Introduction to Political Science: American Politics

POLI 10D

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You can come to office hours to ask me questions about the course content (especially if you're having trouble). But you can also come to office hours to say hello, ask me about my research, learn what political scientists do, tell me about your interests (academic or otherwise), or talk about U.S. politics.

You don't need an appointment if you come by on Wednesdays between 1PM-3PM. I'd love to meet you.

Course Description

We are living through times of change: political polarization, mass protests, democratic backsliding, and challenges to civil rights—to name a few pressing issues. These developments have challenged the institutions of American government and changed how citizens engage with politics in their everyday lives. We'll use the tools of political science to examine how the institutions of American government work, how citizens participate in our democracy, and how some new (and some very old) challenges threaten our political system.

Our class is divided into roughly three parts. In the first half of the quarter, we will cover the foundations and institutions of American government—things like Congress, the presidency, and the courts. Then, we will turn to public opinion and voter behavior. We'll conclude by discussing current challenges facing the American political system: nationalization, polarization, and democratic backsliding.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand, describe, and analyze (i) how the institutions of American government work, (ii) how people engage with these institutions, and (iii) current challenges facing American democracy.
- Interpret current events using the tools of political science.

- Engage more fully with politics in your academic and personal life.

Course Format

- Lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays covering the weekly readings, additional content, and related current events.
- Sections led by YOU, with help from graduate TAs.
 - Sections meet each week and will provide an opportunity to engage with, and expand on, the week's material in a smaller group setting.
 - TAs will take attendance at these sections.

Required Materials

Textbook

Our course does not require a standard textbook. Assigned readings will come from a free, online resource I have created as a companion text to this course called *Understanding American Politics*. You can access these readings here, and they are also linked below.

Please note, this is a brand new resource I am creating for this class! The chapters will be added as we progress through the quarter. If you have thoughts about the quality of this resource or suggestions for how to make it better, please let me know.

For those interested in a more comprehensive (but completely optional) American Politics textbook, I recommend:

- Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. *The Logic of American Politics*. CQ Press.
- Theodore J Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A Shepsle, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Hahrie Han. *American Government: Power and Purpose.* WW Norton.

Most weeks, we will supplement our reading with other materials. These are linked below and freely accessible. Please let me know if you encounter any issues.

Packback (AI Learning Platform)

In this class, we will be using an innovative AI-based writing tool called Packback. This tool provides real-time feedback on your writing and will help you develop writing and critical thinking skills. For a high-level overview, <u>see this video</u>.

¹ This text was developed with the assistance of AI tools including Claude and ChatGPT. All content is based on my own notes and insights about American Politics and has been carefully reviewed for accuracy.

Packback is required for this course and is available for purchase through the inclusive access program.

Always access Packback through Canvas in order to ensure your grades sync properly.

- 1. Click the Packback assignment link within Canvas to access the community.
- 2. Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.
- 3. In order for your Packback discussion grades to be visible in Canvas, make sure to click each Packback assignment link as you post your Packback submissions.

Other Important Information

All slides will be posted on Canvas before the class on which they are presented.

And just so you know...<u>UCSD provides free access</u> to newspapers like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal for students. You might also be interested in the website <u>GoodAuthority.org</u>, which shares political science analyses of current events. I encourage you to take advantage of these resources to continue learning about American politics during, and after, this course.

Course Evaluation

- Weekly reading questions (multiple choice questions) 10%
- Weekly discussion question and responses (Packback-facilitated short answers) 20%
- Weekly, in-person section attendance and participation (as determined by your TA) –
 10%
- Section leader (once per quarter) 20%
- Exam 1 20%
- Exam 2 20%

Please pay particular attention to the underlined points below, as they are especially important for your final grade.

Weekly Assignments (30% Total)

- Each week, you will have two different assignments, described below.
 - These assignments are both <u>due at 11:59pm on Sundays.</u> Note, we will be firm about the deadline. A submission at 12:01am on Monday will be counted as incomplete (even if only because your internet was slow). Please be responsible and plan ahead.
- Because life happens, and you may not always be able to complete these assignments on time, you will be allowed to miss one week's submission without consequence (i.e., we will drop the week with the lowest score from your final grade) with no questions

<u>asked. You do not need to email us to take advantage of this policy</u>—it will be taken care of automatically when we calculate final grades at the end of the quarter. However, please be wise in how you take advantage of this policy. <u>We will be unlikely to grant additional exceptions</u>, accept late assignments, or grant extensions.

Weekly Reading Questions (10%)

- Each week, you will answer multiple choice questions related to the week's content.
 - How you arrive at the answer is up to you! The easiest way to get the right answers is to attend lecture and take careful notes. Almost every answer will be said in class.
 - Answers will also appear in the readings, likely come up during section, and are readily available online or through careful prompting of a large language model.
 - You are responsible for your own learning and understanding of the material. While discussing questions with peers can help, copying someone else's answers will not serve you well in the long run. If you choose to work together, make sure you can explain your answers independently and understand the reasoning behind them.
 - The goal is that you understand the material. There are many ways to get to the right answer (and even more ways to get the wrong one). You're an adult, and you should do what works best for you and your learning style.
- These assignments will be graded for completion rather than for accuracy. To incentivize you to take care with these assignments, note that the questions I ask on these weekly responses are a signal of what I think is most important. That means these questions and topics are very likely to appear on the exams. By carefully completing these assignments (rather than speeding through them), you will be much better prepared for the essays.

