Sample Syllabi – Subject to Change

Confronting a Political Economy in Crisis: Examining Causes, Creating Change

PLSC 10301 96
The University of Chicago

Instructor
Fahad Sajid, PhD

Course Description
Young people, both in the US and elsewhere, are increasingly concerned about how climate change, toxic politics, and the casualization of labor arrangements will affect their own life prospects. This course approaches these concerns from a political economy perspective. With the help of carefully chosen texts and visual media, we will journey to sites of dislocation and distress to examine the toll that our collective choices can take on the lives of workers on the lowest rungs of global value chains, on the health of our planet, and on our ability to act and solve problems in a democratic manner. We will engage with social scientists, journalists, activists, and filmmakers in an effort to explore what, if anything, could be done to tame or retool the political-economic configurations that have produced so many of the crises we face today.

Materials
Most of the required readings will be available for download through Canvas. Students will, in addition, be expected to rent a number of documentary films; please see the Schedule of Readings for details.

Policies
Grades
There is no curve for this course. The grading scale is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing
All written assignments must be typeset in 12-point Times New Roman font and submitted as a Word document. Please make sure to double-space and justify your text, set your margins at 1”, and include page numbers.

Letters of Recommendation
Students seeking a letter of recommendation should contribute meaningfully to class discussion, attend office hours to review course content as appropriate, and earn an A overall.

Attendance
Regular attendance and active participation are key to succeeding at any learning endeavor. For each unexcused absence, the student in question will lose a third of a letter grade from their overall course grade.

Evaluation
Participation (30%)
On a daily basis, students are expected to attend both the lecture and their respective section and to contribute meaningfully to class discussion.

Reflection Papers (45%)
A 500-word reflection essay on the topics covered in the first three weeks of the course is to be submitted through Canvas on each corresponding Saturday by 11:59pm US Central Time. Please see the section entitled “Policies” for expectations around written submissions. Essays turned in after the deadline or that exceed the length allowed will be penalized a third of a letter grade for every hour of tardiness or every 25 words in excess of the word limit.

Final Presentation (25%)
In the final two days of the course, students, in groups of three will present, using PowerPoint, on either:
  i) a feature of advanced, capitalist economies that tends to be downplayed or overlooked, or
  ii) a political-economic phenomenon that is relatively new but which has considerable implications for the future of humanity, our planet, or our politics.
Presentations are to take no more than 15 minutes and will be followed by 8 minutes of Q&A.

Academic Integrity
Students are expected to produce original work. In this class, the penalty for plagiarism will be a failing grade. In the unfortunate event that a student is suspected of plagiarism, we will follow the guidelines set forth in The University of Chicago Student Manual. Click here for more information. Please note finally that Wikipedia articles, while they may be used privately to better understand a topic or event, are not to be cited in academic writing.
Disability Accommodation
The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services.

Please contact the office at 773-702-6000 or email: disabilities@uchicago.edu or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Schedule of Readings

I. Introduction

1. Precipice

Homework:


Extension:


II. People

2. Precarity

Homework:

3. – Globalization’s Discontents

Homework:
  - Note: make sure to select the correct Rodrik reading!

Extension:
- The True Cost (2015), directed by Andrew Morgan (runtime: 1 hr, 28 mins); available to rent from YouTube ($3.99)

4. Low-Wage Work and the Coming Retirement Crisis

Homework:

Note: We will hold a writing workshop during the morning session and discuss these readings in Section.

5. Corporate Power, Consumer Complicity

Homework:
- Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos (2020), by Frontline (runtime: 1 hr, 53 mins); available for free from PBS.org

Revolving Door.
- David Corn and Dan Spinelli, “Amazon Has Become a Prime Revolving Door
Destination in Washington,” MotherJones, March 2, 2021
(https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/03/amazon-has-become-a-prime-revolving-door-destination-in-washington/)

Too-Big-To-Fail/Anti-Trust.

- Eric Dash, “If It’s Too Big to Fail, Is It Too Big to Exist?” The New York Times, June 20, 2009 (Canvas)

Free Riding/Race to the Bottom.


