**IDH 2930: (Un)Common Read: America, The Owner’s Manual: You Can Fight City Hall – And Win**

Tuesdays, period 4 (10:40-11:30) in 201 Pugh Hall (Reading Room, 2nd Floor)

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Office Hours: By Appointment and When Necessary (meaning drop-ins welcome)  
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**1. Course Description**

The 2016 election cycle, and the continuing political fallout from the results, demonstrated one striking fact about current American political discourse – which is that civil political discourse no longer exists. The bombastic tone and vitriol of the election was built upon the venomous hyperpartisan state of politics. The fact that many voters across the US responded in kind demonstrates a lack of citizenship and civic engagement among the electorate.

Beyond being a member of a nation or state, Merriam-Webster defines ‘citizenship’ as “the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.” What does citizenship mean to you within a democratic republic like the US? Being a citizen conveys responsibilities each individual must meet in order to keep any democracy healthy and functioning. Citizenship is not a passive notion, but a dynamic active experience. To fulfill ones role as a citizen, it requires an individual to be both informed and engaged.

While it may not be unusual to have a pessimistic view of politics, it is no excuse for lack of participation. Often we are left to feel powerless or unsure of how to take action when it comes to advocating for those issues or policies we are concerned about the most. *America – The Owner’s Manual* changes all of that by taking you step-by-step through strategies on how to get informed and be active in changing policy for the better. Included in the book are a host of real-world stories that tell how average citizens such as yourself have profoundly made a difference on a host of issues.

Government is all around us, and that is not a bad thing. Policies are implemented every day at our local (city or county), statewide, or national levels that impact our lives. We as citizens have a duty to be vigilant and active in expressing our opinions and beliefs so as to have an impact that benefits our communities. While political discussions tend to focus on Washington, DC, there are avenues of action right here in your city or county that you can play a role in changing. This book gives you the knowhow to know how to be a productive citizen.

**2. Course Objective**

The goal of the course is to provide a perspective on your role within a democratic republic. In American representative democracy, the individual citizen has an active role to play. There have been numerous examples of how citizens have influenced public policy to the benefits of many. Simple proven strategies can make anyone effective in seeking policy change. This book provides the basis for understanding how to make an impact on any issue within any community at any level.

* This course will provide an enhanced perspective on what informed and engaged citizenship
* How individual citizens and average people have enacted major policy reforms
* Critically think about and evaluate issues impacting public discourse and how to develop a plan to implement policy change at the local, state or national level.

**3. Required Text**

Senator Bob Graham and Chris Hand, *America, The Owner’s Manual: You Can Fight City Hall – And Win,* New Edition. ISBN 978-1-5063-5058-5 (You should be able to pick this up relatively easy on Amazon or your preferred online book retailer). This is the only required text. Hard copy or digital copy (ebook/kindle) is fine.

**4. Course Requirements**

1. This course will be run seminar style, which means it will focus mainly on discussion. That means that participation and attendance in class is mandatory, and will be appropriately reflected in your final grade. You are required to do the weekly readings and view any of the material required for that week’s discussion. This is only a 1-credit course, so the assignments will be moderate, but the discussion element is important. The following assignments are required for the course:

- Civic Action Plan: For the final assignment you will create a Civic Action Plan, which is a detailed plan focused on policy change. SEE BELOW FOR A DETAILED DESCRIPTION. You will choose a topic or issue of importance to you that faces our state or local community. You will research this issue, then provide a policy goal. You will then provide a detailed strategy of how to achieve this policy goal, including who your allies and opponents will be. The final plan should be a maximum of 10 pages **due by Monday, Dec. 11** – No late papers will be accepted after this day. Standard formatting is expected – 12pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, 1 to 1.5 inch margins.

- Civic Action Plan Presentation: Topics will be presented during class the last few weeks of the semester. This will give students a chance to talk about their issues and plan, and to have their plans peer-reviewed by their colleagues. This will be an informal presentation. Students are expected to speak for a few minutes on their issue and plan, followed by questions and commentary from the rest of class. As each student will be presenting, it is imperative for you to listen and comment on other students plans.

- Attendance: Come to class and participate in the discussion.

