

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

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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

See Section 2 for a detailed description of each lecture. See Section 3 for information about the instructors.

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) — See Figures 1 and 2.

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.



Figure 1: Pappajohn Business Building



Figure 2: S107 PBB

2 Lectures

2.1 The Judiciary: The Least Dangerous Branch?

Lecturer: [Timothy Hagle](#) (Political Science Department)

Through a combination of discussion and lecture, this session will examine the role of the judiciary as one of the three branches of the US government. Topics will include judicial review, the structure of the judiciary (federal and state), how judges decide cases, how people become judges (federal and state), and possible discussion of current cases in the news.

2.2 Presidential Nominations & the Electoral College

Lecturer: [Alex Smith](#) (Political Science Department)

One unique feature of American government is the process through which the President is elected. In this session we will discuss how presidential elections work in the United States. We will learn about the primaries and caucuses, nominating conventions, relevant constitutional amendments, and the Electoral College. As we think about the presidential elections and how they have changed over time, we will also discuss the different understandings of the presidents held by George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft.

2.3 Representation in Congress

Lecturer: [Alex Smith](#) (Political Science Department)

One of the fundamental questions in a representative democracy is “what does it mean to represent others” as an elected official. In this session we will talk about different models of representation identified by political scientists who study the US Congress. We will not only talk about broad theories of representation, but also look at theories used by Congressional scholars, such as ‘home style’, ‘legislative style’, and ‘legislative

effectiveness' to understand different approaches that members of Congress take in their role as elected representatives.

2.4 Exploring the relationship between Capitalism and Democracy

Lecturer: [Reynolds Cramer](#) (Fareway CEO)

Most people believe they understand the difference between capitalism and democracy. Does the average business have a fair opportunity to start, grow, and expand? What are the challenges and political headwinds that affect starting a business? Do the costs of doing business outweigh the rewards? Is the American dream still a reality and is profit a bad word? We will have great dialogue during this session about what's really going on in the real world today.

2.5 From the Athenian Assembly to Capitol Hill: Rethinking Democracy Then and Now

Lecturer: [Eric Dugdale](#) (board of the Society for Classical Studies)

Public trust in political institutions in the United States has reached historic lows. Many Americans are disillusioned by partisan gridlock, government shutdowns, and a sense that elected officials serve powerful interests rather than the public good. As debates over electoral reform, campaign finance, and civic participation intensify, it is worth asking: *Is this the only possible model of democracy?*

This lecture explores how a very different democratic system functioned in ancient Athens—a participatory democracy in which political power was not delegated to representatives, but exercised *directly* by citizens themselves. Athenian citizens debated and voted on matters of war, economics, and public policy in large assemblies; they implemented safeguards against corruption such as randomized juries, term limits, rotation of office, and mechanisms to prevent the concentration of power.

The Founding Fathers deliberately rejected this Athenian model when designing the political institutions of the United States, choosing instead the representative system of the Roman Republic. This lecture examines why they made that choice, what fears and assumptions shaped their decision, and how these ancient models continue to influence contemporary debates about political power, inequality, and civic responsibility. What might participatory democracy offer today, and why was it considered too radical for the modern nation-state?

2.6 The Foundations of a Constitutional Republic: How Strong are America's

Lecturer: [Stephen H. Balch](#) (Association for the Study of Free Institutions – ASFI)

Stable constitutional republics have always been exceptional. The political norm is not lawful rule but authoritarianism. What conditions need to exist in order to sustain constitutionalism? Do they still prevail in the United States today?

2.7 The Midterm Election of 1994, the “Republican Revolution” and the “Contract With America”: Lessons for 2026 Midterm Elections

Lecturer: [Greg Ganske](#) (former Congressman)

The 1994 elections occurred in the middle of Democratic President Bill Clinton’s first term in office, and elected the members of 104th United States Congress. The elections have been described as the “Republican Revolution” because the Republican Party captured unified control of Congress for the first time since 1952. Republicans picked up eight seats in the Senate and won a net of 54 seats in the House of Representatives. Republicans also picked up a net of ten governorships and took control of many state legislative chambers. This is the first midterm election since 1946 in which the Republicans ended unified Democratic control of Congress in a midterm election under a Democratic president.

