

Participation & Democracy in America

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Course Information

Course Description

This course investigates a central question of American democratic theory: why don't more Americans participate in the political process? Different forms of participation will be discussed with a primary focus on voter turnout. We will learn some of the famous theories concerning why participation is important and learn how to measure the rates of participation in America. Next, we investigate some famous reasons why more Americans do not participate, including individual scarce resources, social-psychological factors, and legal-institutional barriers. Special attention will be paid to inequalities in participation and the 2008 and 2010 elections, which will be used as the data points to compare all of our theories against.

Course Learning Goals

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Describe the concept of participation and some famous theories about its importance
- Discuss some of the famous academic findings about the participation rate in America
- Use the Internet more effectively to research both participation rates and information about political candidates
- Apply theoretical models to evaluate why different Americans participate at different rates

If you opt to address an A-3-A competence, you will be able to:

- Apply your real-world experience of volunteering for a candidate or issue campaign to the theories of how participation benefits America

If you opt to address a H-3-A competence, you will be able to:

- Describe famous arguments and theories about why individuals are motivated to participate and apply these theories to empirical data measuring different participation rates

If you opt to address a H-4 competence, you will be able to:

- Describe many of the inequalities in American political participation, including the moral questions about "who counts" in the first place and gain a greater understanding of the contemporary social context that may promote further inequality

If you opt to address a S-1-A competence, you will be able to:

- Use the statistical crosstabs method to evaluate theoretical claims about participation.
- Formally frame social science theories in the form of a hypothesis; then, create tests to see whether those hypotheses hold true.

Course Resources

To buy your books, go to <http://www.mbsdirect.net> .

Hint: type DePaul for name of the school.

[Click here for help buying your books](#)

There is one textbook required for the course: Martin P. Wattenberg (2002). *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* Harvard University Press. **ISBN-10** : 067400938X.

The following readings are required and available through electronic reserve:

Alexis de Tocqueville (1969). *Democracy in America*. Edited by J. P. Mayer, Trans. George Lawrence. HarperPerennial. pp. 503-528, or ch.1, "Why Democratic Nations Show a More Ardent and Enduring Love for Equality than for Liberty," through ch. 8, "How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Doctrine of Self-Interest Properly Understood."

Robert Putnam (2000). *Bowling Alone*. Simon & Schuster. ch. 1-2, "Thinking about Social Change in America," "Political Participation," pp. 15-47.

Pew Research Center, "Public Knowledge of Current Affairs Little Changed," <http://people-press.org/report/319/public-knowledge-of-current-affairs-little-changed-by-news-and-information-revolutions> .

National Annenberg Election Study. "American Public Still Has Much to Learn About Presidential Candidates' Issue Positions As Campaign End Draws Near." <http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Political%20Knowledge%20Round%20II.pdf>.

Census Bureau. "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2008." <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>.

Pew Research Center. "Who Votes, Who Doesn't, and Why." <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/292.pdf>.

Russell Dalton, "The Myth of the Disengaged American." http://www.umich.edu/~cses/resources/results/POP_Oct2005_1.htm.

James Q. Wilson (1973). *Political Organizations*. Basic Books. ch. 3, "Organizational Maintenance and Incentives," pp. 30-55.

Peter L. Francia, John C. Green, Paul S. Herrnson, and Lynda W. Powell (2003). *The Financiers of Congressional Elections*. Columbia University Press. ch. 2, "Who Are the Financiers of Congressional Elections?" pp. 18-41.

Joshua Green (2008). "The Amazing Money Machine." *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol.301, June 2008.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200806/obama-finance>

Alex Keyssar (2001). *The Right to Vote*. Basic Books. New Ed. ch. 3, "Backsliding and Sideslipping." pp. 53-76.

Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen, *Locked Out*. Oxford University Press. ch. 2, "The Racial Origins of Felon Disenfranchisement." pp. 41-68.

Robert Barnes (2007). "Partisan Fissures Over Voter ID." *Washington Post*. Dec. 25, p. A01.

Eric Lipton and Ian Urbina (2007). "In 5-Year Effort, Scant Evidence of Voter Fraud." *New York Times*, Apr. 12.

William Crawford, et al., v. Plaintiffs-Appellants, Marion County Election Board, et al., Defendants-Appellees.

Martin P. Wattenberg (2007). Pearson Longman. *Is Voting for Young People?* ch. 3, "Don't Ask Anyone Under 30." pp. 61-91.

CIRCLE. "The Youth Vote in 2008."

http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_youth_Voting_2008_updated_6.22.pdf.

