

IDS 2338: Democratic Engagement and Public Leadership  
Fall 2025  
August 21 – December 3, 2025  
**ONLINE**  
**3 credits**

**Instructor:** Dr. Teresa Cornacchione

**Office Location:** 234 Pugh Hall

**Office Hours:** T & W: 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM (drop-in), or by appointment through [Calendly](#)

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**Course Texts:**

**There are no required or assigned textbooks or books for this course.** Readings will consist of scholarly articles, current news articles, policy papers, online resources, and other selected materials. These will appear in the online Canvas course shell. Scholarly articles are listed in the course schedule below, under the weeks for which they are assigned. All scholarly articles can be accessed through the [UF Libraries website](#), if you need help navigating the library website, [tutorials](#) are available [here](#). From your computer, you will need to be on the [UF VPN Network](#).

**Course Materials and Supply Fees:**

NA

**Course Description:**

This course encourages students to reflect on the concept of citizenship in the U.S. Students learn to analyze and solve public problems and effectively evaluate methods of civic activism.

Additionally, this course is designed to introduce students to the key themes, principles, and terminology that govern U.S. civic participation. Students will engage in both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data surrounding civic participation in a democracy, along with the opportunity to engage in meaningful and effective communication to better analyze societal and individual decisions and actions within a healthy democracy. Students will develop a better understanding and deeper appreciations for the workings of the American political system. [This course is a General Education Social and Behavioral Sciences course.](#)

**Course Goals:**

- Provide the context for understanding individuals' roles within a democratic republic.
- Through critical thinking, online discussion, analysis, and evaluation, develop the skills to engage in productive civil discourse.
- Create a Public Policy Proposal to support a public policy stance that addresses a pressing community issue using basic academic research practices.
- Reflect upon and evaluate methods of civic engagement and citizen participation.

**Student Learning Outcomes for social science (S) available at [this link](#).**

- Give students an opportunity to think introspectively about their role as an engaged citizen in today's society, consider questions like what does citizenship mean to you and how can you continue to be an engaged citizen while at UF and after graduation?
- Help students understand how our laws and institutions have influenced our concept of citizenship in the U.S. and around the world.

- Provide students with the tools to maintain active citizenship. This course will discuss how to negotiate and deliberate, how to keep political dialogue civil, how to identify biased political rhetoric, how to advocate for a cause, and how to write and speak for civic participation.

### **Course Objectives:**

Beyond being a member of a nation or state, Merriam-Webster defines ‘citizenship’ as “the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.” What does citizenship mean to you within a democratic republic like the U.S.? Being a citizen conveys responsibilities everyone must meet for a functioning and healthy democracy. Citizenship is not a passive notion, but a dynamic active experience. To fulfill the role of citizen requires you to be both informed and engaged.

While it may not be unusual to have a pessimistic view of politics, it is no excuse for lack of participation. Often, we are left to feel powerless or unsure of how to act when it comes to advocating for those issues or policies we are concerned about the most. This course **attempts to change that assumption by** providing you with the tools, skills, and perspective on how to get informed and be active in public life. The U.S. system of federalism provides opportunities to be involved in a multi-layered system of government which functions from the local to the national level.

Government is all around us. Policies are implemented every day at our local (city or county), state, and national levels that impact our lives. **As citizens, we have a duty to be active in expressing our informed opinions and beliefs to have an impact that benefits our communities.** While political discussions tend to focus on Washington, D.C., there are avenues of action in your city or county and Florida that you can play a role in changing. This course gives you the competencies to know how to be a productive citizen.

Modules will function like an in-person course, where all work is assigned at the beginning of the Module and expected to be completed by the end of the Module, except the Public Policy Proposal. Deadlines are announced in Canvas, and you should contact me if you have any questions.

### **Grade Composition & Policy**

Your grade in this class will be based on four components: module video quizzes, perusall readings, civic action assignments, and a public policy proposal. All assignments must be submitted on time via Canvas. Late Assignments and Make-up Quizzes will not be accepted without a university-approved excuse and instructor approval. Every component is worth 100 points, the weight of each is listed below:

Module Quizzes	10%
Perusall Readings	20%
Civic Action Assignments	25%
Public Policy Proposal Steps	15%
Final Public Policy Proposal	30%

**Module Video Quizzes:** these short lecture videos provide in-depth background information on the selected topic of the Module. The videos offer insight into historical and contemporary policy debates, institutions, and democratic values and norms that support citizenship in the U.S. During

each Module, you will take a short multiple-choice quiz on the background video and selected readings and other media. This is worth 10% of your grade.

