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Fall 2021, Mon. 2:00 – 4:40, LeChase 181
Office Hours (Zoom): Wed. 11:15 AM – 12:15 PM and 1:45 – 2:45 PM

PSCI 210: Pandemic Politics

This Version: December 1, 2021

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. These questions are written in the past tense, but we will also consider the ongoing evolution of the pandemic during the course of the semester.

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 relating to the themes of the course. We will set aside time each week to discuss relevant articles, with an eye toward how data, evidence, and research is used in those articles.

“QUESTIONS ARE THE ANSWER”

The course will be structured around the idea that how we understand a phenomenon depends crucially on the questions we ask about that phenomenon. (*Questions Are the Answer* is the title of a book on this subject.) We will practice this skill throughout the semester, using the aptly-named “Question Formulation Technique.” In-class QFT applications will complement the questions students generated as part of the conversation starters discussed below.

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.

In order to foster an open exchange of ideas and allow for the 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 small seminar of 15-20 students requires the active involvement of all students. Students are expected to attend all classes, complete the readings in advance of class, and share their ideas during class discussions.
- **Set the stage for class discussions.** For classes in weeks 2 through 12 (except 11), 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. *These conversation starters should be based on the readings for the week.* These “conversation starters” should be submitted on Blackboard by 10 AM on the day of class under assignments; late “conversation starters” will not be accepted except in unusual circumstances.
- **Complete a project (proposals due on Blackboard by 5 PM on October 19; individual 20-minute meetings including “elevator pitch” for the project will be held the weeks of Nov. 15 and 22; projects due via email by 5 PM on Dec. 7).**
 - Students are required to complete a project of their choosing. Possible projects include a traditional, 15-page research paper or a non-traditional approach such as a writing a set of op-eds related to the themes of the course.
 - Project topics, structure, and “deliverables” must be approved by Professor Primo. Professor Primo will tailor his guidance and project requirements to the specifics of the proposals.
 - In an effort to encourage students to make progress on their papers in advance of the deadline, students will be required to attend a 15-20-minute one-on-one meeting with Professor Primo, which will begin with students giving him a 3-5 minute “elevator pitch” about their project’s purpose, structure, and tentative conclusions.
 - The bottom line: this project should be one that you are invested in and are excited about. Professor Primo will be there to help along the way.

GRADING

- *Class attendance* counts toward 15% of your grade. Non-attendance imposes costs on other students. That said, Professor Primo understands that “life happens,” so you may miss one class session without penalty—no explanation necessary. Absences beyond one must be justified (e.g., illness). *Please do not come to class if you are not feeling well; just give Professor Primo advance notice whenever possible.*
- *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, so long as it is submitted on time. Following the “life happens” rule, you may skip two “conversation starters” without penalty.
- *Class participation* counts toward 25% 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.
- *The project* counts toward 40% of your course grade, of which 10% will be based on the quality of preparation for the 15-20-minute meeting discussed above.

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
- come to class prepared to engage with others and be open to perspectives that may differ from your own.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Note: Topics are subject to change as the course evolves. Due to the continual release of new research in this area, readings will be finalized about 10 days before each class and go on Blackboard one week in advance of each class. Conversation starters are due by 10 AM on the day of class for all weeks except week 1, 11, and 13.

Date	Topic
1. August 30	Introduction and Course Preliminaries
2. September 13	Managing Uncertainty and Risk
3. September 20	The Politicization of Science
4. September 27	Beliefs and Values
5. October 4	Political Polarization
6. October 18	Lockdowns: Public Health vs. (?) the Economy
7. October 25	Politics, Protests, and Pandemics Guest Speaker: Dr. John McGowan
8. November 1	Economic Policy During a Pandemic
9. November 8	Inequality and the Pandemic
10. November 15	Innovation and the Pandemic
11. November 22	Individual project "pitch meetings" to be set up; no class
12. November 29	Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic Guest Speaker: Dr. Monica Gandhi
13. December 6	Course Wrap-Up