McDonald, Michael P. (2008) "The Return of the Voter: Voter Turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election," *The Forum*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 4, Article 4. <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol6/iss4/art4>.

Wilcox, Clyde. "Internet Fundraising in 2008: A New Model?"

<http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol6/iss1/art6>

Course Competences

In this course, you will develop the following competences:

Competence	Competence Statement and Facets
A-3-A	Can interpret experience in relationship to the perspective of a significant thinker or tradition
H-3-A	Can use two or more theories of human psychology to understand and solve problems
H-4	Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the United States
S-1-A	Can explore natural phenomena or the world of everyday experiences using scientific methods, and can use theories to interpret observations

How Competences Will Be Demonstrated in This Course

All of you will explore two major theoretical arguments for the importance of participation, Tocqueville's and Putnam's. You will all investigate how political participation is measured by use of survey research and will become familiar with some

of the standard findings as regards different forms of participation in America and how America compares to other countries. You will all become familiar with some of the theories used to describe what motivates Americans to participate in the first place and review some of the history of efforts to exclude different groups from voting. Finally, you will all briefly review contemporary debates about why younger voters do not participate more in American elections (at least until 2008) and some of the ongoing controversy about the impact of negative advertisements on voters. You will all develop a definition of participation and learn to manipulate several Internet websites that help us better measure the civic health of American politics. **In addition, you will select from the following competencies:**

A-3-A: Can interpret experience in relationship to the perspective of a significant thinker or tradition.

1. Identifies and describes an individual, social, or cultural experience.
2. Identifies one or more significant thinkers or traditions with philosophical or theological ideas relevant to this experience.
3. Explains one's ideas about the meaning of this experience in relationship to the ideas of this thinker(s) or tradition(s).

If you opt to address this competence, your "experience" will be your volunteer work for a political campaign for the 2010 elections, or for an interest group campaign or a political party. The candidate or issue campaign is of your choosing. You will write a final 8-10 page class paper comparing the predictions that Tocqueville and Putnam made about the benefits of participation to your own personal experience. You will periodically describe your activities on behalf of your campaign in the class discussion and attempt to provide real-world parallels to the theoretical discussions we will have.

H-3-A: Can use two or more theories of human psychology to understand and solve problems.

1. Articulates two or more theories or models explaining human behavior.
2. Identifies a problem and proposes a solution using appropriate theoretical approaches.

If you opt to address this competence, you will focus on the theories discussed in Module Six (which you may wish to read ahead for) as a means to explain the varying rates of participation observed in different contexts. You will assign theoretical motivations to the different kinds of political behavior discussed in class and evaluate why some forms of participation might be rising in America, others falling, and some holding steady. You will write a final 8-10 page class paper that summarizes these findings and then concludes by discussing how we might motivate individuals in America to want to participate more.

H-4: Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the United States.

1. Describes the unequal power relations between at least two racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the U.S.
2. Discusses the historical, sociological, or economic dynamics under which these groups came to be in conflict.

If you opt to address this competence, you will focus on understanding the inequalities in American political participation: what they are, where they came from, and how some of these inequalities might be reduced in the future. You will view an additional PowerPoint discussing the moral questions that go into defining who is an "eligible

voter" in America, and you will complete a short assignment that recalculates what voter turnout would be, given varying assumptions. You will read an additional handout about economic inequality in America when the class discussion turns to campaign contributions. You will write an 8-10 page final paper summarizing your conclusions about the most important, modern forms of inequality in political participation and conclude by suggesting some ways in which inequalities might be reduced in the future.

S-1-A: Can explore natural phenomena or the world of everyday experiences using scientific methods, and can use theories to interpret observations.

1. Identifies aspects of the natural world or everyday experiences that spark interest or curiosity or that pose problems.
2. Applies a generally accepted model(s) of scientific inquiry to (1).
3. Uses or develops a theory, model, or set of principles to interpret observations and experience.

If you opt to address this competence, the "aspect of the natural world" you will be focusing on is participation. You will study the theories discussed in the class readings in a more rigorous, scientific fashion by taking the claims you find in the readings and then using an online dataset to review and test their accuracy. The method of evaluation you will use is called a crosstab, which you will view a presentation about. Based on the claims made in the readings, you will formulate hypotheses as to what results you should see if the readings are correct. You will then learn how to generate your own crosstabs from a special website that makes use of a dataset called the American National Elections Studies. By the end of the class you will have generated multiple crosstabs evaluating the different readings. You will compile a final 8-10 page paper that summarizes your findings about the accuracy of the different theories you have been exposed to in class.

Course Structure

This course consists of 10 modules. The estimated time to complete each module is 1 week.

