

The Practice of Citizenship: Cooperation and Obligations in Democratic Life¹

Department of Political Science, L32 4591

Credits: 3

Term: Spring 2026

Mode: In-person

Classroom: Seigle Hall #206

Days/Times: Monday & Wednesday, 10 to 11:20 AM

Instructor Information

Instructor: Prof. Andrew Reeves

Email: reeves@wustl.edu

Office: Seigle Hall #191

Office Hours: Mondays 1PM to 2PM; Wednesdays 1:45PM to 2:45PM

Assistant in Instruction (AI): Seongkyung Pyo

Email: p.seonkyung@wustl.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4 PM (Seigle Hall #251)

Course Description

This course examines citizenship as both a practice of democratic life and a solution to cooperation problems. We integrate political theory, American political voices, and empirical political science to ask: What civic capacities sustain democracy, and what obligations do citizens and institutions share in cultivating them? Students will engage with classics from Aristotle to MLK, analyze modern empirical studies on trust, polarization, and civic education, and reflect on their own university's role in preparing citizens.

Central Question: How do citizens develop the knowledge, skills, and norms to sustain cooperation in democracy, and what obligations do universities like WashU have to support this development?

Learning Objectives

¹ Last updated January 19, 2026 at 5:34 PM.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze classic and modern theories of citizenship and cooperation
- Evaluate empirical research on civic capacity, trust, and democratic performance
- Synthesize normative and empirical arguments about citizen obligations
- Apply collective action frameworks to contemporary U.S. challenges
- Produce evidence-based policy analysis about higher education's civic role
- Practice skills of dialogue, annotation, and policy writing

Texts and Materials

All readings will be posted on Canvas. There are no required books to purchase.

Reading Load: Most weeks include 75-125 pages. Allen chapters average 15-25 pages each. Empirical articles average 20-30 pages.

Citation Style: Use any standard academic citation style consistently throughout your written work. Political science commonly uses Chicago (author-date) or APSA, but APA, MLA, or other academic styles are also acceptable. Choose one style and use it for all assignments in this course.

Submissions: All assignments will be submitted through Canvas.

How This Course Works

This course combines seminar discussion, collaborative reading, empirical analysis, and policy writing. Here's what to expect each week:

Before Class:

- Complete assigned readings (typically 75-125 pages per week)
- Most weeks, you'll post either a brief reflection (200-300 words) on Canvas OR annotate readings using Hypothesis (our collaborative annotation tool)
- Reflections and annotations are due by 9 AM on the day of class

During Class:

- Discussion-based sessions where we connect theory, empirics, and contemporary challenges
- Some weeks include student-led discussions on case studies

Written Work:

- Three short empirical briefs analyzing studies from our readings
- One analytical paper putting classic and modern thinkers in conversation

- Two response papers connecting outside events to course themes
- One policy white paper as your final project

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation (20%)

Your participation grade is assessed holistically based on:

- **Attendance:** On-time, consistent presence; max 2 unexcused absences. A third unexcused absence results in loss of all attendance points.
- **Weekly Annotations:** At least 5 times across the semester, complete the assigned annotation activity using Hypothesis. Post at least 3 substantive annotations on the assigned reading by 9 AM on the day of class. Annotations are graded for completion and thoughtfulness, not perfection. Annotation weeks include: Week 1 (Aristotle), Week 2 (Federalist/Constitution), Week 4 (Hayek), Week 6 (Locke), Week 7 (Mill), Week 8 (Lincoln/Thoreau), Week 10 (Rawls), Week 11 (Douglass). You choose which 5 to complete.
- **Class Contributions:** Active, thoughtful participation in discussion. Quality matters more than quantity.

Student-Led Case Study (5%)

During Weeks 13-15, you'll work in a group of 3-4 students to lead 30-40 minutes of class discussion on an assigned topic (Free Speech, Religion & Pluralism, Inequality, or Policing & Protest).

Your group will:

- Select 2-3 readings (articles, book chapters, or primary sources) relevant to your topic
- Prepare 3-5 discussion questions based on those readings
- Post your selected readings to Canvas by **Friday, April 3** so classmates can prepare
- Submit a 1-page discussion plan outlining your readings, questions, and facilitation approach by **Friday, April 3**
- Facilitate class discussion using activities, debate, or case analysis

Groups will be formed and topics assigned in Week 11.

Empirical Briefs (3 total) (20%)

Write three briefs (300-400 words each) analyzing empirical studies from the syllabus. Each brief is worth approximately 7% of your grade.

Use this template:

1. What claim does the study test?
2. What method does it use?
3. What does it find?
4. What are the implications for citizenship and cooperation?

