# SOSC 18400 2 - Democracy: Equality, Liberty, and the Dilemmas of Self-Government I - Instructor(s): Andrew Brandel

Project Title: **College Course Feedback - Autumn 2023**

Number Enrolled: **18**
Number of Responses: **12**

**Report Comments**

Opinions expressed in these evaluations are those of students enrolled in the specific course and do not represent the University.

Creation Date: **Friday, February 2, 2024**

## What are the most important things that you learned in this course? Please reflect on the knowledge and skills you gained.

| Comments |
| --- |
| This course really broke down my assumptions about not just democracy but societal structures and roles in general. I've never taken a course like this in that it cleared away everything I thought I knew about democracy and built it back up from the bottom. For example, it changed the way I understand public and private spheres and how those fit into democratic participation. This course really helped me understand some of the modern assumptions that we place as a lens over everything, and how to see beyond those assumptions. |
| I think I've learned to approach ancient texts with a different reading and more inclusive understanding. I also think that I've been more able to participate in class discussions, and learned to formalize my ideas in an understandable way. Also, my writing has gotten better. |
| early democratic systems/republics (ancient greece, rome, florence) and their distinct mechanisms – and how they fit into a historical context. what the feature sof each were and how they affected participation, legitimacy, stability, corruption, etc. also th emost poignant thing i got from this course was th enotion that the more well–functioning a dmeocracy is, the more vulnerable it is to things that will undermine it... that underpins so many of the considerations we looked at with hitting the sweet spot between rule by the few/many and a ton of other dichotomies like that |
| The most important things I learned in this course was the unpacking of the texts and what the authors were thinking when writing it |
| How to think about and rationalize historical politcal thinkers, as well as comparing our beliefs on democracy to historical beliefs |
| Analyzed elements of Ancient Democracy formation and maleability in different case studies – acquired practical knowledge, but more significantly learned how to write effectively. |
| I would say that there was much more of an emphasis on gaining knowledge rather than skills. While the comments given for essay feedback massively helped with improving my essay writing skills, it felt like the course focused a lot more on learning about the progression of democracy historically, which was still interesting! |
| I've learned much more about how to construct a cohesive argument for a paper. I still have much farther to go in this skill, but the challenge of writing for this course has taught me a lot already. |
| Analytical writing techniques, foundational democratic societies. |
| I’ve learned about ancient democracies and how to evaluate the claims of texts. |
| I learned about the governments of ancient Greece, Rome, and the Florentine Republic at a pretty in–depth level for the first time in my life. I also learned how to organize longer (7–12 page) essays, which I wasn't used to coming out of high school. Professor Brandel also challenged me to look at certain sources from interesting perspectives. For example, I was asked to consider how certain philosophers/thinkers might interpret/respond to arguments made by other philosophers/thinkers based on the primary sources available to me. |

## Describe how aspects of this course (lectures, discussions, labs, assignments, etc.) contributed to your learning.

| Comments |
|---|
| We mostly held class discussions in this course, which were really helpful to understanding the text and unpacking the different arguments and ideas brought forth within the readings. |
| The class discussions let me learn a lot about the content, and were often fast paced and effective. |
| discussions were AWESOME (super informative and super engaging, too). he is a lively teacher, cracks a ton of clever (and usually currently relevant) jokes about the reading topics/subjects, speaks concisely but clearly+understandably, etc. i had the impression that the learning environment was really conducive to new thoughts and perspectives and it totally made this class my favorite so far |
| The discussions were helpful because they unpacked the readings that were dense and difficult to follow at the beginning. |
| Lectures/Discussions were engaging and allowed to move in any direction the group found interesting |
| The group discussions really contributed to learning, as it really did feel as if everyone had some other insight or bit of knowledge to emphasise/say which helped my learning. Likewise, Dr Brandel is a really good professor, both in terms of teaching the material and knowing when to step back and let the class take over. Also, his excellent taste in donuts helped with the study, and I strongly believe that his strategy of handing out food should be implemented more widely. |
| open discussion is amazing when reading such THICK and DENSE books |
| The discussions were fun and engaging, a great introduction to the social sciences. The two paper assignments were both big challenges because we had to come up with questions of our own. |
| Discussions on text help me better grasp textual analysis. |
| The readings and class discussions are essential to understanding the content. |
| Discussions are always engaging. Brandel keeps the energy up, and almost everyone participates. Even in the event that you don't get through all of the readings, you'll probably leave class with a good understanding of the content. |