To view the course schedule, click on the Schedule link on the left-hand navigation bar. This page contains the most recently updated listing of the topics and assignments due for each week of the course.

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Assessment

Assessment of Learning

You will participate consistently by completing the activities listed below by their due dates. You will:

- Read and discuss readings on the importance, measurement, and history of political participation in America
- Define political participation and its importance to American democracy
- Compare different theorists' opinions of the importance of participation and what motivates people to participate
- Research the issue positions of the two major-party candidates for office
- Write a letter to your U.S. representative and post the letter and the response (if

- you receive one)
- Locate specific statistical findings on websites such as the American National Election Studies or the Money in Politics database
- Research registration laws in your home state and post your efforts of trying to register others to vote

If you opt to address Competence A-3-A, you will also

- Volunteer for a political candidate or issue campaign throughout the class.
- Keep a diary of your volunteer experiences
- Write a final 8-10 page paper comparing your experiences, in part, to the theorists Putnam and Tocqueville

If you opt to address Competence H-3-A, you will also

- Submit a specific set of definitions taken from Wattenberg and Wilson in the course website
- Analyze political contributions using this set of definitions
- Analyze the impact of voter-ID laws and registration laws using this set of definitions
- Analyze the decline in youth voter turnout using this set of definitions
- Write a final 8-10 page paper analyzing the theories of Wattenberg and Wilson for all forms of participation discussed in class and recommend what steps might improve political participation in the future

If you opt to address Competence H-4, you will also

- View a presentation on how the "eligible voter rate" is calculated, and compile a special dataset of how voting rates in America would change with different assumptions
- Use the American National Election Studies to analyze inequalities in political contributions and registration
- Write a final 8-10 page paper discussing the most important political inequalities you have discovered in this class and recommend what steps might reduce these inequalities in the future

If you opt to address Competence S-1-A, you will also

- View a presentation on how crosstabs work and how to read them
- Learn to manipulate a special website that allows you to generate crosstabs from the American National Election Studies
- Generate several crosstabs that test various theories discussed in class
- Write a final 8-10 page paper compiling these crosstabs and evaluating the accuracy of other classes

Percentage Distribution of Assessments

Common to A-3-A, H-3-A, H-4 and S-1-A:

Class discussion and posts (includes Assignments 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 6.1, 6.2, 7.2, 7.3, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 9.1, 9.2, 10.1)	40%
Submitted assignments to course website (includes Assignments 3.2, 4.1, 7.1)	5%

Written letter to U.S representative (Assignment 5.2)	5%
Comments on peers' papers (Assignment 10.2)	5%

In addition, for A-3-A:

Complete and submit campaign diary during Week Six, Module Six	20%
Final 8–10 page paper	25%

for H-3-A:

Submitted set of definitions to course website (for Module Six)	5%
Analysis of contributions using Wilson / Wattenberg (Module Seven)	5%
Analysis of voter ID and registration laws using Wilson / Wattenberg (Module Eight)	5%
Analysis of younger voter turnout and negative ads using W / W (Module Nine)	5%
Final 8–10 page paper	25%

for H-4:

Problem set on recalculating voting turnout rates (Module Five)	5%
Analysis of contributions using American National Election Studies (Module Seven)	5%
Analysis of voter-ID laws (Module Eight)	5%
Final 8–10 page paper	30%

for S-1-A:

First crosstab (Module Five)	5%
Second crosstab (Module Six)	5%
Who contributes crosstab (Module Seven)	5%
Who registers crosstab (Module Eight)	5%
What is the effect of negativity (Module Nine)	5%
Final 8–10 page paper	20%

General Assessment Criteria for All Writing Assignments

- All written assignments will be evaluated on the basis of their accuracy of representation of course concepts, accuracy of application of course concepts, depth of analysis and application, breadth of analysis and application, and writing style (as below).
- All writing assignments are to be submitted according to APA standards. Citation guides are available at http://www.lib.depaul.edu/eresource/infotype_subject_search.asp?MaterialID=8.
- It is strongly suggested that, if you are using word processing software, you use spell- and grammar-check tools before submitting any draft or final project. In any case, proofreading is essential.
- Be sure to avoid plagiarism. Read the information on this page: http://condor.depaul.edu/~tla/html/student_academic_integrity.htm. Final papers will be submitted to "TurnItIn.com" in order to ensure that the work is the student's own creation and not in violation of the University's Academic Integrity Policy. Submission of work in this course constitutes a pledge that the work is original and consent to have the work submitted to verify that fact.
- The previous cautions also apply to email and discussion postings. While daily postings on the discussion may be less formal than submitted assignments, under no circumstances should correct punctuation, correct spelling, or the division of posted material into paragraphs be considered optional. If you use someone else's words, use quotation marks; if you use someone else's ideas, cite them.