Weekly Packback Discussion Assignment (20%)

- Each week, you will use the Packback platform to ask a discussion question and respond to two questions—one posted by me, and another posted by your peers. <u>Always access Packback through Canvas to ensure your grades sync properly.</u>
 - The question you post should be *open-ended* (i.e., it cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Your questions could ask for clarification about a difficult course concept, connect what you're learning in class to a current event in American politics, or draw connections between different course concepts or events.
 - Your questions should NOT prompt others to debate hot-button political issues or ask others to share political opinions. Rather than ask whether your classmates support or oppose Trump's tariff policies, instead, try asking what they think the political implications of Trump's tariff policies will be, given what we learn about the relationship between presidential approval and the economy.

- You should also respond to two questions—the question I have asked as well as one question asked by your peers. You can respond directly to a question, or you may respond with a supporting point or counterpoint to another response. Think of these responses as a mini-essay or short answer question. They should include a clear thesis statement or topic sentence and provide a logical argument to defend that key point. You should also feel free to cite sources from class, other articles you've read, or other videos you've watched.
- As you type, Packback will provide a live "curiosity score" that evaluates the quality of your response in terms of content and writing style. Follow the recommendations to increase your curiosity score. Responses that achieve at least a 55/100 curiosity score will receive full credit. You can also read more about the curiosity score here.

Section Panel Leader (20%)

- Each week, you will attend a section led by one of our TAs. The goal of these sections is to deepen your understanding of key concepts from class in a smaller setting.
- To that end, in each section, a small group of students (3-4) will present on topics covered in the week's lectures. As a section leader, you will be responsible for providing expert knowledge in one area of the week's topic(s) (as assigned on the first day of section).
- At the beginning of section, leaders will have about 5 minutes each to present a brief (three slide) presentation summarizing their topic. The slideshow should take on the following format: (1) overview of the topic, (2) concrete example or discussion of a relevant current event, (3) importance of the topic to political science. Slideshows should also include brief speaker notes or an accompanying document with an overview of what you plan to discuss on each slide. You can see an example presentation here or on Canvas in the Files section. Please do not worry about design or formatting, focus on the content.
- In terms of content, also consider the week's discussion on Packback. These questions are likely relevant to your discussion and may be asked by other students in section.
- Leaders will then take questions from the student audience and TA and respond to them when they are relevant to their particular topic.
- You must submit your slides to Canvas at least one hour before your section begins. Your TA will assess your knowledge and contribution to the discussion as leader and assign a grade based on your performance.
- If you cannot attend your assigned leader section for an extenuating reason (e.g., illness, family emergency), please contact your TA as far in advance as possible to schedule an alternative day.
- During the first section, your TA will serve as the section leader and provide a demonstration. Your leadership date and topic will be assigned during the first section meeting.

Weekly Section Attendance and Participation (10%)

- If you are a section attendee (i.e., not a presenter), your job is to listen to the presentations given by your peers and ask them questions related to their topic.
- Note, the goal is <u>not</u> to stump panelists with obscure questions. Rather, the goal is to better understand the topics. You should ask questions about the material that you find confusing (many other people are probably confused if you are) or ask questions you (or your classmates) submitted on Packback.
- Each week, non-leaders will receive a grade from their TA for submitting their question on time and attending, and participating in, section in-person.
- Each student will get one excused absence from attending section, no questions asked, that will not count against their grade. You do not need to email us to take advantage of this policy.
- Any *excused* absence beyond the first absence (i.e., illness, disability flare, family emergency, etc) will need approval from your TA. It will also require a short, written makeup assignment related to that week's topic to avoid any negative impact on your grade. If you need to request a make up assignment, <u>please email your TA before your section meets</u> and we will determine whether to assign the makeup. You will have until the following section meeting to submit the makeup assignment.
- <u>Please do not email Professor Noble if you are seeking an excused absence as these are managed by your TA.</u>

In-Class Exams (40%)

- You will complete two in-class exams during the quarter.
- Exam 1 will take place during class on 05/05/2025. Exam 2 will take place during the university assigned time for final exams on 06/13/2025 at 11:30AM (note the unusual day and start time).
- You will have 50 minutes to complete each exam (we will not use the full three hours during the final exam period).
- These exams will include 20 multiple choice questions and 2 short answer questions (you choose 2 of 3).
- These exams <u>are NOT</u>cumulative. Only material covered before 05/05/2025 will appear on Exam 1. Only material covered after 05/05/2025 will appear on Exam 2.
- These will be closed book/closed note. Please bring a pen or pencil with you. You will not need anything else.