Republicans were able to nationalize the election by campaigning on a “Contract with America”, and the new Republican majorities passed conservative legislation such as the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, and the Defense of Marriage Act. The election was a major defeat for Clinton’s health care plan, but Clinton’s subsequent move to the center helped him, and Congressional Republicans, win re-election in 1996.

What were the lessons both Parties learned and how can this election inform us on the coming November election?

3 Instructors

The course is organized by Professor Luciano de Castro, interim Director of the Center for Intellectual Freedom. Subsection [3.1](#) includes more information about Professor de Castro, including contact information. The remaining subsections below provide information about the lecturers in the course.

Any questions or general communications regarding the course or your participation in it should be directed to the course grader:

Chediak, Quentin quentin-chediak@uiowa.edu

3.1 Luciano I. de Castro (Organizer)

Luciano I. de Castro is Professor at the Department of Economics, Tippie College of Business, and the Interim Director for the Center for Intellectual Freedom.

He is a professor of economics at the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business. Previously, he has been an assistant professor at Northwestern University (Kellogg School of Management, MEDS), the University of Illinois (Department of Economics), and a visiting profes-



sor at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (Department of Economics). He holds a PhD and MSc from IMPA and is an electronic engineer from ITA (Brazil).

He has published in *Econometrica*, *Journal of Economic Theory*, *Journal of Econometrics*, *Economic Theory*, *Energy Economics*, and other important journals in economics. His main fields of research are economic theory, energy economics and Brazil's political economy and electricity markets. Recently, he has been investigating properties and applications of quantile preferences and their connection with econometrics, experiments, finance, and other areas of economics.

Campus Address: 116 Calvin Hall.

Phone: (319) 467-1334

E-mail: luciano-decastro@uiowa.edu

3.2 Timothy Hagle

[Timothy Hagle](#). Associate Professor, Political Science Dep., Univ of Iowa

Every four years, the media spotlight shines on the state during the prelude to its first-in-the-nation Iowa caucuses, and University of Iowa political experts are in serious demand. State, national, and international reporters call upon UI faculty to explain how the caucuses work, and to provide insight into how Iowans are responding to candidates and their campaign strategies. One expert who is helping the University leverage this publicity opportunity is Tim Hagle, associate professor of political science in the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.



3.3 Alex Smith

[Alex Smith](#), Political Science Dep., Univ of Iowa.

Alex P. Smith is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science. His teaching and research interests include American institutions (Congress & Presidency), legislative negotiation, political theory, and scholarship of teaching and learning. Alex is currently working on a book project about negotiation



strategies used to overcome stalemate in Congress, for which he was selected for a Library of Congress Fellowship in Congressional Policymaking. He has published articles in Public Choice and the Journal of Political Science Education. Before entering academia, Alex worked as a legislative staffer for a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Minnesota House of Representatives. His research areas include American Politics, Public Policy and Administration, and Political Theory."

3.4 Reynolds Cramer

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Reynolds Cramer joined [Fareway](#) in 1985, when he began working in the Boone Fareway store at just 16 years old. During college, he moved and worked in the Decorah Fareway store in the meat department for three years. When speaking of this experience, Cramer explains, "I knew it would be important to understand all aspects of our business and why our meat departments are second-to-none."

After working in two stores as assistant manager he was promoted in 1997 to store manager, opening a new Fareway store in Des Moines. In 2000, he was promoted to district supervisor at the corporate office in Boone, Iowa.

In 2008, he was elected to the Real Estate Committee, and has been instrumental in choosing the strategic placement of new Fareway locations ever since. In 2009, Cramer was elected to the Board of Directors for Fareway, in 2010 he was named as a regional vice president and in 2012 as an executive vice president in charge of all retail operations.



Cramer's promotion to CEO for Fareway Stores, Inc. occurred in February 2014. He was honored and inducted into the Iowa Business Hall of Fame in 2023.

In addition to his responsibilities with Fareway, Cramer is active in many charitable organizations, including the Muscular Dystrophy Association, ChildServe, Easterseals, Ronald McDonald House, UnityPoint Health Foundation, and he has served as President for Variety-the Children's Charity. Cramer is also a board member of the Iowa Business Council. He is an advocate for animal rescue, having adopted several animals from various rescue organizations.