General Assessment Criteria for Your Final Paper or Project by Competence

- All competencies will include a final paper worth between 20 and 30 percent of your class grade. All the above grading criteria (accuracy of course concepts, APA standards, grammar, plagiarism) still apply.
- The final paper may incorporate some previous material and writing assignments you have already completed. You will be graded on the skill with which you reorganize these earlier findings into a more polished final draft. Do not string together a series of earlier, unedited papers. Each paper should be arranged around a central question, with a clear thesis and supporting evidence drawn from the class readings and exercises.
- *If you adopted the A-3-A competency:* The central question for your class paper is, "Has the experience of volunteering brought me any of the benefits that Tocqueville and Putnam list?" The answer can of course be yes or no. In answering this paper, you should first clearly explain your volunteer assignment and what some of the tasks and duties you took on were. This may take up a substantial portion of your paper. You should then reflect on these experiences and explore whether you feel this experience has changed you in any significant fashion and whether these changes are in any way similar to the effects that Tocqueville and Putnam think participation has.
- *If you adopted the H-3-A competency:* The central question for your class paper is, "What theories of political participation best explain the different forms of behavior we have observed in class?" These participatory behaviors include becoming informed about politics, voting, the behaviors discussed in Russell Dalton's "Myth of the Disengaged American," contributing money, and registering to vote. You will review different motivations that might lead Americans to engage in these different activities drawn from the theories in Martin Wattenberg and James Q. Wilson. You will then assign the different motives that you think are currently most important for different forms of participation and speculate on why we then see the patterns we do in terms of who engages in them and who does not. Your paper will conclude

with some thoughts about how we might increase some of these kinds of participation in the future.

- *If you adopted the H-4 competency.* The central question for your class paper is, "What are the most important forms of inequality in American political participation today?" You will review the different inequalities you have discovered in class so far and argue for the one you feel is the most significant. You will also propose some ideas for how we might reduce some of these inequalities in the future.
- *If you adopted the S-1-A competency.* The central question for your class paper is, "How accurate are some of the different theories about who participates that we have read in this class?" Using the American National Elections Studies dataset and the crosstab procedure, you will evaluate some of the different readings, formulating testable hypotheses and evaluating their accuracy. You may incorporate previous crosstabs you have already made earlier in the class, but you must include at least two wholly new crosstabs for this final paper.

Course Grading Scale

A = 95 to 100	A- = 91 to 94	B+ = 88 to 90
B = 85 to 87	B- = 81 to 84	C+ = 77 to 80
C = 73 to 76	C- = 69 to 72	D+ = 65 to 68
D = 61 to 64	F = 60 or below	INC

For SNL courses taken for Pass/Fail, a "Pass" represents a grade of "A" for purposes of financial aid and employer reimbursement.

Students wishing to declare a Pass/Fail option must do so before the end of the 2nd week of the quarter.

Online Discussion

Assessment Criteria for Online Discussion Participation

The online discussions are a place for you to exchange reflections with other students in the class as well as receive feedback from the instructor. You will also have regular opportunities to link what you are learning in the course, including course readings, to your real life experiences.

In order to receive credit for participation in the online discussion parts of the course it is important that:

- You actively contribute substantive work (as defined below) at least 3-4 times per week in all discussion forums and in a range of topics in each forum.
- You accurately integrate information from multiple sources, particularly class readings. (Be sure to cite your sources appropriately; see "Online Participation Guidelines" for more information.)
- You provide both depth and breadth of comments and analysis.
- You actively contribute to the online discussions in a collegial fashion, maintaining

- a respectful tone toward other participants, greeting others by name, and closing with a signature.
- You contribute original ideas to the online discussions in ways that facilitate learning for other people, relating personal ideas to course ideas.
 - You demonstrate good "listening" skills and active inquiry skills in the online discussions. This means that you should pay attention, address the commentary of others with openness, and offer constructive and interested commentary, whether in the form of questions or statements.
 - You otherwise follow the "Online Participation Guidelines."

Discussion Boards

Discussion Boards are a forum for discussion and sharing information among students. Your instructor may create one or more public forums related to the topics you are studying each week.

At the beginning of the quarter, your instructor will set up three discussion forums. These three forums will help you and your classmates get off to an immediate start on the course by providing conversational spaces for necessary, ongoing social and administrative activities. These forums are:

- Introductions
- Course Q&A
- The "Class Cloakroom," a social meeting space for discussion that is not directly related to course content

The Q&A conference is where the management and administrative tasks of the course are conducted and where you can ask 'process' questions and receive answers.

