

Professor David Primo
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Class Meetings: Mon. and Wed. 11:50 AM – 1:05 PM
Office Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:15 – 2:15 PM (except on days
with guest speakers), Harkness 318

PSCI 238: Business and Politics Spring 2026

This Version: January 19, 2026

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Consider this real-world scenario: You are the CEO of a major corporation, and a US president takes office who has pledged to implement government rules that would hurt your industry. How do you respond? You may think this scenario refers to President Donald Trump, but he was hardly the first president to attack corporations (although his tactics are certainly unorthodox). In 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama promised to enact a windfall profits tax on oil companies if elected, and in 2021, President Joe Biden laid out an agenda to take on “Big Tech.” The lesson? Regardless of who is in control of government, managers must incorporate factors outside of markets—including government, public opinion, activists, and the mass media—into decision making and strategy building.

In this course, we will use the tools of political science and economics to study how businesses affect and are affected by politics. In addition to studying how laws and regulations get made in the United States, we will devote several classes to corporate social responsibility and brand activism. Class sessions will be interactive and feature in-depth discussions of real-world topics and cases in a variety of industries. We will also welcome several guest speakers during the semester.

LEARNING MODULES

PSCI 238 is structured as a set of learning modules. The learning modules have been designed so that you will find all the pre-class preparation materials, assignments, slides, and other material for each topic in one place. Professor Primo’s goal is to provide a course structure that is linear, logical, and user-friendly. The result will be productive class meetings and a positive overall course experience.

COURSE MATERIALS

A textbook is available at no charge to students through the UR Essentials Program. Other required course materials will be made available on Blackboard approximately one week prior to the associated class meeting.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Exams:** There will be two closed-book, in-person exams in this course. The first exam will be given on Wednesday, March 4, and the second exam will be given on Wednesday, April 29.
- **Pre-Class Preparation (PCP) Assignments:** Most learning modules not featuring a guest speaker will include a short pre-class preparation assignment. The purpose of the PCP assignments (and GSQ assignments—see below) is to encourage you to come to class prepared. You will be assessed based on your highest 5 PCP assignment scores, but you are encouraged to complete all assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted.
- **Guest Speaker Question (GSQ) Assignments:** In advance of classes featuring a guest speaker, you will be asked to submit a question for the speaker along with a brief explanation regarding the connection between the question and the pre-class preparation materials. You will be assessed based on your highest 4 GSQ assignment scores, but you are encouraged to complete all assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted.
- **Independent Reading:** Students are expected to spend approximately 50 minutes outside of class each week reading the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* to deepen their understanding of how the themes of the course relate to current policy issues. Students are eligible for free access to the online version of the [New York Times](#) and [Wall Street Journal](#); details are in the links (must be on UR network to register). Students will have an opportunity to share articles relevant to the course as part of selected PCP assignments.
- **Submitting Assignments:** All assignments should be completed and submitted on Blackboard by 8 AM on the due date using the link in the respective learning module—no attachments.

GRADING

- You may earn a total of 250 points in the course. Percentages below are based on this 250-point total.
- Each *exam* counts toward *40 percent* of your course grade and is worth 100 points, for a total of 200 points across both exams.
- *Pre-Class Preparation (PCP) Assignments* collectively count toward *16 percent* of your course grade. Each assignment is worth 8 points. Your highest 5 scores are counted toward your course grade, for a maximum of 40 points.
- *Guest Speaker Question (GSQ) Assignments* collectively count toward *4 percent* of your course grade. Each assignment is worth 2.5 points. Your highest 4 scores are counted toward your course grade, for a maximum of 10 points.
- All exams and assignments must be completed independently.
- Late assignments will not be accepted.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

There are two teaching assistants in the course: Bahar Zafer (bzafer@ur.rochester.edu) and William Zhu (yzhu50@ur.rochester.edu). They are responsible for grading the assignments and exams with Professor Primo's guidance.

