

AMDM 1575-110: Engaging with Democracy

Fall 2025

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Class: CHHS 380, Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:30 – 12:45 pm
Office hours: Tues/Thurs 1:00pm-2:00pm and by appt.
Virtual options are also available via Zoom

Course Description and Purpose

An interdisciplinary examination of issues or concepts related to American democracy, with attention to key historical documents including but not limited to the following: the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, select Federalist Papers, the Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail. The concept of democracy is based on ancient ideas that inspired American democracy, and we will consider how writers/speakers use commonly understood (perhaps, “core”) principles of American Democracy in their messages. Throughout the course, we will focus on the rhetorical assumptions writers/speakers employ to attempt to persuade audiences.

Additional texts are on Canvas, and our course outline of topics is on the class website: <https://pages.charlotte.edu/aaron-toscano/>.

Course Objectives and Biases

I have a bias that drives my pedagogy, and I want to make this absolutely clear: **I believe that education for the sake of education is good in and of itself.** I don't make any claim that you will learn anything practical that you may directly apply to a 9-to-5 job. Another huge bias I have is that a university education is not about reinforcing student beliefs; instead, students should consider how their own biased perspectives have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a broader intellectual appreciation of rhetoric and American democracy.

Texts and Materials

Required Readings

Readings on [Canvas](#)—see syllabus calendar for specific dates

- [The Declaration of Independence](#)
- [The U.S. Constitution](#) & [Bill of Rights](#)
- [Federalist Papers 10, 58, & 71](#)
- [The Gettysburg Address](#)
- [The Emancipation Proclamation](#)
- [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)

Recommended Reading

Locker, Laura. *Introducing American Politics*. 1st or 2nd Edition, Icon Books, 2020. {9781785786020}

Withey, Michael. *Mastering Logical Fallacies: The Definitive Guide to Flawless Rhetoric and Bulletproof Logic*. Zephyros P, 2016. {9781623157104}

Expectations

I expect students to be prepared when they come to class. There is not a lot of reading in this course, but you must plan your school-work-life needs to be successful. Students should have read the assigned reading prior to coming to class. Also, to get the most out of this course, students should read and take good notes on the reading. I have a website devoted to this class, and [Canvas](#) will have some additional information. This is a large lecture class, so it is vital that you follow along with the syllabus and class website. Do not expect detailed notes about the readings via e-mail. In addition to the readings and tests, students must do (almost) Weekly Discussion Posts on [Canvas](#). Please don't neglect these. These reflections are not right or wrong; instead, they are chances for you to think through your ideas and develop critical thinking faculties. Remember, you

are here to learn. This course, specifically, and Gen Ed requirements, in general, are supposed to help you expand your thinking. These courses are not to tell you what to think—that’s up to you. Our goal is to demonstrate how ideas, discourse, and society provide filters for how we understand broader cultural ideology. Specifically, this class on foundational American texts attempts to foster learning not for any specific job but to be an informed (perhaps, well-rounded) citizen. Critical thinkers and informed citizens do not look to be spoon fed ideas. They strive to ask appropriate questions about topics or situations or life itself. However, you should leave with more questions than answers and learn to cope with ambiguity.

UNC Charlotte adheres to the “Carnegie unit” for determining credit hours. This 3-credit course requires 150 minutes of classroom or direct faculty instruction and 300 minutes of out-of-class student work **each week for approximately 15 weeks**. Out-of-class work may include but is not limited to the following: reading, researching, doing assignments, and studying for exams. The above outside-of-class work expectations are derived from [Academic Affairs, II. Policy Statement](#).

Assignments and Grading Policy

Students will take four tests (including a midterm and final exam) and do (almost) Weekly Discussion posts.

Assignments	pts.	Grading Scale
Test #1	100	A= 90 – 100
Midterm Exam	200	B= 80 – 89.99
Test #2	100	C= 70 – 79.99
Final Exam	200	D= 60 – 69.99
Participation (in-class)	100	F= Below 60
(almost) Weekly Discussion Posts (10)	300	
Total	1000	

Late Work

No late work will be accepted. Unless we need to make other accommodations, all assignments will be turned in on [Canvas](#) by the **11:07 pm deadline**. It is your responsibility to make sure your assignments are properly and completely uploaded to [Canvas](#) before the deadline. This will require you to upload and then double check to make sure there were no glitches. For instance, when you copy + paste your Discussion Posts into the [Canvas](#) text box, after clicking **submit**, go to the assignment and make sure yours has been uploaded.