Which studies to analyze:

- Brief #1 (due Jan 30): Choose either Persson & Tabellini (Week 2) OR Alesina & La Ferrara (Week 3)
- Brief #2 (due Feb 6): Choose either Henrich et al. OR Alesina & La Ferrara
- Brief #3 (due Feb 20): Calfano, Djupe, and Wilson

Submit briefs as PDFs via Canvas by 11:59 PM on the due date.

Short Paper (10%)

Write one analytical essay (6-7 pages, approximately 1,500-1,800 words) that puts one classic thinker from Weeks 1-8 in dialogue with Danielle Allen's argument in *Talking to Strangers* and one empirical study from the syllabus.

Choose one classic thinker: Aristotle, Federalist authors, Smith, Hayek, Tocqueville, Locke, MLK, Mill, Lincoln, or Thoreau.

Your paper should:

- Explain the classic thinker's core argument about citizenship or cooperation
- Show how Allen extends, challenges, or applies that argument
- Use an empirical study to test or illustrate the theoretical claims
- Develop your own argument about what this synthesis reveals

You may choose any combination of texts from the syllabus. If you'd like to discuss your topic, come to office hours.

Due: Friday, April 3 by 11:59 PM via Canvas

Event Response Papers (10%)

Attend at least **two** outside events during the semester that engage with democratic citizenship, public policy, or civic life. Write a 2-3 page response paper (approximately 600-900 words) for each, connecting the event to course themes and readings. Each paper is worth 5% of your grade.

Event Approval:

Post event details to the Canvas discussion board **at least 3 days before attending** with: (1) event title and speaker, (2) date/time/location, and (3) one sentence explaining how it connects to citizenship or democratic life. Seongkyung will respond within 24 hours to approve or suggest modifications.

In your response paper:

- Briefly summarize the event (1 paragraph)
- Connect it to at least 2 course readings or themes
- Reflect on what you learned about citizenship, cooperation, or democratic obligations

Deadlines: Attend two events anytime during the semester. Submit both response papers together by **Monday, April 20**. Alternatively, you may submit one paper by **Friday, March 7** (before spring break) and one by **Monday, April 20** if you'd like feedback on your first before writing your second.

Final Project (25%)

White Paper: What Does WashU Owe Its Students in Creating Citizens?

Write a 10-12 page policy white paper (approximately 2500 to 3,000 words) answering the question: What obligations does Washington University in St. Louis have to its students in preparing them for the responsibilities of citizenship in the 21st century?

Your white paper should:

- Define what capacities or knowledge citizens need in a democracy
- Draw on course readings (theory and empirics) to justify your claims
- Make specific, actionable recommendations for WashU
- Address potential objections or trade-offs
- Be written for an audience of university administrators or trustees

Structure:

- Executive summary (1 page)
- Problem statement (What civic capacities do citizens need?)
- Analysis and argument (drawing on course readings)
- Recommendations (What should WashU do?)
- Conclusion

Due: Wednesday, May 6, 2026, by 11:59 PM via Canvas

Grading Scale

A = 93–100	A– = 90–92	B+ = 87–89	B = 83–86	B– = 80–82
C+ = 77–79	C = 73–76	C– = 70–72	D = 60–69	F = below 60

Course Calendar (Spring 2026, M/W)

Key WashU Dates:

- **First Day:** Mon, Jan 12
 - **MLK Holiday:** Mon, Jan 19 (no class)
 - **Spring Break:** Mar 9–15 (no classes)
 - **Last Class:** Wed, Apr 22
 - **Reading Days:** Apr 27–29
 - **Finals:** Apr 30–May 6 (No Final Exam)
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Part I: Foundations of Citizenship & Cooperation (Weeks 1–5)

Week 1 (Jan 12 & 14) – What is Citizenship?

Mon: Course overview; reflective writing prompt (What is citizenship?).

Wed: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, chs. 1–5 (annotation)

Week 2 (Jan 19 & 21) – Law, Liberty, and Institutions

Mon: No Class – MLK Day

Wed: Federalist 10, 51, and U.S. Constitution (annotation); Persson & Tabellini, "Constitutional Rules and Fiscal Policy Outcomes," *AER* (2004).

Week 3 (Jan 26 & 28) – Citizenship and Trust

Mon: Alesina & La Ferrara, "Who Trusts Others?" *Journal of Public Economics* (2002).

Wed: Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* (1995); Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chs. 1–2.

→ **Empirical Brief #1 due Friday, Jan 30**

Week 4 (Feb 2 & 4) – Markets and Knowledge

Mon: Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, ch. 2; Henrich et al., "In Search of Homo Economicus," *AER* (2001).

Wed: Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (annotation); Allen, ch. 3; Scott, *Seeing Like A State*, introduction and ch. 1.

→ **Empirical Brief #2 due Friday, Feb 6**

Week 5 (Feb 9 & 11) – Community and Civil Society

Mon: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Pt. II, chs. 5–7 (annotation).

