

Introduction to U.S. Politics

University of Rochester, PSCI 105

Spring 2024

Tue/Thur, 9:40 am - 10:55 am, Meliora 203

Instructor: Dan Alexander (he/him)
Contact: dan.alexander@rochester.edu
Office hours: **by appointment only** (see below for more details):
for Wed., 10:30 am - noon, via <https://calendly.com/danalexander7/office-hours>;
otherwise, please arrange a time via email.

Course Information

This Document's Purpose and Contents The syllabus contains information students need to be successful in this course. It covers the coursework, material, resources for academic assistance and honesty, information about TAs and office hours, as well as a detailed schedule for the course. Please read this document carefully and refer back to it frequently throughout the semester, and do so via Blackboard as updates will likely occur.

Course 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 and non-political actors in the United States. 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. We also draw extensively upon accounts 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 the 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) investigating a rule (regulation) in the federal register, and 4) understanding the role of political parties in the progression of racism/racial progress in the United States.

Specific times and submission instructions will be given on the assignments themselves, but the due dates are: Fri. February 9, Fri. March 1, Fri. April 5, and Fri. April 26.

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. After 24 hours have passed, 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 (March 7, 2023) and a final exam (April 30, 2023) 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 in-class, closed-note, and closed-book. 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. 2023. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. 2nd edition. New York: Bold Type Books.

We will look to Kendi (2023) for context around American political development and American political thought. It should be available at the bookstore but is also available from online booksellers.

Three 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. 3) I don't think there were extensive changes from the first to the second edition, so if you'd like to use the first edition for whatever reason, that likely won't be a problem.

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; (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 only shares information with staff who need to know it to help you. I *care* about your success and am committed to my role in helping you get connected to appropriate campus resources.

Academic Honesty Information

Academic honesty means acting with truthfulness and sincerity in carrying out all aspects of our individual and collaborative work, maintaining ownership over our work and acknowledging our debt to the work of others.

Students can best meet their obligation to academic honesty by adhering to the Academic Honesty Policy in all academic matters. This includes completing their work through their own honest efforts and expecting and encouraging honesty among their peers.

The text above is an excerpt taken from <https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>, where students may – and should! – also find the full policy.

Issues of improper conduct (such as insufficient attribution) will be addressed with a formal warning. Subsequent instances of improper academic conduct or suspected academic misconduct will be passed along to the Board that oversees such matters. As indicated in the guidelines linked above, the punishments for violations are significant. We will include some assignment-specific clarifications in the prompt for each assignment, but if you have questions at any point about whether your conduct adheres to the guidelines, reach out to the instructor (or the TAs, or both).

Office Hours I strongly encourage you to avail yourself of office hours, especially my own. I will always have availability Wednesdays from 10:30 am-noon, though I still ask that you make an appointment for a time slot during that window using the calendly link at the top of the syllabus. If that time slot does not work for any reason, please email me (again, see the contact information at the beginning of the syllabus) *with some suggested times* to meet and whether you would like to meet in person or via Zoom. Office hours may be used to discuss upcoming assignments, graded work, or the course material more broadly, as well as any other issues that may arise.

TAs We have a couple of TAs for the course: Thi Theu Dinh and Maggie Zheng. Theu will hold standing office hours, for which you do not need to make an appointment, on Mondays, 9:30 am - 11:00 am, Harkness 308B.

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 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

Jan. 18 No readings

Topic 1. A state and a constitutionq

Jan. 23 Readings:

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

Jan. 25 Readings:

- Articles of Confederation
- U.S. Constitution preamble; articles V-VII; and amendment 16
- Kendi, ch 1-2
- Douglass, “Fourth of July”
- Anthony, “Equal Suffrage”
- Riker, APM ch 8

Topic 2. Democracy, representative government, and elections

Jan. 30 Readings:

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

Feb. 1 Readings:

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

Topic 3. Federalism

Feb. 6 Readings:

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

Feb. 8 Readings:

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

Essay 1 due by 5 pm on February 9, via Blackboard

Topic 4. A legislature

Feb. 13 Readings:

- U.S. Constitution article I, section 1-3, 5-8; and amendments 17, 27

- Kendi, ch 10-12
- Burke, “Electors”

Feb. 15 Readings:

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

Topic 5. The executive

Feb. 20 Readings:

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

Feb. 22 Readings:

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

Topic 6. Bureaucracy

Feb. 27 Readings:

- Kendi, ch 17-18

Feb. 29 Readings:

- Kendi, ch 19-20

Essay 2 due by 5 pm on March 1, via Blackboard

***** Review and Exam**

Mar. 5 Readings:

- Gordon & Ruddock, “What Your Professor Thinks You Already Know About U.S. Politics”

Mid-term exam on March 7

No classes on March 12 and March 14 for Spring Break

Topic 7. Separation of powers & checks and balances

Mar. 19 Readings:

- Kendi, ch 21-22
- Madison, “Federalist 51”

Mar. 21 Readings:

- Kendi, ch 23-25
- Thrower, “Regulatory delay”

Topic 8. The judiciary (and elections)

Mar. 26 Readings:

- U.S. Constitution article III

- Kendi, ch 26-27
- Hamilton, “Federalist 78”

Mar. 28 Readings:

- Kendi, ch 28-29
- Marshall, “Bicentennial”

Topic 9. Interest groups

Apr. 2 Readings:

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

*Apr. 4 **No class**, no readings*

No class on April 4

Apr. 9 Readings:

- Sunstein, “Interest Groups”

Essay 3 due by 5 pm on April 5, via Blackboard

Topic 10. Public opinion

Apr. 11 Readings:

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

Apr. 16 Readings:

- Hofstadter, “Paranoid”

Topic 11. Mass media

April. 18 Readings:

- U.S. Constitution amendment 1
- Kendi, ch 36-37

Apr. 23 Readings:

- White, “TV Debates”

Essay 4 due by 5 pm, April 26, via Blackboard

Conclusion. Closing thoughts and a short case study

April 25 Readings:

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

Final exam on April 30