

PS109-E: The US Executive Branch and its Political Environment (Spring 2025)

Discussion Section Syllabus (101 & 102)*

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Office Hours: Wed 3:00pm – 4:00pm, Thurs 1:00pm – 2:00pm

Office Hours Location: SSB 715

Office Hours Sign Up: [Calendly Link](#)

Section 101: Tues 4:00pm - 5:00pm

Section 102: Tues 5:00pm - 6:00pm

Section Room: SSB 155

Section Objectives

First and foremost, it is my wish to welcome you to the spring 2025 iteration of *PS109-E: The US Executive Branch and its Political Environment*. This semester presents us with a unique opportunity to study the executive branch in the shadow of a new presidential term's first one hundred days. Undergoing this study is likely to raise a number of emotions, intellectual puzzles, and questions; it is my hope that in section, I will give you the tools needed to confront all three in turn.

In particular, my goal is for this section to serve as a space to build your understanding of extant theories of the bureaucracy and encourage you to analyze current events through this lens. You should be able to draw on material from lecture and course readings in discussions during section, while exploring the connections between these materials in a collaborative manner. This will entail questioning, explaining, and applying these theories; you may also draw on other academic sources or real-world events. Activities to do so may include class discussions, small group discussions, short written assignments, and additional learning activities. These activities are designed to encourage you to deeply engage with the week's assigned readings within the greater context of the class alongside your peers. They are a necessary and core component of the course, and as such **attendance is required**.

Additionally, I want section to help you build a support system that will help you succeed in this class. This requires a classroom in which *everyone* feels comfortable asking questions and helping each other. To that end, I want to remind you that it is *ok* to not know everything. We are all here to learn - even me! Sustained effort and a [growth mindset](#) are key to succeeding in this course, and I have full confidence in everyone's ability to apply both.

Section is also an opportunity for you to ask questions about lectures. I **strongly** encourage you to submit your questions **before section has started** so that I have sufficient time to prepare answers. [Submitting questions](#) (under your name) ahead of section will count towards your participation grade, and are also essential for me to focus section time to ensure discussion is helpful for you. I plan to structure section to start by answering your pre-submitted questions, then any questions raised during section. If there are requests to recap previously-covered concepts, I will do that as well.

*Current version: 1.1 - 25 January, 2025.

Feedback and Evaluations

Honestly, I am incredibly excited to be your GSI! I will do my best to answer your questions and be a resource to you for this class. There are no “bad” questions and while in rare cases I may not immediately have an answer, I will be sure to get back to you with an answer!

Your feedback will be important to me to ensure I am making section most useful for you. You will receive an evaluation form around mid-semester; please do take the time to fill it out. I also welcome feedback at any point and it would be helpful to hear from you on what is working and what can be improved.

Contact Information

It is my goal as your GSI to help you with anything even remotely related to the course! I would prefer that you reserve email communication for technical and administrative questions about the course. When you have these questions, please feel free to email me (zachary_hertz@berkeley.edu). I would prefer that you bring substantive questions about course content or other questions either to section or to my office hours.

I aim to respond to every email in a timely manner, but I may miss the occasional email. If I do not respond to your email within two business days, please kindly remind me. I generally reply to emails during normal business hours (ie. not after around 6 pm, and generally not on weekends barring either extenuating circumstances or agreed-upon prior notification). If your question is urgent, please mark it as such and I will do my best to respond promptly. Likewise, please label your emails with “PS109E” in the subject line (I have an email filter that bumps these emails to the top of my inbox so I can respond ASAP).

Office Hours

I will hold office hours every Wednesday from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm, and every Thursday from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm, before lecture. These office hours will be held with the option to meet in-person in 715 Social Sciences Building (the GSI room), though you can also make an appointment over Zoom if you so wish or even request a quick stroll around campus if you think better while walking.

To sign up for office hours, please use [this Calendly Link](#). I ask that you please sign up for office hours **no later than** 10:30 pm the night before, to allow adequate time for me to prepare to answer your questions. Office hours will be open but I require you to sign up to track participation. Please feel free to sign up for multiple time slots for my office hours if you require more time. Likewise, if you sign up for an office hours slot and can no longer attend, please cancel the appointment in a timely manner (ie. before 10:30 pm the previous night) in order to be considerate to both myself and the other students in the course. Repeated no-shows to office hours may result in a reduction of your participation grade.