**Perusall Reading Discussions:** You will read and annotate the scholarly readings on the syllabus via Perusall. Perusall is interactive software that allows you to read and annotate a text along with your peers. You can highlight, ask questions, and respond to your classmates' comments and questions. You will have between two and four Persuall Readings each Module. You are required to provide at least two annotations per reading, one of which must be a response to a classmate's annotations. Annotations will be evaluated based on content, and engagement with the material. This is worth 20% of your grade.

**Civic Action Assignments:** Within each Module, you will have the chance to work on interactive assignments and exercise your civic engagement responsibilities. Specific assignments will include Discussion Forums where you will synthesize readings, background videos, and additional resources to address and discuss specific questions with your classmates; attend or view local election candidate forums; craft a candidate or local issue profile; participate in Unify America; attend a local government meeting; and more. Each Module has a variety of assignments from which you can choose. You are expected to complete (2) action assignments each Module, except Module 1, which only has (1) action assignment. Your civic action assignments will be evaluated on: completeness, grammar/spelling, and quality of the reflection. You MUST complete Module 1's action assignment. This is worth 25% of your grade.

**Policy Proposal:** The Public Policy Proposal is a semester long assignment where you will choose a local or state issue you are passionate about and propose a policy solution to that issue. You will take a proactive position and conduct research on the topic, identifying the need for your proposal, and construct a strategy on how you would implement the solution. The assignment is graded through a scaffolded model, whereby steps are reviewed throughout the semester and evaluated on the quality of your work and construction and defense of the policy proposal. This is worth 45% of your grade – 15% for the steps (each step is worth 3%) and 30% for the final submission. Each step of the assignment, a brief description of the step, and its associated due date are listed below. More detailed information on each step is available on Canvas.

<b>Project Step</b>	<b>Due Date 11:59PM</b>
Step 1: Problem Identification <i>What is the public policy issue you would like to address? Why is this a problem? What are the appropriate level of government to handle this issue?</i>	Wednesday, Sept. 3
Step 2: Annotated Bibliography <i>Identify 5-7 sources that will help you research and write your final proposal. Provide no more than a 1 paragraph annotation for each source, explaining how that source contributes to your research.</i>	Wednesday, Sept. 24
Step 3: Solution Strategy <i>Provide a detailed plan for addressing your policy issue. What is the timeline for implementation, who are the stakeholders? What costs are associated?</i>	Wednesday, Oct. 15
Step 4: Limitations, Challenges, and Opportunities <i>Explain the potential challenges to implementing your policy plan- and the opportunities it presents – how do you plan on overcoming potential limitations?</i>	Wednesday, Nov. 5
Step 5: Draft Intro & Conclusion <i>Create an introduction that provides a short, yet comprehensive background to your policy issues. Create a conclusion that summarizes the main points of your policy proposal – and provides a call to action.</i>	Thursday, Nov. 20
<b>Full Policy Proposal DUE: Monday, December 8 @ 11:59 PM</b>	

**Grading Policy/Conduct/Evaluation:**

I adhere to the following letter-to-grade conversion chart for all assignments and final grades. Grades ending in 0.5 or higher are rounded up to the nearest whole percentage point. **Note that a minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.** Additional information on UF grading policies is found at [this link](#).

$\geq 93 = A$	$90 - 92 = A-$	$87 - 89 = B+$	$83 - 86 = B$	$80 - 82 = B-$	$77 - 79 = C+$
$73 - 76 = C$	$70 - 72 = C-$	$67 - 69 = D+$	$63 - 66 = D$	$60 - 62 = D-$	$\leq 59 = E (F)$

Assignments are expected to be turned in on the due date. One letter grade per day (not class days) will be taken off for late assignments unless you have obtained prior approval for a different date due to special circumstances or have a university-approved excused absence. You can read more about UF's attendance policy [at this link](#).