PROFESSIONALISM

Professor Primo strives to create a professional atmosphere in class where all individuals 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.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The reproduction or dissemination of course materials, including but not limited to assignments, exams, slides, pre-class videos, and audio or video from class meetings—electronically or through other means—is not permitted under any circumstances. The unauthorized use, reproduction, or distribution of course content constitutes an academic honesty violation.

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. As noted above, the unauthorized use, reproduction, or distribution of course content constitutes an academic honesty violation.

GENERATIVE AI USAGE

Students may use AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete PCP and GSQ assignments, and in some assignments students may be explicitly asked to use AI tools. However, students should ensure that all submitted work reflects their own understanding of the material. Students are responsible for all errors due to the use of AI (e.g., factual errors, misinterpretations of course material, or failure to follow assignment instructions).

STATEMENT ON CREDIT HOURS

This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses. This course meets twice 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 policy issues for an average of 50 minutes per week.

Date	Topic (Note: This schedule is subject to change, except for exam dates. Blackboard will always have the most up-to-date schedule.)	PCP Assignment (Due by 8 AM ET)	GSQ Assignment (Due by 8 AM ET)
1. Wed. 1/21	Course Overview		
2. Fri. 1/23 Rochester Monday	Introduction to the Nonmarket Environment		
3. Mon. 1/26	Integrated Strategy in American Politics I		
4. Wed. 1/28	Integrated Strategy in American Politics II	Due 1/28	
5. Mon. 2/2	Nonmarket Analysis for Business I		
6. Wed. 2/4	Nonmarket Analysis for Business II	Due 2/4	
7. Mon. 2/9	Nonmarket Strategy: Formulation and Implementation I		
8. Wed. 2/11	Nonmarket Strategy: Formulation and Implementation II	Due 2/11	
9. Mon. 2/16	Lobbying I		
10. Wed. 2/18	Lobbying II / Pivotal Politics and Nonmarket Strategy I		
11. Mon. 2/23	Pivotal Politics and Nonmarket Strategy II	Due 2/23	
12. Wed. 2/25	Topic: Designing an Issue Campaign <i>Guest Speaker: Rob Shrum, Nexus Public Affairs</i>		Due 2/25
13. Mon. 3/2	Campaign Finance		
14. Wed. 3/4	Exam 1 (covers classes 1 through 12)		
15. Mon. 3/16	Topic: TBD <i>Guest Speaker: Emily Trapani, New Markets Lead, Valinor, and former Congressional staff member</i>		Due 3/16
16. Wed. 3/18	Topic: The T-Mobile and Sprint Merger <i>Guest Speaker: David Carey, former Executive Vice President at T-Mobile</i>		Due 3/18
17. Mon. 3/23	Regulation and Rulemaking		
18. Wed. 3/25	Topic: Regulation in Telecom and Tech <i>Guest Speaker: Marty Stern, Partner, Womble, Bond, Dickinson</i>		Due 3/25
19. Mon. 3/30	TBD		
Wed. 4/1	No class meeting (replaced by Wed. 4/8 evening event)		
20. Mon. 4/6	Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Activism I		
21. Wed. 4/8 Pt. I	Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Activism II	Due 4/8	
22. Wed. 4/8 Pt. II	Politics and Markets Project Event at 7:30 PM in Wegmans 1400 Topic: TBD	Optional assignment due 4/10 @ 5 PM (replaces lowest PCP or GSQ score – whatever helps your grade more)	
23. Mon. 4/13	Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Activism III/Private Politics I		
24. Wed. 4/15	Private Politics II	Due 4/15	
25. Mon. 4/20	Private Politics III		
26. Wed. 4/22	Topic: Crisis Management <i>Guest Speaker: Richard Keil, Crisis Management Expert (ex-Accenture)</i>		Due 4/22
27. Mon. 4/27	Course Wrap-Up		
28. Wed. 4/29	Exam 2 (covers classes 15 through 27 except for 22)		
There is no final exam in this course.			