**Thresholds of Democracy**

**Arts and Sciences 1137, First-year Seminar**

**1 semester-hour credit**

**Instructor Name and Office Hours:**

Tom Hawkins, UH 414E (hours TBA)

**Course content:**

This course emerges from the tradition of [Reacting to the Past](https://reacting.barnard.edu/), a performance based pedagogy developed at Barnard College that has shown that students learn more by actively immersing themselves into their curriculum in participatory ways. This approach has earned rave reviews from the [Chronicle of Higher Education](http://chronicle.com/search/?q=%22reacting+to+the+past%22) and the [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/23/nyregion/getting-into-history-by-getting-into-character.html?_r=0) (among others). The case of ancient Athens, which has been a focus of Reacting to the Past from its inception, begins from two basic premises:

1. Thinking hard about the foundations of Western political and philosophical thought can help us all to be more effectively engaged citizens of the world.
2. Engaged citizenship can be modeled via engaged education.

In the spirit of these two ideals, we will study a cluster of people, ideas, situations and crises from ancient Athens at the end of the 5th century BCE. We will gamify our learning and, under the aegis of your Game Master (Prof Hawkins), take on specific historical roles and replay key debates. If we engage openly, critically, and vehemently, we will all come away from this experience with a better understanding of the historical and intellectual roots of Western democracy, increased critical thinking and speaking skills, and a clearer understanding about how we can shape the world we inhabit in positive ways. This is a game-based course, but this does not mean that it is either easy or carefree – the game is rigged against such approaches.

Our class meetings will be divided between traditional discussion sessions (with focused readings and discussion prompts) and game events in which you will prepare yourselves to take the leading roles. The structure of our game will be set by our one assigned text. This book presents the Athenian situation as **the** critical turning point in the history of democracy, but in our discussions we will explore the ways in which the broadened title of this course might be of greater value for confronting the needs of the Anthropocene, our modern, globalized, technologized world.

**Required text:**

*The Threshold of Democracy* (4th ed., Norton and Co.) by J. Ober, N. Norman and M. Carnes

**Course requirements:**

1. Complete all assigned readings prior to each class session.
2. Participate thoughtfully, respectfully and vocally in each session. For Game Days, this will necessitate preparing to play your role effectively and knowledgably.
3. Complete three one-page written assignments.
4. Take several pop-quizzes on assigned readings.

**Grade rubric:** This course will be offered for a letter grade based on a standard 100 point scale.

Participation 50 points

Papers 30 points (10 per paper)

Quiz average 20 points

**Paper topics:**

These are single-page, single-spaced response papers (i.e. you need to think hard but not necessarily do research). Select three of the following topics and submit your work on

1. Select an assigned reading from our syllabus and show how it offers lessons about the theory or practice of living within a political community.
2. Find someone outside of class with whom you can have a discussion about a broad political topic (e.g. the judicial system or foreign policy, rather than abortion or inheritance tax). Aim to have your conversation avoid falling into partisan banter and instead try to keep it focused on principles or hypotheticals. Write up a report on your experience.
3. Based on your experiences in this course, compose an op-ed advocating one concrete change to our contemporary political system.
4. What is the relationship between art and democracy today?
5. One of the most obvious and salient differences between ancient Athens and the contemporary US is the relative sizes of these two polities. What is greatest advantage of being part of such a small political community (Athens)? And of such a large one (US)?

**Academic Misconduct:**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (<http://studentlife.osu.edu/pdfs/csc_12-31-07.pdf>).

**Students with Disabilities:**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

**Course schedule:**

**Week 1:** Overview of the Course

Introduction to Ancient Athens

Initial Role Assignments

**Week 2:** Discussion of political, social, cultural climate of ancient Athens.

**READ:** Gamebook 3-53

**Discussion question:** How is ancient Athenian *dêmokratia* similar to but not the same as modern democracy?

**Week 3:** Discussion of *Republic*

**READ:** Pericles’ Funeral Oration (pp. 89-94)

Selections from Plato’s *Republic* 1-3 (pp. 95-139)

**Discussion question:** How does a political community inspire the allegiance of its members? Is justice a personal concept extended to the polity or vice-versa?

**Week 4:** Discussion of *Republic* (continued)

**READ:** Gamebook 55-75

Selections from *Republic* 3-8 (pp. 139-199)

**Discussion question:** Is education rooted more in politics/economics or in philosophy/religion? (Or something else?) What are the alternatives to education?

**Week 5:** Game Session 1: Reconciliation Agreement

**READ:** Gamebook 68 and info on Roles and Factions (pp. 77-87)

**Week 6:** Game Session 2: Electorate

**READ:** Gamebook 69

**Week 7:** Individual, God(s) and State

**READ:** Sophocles, *Antigone*

**Discussion question:** Can right ever clash with right? And if so, how can such a conflict be contained within the polity?

**Week 8:** Game Session 3: Social Welfare

**READ:** Gamebook 69-70

**Week 9:** The Contrarian View:

**READ:** “The Old Oligarch”

**Discussion question:** Doesn’t democracy put the least talented and least informed in control? Aren’t democratic citizens completely exposed to being bamboozled by those who control civic resources?

**Week 10:** Democracy and Empire

**READ:** Selections of Thucydides on unrest at Epidamnus, Corcyra, Melos and Mitylene

**Discussion question:** Should a democracy extend its democratic ideals beyond its border? What are the ethics of having a domestic democracy and an empire abroad?

**Week 11:** Ethics of Conquest

**READ:** Euripides, *Trojan Women*

**Discussion question:** What are our responsibilities to enemy (or even ‘non-allied’) populations?

**Week 12:** Game Session 4: Trial Day

**READ:** Gamebook 70

**Week 13:** Game Session 5: Governance/Law-making

**READ:** Gamebook 71

**Week 14:** Game Session 6: Militarization and Empire

**READ:** Gamebook 71-72