

# Introduction to U.S. Politics

University of Rochester, PSCI 105

Fall 2021

Tue/Thur, 9:40 am - 10:55 am, Harkness 115

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Office hours: Wed., 10:30 am - noon, **by appointment only**,  
via <https://calendly.com/danalexander7/office-hours>  
(see essay prompts for information about TA office hours)

## Course Information

**Description** This course will introduce students to the foundations of the United States government. Students will examine important political institutions and the interactions among them to understand how they shape the behavior of political actors and ordinary U.S. citizens. Specific topics will include: the need for a state, the purposes of elections, federalism, the three branches of U.S. government, and the role of interest groups in U.S. politics. Throughout, the course employs concepts from the rational-choice approach to political science to model key concepts; however, no background in this is necessary. For additional context, we also draw upon an account of the role of race in U.S. political development. This course is appropriate for majors and non-majors with an interest in understanding how and why the U.S. political system works as it does.

**Assignments and Expectations** I expect students to have read the assigned material and to be prepared to ask questions and engage in discussions that draw upon the readings. Participation and attendance will not be graded, but I reserve the right to revise this policy if it becomes necessary. Students will complete four short assignments (each worth 15% of the grade) and two in-class exams (each worth 20% of the grade). Details about each of these elements of course may be found below.

**Short Assignments** Over the course of the term, students will complete four short assignments. Broadly, these will consist of short essays, 2-4 pages in length, double-spaced. More information will

be provided about each of these, but the topics are as follows: 1) identifying a pair of contradictory forces in founding documents/political thought, 2) writing a bill for a law you will argue ought to exist, 3) a reflection on the election in early November, and 4) an analytical vignette à la Riker about political maneuvering.

Specific times and submission instructions will be given on the assignments themselves, but the due dates are: September 17, October 8, November 12, and December 1.

If you turn in a short assignment late, you will be docked 10% (of the original total points) for every 24 hours that the paper is late, with late penalties accruing from the time the paper is due. For example, if your paper earned 95%, but you turned it in a few hours past the time it was due, you would receive 85%; if you turned it in 30 hours past the time it was due, you would receive 75%. Barring extraordinary circumstances, there will be no extensions granted.

Grade disputes will not be accepted in the first 24 hours after receiving the grade back. Grade disputes should be accompanied by a memo detailing the reasons that the student believes a higher grade is warranted. I will not consider regrades without this accompanying memo. The professor (i.e., not the TAs) will be the grade dispute arbiter and the grade that I determine binds (i.e., if you get a lower grade on the regrade, this lower grade is the final assignment mark).

**Exams** A mid-term (October 19, 2020) and a final exam (December 7, 2020) will test students' knowledge of particularly important concepts or arguments from the course. Students will be asked to demonstrate their knowledge of these ideas and employ key frameworks to provide insightful answers to a variety of prompts. If you have a conflict with either of these dates, please let me know immediately. The exams will be online, and students may use class notes and posted materials (i.e., readings, lectures), but students *may not* conduct searches on the Internet. No make-ups will be offered except in extenuating circumstances.

**Materials** We will not be using a standard "Intro to U.S. Politics" textbook. Instead, we will rely on a variety of primary and secondary sources (all available on Blackboard), as well as a book that will provide context for the material we learn:

- Kendi, Ibram X. 2016. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York: Bold Type Books.

We will look to Kendi (2016) for context around American political development and American political

thought. It should be available at the bookstore but is also available from online booksellers.

Two additional notes on Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*. 1) Make sure you are using the correct version, *not* the adaptation for young adults. 2) I do not mind if you use the audiobook version, but I would encourage you to take notes while or at least shortly after you finish a chapter. I'll say more about this in class.

**Assistance and Resources to Promote Student Success** Please feel free to reach out to me at any point during the course with any concerns or information that you would like me to know to support your success this semester, as well as with any questions about the course.

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: [disability@rochester.edu](mailto:disability@rochester.edu); (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has a number of resources to improve study habits, including one-on-one study skills consultations, study skills course (CAS 142), quiet study space with peer support (Study Zone), and, for specific courses, one-on-one tutoring, drop-in group tutoring, and weekly study groups.