In the space for questions, please indicate the reason for meeting with me (that is, if you have a specific question) so I can be best prepared to help you. If you would like to meet me for personal reasons outside of office hours, please feel free to email me and I will try to make the scheduling fit.

This is not mandatory, but in the first two weeks, please do take the time to sign up for office hours to meet with me, even if you don't have questions! I would love the opportunity to get to know you a little bit, understand your motivations for taking the course, and how I can be of most help to you.

A final note on office hours: students often let a lack of clarity on the purpose of office hours keep them from attending, so I want to clear this up. Some discussion topics you can come to me to talk about during office hours include (but are not limited to):

- You are having trouble with a course concept and need help understanding it
- You want to write a thesis next year and wanted to ask questions about this
- You want to know what graduate school is like
- You want to practice going to office hours in a lower stakes environment

Course Policies

Course policies are outlined in the syllabus. Please refer to the syllabus for all questions related to grading, assignments, and the course schedule.

Section Rules

Please be respectful and kind towards your peers and towards me. Creating a safe and inclusive classroom is important to me, and is important to create an environment conducive to everyone's learning. Any discriminatory language or behavior **will not** be tolerated. If you have concerns about section, please feel free to come to speak with me. I will not disclose any information shared with me.

As is perhaps obvious (and perhaps even driving your interest in this course), this is a class about presidential politics in the first few months of a new presidential term. I do not expect that everyone will agree — politically or intellectually — throughout this class, and in fact measured, respectful disagreement is healthy and important to generate discussion. You will never be penalized for political views, and I want you to feel safe expressing your views in this class. I ask that you respect the opinions of others in the class, however, and know that I will respect yours.

As we will use technology throughout this section to facilitate interactive activities and group work, I will not place a blanket restriction on your use of technology in section. I do, however, ask that you keep your phones *out of sight* and refrain from using your phones unless explicitly granted permission to do so for section activities or for accessibility reasons. Why do I ask that you keep your phones out of view? Even simply seeing a notification *has been found* to affect student learning, and this can serve as a distraction not only to yourself but also to any nosy neighbors you might have.

Grading and expectations

Participation

Participation is 10 percent of your final grade, and your contributions in section will be a major component of this grade. You should try to make thoughtful, engaged, and well-informed contributions in the form of either questions or comments. During our meetings, I will want to hear you articulate *what* and *how* you are thinking about the material and the issues they raise and to engage with one another while exercising active listening. Participation in section may look different for different students, but coming to section prepared and *having read the material* is the key to valuable participation that can benefit you and your classmates. Participating in class discussions may include:

- Posing a question about the text or suggesting an answer to somebody else's question;
- *Submitting a question* before section under your name
- Voicing your agreement with the GSI's or another student's comment and adding further evidence to support or expand upon their idea;

- Respectfully disagreeing with an assertion and providing evidence to support your point;
- Making an observation about the text;
- Using a text to analyze a case study;
- Drawing connections and comparing a text with readings we have previously discussed;
- Pointing out a passage, concept, or idea that you don't understand;
- Coming to office hours to raise questions or discuss a particular text.

If you will have difficulties actively participating due to DSP provisions, please let us know at the beginning of the semester so we can provide alternative means of achieving a high participation grade.

Grading

All assignments will be graded fairly following the rubric and/or guidelines set forth by the professor. As we near each assignment, we will discuss these issues in greater detail so that the students will be well aware of what is expected of them and how their assignments will be graded.

I am more than happy to discuss your assignment grades with you in office hours, but not within the first 48 hours after you receive your graded assignment. If you wish to dispute an assignment grade, you must document and explain in writing each aspect of your assignment that you feel was graded incorrectly or unfairly. Be aware that a re-grade may lower rather than raise your assignment score.

