

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Empowering Citizens

Course Number and Section

GLE

3009F 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL Brightspace is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

We live in an era when trust in public officials, governments, experts and leaders across sectors are reaching critical lows, with important consequences for the legitimacy of decision making, the health of our democracy, and our ability to solve complex problems. Some observers are ringing the alarm bells, dubbing this an era of polarization and pessimism, or characterized by disinformation, division and disconnection.

Can empowering citizens produce different (and better) policy outcomes?

This course takes a deep, curiosity-driven look into these questions by examining the idea of ‘the citizen’ and what can happen when citizens are empowered to play a greater role in governance, leadership and policy-making. The course is organized into three sections: an examination of the idea of ‘the citizen’ in our changing world; an exploration into new ways citizens are being empowered as policy and decision makers; and, conversations about the role of the citizen actor in addressing a series of major policy challenges. Most of the specific classes in this course are organized around one central question – focused on engaging, lively dialogue informed by the materials and perspectives curated for each class.

Students: don’t be surprised if the course causes you to question the role that citizens are, can and should play in our world today – including you.

Learning Outcomes: one outcome per entry

Conceptualize multiple definitions, ideas and theories related to key concepts including citizenship, community engagement, empowerment, forms of democracy (deliberative democracy, participatory democracy), co-creation and more.

Integrate knowledge and develop critical understanding of the connections and interplay between citizenship, governance and leadership.

Deepen their own understanding (and ideally, interest and investment) in a host of contemporary policy challenges where the individual actor can play a key role in driving change.

Demonstrate critical awareness of and commitment to the public good and ethical decision making, including transparency and accountability, particularly in the formation of public policy.

Develop self-awareness about their own interest as citizens in the world.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

This course draws on two central texts which are both available on OWL (and via the library):

Bua, Adrian and Sonia Bussu, Reclaiming Participatory Governance: Social Movements and the Rise of Democratic Innovation, Routledge Studies in Democratic Innovations (2023).

OECD, Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave, OECD Publishing, Paris (2020).

We will also be engaging with an array of materials including journal articles, media reports, podcasts and more. All readings are posted in the schedule below, and when possible will be made available in OWL. Weekly readings may change or be added, as events develop (eg. relevant media articles about current events will be added throughout the course).

Methods of Evaluation: one assignment per entry

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Class Contribution	10/15/2006	10
Class Contribution	12/09/2006	10
Reflection Paper	09/25/2026	15
Reflection Paper	11/06/2026	15
Case Study	11/20/2026	20
Final Essay	12/09/2026	30

Monday, August 10, 2026

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For Textbooks and Course Materials (below), you are required to include the cost of each textbook or other learning material.

Note whether there are any restrictions that would prevent a student from using a second-hand copy. Here is some suggested text:

- Required textbook: [author, title, edition, publisher, date]. Cost: [insert amount].
 - Or include the weblink of the textbook's publisher site that includes the cost information.
- Students need to purchase this edition. Second-hand or older editions will not be sufficient.
- OR Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- This course has an optional field trip that costs [insert amount].
- This course has a required field component that costs [insert amount].

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.