

Syllabus

CSI:1214:0003 Special Topics II

Political and Economic Institutions in the United States

Luciano I. de Castro
Professor of Economics & Interim Director
Center for Intellectual Freedom
The University of Iowa

Spring 2026

1 Overview of the Course

This course is offered by the [Center for Intellectual Freedom](#). It consists of a series of 110-minute lectures held weekly in the evenings. The instructors, drawn from diverse backgrounds and experiences (including but not limited to university professors), will present engaging and thought-provoking topics for discussion in a class limited to 32 students. This small class size fosters open discussion and in-depth exploration of each topic's multiple dimensions.

The courses organized by the Center for Intellectual Freedom aim to inspire students to embark on a compelling journey of discovery and learning about significant issues related to the courses' theme.

The course *Political and Economic Institutions in the United States* will explore the foundational ideas, texts, and traditions that have shaped American political and economic institutions. Students are encouraged to grow stronger in their viewpoints and engage in open discussion, civil debate, and conversation.

1.1 Learning Objectives

The primary objective of this course is to inspire students to engage in a thoughtful and open exploration of significant issues related to American political and economic institutions.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain key foundational ideas, texts, and traditions that have shaped American political and economic institutions;

- Analyze the interplay between democratic governance and market-based economic systems, including their historical development and contemporary relevance;
- Participate in informed, civil, and open discussions and debates on complex political and economic topics;

These objectives align with the course’s emphasis on promoting intellectual freedom, free speech, and critical inquiry in compliance with the University of Iowa’s policies on free expression and non-discrimination.

1.2 Outline of Course Topics

The following is an outline of the lectures planned for this course:

| Week | Dates | Title | Lecturer |
|------|-------|--|-----------------|
| 1 | 3/24 | The Judiciary: The Least Dangerous Branch? | Timothy Hagle |
| 2 | 3/31 | Presidential Nominations & the Electoral College | Alex P. Smith |
| 3 | 4/7 | Representation in Congress | Alex P. Smith |
| 4 | 4/14 | Exploring the relationship between Capitalism and Democracy | Reynolds Cramer |
| 5 | 4/21 | From the Athenian Assembly to Capitol Hill | Eric Dugdale |
| 6 | 4/28 | The Foundations of a Constitutional Republic: How Strong are America’s | Stephen Balch |
| 7 | 5/5 | Midterm Elections: 1994 vs. 2026 | Greg Ganske |

A detailed description of each lecture and each lecturer is available in the ICON website.

1.3 Required Textbooks, Readings, and Other Materials

All reading materials will be available on ICON. No textbook is required for this course.

1.4 Course Meeting Time and Place

Time: 6:30 PM – 8:20 PM on Tuesdays

Location: S107 Pappajohn Business Building (PBB)

Dates: March 24 – May 5, 2026

1.5 Participation

This course is designed to foster lively, open, and frank discussion. All students are warmly invited to contribute their perspectives, challenge ideas, and explore diverse viewpoints in an intellectually engaging environment. Students are expected to maintain a high level of respect during discussions, treating all participants with courtesy and openness, even when disagreeing or challenging ideas. Disruptive, disrespectful, or personal attacks of any kind will not be tolerated.

2 Assignments and Grading

Students in this course will receive one of two grades: S (Satisfactory) or U (Unsatisfactory). These grades do not affect the student's grade-point average (GPA).

To earn an S grade, a student must:

- attend at least 5 out of the 7 in-person lectures;
- complete the required assignment associated with each attended lecture.

In exceptional cases, students who attend only 4 out of 7 lectures may still receive an S grade if they provide a valid justification for the absences.

2.1 Assignments

There are three types of assignments in this course.

Initial and final reflection assignments provide an opportunity for students to articulate their expectations at the beginning of the course and to reflect on the most significant take-aways at the end. The *initial assignment* is a short questionnaire about your expectations, motivations, and prior knowledge related to the course topics. It must be completed and submitted before the first class meeting. The *final assignment* is a brief reflection in which you identify and discuss the main highlights, key insights, or most valuable aspects of the course for you personally. Both assignments are short, ungraded, and intended solely for reflection and instructor awareness. To receive a Satisfactory (S) grade in the course, students must complete and submit **both** the initial and final reflection assignments. No content-based grading will be applied; thoughtful and honest completion is sufficient to meet the requirement.

Required assignments provide an opportunity for feedback and reflection on each lecture. These assignments include a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions and are due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday following the lecture. To earn a Satisfactory (S) grade, students must complete at least 5 of these required assignments. They will not be graded for content; an honest effort to respond thoughtfully to the questions is sufficient to satisfy the requirement.

Optional assignments may be proposed by some lecturers to explore the lecture topics in greater depth. These additional assignments are not required for the S grade, but instructors who offer them may provide feedback, offering valuable opportunities for further learning.

2.2 Attendance and Accommodations

Attendance at all lectures is expected and will be verified. If a student cannot attend a lecture, they should notify the course grader as soon as possible:

Chediak, Quentin quentin-chediak@uiowa.edu

2.3 Calendar of Course Assignments

This course has no exams. The assignment associated with each lecture must be submitted by 11:59 PM on the Sunday following the lecture.

3 General information to students

3.1 Student Complaints

Students with any complaint should discuss the situation with the instructor and/or the course supervisor (Professor de Castro, see Subsection ??).

3.2 Drop Deadline for this Course

The drop deadline for this course is Friday of the second week of classes.

3.3 UI Email

Students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for any communication with instructors or staff in the UI community.

3.4 Course ICON Site

To access the course site, log into Iowa Courses Online (<https://icon.uiowa.edu/>) using your Hawk ID and password.

3.5 Academic Honesty and Misconduct

All students are expected to prepare their assignments independently, without consulting classmates or others for assistance in completing them. Failure to do so may constitute academic misconduct.

3.6 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

Assignments in this course must be prepared directly by the students. AI tools may be used only to revise grammar and improve clarity, not to generate new content.

3.7 University Course Policies and Resources for Students

Students should consult the University policies on Free Speech and Resources for Students page:

<https://provost.uiowa.edu/student-course-policies>

This page contains policies regarding:

- Free Speech and Expression

- Non-discrimination Statement
- Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
- Absences from Class
- Absences for Religious Holy Days
- Absences for Military Service Obligations
- Classroom Expectations
- Sexual Harassment/Sexual Misconduct and Supportive Measures
- Conflict Resolution
- Mental Health
- Basic Needs and Student Support