Student success at the University of Rochester includes more than just academic performance. Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE Referral on your behalf. A CARE Referral is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator shares information only with staff who need to know it in order to help you. I *care* about your success and am committed to my role in helping you get connected to appropriate campus resources.

## Course Schedule

We will spend a week on each topic, as the course is intended to provide a survey, moving quickly to give students a taste of the many facets and scientific study of U.S. politics. The readings listed after a given date are to be completed by that date. A schedule of topics and readings may be found below.

## **Introduction. Motivating and explaining the course**

*Aug. 26 No readings*

### **Topic 1. A state and a constitution**

*Aug. 31 Readings:*

- Declaration of Independence
- U.S. Constitution amendments 3-8
- Kendi, Preface and Prologue
- de Tocqueville, “Tyranny”

*Sep. 2 Readings:*

- Articles of Confederation
- U.S. Constitution preamble; articles V-VII; and amendment 16
- Kendi, ch 1-2
- Marshall, “Bicentennial”
- Riker, APM ch 8

### **Topic 2. Democracy, representative government, and elections**

*Sep. 7 No class*

*Sep. 9 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution article I, section 4; amendments 14-15, 19, 23-24, 26
- Kendi, ch 3-4
- Adams, “Letter”

*Sep. 14 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 5-6
- Madison, “Federalist 39”
- Riker, LAP ch 9

*Sep. 16 No class*

**Essay 1 due by 5 pm on September 17, via Blackboard**

### **Topic 3. Federalism**

*Sep. 21 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution article I, sections 9-10; article IV; and amendments 9-11
- Kendi, ch 7-9
- Bryce, “Dual”

*Sep. 23 Readings:*

- Grodzins, “Marble”
- Riker, “Federalism”

### **Topic 4. A legislature**

*Sep. 28 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution article I, section 1-3, 5-8; and amendments 17, 27
- Kendi, ch 10-12
- Burke, “Electors”

*Sep. 30 Readings:*

- Madison, “Federalist 35”
- Riker, APM ch 2

### **Topic 5. The executive**

*Oct. 5 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution article II; amendments 12-13, 20, 22, 25
- Kendi, ch 13-14
- Hamilton, “Federalist 69”

*Oct. 7 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 15-16
- Howell, podcast
- Riker, “Heresthetics” (first few sections, skim the rest)

**Essay 2 due by 5 pm on October 8, via Blackboard**

## **Topic 6. Bureaucracy**

### *Oct. 12 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 17-18
- Wilson & Kelling

### *Oct. 14 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 19-20
- Bring in questions to review for exam!

**Mid-term exam on October 19**

## **Topic 7. Separation of powers & checks and balances**

### *Oct. 21 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 21-23
- Madison, “Federalist 51”

### *Oct. 26 Readings:*

- Thrower, “Regulatory delay”

## **Topic 8. The judiciary (and elections)**

### *Oct. 28 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution article III
- Kendi, ch 24-25
- Hamilton, “Federalist 78”

### *Nov. 2 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 26-27
- Douglass, “Fourth of July”
- Anthony, “Equal Suffrage”

### *Nov. 4 Readings:*

- Kendi, ch 28-29

- RBG, “Writing”

### **Topic 9. Interest groups**

*Nov. 9 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution amendment 2
- Madison, “Federalist 10”
- Kendi, ch 30-32

*Nov. 11 Readings:*

- Sunstein, “Interest Groups”

**Essay 3 due by 5 pm on November 12, via Blackboard**

### **Topic 10. Public opinion**

*Nov. 16 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution amendments 18, 21
- Kendi, ch 33-35
- Lippmann, “Public Opinion”

*Nov. 18 Readings:*

- Hofstadter, “Paranoid”

### **Topic 11. Mass media**

*Nov. 23 Readings:*

- U.S. Constitution amendment 1
- Kendi, ch 36-37
- Orwell, “Political Speech”

*Nov. 30 Readings:*

- White, “TV Debates”

**Essay 4 due by 5 pm on December 1, via Blackboard**

**Conclusion. Closing thoughts and a short case study**

*Dec. 2 Readings:*

- Kendi, Epilogue
- Bring in questions to review for exam!

**Final exam on December 7**