READINGS

September 13: Managing Uncertainty and Risk

- Sunstein, Cass R. 2021. *Averting Catastrophe*. New York: New York University Press, excerpt.
- Sanyal, Sanjeev. 2021. "View: Economic Survey Lays Out the Intellectual Foundations of India's Covid Response," *The Economic Times*, January 30.
- Okamoto, Geoffrey. 2020. "Knightmare Uncertainty." *IMF Finance and Development*, September.
- Recchia et al. 2021. "How Well Did Experts and Laypeople Forecast the Size of the COVID-19 Pandemic?" *PLoS ONE* 16(5):e0250935.
- Varnum et al. 2021. "Everyone Was Wrong on the Pandemic's Societal Impact." *Foreign Policy*, March 18.
- van der Bles et al. 2020. "The Effects of Communicating Uncertainty on Public Trust in Facts and Numbers." *PNAS* 117(14):7672-83.
- Leonhardt, David. 2021. "Irrational Covid Fears." *New York Times*, April 19.

September 20: The Politicization of Science

Overview Readings

- [Bridge piece connecting last week to this week] Mandavilli, Apoorva. 2021. "The U.S. Is Getting a Crash Course in Scientific Uncertainty." *New York Times*, August 22.
- Lenzer, Jeanne, and Shannon Brownlee. 2020. "The COVID Science Wars." *Scientific American*, November 30.

Scott Atlas Controversy at Stanford University

- Open Letter from Stanford faculty
- Flaherty, Colleen. 2020. "Not Shrugging Off Criticism." *Inside Higher Ed*, September 23.
- Chelsey, Kate. 2020. "Faculty Senate Condemns COVID-19 Actions of Hoover's Scott Atlas." *Stanford News*, November 20.

- Pizzo, Philip, et al. 2021. "When Physicians Engage in Practices That Threaten the Nation's Health." *JAMA* 325(8): 723-24.

The Lab Leak Theory

- O'Neal, Adam. 2021. "A Scientist Who Said No to Covid Groupthink." *Wall Street Journal*, June 11.
- Rabin, Roni Caryn. 2021. "Caught in the Crossfire Over Covid's Origins." *New York Times*, August 24.

Research

- Kreps, S.E., and D.L. Kriner. 2020. "Model Uncertainty, Political Contestation, and Public Trust in Science: Evidence from the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Science Advances* 6:eabd4563.
- OPTIONAL. Bokemper, Scott E., et al. 2020. "Timing of COVID-19 Vaccine Approval and Endorsement by Public Figures." *Vaccine* 39:825-29.

September 27: Beliefs and Values

Background

- Oshinsky, David. 2021. "The Long History of Vaccine Mandates in America." *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 17.

Surveys and Interviews

- Wagner, Dennis. 2021. "When Should Liberty Yield to Public Good?" *USA Today*, Aug. 3.
- Ipsos. 2021. "On COVID-19 Vaccine, Mask Requirements, Americans Prioritize Common Good Over Personal Liberty." Aug. 18.

Civil Liberties (Free Speech and Privacy)

- Schechner, Sam, et al. 2021. "How Facebook Hobbled Mark Zuckerberg's Bid to Get America Vaccinated." *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 17.
- Zimmerman, Jonathan. 2021. "Teachers Have a Duty on COVID-19 Facts." *USA Today*, Aug. 26.
- Woo, Erin, and Kellen Browning. 2021. "New York City's Vaccine Passport Plan Renews Online Privacy Debate." *New York Times*, Aug. 4.
- Cole, David, and Daniel Mach. 2021. "We Work at the A.C.L.U. Here's What We Think About Vaccine Mandates." *New York Times*, Sept. 2.