## Please respond to the following:

| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This course challenged me intellectually. | 4.58 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 41.67% | 58.33% |
| I understood the purpose of this course and what I was expected to gain from it. | 4.67 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 33.33% | 66.67% |
| I understood the standards for success on assignments. | 4.42 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 58.33% | 41.67% |
| Class time enhanced my ability to succeed in graded assignments. | 4.58 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 25.00% | 66.67% |
| I received feedback on my performance that helped me improve my subsequent work. | 4.58 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 41.67% | 58.33% |
| My work was evaluated fairly. | 4.67 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 16.67% | 75.00% |
| I felt respected in this class. | 4.83 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 83.33% |
| Overall, this was an excellent course. | 4.92 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 91.67% |

## Additional comments about the course:

| Comments |
|---|
| This is seriously an excellent course, and I really recommend it as an introduction to the style of thinking that is encouraged at UChicago. Professor Brandel is a very qualified and engaging instructor, and he makes the class especially memorable. |

## I would recommend this course to:

| | No | Yes |
|---|---|---|
| Highly-motivated and well-prepared students | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Anyone interested in the topic | 0.00% | 100.00% |

## Thinking about your time in the class, what aspect of the instructor's teaching contributed most to your learning?

| Comments |
| --- |
| The professor's ability to challenge students' arguments and assumptions was really helpful to my understanding of how to make an argument and be able to back it up, as well as to recognize the assumptions and logic behind other people's arguments. The ease with which he led class discussions allowed me to understand the parts of the text I struggled with, and because he elevated students' participation, almost everyone participated in these discussions, which brought forth a lot of different interpretations of the ideas we were discussing that I never would have seen on my own. |
| The instructor was able to guide discussion to the relevant point very well, and was also pretty funny in his discussions, which helped to keep discussions engaging. |
| went though this but his style is so engaging and fun but somehow even more informative and thought–provoking. also he has one on one meetings for each and every one of us to hone our research Qs for essays and is open to new ideas – he literally was like i dont need to read the same answer to the same prompt, basically throw original ideas out there and really think, i want to see you all improve and really tussle with the ideas bc thats what this is all abt |
| Going through the texts and explaining what the text was saying more clearly was the most helpful |
| You can tell how passionate Brandel is for this class, and it made this class so much better than I expected. He is excellent at facilitating discussions on democracy and keeping his students engaged and motivated to learn, which in turn, allowed for me to learn more through the in–class discussions. |
| Extremely approachable and treated students as real people – created an incredibly receptive group setting that everyone benefited from. |
| He seemed to have a really deep understanding of the topic, and was able to teach really well. It didn't just feel like the information was being lectured to us, it felt as if it was really being taught. |
| His way of guiding discussion around the most important aspects of the readings. We got a good sense of what we should get out of the material while being able to explore ideas we found interesting. |
| Explaining the context of each reading. |
| He led thorough discussions about the text and clarified misconceptions. |
| In–class discussions were the biggest contributor to my learning. Feedback on essays was also pretty thorough. Definitely make use off the time you get to meet with prof. Brandel before essays are due. He can really help you get an idea off of the ground. |

## What could the instructor modify to help you learn more?

| Comments |
| --- |
| I think it would be helpful if we had received more feedback on our participation and ideas before writing the paper, because we didn't have any discussion posts or anything, so I wasn't sure what the professor's expectations were going into the first paper. |
| cant think of anything really he slays |
| N/A |
| N/A |
| Perhaps some writing on the board, some visual aspect to improve our understanding. |
| Not much |

## The Instructor . . .

| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organized the course clearly. | 4.83 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 83.33% | 0.00% |
| Presented lectures that enhanced your understanding. | 4.80 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 66.67% | 16.67% |
| Facilitated discussions that were engaging and useful. | 4.92 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 91.67% | 0.00% |
| Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the course. | 4.75 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 8.33% | 83.33% | 0.00% |
| Challenged you to learn. | 4.75 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% | 75.00% | 0.00% |
| Helped you gain significant learning from the course content. | 4.67 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 16.67% | 75.00% | 0.00% |
| Was available and helpful outside of class. | 4.50 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 8.33% | 33.33% | 58.33% | 0.00% |
| Motivated you to think independently. | 4.83 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 83.33% | 0.00% |
| Worked to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. | 4.83 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 83.33% | 0.00% |
| Overall, this instructor made a significant contribution to your learning. | 4.83 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 16.67% | 83.33% | 0.00% |

## Please include the name of the TA/CA/Intern you are evaluating. What aspects of the TA's teaching contributed most to your learning? What could the TA modify to help you learn more? Please include any additional feedback for the TA/CA/Intern.

| Comments |
|---|
| Emma Adler – Her writing workshops were really helpful to understand argument reconstruction and organization of ideas. I do think she could be more active in the workshops in terms of explaining whether our work with the text is working or if it needs to be re–evaluated. |
| Emma Adler |
| Emma Adler – was a helpful resource for writing mechanics |