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have some type of special circumstance, but you must do so before the due date unless it is an emergency. Communication is key.

This course offers a constructive environment in which students are free to offer their opinions and perspectives on many current issues. As we will discuss controversial issues, about which many people have strong opinions and beliefs, mutual respect is critical. It is fine to challenge someone's ideas/positions, but not the individual. Personal attacks will not be tolerated. Being an engaged citizen means understanding civil discourse, and this class is grounded in treating one another with mutual respect.

**This course complies with all UF academic policies. For more information on those policies and for resources for students, please [visit this link](#).**

**Course Schedule:**

*Please note: All Modules will be open at the beginning of the semester. All module assignments MUST BE COMPLETED by the module end date, unless otherwise indicated.*

**First Day of Class is August 21, 2025 – by Friday, August 29 – be sure to:**

- Log on to Canvas and tour the course site, including the syllabus and grading policy.
- View the Course Introduction Video.
- Review the Syllabus and contact me if you have questions.
- Post your introduction to Canvas.

## Course Schedule

<b>Module 1</b>	<b>The Fundamentals of the U.S. System &amp; Federalism</b>	<b>Read</b>	<b>Watch</b>	<b>Complete</b>
Aug 21 - Sept. 3	Course Introduction	What is Civic Engagement? Oxford Handbook of Political Participation, p. 381-395	Module 1 Lecture (13 mins.)	Course Discussion Post
	Basics & Goals of the System and Public Service	Graham & Hand (2020), p. 32 -38	Daniel Robert “Bob” Graham: A Lifetime Service (6 min.)	Quiz 1  Public Policy Proposal - Step 1
	American Federalism & polarization	Goelzhhauser & Konisky (2020), p. 311-342	Marijuana & Federalism: Who’s In Charge? (7 min)	Civic Action Assign.: National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Data Tool Read 2 articles and summarize (1/2 to 1 page each) Public Policy
<b>Module 2</b>	<b>Civic Participation</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Watch</b>	<b>Complete</b>
Sept. 4 - Sept. 24	Civil Rights & Civil Liberties	FIRE 2025 Report: Free-Speech on College Campuses	Module 2 Lecture (24 min.)	Civic Action Assignment: choose 1 1. CIRCLE – Young People and Discontent. 2. RAYSE Index Data exploration
	Political Participation	Vasilopoulos et al (2022) p. 422-442  Gillion et al (2020), p.1217-1243 <b>OR</b> Deckman & McDonald (2022), p. 1-25	BBC News Polarization (2 min.)	Public Policy Proposal, Step 2  Quiz 2
	Civic Engagement	Graham & Hand, p. 39-64		
<b>Module 3</b>	<b>Policymaking</b>	<b>Read</b>	<b>Watch</b>	<b>Complete</b>
Sept. 25- Oct. 15	Legislative Power	Curry & Roberts (2023), p. 333-69	Module 3 Lecture (23 min.)	Civic Action Assign: Choose 1: 1. Oyez.org- SCOTUS Analysis
	Executive Power	Thrower (2022), p. 14-28		2. Party Platforms Analysis 3. Issue Voter
	Judicial Power		Justice Stephen Breyer: How the Supreme Court Decides Cases (5 min).	

Political Parties	Karol, Handbook of American Political Parties, p. 1-15	We the People: Parties, Platforms, Conventions, & the Constitution (48 min).	Public Policy Proposal Step 3
Local Governance	Graham & Hand, p. 65-96		Quiz 3

Module 4	Important Issues	Read	Watch	Complete
Oct. 16- Nov. 12	The Role of the Media	Guess et al (2023) p. 398-404	Module 4 Lecture (10 min.)	Civic Action Assign. Choose 1: 1. Living Room Candidate 2. Local Govt. Participation 3. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
		Hutchens, et al (2023) p.1140-1457	AI Deepfakes (1 min)	Quiz 4
		Graham & Hand, p. 131-199	Monica Guzman TEDx Talk "How Curiosity Will Save Us" (18 min.)	Public Policy Proposal, Step 4 (due November 5)
Module 5	Reflections	Read	Watch	Complete
Nov. 13- Dec. 3	The State of Civic Engagement & your role in democracy	"What Killed Civic Culture?" (5 pages)	Module 5 Lecture (8 min.)	Civic Action Assign. Complete: One additional Previous Civic Action Assignment from previous module
		Graham & Hand, p. 273-287	Robert Putnam: "How America Came Together" (90 min)	Peer Review: Public Policy Proposal <b>Due December 3</b>
		Hope, "Rethinking Civic Engagement" p. 1-14	Bob Graham: "On Civic Engagement" Parts 1 & 2 (12 min).	Reflection Discussion Post
		Graham & Hand, p. 273-287		Public Policy Proposal, Step 5, <b>DUE NOVEMBER 20</b>