Research

- Tavernise, Sabrina. 2021. "Vaccine Skepticism Was Viewed as a Knowledge Problem. It's Actually About Gut Beliefs." *New York Times*, April 29.
- Tram, Khai Hoan, et al. 2021. "Deliberation, Dissent, and Distrust: Understanding Distinct Drivers of Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccine Hesitancy in the United States." *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciab633>.
- OPTIONAL James, Erin K. 2021. "Persuasive Messaging to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake Intentions." Manuscript.

October 4: Political Polarization

- Gawande, Atul. 2021. "Inside the Worst-Hit County in the Worst-Hit State in the Worst-Hit Country." *New Yorker*, February 8.
- Lopez, German. 2021. "How Political Polarization Broke America's Vaccine Campaign." *Vox*, July 6.
- Kaplan, Robert M. 2021. "A False Narrative About 'Misinformation and Covid Vaccines.'" *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 3.
- Jena, Anupam. 2021. "The Covid 'Birthday Effect Crossed Political Boundaries.'" *New York Times*, July 16.
 - OPTIONAL (research article that Dr. Jena's op-ed is based on): Whatley, Christopher M., et al. 2021. "Assessing the Association Between Social Gatherings and COVID-19 Risk Using Birthdays." *JAMA Internal Medicine* 181(8):1090-99.
- Hartney, Michael T., and Leslie L. Finger. 2021. "Politics, Markets, and Pandemics: Public Education's Response to COVID-19." *Perspectives on Politics*.
- Blake, Aaron. 2021. "America's Exceptional Infighting Over the Coronavirus." *Washington Post*, Aug. 25.

October 18: Lockdowns: Public Health vs. (?) the Economy

The US Case (Short Run)

- Thompson, Derek. 2021. "The Curious Case of Florida's Pandemic Response." *The Atlantic*, March 23.
- Agrawal, Vinat, et al. 2021. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Policy Responses on Excess Mortality." NBER Working Paper, June.
- Goolsbee, Austan, and Chad Syverson. 2021. "Fear, Lockdown, and Diversion: Comparing Drivers of Pandemic Economic Decline." BFI Research Update, February 16.

The US Case (Long Run)

- Bianchi, Francesco, et al. 2021. "The Long-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Unemployment Shock on Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates." NBER Working Paper, September.
- Frederick, Wayne A.I. 2021. "What Happens When People Stop Going to the Doctor? We're About to Find Out." *New York Times*, February 22.
- Dorn, Emma, et al. 2021. "COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning." McKinsey & Company, July.

The Swedish Case

- Pickett, Mallory. 2021. "Sweden's Pandemic Experiment." *The New Yorker*, April 6.
- Born, Benjamin, et al. 2021. "The Lockdown Effect: A Counterfactual for Sweden." *PLoS ONE* 16(4):e0249732.

October 25: Politics, Protests, and Pandemics (Guest Speaker: Dr. John McGowan)

- Roberts, Adam. 2020. "Pandemics and Politics." *Survival* 62(5):7-40.
- Morens, David M., Jeffery K. Taubenberger, and Anthony S. Fauci. 2021. "A Centenary Tale of Two Pandemics: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and COVID-19, Part II." *American Journal of Public Health* 111(7):1267-1272.
- Madhav, Nita, et al. 2018. "Pandemics: Risks, Impacts, and Mitigation." In *Disease Control Priorities: Improving Health and Reducing Poverty*, 3rd ed., eds. Dean T. Jamison et al. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
- Knowledge@Wharton. 2020. "The Politics of Pandemics: Why Some Countries Respond Better Than Others."
- Gopnik, Adam. 2021. "Politics, Protests, and Pandemics." *The New Yorker*, February 17.
- Parker, Richard, and Dulce Ferraz. 2021. "Politics and Pandemics." *Global Public Health* 16(8-9):1131-1140.