## The TA/CA or Intern. . .

| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facilitated discussions that supported your learning. | 4.00 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 75.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |
| Gave you useful feedback on your work. | 3.33 | 3.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 25.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |
| Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the class. | 4.00 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% | 25.00% | 25.00% | 25.00% |
| Challenged you to learn. | 3.33 | 3.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 25.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |
| Helped you succeed in the class. | 3.67 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |
| Was available and helpful outside of class. | 4.00 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 75.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |
| Overall, this individual made a significant contribution to your learning. | 3.33 | 3.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 25.00% | 0.00% | 25.00% |

## How much did the following elements of the course contribute to your learning gains?

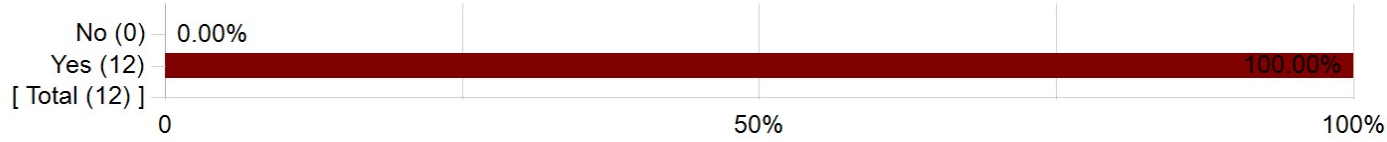
| | Mean | Median | No Gain | A Little Gain | Moderate Gain | Good Gain | Great Gain | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laboratory Experience | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Field Trips | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Library Sessions | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Review Sessions | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Writing Seminars | 2.43 | 2.00 | 12.50% | 37.50% | 25.00% | 12.50% | 0.00% | 12.50% |

## Other course elements not mentioned above:

| Comments |
|---|
| Writing workshops |

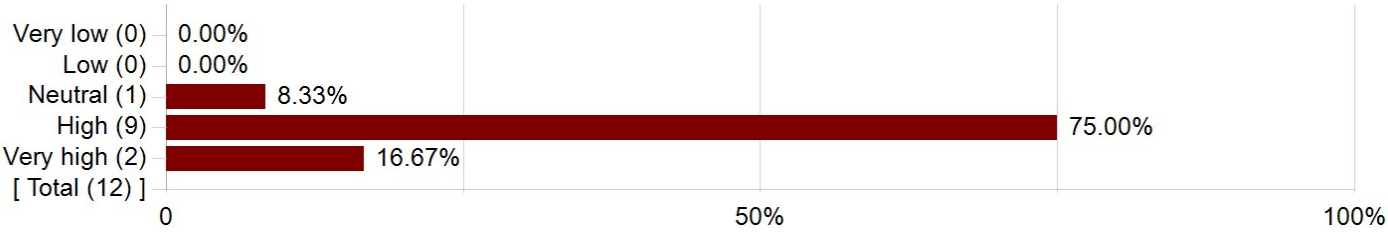
## Is this class a requirement of some sort?

Is this class a requirement of some sort?



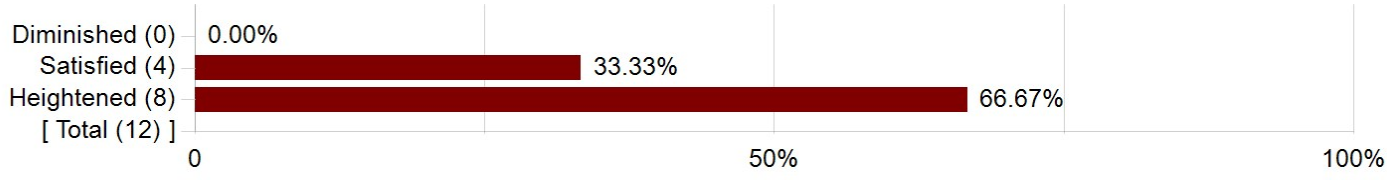

## Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?

Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?

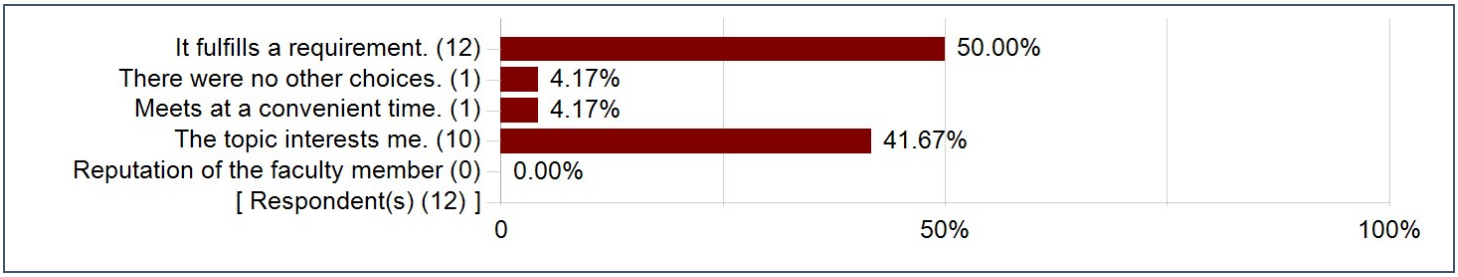



## Now that this class is over, your interest is?

Now that this class is over, your interest is?