Attendance

I will not take attendance every day. It is very important that you attend every class in order to keep up with the course objectives. **YOU WILL NOT DO WELL IF YOU MISS CLASS**. Class discussion is important because it reinforces the material you read and helps explain the rhetorical theories and possible cultural contexts important for finding meaning in an author’s work. Author assumptions are not always obvious on a first reading. You’ll be reading primary texts, so you can form your initial opinions without the “noise” of interpreters or the “gaps” of summary. What I have noticed from past semesters is that students who miss class also forget what is coming up—readings, tests, etc. **DO NOT EXPECT MAKE-UP TESTS/EXAMS**. Ultimately, your success in this course lies with your decision to commit to the course requirements and appropriately balance school-work-life needs. There are no such things as excused absences. Only students participating in UNC Charlotte sponsored activities (with the proper documentation) will be allowed to change test times. I will ask you to request a meeting with the Dean of Students if you have situations that you feel should allow you an exception to these course policies. Cars break down, parking is limited, students get sick, and traffic is brutal, but class still happens. Please get to class on time, and, if you are late, be courteous and do not disturb the class with your noise. Also, if you have to leave class, do so quietly. If you are absent, follow along with the syllabus and webpage or get class notes from another student. Do not expect me to e-mail the class notes to you. Of course, never e-mail me and ask, “so...like, Dr. Toscano, man...did we...like...you know...do anything the other day in class?”

Please note that UNC Charlotte is under a federal mandate to comply with a financial aid rule that requires professors to identify the last date of attendance for students receiving unsatisfactory grades. Please visit the following webpage for more information: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/gradingholds/last-date-attendance>.

Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule on the last two pages has important dates for readings and assignments. Students are responsible for not only knowing course deadlines but also knowing UNC Charlotte deadlines (drop/add, billing, vacation, etc.). Please visit the following link for the registrar's calendar: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/printable-calendar>.

Classroom Recording (Audio, Visual, etc.)

Electronic video, image capture, and/or audio recording is not permitted during class, whether conducted in person or online, unless the student obtains permission from the instructor. If permission is granted, any distribution of the recording is prohibited. Students with specific electronic recording accommodations authorized by the Office of Disability Services do not require instructor permission; however, the instructor must be notified of any such accommodation prior to recording. **Any distribution of such recordings is prohibited.** Remember, recorded lectures are protected, and the information recorded is for a student's (with appropriate documented accommodations) personal study use and cannot be shared with others.

The above language comes directly from the [University's Legal Affairs Office](#), and more information related to this can be found at [University Policy 402, Student Education Records \(FERPA\)](#): <https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-402#directory>.

Academic Integrity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is an academic community dedicated to teaching, scholarship, service, inclusion, and the holistic development of Students. Academic integrity is a cornerstone value of the University's intellectual community. It is important to nurture an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and mutual responsibility. **Integrity is essential because it ensures that Students fairly benefit from their educational experience and pursuits of knowledge.** Violating the principles of academic integrity damages the reputation of the University and undermines its educational mission and goals.

The University recognizes that Academic Misconduct detracts from the value of a UNC Charlotte degree and has influence beyond the University community, including relationships with employers, other educational institutions, the business community, the UNC system, and the community at large.

The purpose of [the Code](#) is to:

1. support and promote an ethical learning environment;
2. create consistent standards for all members of the academic community;
3. **assist Students in learning responsibility for one's own academic work;**
4. protect the academic environment of the University community; and
5. **clarify Student values and how they relate to the behavior in question.**

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty (From University Policy: 407, Ch. 6—<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-407#c6>)

- A. **Cheating** means using or attempting to use materials, or giving assistance or materials without Authorization to another in any academic exercise that could result in gaining or helping another to gain academic advantage. Cheating includes, but is not limited, to the following actions:
 1. *Copying* - copying from another's assignment, examination, or other academic exercise;