Preparation

Carefully and thoughtfully read the assigned texts of the week prior to each section. You will need to reflect on them and work out at least some of your own thinking about them, especially because our meetings are short. I will frequently ask you to draw on the readings during our discussions.

Attendance

Remember that attendance for *lectures* is required but flexible. I maintain the same policy for sections. You are granted **one single unexcused absence for section**, with no questions asked. Additional absences will result in lower participation grades, barring an excused absence approved by the GSI (ie. me). Requests for excused absences **must be submitted in writing to be considered**. Attendance will be taken via QR code on the slides at the end of section; responses must be submitted no more than 5 minutes after the end of section.

Things come up and life happens! Contact me in advance if, for some appropriate reason, you must miss a section so we can discuss any assignments due and/or the possibility of attending a make-up section. Please arrive on time and do not leave early. If you must leave early, please inform me ahead of time and sit near the door to minimize the disruption for your classmates.

Academic Honesty

You are required to submit only original work in this course; this means assignments should be written by you and you alone, and cannot have been submitted for credit in another class without instructor permission.

You must use proper attribution when engaging with ideas and written words from other individuals (i.e. citing your sources when referring to academic materials). If you remain unsure what the bounds of proper attribution are, feel free to reach out to me, the instructor, or find clarification from other campus resources.

(the Office of Student Conduct, the Student Learning Center, the campus library). Remember, the consequences to academic dishonesty are severe but can be avoided by asking questions and utilizing proper attribution.

Additionally, as a part of the Berkeley campus community you are expected to abide by certain standards of integrity in your academic endeavors. Your work should provide you with the opportunity to be evaluated on your own merits, and represent fully and honestly the strength of your original ideas. We will assume that any assignment you submit under your name meets these criteria of proper attribution, and expect your work to meet the basic tenets of academic honesty.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence

You are strictly forbidden from using generative AI (a catch-all term including but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, and similar LLMs) to produce work submitted under your name in such a way that would constitute plagiarism if the generative AI were any other author. Furthermore, its use on exams is strictly prohibited in this course.

Permissible uses of generative AI are those that act similar to search engines such as Google (ie. to ask about potential sources) and to assess potential spelling/grammar errors. Note, however, that while generative AI is decent at the latter task, the former remains plagued by hallucination and potential errors will be penalized. Furthermore, generative AI **may not** be used to directly compose any part of submitted assignments. To rephrase, you **may not** directly copy and paste — nor recreate verbatim without attribution — the output of a Large Language Model.

In general, I **strongly** encourage students to refrain using generative AI for any purpose throughout this course, even in potentially permissible ways. Remember that this course aims to help you build the skills necessary to critically think and write on a complex topic in American Politics today; while it may be uncomfortable at times, engaging directly in this process without the aid of generative AI will ultimately make you a stronger and more capable person, and this class will reward the effort you put in. To demonstrate to me that you've read this syllabus and understood it (including this section) please email me with PS109E in the subject line, telling me which fruit you most identify with; doing this will earn you an extra 5% participation.

As a general rule of thumb: if you are unsure if the use of generative AI is appropriate or not, do not use it.

Tentative Section Schedule

- **Week 1, Tuesday 1/28:** Introductions; Origins and Development of the Modern Presidency
- **Week 2, Tuesday 2/4:** The expansion of presidential authority; Short writing exercise and advice
- **Week 3, Tuesday 2/11:** Challenges and constraints on presidential authority
- **Week 4, Tuesday 2/18:** Civil service in the modern era (Guest speakers from DHHS, DOE and the White House)
- **Week 5, Tuesday 2/25:** Unilateral action and Bureaucratic capacity
- **Week 6, Tuesday 3/04:** Midterm Review Session
- **Week 7, Tuesday 3/11:** Bureaucratic policymaking
- **Week 8, Tuesday 3/18:** Checks-and-balances as constraints on bureaucratic policymaking
- **Week 9, Tuesday 3/25:** NO SECTION (Spring Break)
- **Week 10, Tuesday 4/01:** Interest groups and bureaucratic discretion

