

PSCI 232/PSCI 232W: Disagreement in a Democratic Society

This Version: January 22, 2024

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is consensus overrated? In this seminar course we will study the role of disagreement in a democratic society. Topics will include the causes and consequences of political polarization, academic freedom and viewpoint diversity on college campuses, and practical tools for managing disagreements.

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. In order to stay up-to-date with news in this area and access some required readings, students should obtain free subscriptions to [Inside Higher Ed](#), the [New York Times](#), and the [Wall Street Journal](#).

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 approximately 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 weeks 2-10, you will be asked to submit one question to Professor Primo that you would like discussed during class (think of it as a “conversation starter”) along with a 250-word explanation of why you selected that question, with support from at least two of that week’s readings. 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 take-home midterm essay.** On April 1, you will be provided with a prompt and be asked to write a 1,250-word essay that is based on the readings. The essay is due by 8 AM on April 8.
- **Complete the Perspectives program on disagreement.** Students will be placed in groups of 3-4 students and will meet once per week for 30 minutes over the course of three weeks after completing online lessons each week regarding the science of constructive disagreements. Students must come to class prepared to discuss their group meetings. More details will be provided in class.

- **Complete a take-home end-of-semester reflection.** Upon completing the Perspectives program, students will be asked to write a 750-word reflection based on a prompt to be provided by Professor Primo on April 29. This essay is due by 7 PM on May 6.
- **Read the news and share relevant articles:** Students are expected to spend 50 minutes outside of class each week reading the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Inside Higher Ed* in order to deepen their understanding of how the themes of the course relate to current affairs. Twice in the semester (once during weeks 3-5 and once during weeks 6-9), students will submit a news article and brief explanation for how it relates to the course material on political polarization (weeks 3-5) or free speech in higher education (weeks 6-9).
- **W students:** W students meet the writing requirement by completing at least six conversation starters and both essays with careful attention to the quality of their writing.

GRADING

- You may earn a total of 100 points in the course.
- *Conversation starters* collectively count toward 18% of your course grade. Each assignment is worth 3 points. You can receive credit for a conversation starter even if you do not attend class. Your grade is based on your highest 6 of 9 conversation starters.
- *Class participation* counts toward 15% of your course grade and is worth 15 points. 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. Students will also be evaluated based on how well-prepared they are for the discussion of the Perspectives program. *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.*
- *Completion of the Perspectives program* counts toward 12% of your grade and is worth 12 points. This grade is based on (a) completion of all 6 online lessons in the program and associated quizzes and (b) active participation in the three group dialogues.
- *The midterm essay* counts toward 35% of your grade and is worth 35 points.
- *The end-of-semester reflection* counts toward 15% of your grade and is worth 15 points.
- *In the News assignments* collectively count toward 5% of your course grade and are worth 2.5 points each.

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 to improve their writing or to explore ideas. All submitted work must be written by the student (e.g., students may not cut-and-paste ChatGPT content into their essays). Incorrect quotations, fake citations, inappropriate references or citations, and all other errors due to the use of AI are the responsibility of the student and will result in point deductions.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Note: Topics are subject to change as the course evolves. Readings will go on Blackboard approximately one week in advance of each class. CS=Conversation Starter.

Date	Topic	Assignment	
1. January 22	Introduction		
2. January 29	Foundations	CS (8 AM)	
3. February 5	Political Polarization I	CS (8 AM)	"In the News" (due 2/19 by 8 AM)
4. February 12	Political Polarization II	CS (8 AM)	
5. February 19	Political Polarization III	CS (8 AM)	
6. February 26	The University of Rochester and Campus Speech	CS (8 AM)	"In the News" (due 3/25 by 8 AM)
7. March 4	Higher Education I: The Campus Speech Climate	CS (8 AM)	
8. March 18	Higher Education II: DEI vs. (?) Free Speech	CS (8 AM)	
9. March 25	Higher Education III: Scientific Advancement	CS (8 AM)	
March 27	Optional: Politics and Markets Project Event at 7:30 PM in Wegmans 1400		
10. April 1	Disagreement, Diversity, and Innovation	CS (8 AM); Midterm Essay prompt distributed	
11. April 8	No Class—Start on Perspectives Program	Midterm Essay due by 2 PM	
12. April 15	Perspectives Program, continued		
13. April 22	Perspectives Program, continued		
14. April 29	Class Wrap-up	End-of-Semester Reflection prompt distributed	
May 6	End-of-Semester Reflection due by 7 PM		

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 including, but not limited to, reading the news to connect course themes to current affairs for an average of 50 minutes per week.