

## PSCI 210/PSCI 210W: Pandemic Politics

This Version: August 26, 2023

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The initial governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic rocked the foundations of the world's economy. Decisions to “shut down the economy,” however, were not universally praised and remain controversial. Science became more politicized during the pandemic, and Americans could not even agree on whether mask wearing was necessary, often dividing along party lines. In this seminar, we will study the COVID-19 pandemic from a political economy perspective, focusing on the United States and asking difficult questions. Did the shutdowns go too far, or were they necessary to protect public health? Was the run-up in government debt due to the pandemic fiscally irresponsible or necessary to prevent an economic depression? Did political polarization make the pandemic worse? Were dissenters who challenged dominant scientific explanations for the pandemic silenced or given a fair hearing? In the spirit of free and open inquiry, seminar participants will consider cutting-edge research and discuss competing viewpoints on these and other pandemic-related topics.

### READINGS

The required readings for this course are available on Blackboard. In addition to the required readings, students should regularly read the news to identify current events related to the course. We will set aside time each week to discuss relevant articles, with an eye toward how data, evidence, and research are used in those articles.

### PROFESSOR PRIMO'S PERSPECTIVE ON SEMINAR COURSES

Seminar courses are spaces where ideas should be shared, debated, and challenged, as this is how we strengthen our understandings and beliefs about the world. To that end, Professor Primo will often encourage students to question their beliefs and further refine their arguments. In other situations, Professor Primo may articulate arguments for or against an idea in ways that do not necessarily reflect his own views. When appropriate, he may choose to articulate his own opinions, and students are encouraged to challenge him, as well.

To foster an open exchange of ideas and allow for frank discussion of controversial topics, class sessions will not be recorded. There may be times when class gets “uncomfortable.” This is a positive, not a negative, so long as it is clear we are all working together toward a shared end of deeper understandings about the world. To use an analogy, you can go to the gym and sit on an exercise bike pedaling slowly and texting friends. You are likely to be quite comfortable doing so. Alternatively, you can get on the same bike with a heart rate monitor and push yourself hard, to the point that you are quite uncomfortable. Which is the better workout? Think of a seminar course in the same way—as a workout for your mind and your ideas.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Prepare for, attend, and be an active participant in class.** A seminar of 20 students requires the active involvement of all students. Students are expected to attend all classes (health permitting), complete the readings in advance of class, and share their ideas during class discussions.
- **Set the stage for class discussions.** For all classes except for the first week of class, the last week of class, and the week of the peer workshops, you must submit one question to Professor Primo that you would like discussed during class (think of it as a “conversation starter”) along with a brief explanation (1 or 2 paragraphs) of why you selected that question. *Conversation starters should be based on the readings for the week.* Answers should be submitted on Blackboard by 8 AM on the day of class; late conversation starters will not be accepted except in unusual circumstances.

- **Complete a research paper (proposals due on Blackboard by 7 PM on October 24; required peer group workshops will take place the week of November 27 with a brief follow-up survey that should be completed on Blackboard by within 24 hours of concluding the workshop; projects due on Blackboard by 7 PM on December 13).**
  - Students are required to complete a 3,500 word research paper.
  - To encourage students to make progress on their papers well in advance of the deadline, in lieu of class on November 27, students will instead participate in a peer group workshop in which students will meet in small groups to offer feedback on each other's papers. Participation in the workshop is required and will be part of your paper grade.
  - Additional details regarding this assignment are available in a separate Research Paper Guidelines document to be made available on Blackboard under Syllabus and Research Paper Guidelines.
  - The bottom line: this paper should be one that you are invested in and are excited about. Professor Primo will be there to help along the way.

## GRADING

- *Conversation starters* count toward 20% of your course grade. Conversation starters will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis. Questions that are submitted without an explanation or with an explanation that fails to demonstrate a connection to the readings will receive no credit. You can receive credit for a conversation starter even if you do not attend class. Following the "life happens" rule, you may skip two conversation starters without penalty.
- *Class participation* counts toward 20% of your course grade. Students are expected to do the reading in advance of class and come prepared for discussion. Students should "take ownership" of the seminar by sharing their ideas, asking questions, challenging each other's ideas (and those of Professor Primo), and keeping up with the news to participate in the "current events" portion of class discussion. *Class attendance factors into class participation. However, please do not come to class if you are not feeling well or it would present a hardship to do so; just give Professor Primo advance notice when possible.*
- *The research paper* counts toward 60% of your course grade. 5% of your course grade is based on fulfilling all aspects of required participation in the workshop. 55% of your course grade is based on the final paper submission. Additional details regarding the grading of the workshop and the paper will be available in a separate Research Paper Guidelines document to be made available on Blackboard under Syllabus and Research Paper Guidelines.

## PROFESSIONALISM

Professor Primo strives to create a professional atmosphere in class where all are treated with respect. To help achieve this goal, please make every effort to attend and be on time for each class meeting, silence mobile phones and other electronic devices, keep texting and other non-course-related activities to a minimum, and come to class prepared to engage with others and be open to perspectives that may differ from your own.

## GENERATIVE AI USAGE

Students may use generative AI such as ChatGPT as a starting point for their work. However, all written assignments must be written by the student (e.g., you may not cut-and-paste ChatGPT content into your research paper), and students are responsible for all submissions (e.g., if ChatGPT "hallucinates," it is your responsibility to figure that out). Students must disclose if ChatGPT or a similar tool was utilized for any given assignment and briefly describe how it was used.

## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Note: Topics are subject to change as the course evolves. Due to the consistent flow of new research in this area, readings will go on Blackboard approximately one week in advance of each class. Conversation starters are due by 8 AM on the day of class for all weeks except the first week of class, the last week of class, and the week of the peer workshop.

Date	Topic
1. September 11	Introduction and Course Preliminaries
2. September 18	Managing Uncertainty and Risk
3. September 25	The Politicization of Science
4. October 2	Political Polarization and the Pandemic
5. October 9	Free Speech and the Pandemic
6. October 23	“Lockdowns”: Public Health vs. (?) the Economy
→October 24 at 7 PM	Project topics due on Blackboard
7. October 30	Mask and Vaccine Mandates
8. November 6	Academic Freedom and the Pandemic Guest Speaker: Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, Stanford University
9. November 13	<i>Endemic: A Post-Pandemic Playbook</i> Guest Speaker: Dr. Monica Gandhi, UCSF
10. November 20	Economic Policy and the Pandemic
11. Week of November 27	Peer Group Workshops (in lieu of class meeting) →Post-workshop survey due by December 4 at 8 AM
12. December 4	TBD
13. December 11	Course Wrap-Up
→ December 13 at 7 PM	Final projects due on Blackboard

## ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

### Intellectual Property

No photography, video recording, or audio recording of any kind is allowed during class. In addition, no reproduction or dissemination of course materials, slides, or lectures—electronically or through other means—is allowed.

### Academic Honesty

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester’s Academic Honesty Policy. More information is available at [www.rochester.edu/college/honesty](http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty).

### Statement on Credit Hours

This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets once per week for a total of 150 minutes per week of faculty-led instructional time. The course also includes independent out-of-class activities for 50 minutes per week; specifically, students will read novel academic papers and research reports as well as seek out news articles related to the course.