- **Week 11, Tuesday 4/08:** The president and the bureaucracy in foreign policy
- **Week 12, Tuesday 4/15:** The president and the bureaucracy in foreign policy (part two)
- **Week 13, Tuesday 4/22:** Unilateral action and immigration policy
- **Week 14, Tuesday 4/29:** Final Exam Review Session

Other Resources

Technology Access Issues

If you encounter an issue accessing technology at any point in the semester (or, indeed, throughout your time at Berkeley) consider the following resources:

- Student Technology Equity Program: free long-term loans of laptops, headphones, and other hardware devices
- Cost of Attendance Adjustment: loan (sometimes grant) of \$3000 to purchase a computer every 3 years through the financial aid office
- Student Helpdesk: free drop-in tech support (wi-fi issues, broken laptop, etc.) located in Doe Library, Eshleman Hall, and Fannie Lou Hamer Resource Center, and via email (sts-help@berkeley.edu) and phone (510-642-HELP)
- Free Software: Visit software.berkeley.edu and click “What am I eligible for?” to find over a dozen free software downloads.

Diversity and Classroom Climate

Diversity is a defining feature of the University of California and we embrace it as a source of strength. Our differences — of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, abilities, experience, and more — enhance our ability to achieve the University’s core missions of public service, teaching, and research. We welcome faculty, staff, and students from all backgrounds and want everyone at UC Berkeley to feel respected and valued.

We are all responsible for creating a learning environment that is welcoming, inclusive, equitable, and respectful. If you feel that these expectations are not being met, you can consult me or Sean Gailmard. The expectation in this class is that we all live up to this responsibility, even during vigorous debate or disagreement. The resources listed below may help individual students feel a sense of belonging.

As UC employees, all course instructors, GSIs, and tutors are “Responsible Employees” and are required to report incidents of sexual violence, sexual harassment or other conduct prohibited by university policy to the Title IX officer. We cannot keep reports of sexual harassment or sexual violence confidential, but the Title IX officer will consider requests for confidentiality. There are confidential resources available to you through UCB’s PATH to Care Center, which serves survivors of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment and Violence

Visit the PATH to Care website: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/dean/confidential-care-advocate> or call the PATH to Care 24/7 Care Line: 510-643-2005.

Students with Disabilities

If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, or if you have emergency medical information you wish to share, please inform me immediately, either in private after class or during office hours. For more information, visit the website of the Disabled Students' Program at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu/> or contact DSP by phone at (510) 642-0518 (voice), (510) 642-6376 (TTY), or email dsp@berkeley.edu.

Student Learning Center

Located in the Cesar Chavez Student Center, Lower Sproul Plaza. Visit <http://slc.berkeley.edu/general/> for more information. The Student Learning Center provides a variety of services to assist students with coursework and assignments, including study groups, writing consultations, and workshops.

Counseling and Psychological Services

The Tang Center, 2222 Bancroft Way, offers counseling and psychological services for students facing various challenges, such as adjusting to school, deciding on a major, dealing with personal crises, and more. Visit <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/caps> for more information.

Undocumented Students Program (USP)

Located at 119 Cesar Chavez Center, USP provides holistic, multicultural, and solution-focused services to undocumented students. Visit <https://undocu.berkeley.edu/> for more information.

Basic Needs Center

The Basic Needs Center, located at the lower level of MLK Student Union (BNorth), Suite 72, provides support with essential resources like food, housing, healthcare, and more. Visit <https://basicneeds.berkeley.edu/home> for more information.

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

EOP at Cal supports first-generation and low-income college students with guidance and resources necessary to succeed. Visit <http://eop.berkeley.edu> for more details.

Gender Equity Resource Center (GenEq)

Located at 202 Cesar Chavez Student Center, GenEq fosters an inclusive experience for all students and provides resources related to gender and sexuality. Visit <https://cejce.berkeley.edu/geneq> for more information.

Multicultural Education Program (MEP)

MEP works towards institutional change and a positive campus climate for diversity. Visit <https://mep.berkeley.edu/> for more details.

Ombudsperson for Students

Located at 102 Sproul Hall, the Ombudsperson provides a confidential service for students involved in University-related problems. Visit <http://sa.berkeley.edu/ombuds> for more information.

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