A native Iowan and graduate of Boone High School in 1987 and Luther College in 1991. Cramer has two daughters, Ashley, 24, and Zoe, 19. Reynolds and his wife, Sheila, live in Norwalk with their son Benny, 6.

3.5 Eric Dugdale

Eric Dugdale, board of the Society for Classical Studies.

Eric Dugdale is a scholar whose teaching and research focus on the ancient world. He earned a B.A. with Honors from the University of Oxford and a Ph.D. in Classics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received the Tanner Award for Distinguished Teaching. His research centers on Greek theatre and its modern reception. He is the author of two books on Greek theatre, both published by Cambridge University Press, and co-editor (with James Morwood) of the series *Greece and Rome: Texts and Contexts*. He is currently completing a book on prophecy and power in the plays of Sophocles, forthcoming with Bloomsbury. Dr. Dugdale has taught or studied on every continent except Antarctica.



3.6 Stephen H. Balch

Stephen H. Balch is an American academic, political theorist, and prominent advocate for intellectual diversity and viewpoint pluralism in higher education.

Professor Balch is best known as the founding president of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), a nonprofit organization he led from 1987 to 2009 (and later served as chairman). Under his leadership, NAS became one of the most influential groups documenting and critiquing perceived ideological imbalances, political correctness, and declining academic standards in American universities. Balch earned his Ph.D. in political science from City University of New York and taught at institutions including the City University of New York and the University of Delaware before dedicating himself full-time to NAS and related reform efforts.



He has been a vocal critic of what he views as the politicization of the academy, particularly the dominance of progressive/left-leaning perspectives in the humanities and social sciences. Balch has written extensively on the importance of free inquiry, the dangers of ideological conformity, and the need for genuine viewpoint diversity in faculty hiring, curriculum design, and campus culture. His work helped shape debates about academic freedom, speech codes, and the role of universities in a pluralistic society. In recent years he has continued to speak and write on these themes, including as a guest lecturer for initiatives like the Center for Intellectual Freedom.

3.7 Greg Ganske

John Greg Ganske served as a Republican member of the United States House of Representatives from 1995 to 2003, representing Iowa's 4th congressional district.

Greg Ganske served as a Republican member of the United States House of Representatives from 1995 to 2003, representing Iowa's 4th congressional district. A plastic and reconstructive surgeon by profession, he brought a unique background to Congress, having practiced medicine in Des Moines for many years before entering politics. Elected in the 1994 Republican wave, Ganske quickly established himself as a pragmatic conservative with a particular focus on health care, agriculture, and fiscal responsibility—issues that resonated deeply with his largely rural and Midwestern constituency. During his four terms in the House, Ganske was known for his independent streak and willingness to break with party orthodoxy when he believed it conflicted with Iowa's interests or sound policy. He played a



prominent role in debates over Medicare reform, patients' rights legislation (notably co-sponsoring the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act), and agricultural policy, including support for ethanol and family farm protections. His medical expertise made him a respected voice on health-related bills, and he often bridged partisan divides to advance legislation aimed at improving access to care while controlling costs. After redistricting in 2002 placed him in a more competitive district, Ganske ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 2002 against Tom Harkin, a race that highlighted his reputation as a principled, moderate Republican.

Following his congressional career, Ganske returned to medicine and public service in Iowa. He has remained active in civic life, occasionally commenting on health policy and political issues, and has been affiliated with organizations promoting limited government and free-market principles. His tenure in Congress is remembered as a period of thoughtful, issue-driven representation at a time of significant partisan polarization.

4 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.

4.1 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.

4.2 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 Teaching Assistant (TA) as soon as possible:

TA: Chediak, Quentin quentin-chediak@uiowa.edu

4.3 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.

5 General information to students

5.1 Student Complaints

Students with any complaint should discuss the situation with the instructor and/or the course supervisor (Professor de Castro, see Subsection 3.1).

5.2 Drop Deadline for this Course

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

5.3 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.

5.4 Course ICON Site

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

5.5 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.

5.6 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.

5.7 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