

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

This Version: August 20, 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 course 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.** Several times in the semester, 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 the Perspectives program.** Students will be placed in groups of 3-4 students in class on September 18 after completing online lessons regarding the science of constructive disagreements. More details will be provided in class.
- **Complete a take-home essay.** On November 6, you will be provided with a prompt and be asked to write a 1,500-word essay that is based on the readings and class discussions. The essay is due by 5 PM on November 22.
- **Complete an end-of-semester reflection.** Students will be asked to write a 500-word reflection based on a prompt to be provided by Professor Primo on December 4. This essay is due by 5 PM on December 11.

- **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. Students will be asked to share relevant articles with the class during in-class discussions.
- **W students:** W students meet the writing requirement by completing at least 6 conversation starters, the take-home essay, and the end-of-semester reflection 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 conversation starters.
- *Class Participation* counts toward 20% of your course grade and is worth 20 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 7% of your grade and is worth 7 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 group dialogue.
- *The Take-Home Essay* counts toward 50% of your grade and is worth 50 points.
- *The End-of-Semester Reflection* counts toward 5% of your grade and is worth 5 points.

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 should not rely on ChatGPT or other generative AI to complete writing assignments for this course. Students may use tools like ChatGPT to improve the quality of their writing, but all ideas should be their own. 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 a reduced grade on the assignment.

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 Due
1. August 28	Introduction	
2. September 4	Foundations	CS (8 AM)
3. September 11	The University of Rochester and Campus Speech	CS (8 AM)
4. September 18	Practical Tools	Complete Perspectives program
5. September 25	Screening: "UNDIVIDE US"	
6. October 2	Political Polarization I	CS (8 AM)
7. October 9	Political Polarization II	CS (8 AM)
8. October 16	Political Polarization III	CS (8 AM)
9. October 23	Higher Education I: The Campus Speech Climate	CS (8 AM)
10. October 30	Higher Education II: DEI vs. (?) Free Speech	CS (8 AM)
11. November 6	Higher Education III: Scientific Advancement *take-home essay prompt distributed	CS (8 AM)
12. November 13 @ 7:30 PM	Politics and Markets Project Event on Election 2024 (no class at 2 PM)	
13. November 20	Disagreement, Diversity, and Innovation	CS (8 AM)
November 22 (due date; not a class day)		Take-home essay (5 PM)
14. December 4	Course Wrap-up *end-of-semester reflection prompt distributed	
December 11 (due date; not a class day)		End-of-semester reflection (5 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.