November 1: Economic Policy During a Pandemic

Economic Policy and COVID-19

- Bourne, Ryan A. 2021. *Economics in One Virus*. Washington, DC: Cato, chapters 13-16.
- Tooze, Adam. 2021. *Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World's Economy*. New York: Viking, ch. 6.
- Rocco, Philip, et al. 2020. "Stuck in Neutral? Federalism, Policy Instruments, and Counter-Cyclical Responses to COVID-19 in the United States." *Politics and Society* 39(3):458-477.
- Ip, Greg. 2021. "How the U.S. Nailed the Economic Response to Covid-19." *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 15.

Should We Worry about the National Debt?

- Davidson, Kate, and Jon Hilsenrath. 2019. "How Washington Learned to Love Debt and Deficits." *Wall Street Journal*, June 13.
- Davidson, Kate, and Jon Hilsenrath. 2021. "The Debt Question Facing Janet Yellen: How Much Is Too Much?" *Wall Street Journal*, Jan 18.
- Riedl, Brian. 2020. "Liberal Economists Say Debt Doesn't Matter. They're Wrong." *Washington Post*, Dec. 8.

November 8: Inequality and the Pandemic

Global and Historical Perspectives

- Galletta, Serigo, and Tommaso Giommoni. 2020. "Pandemics and Inequality." *VOX/CEPR Policy Portal*, October 3.
- Alfani, Guido. 2020. "Pandemics and Inequality: A Historical Overview." *VOX/CEPR Policy Portal*, October 15.
- Ferreira, Francisco H.G. 2021. "Inequality in the Time of COVID-19." *IMF Finance & Development*, June.

Disparities in Employment, USA

- Albanesi, Stefania, and Jiyeon Kim. 2021. "Effects of the COVID-19 Recession on the US Labor Market: Occupation, Family, and Gender." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 35(3):3-24.
- Sáenz, Rogelio, Corey Sparks, and Asiya Validova. 2021. "Inequities in Job Recovery During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Carsey Research*, National Issue Brief #156.

Health Disparities, USA

- Andrasfay, Theresa, and Noreen Goldman. 2021. "Reductions in 2020 US Life Expectancy Due to COVID-19 and the Disproportionate Impact on the Black and Latino Populations." *PNAS* 118(5):e201476118.

November 15 Innovation and the Pandemic

- Ip, Greg. 2020. "Covid-19 Propelled Businesses Into the Future. Ready or Not." *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 26.
- McKinsey Global Institute. 2021. *The Future of Work After COVID-19: Executive Summary*. February.
- Galloway, Scott. 2020. *Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity*. New York: Portfolio, Introduction and ch. 4.
- Guo, Eileen. 2021. "Universal Basic Income Is Here--It Just Looks Different from What You Expected." *MIT Technology Review*, May 7.
 - Optional: de Rugy, Veronique, and Andrea Castillo. 2021. "US Antipoverty Policy and Reform." Mercatus Center at George Mason University.
- Interview with the author of *Care After Covid: What the Pandemic Revealed is Broken in Healthcare and How to Reinvent It*.

November 29: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic (Guest Speaker: Dr. Monica Gandhi)

- Gandhi, Monica. 2021. "Don't Panic Over Waning Antibodies. Here's Why." Leaps.org, September 2.
- Gandhi, Monica. 2021. "Vaccine Mandates Are the Only Way to End This Public Health Emergency." *Daily Caller*, September 21.
- Gandhi, Monica. 2021. "We Won't Eradicate COVID. The Pandemic Will Still End." *Washington Post*, September 21.
- Vergales, Jeffrey, and Monica Gandhi. 2021. "School Quarantines Keep Too Many Kids at Home--With Barely Any Effect on COVID." *Washington Post*, October 5.
- Halperin, Daniel T., et al. (Gandhi is co-senior author). 2021. "Revisiting COVID-19 Policies: 10 Evidence-Based Recommendations for Where to Go From Here." *BMC Public Health* 21:2084.

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.

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 will be asked to read reputable news sources to identify current events related to the themes of the course.