This is a course designed to introduce undergraduate students to the remarkable resurgence of attention to the associational and voluntary sector which Alexis de Tocqueville identified a century and a half ago as the distinctive characteristic of American society. For the past twenty years or so, increasing interest in this sector has been displayed by politicians and scholars, and the sector has come to be praised on all sides. Alas, it has not been understood as much as it has been admired. Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of most socialist states has led to international enthusiasm for the building of civil society by means of voluntary non-profit activity, in the belief that strong civil societies would promote democracy. The real question is which comes first, civil society or democracy.

We will begin by closely examining the concepts of civil society and social capital – civil society as it has been redefined since the end of the Cold War, and social capital as it have been developed by Robert Putnam and other social scientists. We will then focus on the network of institutions called the Third (or not-for-profit) Sector, in order to see how Americans organize themselves in the space between the state and the market. Finally, we will contrast American behavior with that in other societies, notably of the formerly socialist nations. The problematic of the course will be to see whether there is such a thing as social capital (or social trust), and, if so, whether social capital builds civil society and democracy.

The course will meet once a week in a seminar format. There will be a reading assignment for each week, generally a single monograph. I do not expect students to read the entirety of any of these works, but I do want them to begin to learn how to deal with a book –reading parts in full, skimming others. The basic course requirement is to write a research paper on a topic to be determined in discussion with me. The alternative of an examination will be available for those whose theses and JPs make another writing assignment too difficult.

Monographs required for purchase are available at Micawber’s Bookstore on Nassau St. They include all those assigned for weekly readings in the schedule below.
Reading Assignments:


20 February: Robert D. Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton U., 1993)

27 February: Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change in America (Rutgers U., 1978)


20 March: Spring Break


10 April: Francis Fukuyama, Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity (Free Press, 1996)


24 April: TBA

1 May: TBA
Books on reserve in Stokes Library, WWS:


Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Rutgers U., 1978)


John K. Glenn, Framing Democracy: Civil Society and Civic Movements in Eastern Europe (Stanford, 2001)

Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord (eds.) Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe (Lanham, MD, 2000)


Rogers Smith, Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven, CT, 1997)

Ken Thomson, From Neighborhood to Nation: The Democratic Foundations of Civil Society (Hanover, NH, 2001)

Mark E. Warren, Democracy and Association (Princeton, NJ, 2001)