**Final Public Policy Proposal Due Monday, December 8 at 11:59 PM**

## Addendum: Description of Readings & Other Supplementary Material

### Module 1

- What is Civic Engagement? This chapter provides some basic definitions on civic engagement, civic participation, and civic culture.
- Graham & Hand. Chapter 1 introduces students to the idea of active participation and provides tools and guidance for identifying local policy issues. It provides practical guidance pertaining to the development of their class project.
- Goelzhauser & Konisky. This piece provides current and tangible examples of federalism

and how federalism impacts public policy in domains such as COVID-19, the environment, health, etc.

- Bob Graham: A Lifetime of Service. The video provides context and background on the late Senator's life of service, and commitment to civic engagement.
- Marijuana and Federalism: Who's in Charge? This video uses the example of marijuana regulation to illustrate the complexities of federalism.

## Module 2

- FIRE 2025 Report: This annual report ranks universities and colleges on their free speech policies. It also provides important context for current debates surrounding universities' role in fostering an open environment.
- Vasilopoulos et al. This article discusses how public opinion shifts in support for restrictions on Civil Liberties in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Gillion et al. This article discusses how political orientation, specifically the U.S. partisan gender-gap, develops, and illustrates how political preferences arise.
- Deckman & McDonald. This article specifically discusses Gen-Z's political preferences in terms of candidates and policies.
- Graham & Hand. Chapter 2 discusses how to gather important data and information to discuss with policy makers - and will provide students with some practical guidance pertaining to their class project.
- BBC News: Polarization. This video discusses the issue of political polarization and how it manifests in modern U.S. politics.

## Module 3

- Curry & Roberts. This article explores legislative behavior, specifically how members of Congress collaborate and build professional working relationships.
- Graham & Hand. Chapter 3 explores how to appropriately identify the level of government to petition for change. It provides practical guidance for students' class projects.
- Thrower. This article explores how Congress and public opinion both work to limit executive power and provides academic evidence for the concept of *separation of powers*.
- Karol. This article explores the role of the American political parties. Specifically in how parties contribute to the political landscape.
- Justice Breyer. This video features Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. He discusses the logistic process of how SCOTUS arrives at decisions. He underscores the importance of civil discourse.
- We the People: This podcast episode explores how parties developed, and their role in our system.

## Module 4

- Guess et al. This article explores how social media's algorithms during the 2020 election impacted polarization, political knowledge, and key political attitudes.
- Hutchens et al. This article explores the negative impacts of uncivil news comments on both users and newsrooms. The authors connect these types of stories to elements such as media trust.
- Graham & Hand. Chapters 5 & 7 discuss how citizens can build relationships and help influence policymakers. Specifically, coalition building both within citizen groups and with political elites. These chapters provide practical guidance for students' class projects.

- AI Deepfakes. This short video is from the UF Consortium for Trust and the Media. Explains the recent issue of AI and deepfakes in the media.
- Monica Guzman. This video is of Guzman's TED Talk where she discusses how to continue to be curious and seek out important and accurate information. She also emphasizes the importance of discussions with others.

## **Module 5**

- What Killed Civic Culture? This short reading discusses how Americans have become increasingly polarized.
- Hope: This article provides some research findings on how young people are civically engaged in the U.S. system.
- Graham & Hand. Chapter 10 provides guidance on how to take the next steps in policy reform, regardless of whether an individual is successful on their first try.
- Robert Putnam. In this video, Robert Putnam discusses his perception on America's historical civic participation, and prospects for increasing the civic life of Americans.
- Bob Graham: On Civic Engagement. These videos provide the late Senator's vision for increased citizen participation and civic engagement