All grades and policies are conducted in accordance with UF policy <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

**Grading Distribution**

Class participation and attendance: 15%

Civic Action Plan Presentation: 25%

Civic Action Plan: 60%

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

100 – 93% = A

92 – 90% = A-

89 – 88% = B+

87 – 83% = B

82 – 80% = B-

79 -78% = C+

77 – 73% = C

72 – 70% = C-

69 – 68% = D+

67 – 63% = D

62 – 60% = D-

59% and Below = F

**5. Course Policies**

1. Attendance and participation in discussion is mandatory and expected. Attendance will be taken each class meeting. Excused absences are allowed, as life often happens and can interfere. However, after 2 excused absences your participation grade may be lowered. Unexcused absences are not tolerated and will impact your final grade in the course. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to communicate with the instructor about missed classes. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
2. Late assignments will not be accepted. Students are expected to turn assignments in on the dates they are due as listed in the syllabus. Late work may be accepted on a case-by-case basis as deemed necessary through communication with the instructor. Additionally, special arrangements can be accommodated for exams and/or assignments as required by the student, if noted ahead of time per university policy.
3. **All electronic devices are prohibited in the classroom, without the express consent of the instructor.** The use of mobile electronic devices (cellphones/smartphones/tablets/laptops) is strictly prohibited – any student using a mobile device will be asked to leave and that day will be marked as an unexcused absence. Students are expected to utilize the old-fashioned methods of note taking – paper and pen/pencil. Special circumstances per university policy can be made. Students who wish to utilize presentation software (PowerPoint, etc.) for presentations must ask permission and make arrangements beforehand.
4. Professionalism on the part of the student is expected at all times. There has been recent debate on the appropriate levels of professor-student casualness, as exemplified here - <https://nyti.ms/2rchhI8>. While we can have endless debate on this subject, for the purpose of this course, you are expected to maintain an appropriate level of professionalism both in class and in communications outside of class.

**\*\*\*DISCLAIMER:** This syllabus represents my current thinking and plan for this course. However, circumstances arise that may necessitate changes to this syllabus. Communication will be given in advance of any changes to this syllabus and course plan so that you are prepared and knowledgeable of requirements and expectations.

University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation

letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

University Policy on Academic Misconduct: Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

etiquette: Communication Courtesy: All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all classroom discussions, email messages, threaded discussions and chats. The classroom is a safe environment to explore new ideas and perspectives – all of which are welcome. Ideas are open for debate and discussion, but not people – there is a zero tolerance policy on personal attacks. <http://teach.ufl.edu/docs/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf>

eVALUATIONS: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

**6. COURSE SCHEDULE:**

**1. August 22.** Introduction

* Review syllabus and discuss course goals

**2. August 29.**

* Read Preface, Prologue, and Introduction – to page 28

**3. September 5.**

* Chapter 1: In the Arena – pages 28-38

**4. September 12.**

* Chapter 2: Just the Facts Ma’am – pages 39-64

**5. September 19.**

* Chapter 3: The Buck Stops Where? – pages 65-96

**6. September 26.**

* Chapter 4: Testing the Waters – pages 97-130

**7. October 3.**

* Chapter 5: Winning Friends and Influencing People – pages 131-155

**8. October 10.**

* Chapter 6: Timing is Everything – pages 156-173

**9. October 17.**

* Chapter 7: All for One – pages – 174-199

**10. October 24.**

* Chapter 8: All Your News is Fit to Print – pages 200-243

**11. October 31.**

* Chapter 9: The Price of Progress – pages 244-272

**12. November 7.**

* Chapter 10: You’ve Won; You’ve Lost – pages 273-287

**13. November 14.**

* Presentations on Civic Action Plans

**14. November 21** (Thanksgiving Week)

* No Class

**15. November 28.**

* Presentations on Civic Action Plans

**16. December 5.**

* Option Day – if we need more time for presentations

**Final Civic Action Plans are Due by 11:59 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 11.**

**Civic Action Plan – A How-To Guide**

**Step 1. Pick an Issue.** This is important. Pick an issue that interests you. Think about what is impacting your local community or state, and choose an issue that you would like to research and address. Think about this as being something you could actually have an impact on.

* Many issues are large. For example, climate change is an issue that impacts everyone on the planet. However, it is likely that there are facets of this issue that can be addressed locally, such as lowering carbon emissions through better public transportation or use of solar energy. As climate change encompasses many environmentally focused topics, when it comes to solutions or actions, what could your city or county do to address one of these aspects? Another example, homelessness, is a national problem, but it is also a problem in Gainesville and Alachua County. What could our city or county do to better help those homeless living among us? One more example: Medical marijuana was passed by Florida voters last year, but the state legislature and governor’s office have yet to come up with a plan to implement the policy. What could be done to implement and facilitate public access to medicinal marijuana in the state, how should it be regulated, and what could a city or county do to lead on this issue?
* Most importantly, the issue should interest and inspire you. If that is the case, you will be more likely to read more widely and understand the issue better. As a result, you will likely draft a better action plan. This is true of most things in life: pursue your interests! In the end, you’ll be better for it.

