802. Field Research on Civic Engagement.
This is a graduate-level course that will focus on the field research of civic engagement.

AS.196.805. Graduate Internship - Disinformation.
This course requires instructor approval. There will be administrative work to complete with some hands-on field research.