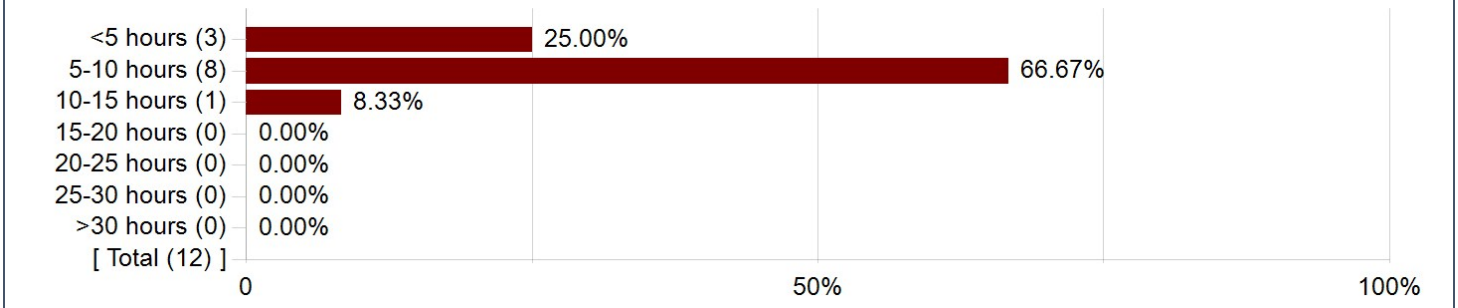


## Why did you choose to take this course? (Select all that apply)



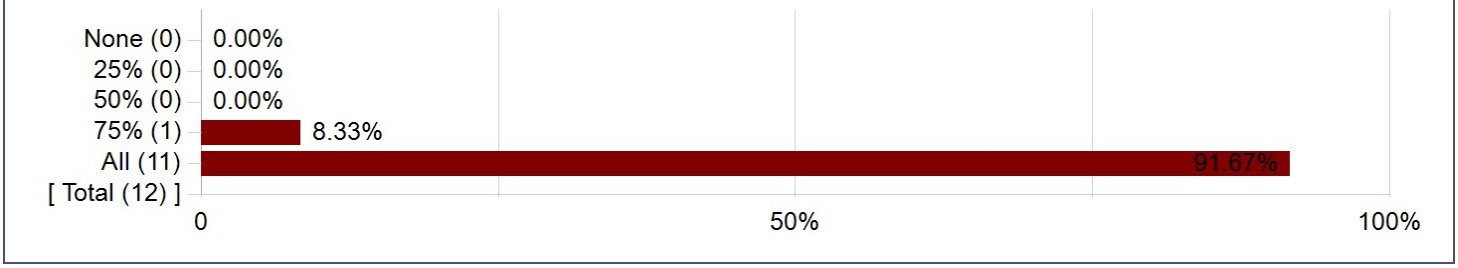

## How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course?

How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course?




## What proportion of classes did you attend?

What proportion of classes did you attend?



## Please comment on the level of difficulty of the course relative to your background and experience.

| Comments |
| --- |
| It honestly didn't feel difficult as much as it felt intellectually challenging. I do think the jump from class discussions to the first paper was a little rocky as a first year but I was satisfied with the feedback I received. |
| This class had much more reading and discussion than I'm used to, but in general I understood the content well based off my background. |
| havent ever taken a sosc obvi b/c this is the first in the req sequence. but i have onyl written hs english class papers until this point and this was a toally new type of writing but so rewarding to meet w him and figure out my research Qs and how to write this sort of thing. same applied with classes that helped me learn how to approach the types of texts we read and how to analyze them in a not–hs english–class way, a more menaingful, contexualized, analytical way instead |
| I had no background and experience with the readings and authors of them so the readings/course were hard in the beginning but it got better |
| Had a background in the subject material, but learning to "think" better and subsequently express those ideas proved to be valuable. |
| It was more difficult than other discussion classes I've taken in the past. There was more intellectual freedom given, and that was challenging. |
| I felt that the difficulty of this class was very fair. He doesn't hand out free As, but almost everyone ends up doing fairly well, and if you're willing to put in the effort I think that anyone can succeed grade–wise in this course. |