2. *Use of Unauthorized Materials* - using materials or equipment in connection with an assignment, examination, or other academic exercise which have not been authorized by the faculty member, including but not limited to, notes, calculator, websites, **Artificial Intelligence and/or other technology**;
 3. *Misrepresentation* - permitting another to substitute for one's self in an academic exercise, or submitting of an academic exercise that has been prepared by another;
 4. *Unauthorized Collaboration* - communicating about and/or sharing the work or effort in an academic exercise with another individual or individuals without Authorization.
- B. **Fabrication** means providing fabricated information, including inventing or counterfeiting information, in any form in an academic exercise.
 - C. **Failure to Comply** means failing to comply with a specific instruction related to a condition of protecting academic integrity that has been clearly communicated in a particular course, syllabus, test, assessment, assignment, or other academic exercise.
 - D. **Falsification** means altering without Authorization any data or information, regardless of communication method (e.g., e-mail or other electronic communication), in an academic exercise.
 - E. **Misuse of Academic Materials** means sharing, distributing, altering, acquiring, damaging, or making inaccessible academic materials without Authorization, that could result in gaining or helping another to gain an academic advantage.
 - F. **Multiple Submission** means submitting academic work or substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) in more than one academic exercise without Authorization.
 - G. **Plagiarism** means presenting the words or ideas of another as one's own words or ideas, including failing to properly acknowledge a source, unless the ideas or information are common knowledge. **[See [website](#) for more information]**

If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source—you will receive an 'F' in this course. If you use non-sanctioned resources (e.g., other classmates) to complete assignments, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

In addition to the above identification of Academic Dishonesty, students should be aware of technology-mediated concerns related to Academic Integrity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "**integrity**" as "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety." A second definition states that integrity means, "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness." Therefore, anything that draws students' attention away from course activities and goals violates the essence of academic integrity because it corrupts the soundness and condition of learning. For instance, engaging in critical thinking/awareness is a sound, perfect state activity for this course; on the other hand, devoting attention to social media, texting/messaging, non-class-related internet activities (e-mailing, etc.) violates or corrupts the learning goals of this course. Although we may point to the internet in general and social media sites specifically in our discussions of American democracy, engrossing oneself in them during class to "catch up with friends" divides your attention and may be distracting to members of this class. You have plenty of time during the day to doom scroll and indulge in all that your phone has to offer before or after class. There will be times (usually at the end of class) when I ask you to access Canvas, and you can use your laptops or phones to do so. Please only use your mobile devices for class-related stuff when in class.

You will also receive an 'F' in the course for other academic integrity violations. Do not expect another warning—this is it. Please see me if you need further clarification regarding cheating, fabrication or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, or complicity in academic dishonesty. Again, so there's no confusion, you will most likely fail the course if you violate any part of the academic integrity code.

Title IX Mandated Reporting

{This section is often subject to change based on federal changes that could happen during the semester. We will abide by any new regulations.}

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that many UNC Charlotte employees, including all faculty members, are considered [Responsible Employees](#) who are required to relay any information or reports of sexual misconduct they receive to the Title IX Coordinator. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must [report the information to the Title IX Coordinator](#). Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, please contact any of the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator: (1) University Counseling Center (caps.charlotte.edu, 7-0311); (2) Student Health Center (studenthealth.charlotte.edu, 7-7400); or (3) Center for Wellness Promotion (wellness.charlotte.edu, 7-7407). Additional information about your options is also available at the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX](#) under the "Students" tab.

Safety and Security Information

UNC Charlotte's Emergency Management offers the following safety tips. Visit emergency.charlotte.edu for more information, and Download the [Livesafe app](#), which connects you to campus police via phone or text 24/7.

- 911 dialed from a mobile phone connects to CMPD and can slow down response.
- Alternatively, you can put the UNC Charlotte Police emergency number in your phone: 704-687-2200.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and know the quickest escape routes: exit doors, windows, etc.
- Safety and Security offers a variety of trainings to students. For more information, visit: <https://police.charlotte.edu/safety>
- Remember: Personal pepper spray is allowed on campus. [These weapons are prohibited](#).

Action Directives included from Emergency Management's ["Preparedness"](#):

Run-Hide-Fight is the individual's Action Directive for an active assailant.

- **RUN:** If outside or in a building and it is safe to flee, run and leave the campus if possible.
- **HIDE:** If you are in a building and unsure of where the threat is, find the closest room in which to hide. Close, lock and/or barricade doors if they do not lock. Do not huddle in one location. Remain quiet.
- **FIGHT:** This is a last-resort option. Do not seek the assailant. If you come into direct contact with the individual, use any means necessary to defend yourself.

A **Seek Shelter** directive is normally issued during severe weather or hazardous material releases.