Wed: Skocpol, "Voice and Inequality: The Transformation of American Civic Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics* (2004).

Part II: Civic Capacities & Obligations (Weeks 6–10)

Week 6 (Feb 16 & 18) – Religion and Pluralism

Mon: Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*. (annotation)

- **To the Reader" + Opening argument (pp. 213-220):** Essential framing of toleration as the "chief characteristic mark of the true church" and the separation of church/commonwealth
- **The magistrate's duty section (pp. 228-236):** Locke's core argument about civil vs. religious jurisdiction, with the practical examples (the calf sacrifice, baptism cases)

- **Limits of toleration (pp. 244-246):** The exceptions—atheists, those undermining civil society, those pledging allegiance to foreign powers
- **Conclusion on equal rights (pp. 248-251):** Brings the argument home to practical application

Wed: MLK, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"; Allen, ch. 4; Calfano, Djupe, and Wilson, "Religious Value Priming, Threat, and Political Tolerance," *Political Research Quarterly* (2013).

→ **Empirical Brief #3 due Friday, Feb 20**

Week 7 (Feb 23 & 25) – Free Speech and Discourse

Mon: Mill, *On Liberty* (ch. II) (annotation); Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, intro and ch. 4.

Wed: Allen, ch. 4 (finish if needed); Levendusky, "Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?" *AJPS* (2013).

Week 8 (Mar 2 & 4) – Citizenship in Crisis

Mon: Lincoln, "Lyceum Address" and Gettysburg Address (annotation); Svolik, "Polarization versus Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* (2019).

Wed: Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address; Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (annotation); Allen, ch. 5; Wasow, "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting," *APSR* (2020).

→ **Optional: Submit first event response paper by Friday, March 7**

Week 9 (Mar 9 & 11) – Spring Break – No Classes

Week 10 (Mar 16 & 18) – Inequality and Justice

Mon: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Vol. II, Pt. II, ch. 1) (annotation); Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (§§1–4) (annotation).

Wed: Allen, ch. 6; Gilens & Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* (2014).

Part III: Contemporary Challenges & Applications (Weeks 11–15)

Week 11 (Mar 23 & 25) – Responsibility and Education

Mon: Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"; Dee, "Are There Civic Returns to Education?" *Journal of Public Economics* (2004).

Wed: Allen, chs. 7–8; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, "Civic Education and Deeper Learning" (2014); Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*, ch. 1 (2012).

Student-led case study groups formed and topics assigned this week.

Week 12 (Mar 30 & Apr 1) – Polarization and Breakdown

Mon: Levitsky & Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Intro, ch. 4).

Wed: No class. Prep for case studies.

→ **Short Paper due Friday, Apr 3**

Week 13 (Apr 6 & 8) – Case Studies I

Mon: Student-Led Case Study: Free Speech.

Wed: Student-Led Case Study: Religion & Pluralism.

Week 14 (Apr 13 & 15) – Case Studies II

Mon: Student-Led Case Study: Disinformation & Democratic Discourse.

Wed: Student-Led Case Study: Inequality.

Week 15 (Apr 20 & 22) – The Practice of Citizenship Today

Mon: Student-Led Case Study: Policing & Protest.

Wed: Arendt, *Human Condition* (Prologue; ch. V §§24–26); Allen, Conclusion; Pew Research Center, "Americans' Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for Its Role" (2023).

→ **Event response papers due Monday, April 20**

→ **Final White Paper due Wednesday, May 6 by 11:59 PM**

University-Wide Required Policies

Academic Integrity

Students must uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. All work must be your own. Proper citation of sources, including AI tools, is required. Plagiarism, cheating, or misrepresentation will result in disciplinary action as outlined in the Washington University Undergraduate Student Academic Integrity Policy.

Generative AI Policy (Course-Specific)

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, Claude) may not be used to complete graded assignments. They may be used for brainstorming or outlining only if disclosed in writing. Submitting AI-generated work as your own is an integrity violation.

Unauthorized Recording and Distribution

Students may not record, stream, or distribute class sessions without prior approval. Approved recordings are for personal use only.

Disability Resources

Students requiring accommodations should contact Disability Resources (<https://disability.wustl.edu/>) as early as possible. I will work with you to ensure equal access.

Sexual Harassment and Assault

WashU is committed to a safe learning environment. If you experience or witness sexual harassment, assault, or discrimination, I am required to report it to the Title IX Office. Confidential resources are available through the RSVP Center.

Religious Holidays

Students who need to miss class or assignments for religious observances should notify me by the third week of the semester.

Emergency Preparedness

In case of emergency, follow university guidance. Download the WashU Safe App and review classroom emergency quick guides.

Student Resources

WashU provides many student resources, including mental health services, tutoring, and career advising. Visit <https://students.wustl.edu/> for details.