**Step 2. Begin researching your issue.** This will require reading, a lot of reading, so please start reading. You will need to create a reading list with a minimum of 7 sources. These sources need to include peer-reviewed articles or books, journalistic sources, and online resources. Compile these resources into an easy to reference list or annotated bibliography.

* Peer-reviewed articles or books are written by experts/academics in the field and are reviewed by several other experts before publication. These articles and books maintain a high level of quality as trusted source material on topics. Peer-reviewed resources are easily accessed and available through UF Libraries - <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/> or through [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/) (login on the UF VPN network prior to searching as that will give you full access).
* Journalistic sources are recognized news outlets. These would include national newspapers like the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*; local newspapers like the *Gainesville Sun*; cable and network television news channels like NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX, CNN, MSNBC and their corresponding websites; radio news like NPR; or any related news outlet.
  + **Disclaimer:** Please pay attention to the difference between news and opinion. Every major newspaper and news network offers opinion-based commentary on the issues, which is not a bad thing. Opinion offers us perspective and different ways to think about issues. News reporting offers facts surrounding issues with no opinion or commentary. Please make sure to pay attention to the differences. For this project you can utilize news and opinion from these sources, but make sure you are aware of the differences. This means you cannot state opinion as fact.
* Online resources are whatever you can find online to support your research on your issue topic. This can be government websites, advocacy organizations, non-profit organizations, or whatever else the bowels of the Internet provide to you. I will caution again to be mindful of where your source material is being produced. For example, an advocacy organization will take a specific position on an issue, which will be helpful for this project, but be mindful of what position they take, and what the opposing position is. Please avoid using any Online resources that delve into conspiracy theory or provide information that is not based on fact or at least a mutual understanding of reality.

**Step 3. Write your issue introduction.** This is a one page statement that identifies the issue, explains its importance, provides historical context, identifies competing views, and states your position.

* Yes, this is a lot for one page – BE CONCISE!
* Again, your one-page issue introduction should:
* identify the issue,
* explain why the issue is important,
* provide historical context for the issue (how has this issue developed over time?),
* identify competing views, and
* state your stance.

**Step 4. Write your Statement of Policy Goal.** This is a statement of your goal for the issue that identifies the exact policy outcome you would like to see enacted. This would include what level of government – local (city; county) or state. You will provide your rationale for why you wish to see this policy goal achieved. This is a prescriptive policy statement and reasoning for why it needs to be implemented. To word it differently, your policy goal is a recommendation or solution that is specific to and targets the issue you have chosen to address.

* Use evidence from your resources and source material. Make sure to cite your sources (use whatever citation style you prefer, but be consistent).
* Write the statement in your own words, but you can include brief quotes from your sources if appropriate.
* Be cognizant of past and recent policy actions taken on this issue at the level you are proposing. In this way, your policy goal can coordinate with ongoing efforts, or change existing policy, depending on how you chose to frame it and what past policy actions exist.

**Step 5. Develop a strategy.** An effective strategy can make all the difference, and as the course has focused around a book that develops strategies, now is the time to examine how you would seek to enact your policy goal. In essence, use what we have talked about in class, the book, and any other resources to devise a plan on how you would articulate your policy goal to the proper elected officials and other citizens to build support, get the policy passed, and implemented.

* You should have 4 or 5 distinct strategy steps/goals at minimum.

**Step 6. Discover Allies and Opponents.** For this section, you will identify a minimum of 3 allies and 3 opponents that you will face in your quest to enact your policy goal. Knowing who you can count on for support, and who you are up against is important in any public policy fight. Provide a brief description of each of your Allies and Opponents, which includes why you see them as an ally or opponent, and how you would collaborate with them or neutralize their ongoing efforts to oppose yours.

**Step 7. References.** Provide a reference list of all of your sources, using whatever citation style you choose, so long as you are consistent in style throughout.

**RECAP:** When finished, your Civic Action Plan will be a maximum of 10 pages, 12pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, 1 to 1.5 inch margins. The paper will include:

1. Issue Introduction
2. Statement of Policy Goal
3. Strategies
4. Allies and Opponents
5. References