If a Seek Shelter is ordered:

- Stay inside if you are indoors.
- If outside, quickly go to the nearest building.
- Once indoors, find a fitting room or space in the building to shelter. Stay away from windows.

An **Evacuation** can be for either a single building, area, or the entire campus. Further information and direction will be included in the NinerAlert.

Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to their own tastes and convictions (but don't mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think texts have single, objectively reasoned meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, education, etc. influence how we

perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the Disabilities Resource Center (ds.charlotte.edu/) to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. I don't need specifics about a condition, but I will need to know what specific accommodations you will need.

Inclement Weather/Building Issues/Apocalypse

Some buildings can have HVAC problems. Occasionally, the powers that be close buildings and classes are canceled because it is too brutally hot to remain inside. If a building related "issue" cancels class, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and [Canvas](#) posts. The library has lots of space and many computers. We'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus when we return to class. This also goes for inclement weather and other situations that cancel class.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(have readings and assignments done before class)

August 19	Introduction to the Course: Go over the syllabus and introduce the class material Know where the readings are located on Canvas .
August 21*	Jefferson, Thomas et. al. The Declaration of Independence. 4 July 1776. National Archives
*August 26 th : Last day to register. If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course.	
August 26*	The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence (May 20, 1775) Abigail Adams to John Adams "Remember the Ladies" (March 31 & April 5, 1776)
August 28	de Crèvecoeur [krev-kur], J. Hector St. John. "What is an American?" (1792). <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> . Library of Congress, 1792, pp. 42-80. Discussion Post #1
September 2	Madison, James. The U.S. Constitution
September 4	de Tocqueville , Alexis. "Chapter IV: On the Principal Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic" (1835). <i>Democracy in America</i> , 1835, pp. 264-302. Discussion Post #2
September 9	George Washington's Farewell Address (1796)
September 11 **Test 1**	No Class Meeting—Test #1 on Canvas
September 16	Rosen, Jeffrey. "Order," <i>The Pursuit of Happiness: How Classical Writers on Virtue Inspired the Lives of the Founders and Defined America</i> . Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 1-15.
September 18*	Bill of Rights Discussion Post #3

*September 18th: Deadline to apply for December 2024 graduation

September 23	Key Amendments [Others TBD] The Twenty-Seventh Amendment to the Constitution (1992)
September 25	Madison, James. Federalist Paper #10 Discussion Post #4
September 30	Madison, James. Federalist Paper #58
October 2	Hamilton, Alexander. Federalist Paper #71 Discussion Post #5
October 7 **MIDTERM**	No Class Meeting—MIDTERM on Canvas: Covers Readings up to this point
October 9	Fall Break—No Class
October 14	Stowe, Harriet Beecher. "In Which it Appears that a Senator is but a Man" from <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (1852)
October 16*	Lincoln, Abraham. The Emancipation Proclamation. 1 Jan. 1863 Discussion Post #6
*October 16th: Last day to withdraw from a course or courses; grade subject to cumulative Withdrawal Policy .	
October 21	Lincoln, Abraham. The Gettysburg Address. 19 Nov. 1863.
October 23*	Bryan, William Jennings. "Cross of Gold," July 09, 1896. From Teaching American History. https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/the-cross-of-gold-speech/ Discussion Post #7
*October 27th: Registration for Spring 2025 begins	
October 28	King, Martin Luther, Jr. Letter from Birmingham Jail. 16 April 1963
October 30	Dwight D. Eisenhower, News Conference (June 17, 1953) Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address (January 17, 1961) Discussion Post #8
November 4	Debate Showcase—Canvas Response immediately afterwards
November 6 **Test 2**	No Class Meeting—Test #2 on Canvas
November 11	Veteran's Day Holiday—No Class
November 13	Chavez, Cesar E. "United We Shall Stand: Delano Manifesto" (March 17, 1966) Discussion Post #9
November 18	Powell, Lewis F., Jr., "The Memo" (1971), excerpt pp. 1-20.
November 20	Le Guin, Ursula K. "A Left-Handed Commencement Address" (1983) Discussion Post #10
November 25	Reagan, Ronald W. "Farewell Address to the Nation" (July 11, 1989)
November 27	Thanksgiving Break—No Class
December 2	Last Day of Class Please do the Online Teaching Evaluations
December 9 **Final Exam**	FINAL EXAM Presentations—the rest of you must present

Commencement December 12th and 13th (congratulations)