Extension:

III. Planet

6. Tragedy or Crime?

**Homework:**

**Extension:**
- *Before the Flood* (2016), directed by Fisher Stevens (runtime: 1 hr, 36 mins); available to rent from YouTube ($3.99)

7. Climate (In)Justice

**Homework:**
- “Elite Status: Global Inequalities in Flying,” Possible, March 2021 (Canvas).
  - **Note:** skim this resource; no need to consult the appendices.
- “The Green New Deal, explained” (2019), by *Vox* (runtime: 7 mins, 30 secs); available for free from YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gx1DJWCbk6I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gx1DJWCbk6I))

**Note:** I will provide guidelines for and you will begin working on your group presentation in the morning session. We will discuss the assigned material in Section.

IV. Politics

8. Rules of the Game

**Homework:**
  - “Introduction,” xi-xvii.
  - **Note:** read only until p. 58.

**Extension:**
- *Inside Job* (2010), directed by Charles Ferguson (runtime: 1 hr, 48 mins); available to rent on Vudu ($0.99) and YouTube ($3.99)
9. Priorities

**Homework:**

  - **Note:** read only pp. 60-65.

**Extension:**

**Case Study: Policing in America**

  - **Note:** read only pp. 1-13.
  
- Paul Kiel and Jesse Eisenger, “How the IRS was Gutted,” ProPublica, December 11, 2018 (https://www.propublica.org/article/how-the-irs-was-gutted)

10. The Developmental State

**Homework:**

Extension:

- “The world’s scariest economist” on coronavirus, innovation, and purpose,” *The Ezra Klein Show* with Mariana Mazzucato, professor of economics at University College, London, May 18, 2020 (runtime: 1 hr, 24 mins) (https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/vox/the-ezra-klein-show/e/69716804)
  
  - Note: start from 41:43
- “Stop Whining About Big Government” (2021), with Kara Swisher and Mariana Mazzucato, by Sway (runtime: 46 mins, 9 secs); available for free from The New York Times (https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/opinion/sway-kara-swisher-mariana-mazzucato.html?smtp=cur#038;smid=tw-nytopinion#new_tab)

V. A Better World is Possible

11. Economic Democracy/Stakeholder Capitalism: People Before Profit

Homework:


  **Case Study: Mondragon**

- “Mondragon’s Cooperatives and the Legacy of Catholic Priest José María Arizmendiarieta,” (2019) *The Laura Flanders Show* (runtime: 5 mins, 33 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPhk-ljfpdl)
- “The Mondragon Cooperatives,” excerpt from *Shift Change* (runtime: 2 mins, 41 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZoI0C1mPek)

Extension:

  **Universal Basic Income.**

- Peter Bergman, “Poverty isn’t a lack of character; it’s a lack of cash” (2017), by TED (runtime: 14 mins, 50 secs); available for free from TED (https://www.ted.com/talks/rutger_bregman_poverty_isn_t_a_lack_of_character_it_s_a_lack_of_cash/up-next)

  **Fair Trade.**

- “Fair Trade: The First Step,” (2016), by Patagonia (runtime: 12 mins, 54 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1gIKo0kti4)

  **Universal Healthcare.**

- “Medicare for All: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver” (2020), *HBO* (runtime: 19 mins, 54 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z2XRg3dy9k)

  **Countervailing Worker Power.**

- “Why Unions Matter to You” (2019), Robert Reich (runtime: 5 mins, 4 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=402m57yFjTM)

  **Reparations.**
• “The Racial Wealth Gap” (2018), by Netflix and Vox (runtime: 16 mins, 13 secs); available for free from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mqrhn8khGLM)

12. Ideas, Politics, and Agents of Change

Homework:
  o Note: read only pp. 1-11, 18-28, 34-35, and 41-43.

Note: There will be no Sections today. Instead, you are expected to put final touches on and practice your presentations.

VI. Presentations

13. Group 1 Presentations
Note: We will be meeting from 9am to 11:30am. There will be no Office Hours or Sections.

14. Group 2 Presentations
Note: We will be meeting from 9am to 11:30am. There will be no Office Hours or Sections.