The Class Cloakroom (a "cloakroom," in legislatures, refers to an area where legislators can informally relax and discuss with one another) can be used freely for your own conversation.

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Policies

Academic Integrity

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html> for further details.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.
- Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.
- Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
- The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If a instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion.

Disability Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities on an individualized and flexible basis. The Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) determines appropriate accommodations through consultation with the student. For certain learning disabilities and/or attention deficit disorders, the Productive Learning Strategies Program (PLuS) determines the appropriate accommodations. See the instructor for more information or call OSD at 773-325-7290 (phone) or 773-325-7296 (TTY); or call PLuS at 773-325-1677.

Incomplete Grades

The intent of the Incomplete grade is to allow students extra time to complete their final assignments. This need arises because, in the closing weeks of the course, they have an event of significant magnitude that adversely affects their ability to complete the course, e.g. serious illness, death in the family, overseas deployment, or natural disaster.

You must request an incomplete grade in writing two weeks before the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades will be considered only after you have satisfactorily completed at least 75 percent of the coursework, and you have such an unexpected, uncontrollable event that prevents you from completing your course. Do not assume that you will qualify for an incomplete. Students who are failing the course at the point where they request an incomplete will not receive one, nor will they be granted after the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.

If you do receive permission from the instructor to take an incomplete in the course, you will be required to complete a contract with the instructor, specifying how you will finish the missing work within the next two quarters (excluding summer). Incompletes not finished by the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) will automatically become an F grade on your transcript.

Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee.

NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four week grace period before final degree certification.

Protection of Human Subjects

For more information see: <http://condor.depaul.edu/~irb>

Demonstrating the acquisition of competences in this course can involve "interactions"—interviewing and or observing other people—discussing those interviews or observations with other class members and writing them up in one or more final report(s).

As such, these activities qualify as "research" with "human subjects" and are subject to University and Federal guidelines. Because it takes place in the context of this course, your research is exempt from approval by the School for New Learning's Local Review Board only under the following conditions:

1. The information you collect is EXCLUSIVELY for the purpose of classroom discussion and will NOT be used after the term is over. If there is any possibility that you will EVER use it in further research or for publication, you must obtain approval from the Local Review Board before you begin.
2. You assess and ensure that no "harm"—physical, mental, or social—does or could result from either your interviews and/or observations or your discussion and/or reports.
3. The privacy and confidentiality of those that you interview or observe must be protected. Unless you receive specific permission, in writing, from the person(s) you interview or observe, please change their names, and make sure that their identity cannot be readily ascertained from the information you provide.
 - a. If you want to use real names and relationships, they must sign an "informed consent" document. For information on creating an "informed consent document" see, for example, www.research.umn.edu/consent/

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Course Expectations

Time Management and Attendance

SNL's online courses are not self-paced and require a regular time commitment EACH week throughout the quarter.

You are required to log in to your course at least four times a week so that you can participate in the ongoing course discussions.

Online courses are no less time consuming than "face to face" courses. You will have to dedicate some time every day or at least every second day to your studies. A typical four credit hour "face to face" course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week, plus at least three to six hours of study and homework per week.

This course will require at least the same time commitment, but your learning activities will be spread out through the week. If you have any problems with your technology, or if you need to improve your reading or writing skills, it may take even longer.

The instructor should be notified if your life events do not allow you to participate in the course and the online discussions for more than one week. This is particularly important when there are group discussions or you are working as part of a team.

If you find yourself getting behind, please contact the instructor immediately.

Your Instructor's Role

Your instructor's role in this course is that of a discussion facilitator and learning

advisor. It is not their responsibility to make sure you log in regularly and submit your assignments. As instructor, s/he will read all postings to the general discussion forums on a daily basis but may not choose to respond to each posting. You will receive feedback to assignments.

The instructor may choose to designate "office hours" when s/he will be online and available and will immediately respond to questions. Depending on the instructor, this response may be by e-mail, instant messenger or telephone. Otherwise, you will generally receive a response to emailed or posted queries within 48 hours.

Your Role as a Student

As an online student, you will be taking a proactive approach to your learning. As the course instructor's role is that of a learning guide, your role is that of the leader in your own learning.

You will be managing your own time so that you can complete the readings, activities and assignments for the course, and you will also be expected to take a more active role in peer learning.

Credits

This course was designed and produced by Zachary Cook and staff of SNL Online at DePaul University.

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