Policies

Academic Integrity

I take academic honesty and integrity seriously. Please see the <u>UCSD policy on academic integrity</u> for more information or talk to me if you are ever uncertain about whether some action would violate academic integrity.

Use of Al

Large Language Models like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini are powerful and transformative technologies that will likely play a significant role in your professional lives after graduation. In fact, I use these tools every day when researching, learning new things, and preparing for this class. Given their potential value in learning and problem-solving, I encourage you to use them thoughtfully and ethically in this class as a complement to your own learning—not as a substitute for it.

These tools can provide helpful summaries or assist with specific tasks, such as reviewing concepts about the Constitution or Congress, but as you know: simply copying and pasting answers will not help you develop a deep understanding of the material. Instead, I would encourage you to try using AI to ask clarifying questions, generate practice questions, or explore complex topics in greater depth. These tools are especially effective when you use them to build on an existing understanding of the course content. For more guidance, I would recommend Professor Ethan Mollick's blog post, 15 Times to use AI, and 5 Not to.

Of course, I do not allow AI use for *every* aspect of the course. For exams, you will be required to demonstrate your knowledge without books, notes, or the internet. I do this to ensure you can engage critically with the material and internalize key lessons. In turn, mastering the content independently will make AI tools even more valuable as you continue to build on your knowledge.

Outside of exams, you should feel free to use AI as you see fit. If you are unsure, feel free to ask for clarification---but I will likely say that whatever you're doing is fine. However, please know that you are responsible for any AI output you incorporate in your work for this class. These models do make mistakes!

Requests for Re-grades

If you believe an error has been made, you have one week following the return of the assignment to request a regrade. To do so, please email your TA with a brief explanation of why you are requesting a re-grade as well as evidence from our course materials justifying the

request. We reserve the right to refuse to re-grade, and if we do re-grade, please note it may result in a lower grade.

Communication

For all questions or comments, you may get in touch with me or the teaching assistants during our office hours listed on this syllabus, or via email. If your email requires a response, you can expect one within 24–48 hours, Monday through Friday. If you email us over the weekend, you can expect a response the following week.

Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the <u>Office for Students with Disabilities</u>. Students are required to discuss accommodation arrangements with instructors, TAs, and OSD liaisons in the department.

Other resources, including the inclusive classroom statement, advising, and resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion, and more can be found in the <u>Additional Resources</u> section below the reading list.

Reading List

You should complete these readings to help you with the weekly response questions, section preparation, and exams. You are free to complete them before or after the lecture in which they are assigned---whatever is most helpful to you.

Below, UAP refers to my free, online companion text, Understanding American Politics. Note, this text is a work in progress, so links may be updated in advance of the specific week on which a chapter is assigned. You can always <u>access all readings here</u>.

03/31/2025: Introduction

No reading.

04/02/2025: How to Think Like a Political Scientist

- UAP, How to Think Like a Political Scientist.
- Paul Musgrave. August 17, 2023. Political Science Isn't Civics. Systematic Hatreds.
- Eric Gonzalez Juenke. May 16, 2025. Good to Know: Why do we need government? Good Authority.

Week 1 Section

04/07/2025: The Constitution Didn't Fall Out of a Coconut Tree

- UAP, The Constitution Didn't Fall Out of a Coconut Tree.
- The U.S. Constitution (it's pretty short, actually). The National Constitution Center provides an <u>interactive version</u>.

04/09/2025: What's the Point of Congress?

- UAP, <u>What Does Congress Do All Day?</u> (stop before "Delegates vs. Trustees: Models of Representation").
- Steven Smith. June 2, 2021. Note 16. Roles, Goals, and Styles. Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics.

Week 2 Section

04/14/2025: Does Congress Actually Do Anything?

- UAP, <u>What Does Congress Do All Day?</u> ("Delegates vs. Trustees: Models of Representation" to the end).
- Steven Smith. June 3, 2021. <u>Note 14. Regular Order: What is It? What happened to It?</u> Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics.
- Brendan Buck. April 22, 2024. <u>The Freedom Caucus Started Believing in the Myth of Its Own Power</u>. *New York Times*.

Optional

 Kevin R. Kosar. April 7, 2025. What Does a Member of the House of Representatives Do All Day? (with Fmr. Rep. Derek Kilmer). American Enterprise Institute, Understanding Congress Podcast.

04/16/2025: The Presidency...Not (Just) What You See on TV

- UAP, <u>More Presidential Power, More Presidential Problems</u> (stop before "The Strategy of Going Public").
- Matthew Yglesias. June 7, 2023. <u>It's Great to Have a President Who Knows When to Shut Up.</u> *New York Times.*

Week 3 Section

04/21/2025: I Alone Can Fix It?

- UAP, <u>More Presidential Power, More Presidential Problems</u> (from "The Strategy of Going Public" to the end).
- Ezra Klein and Brendan Nyhan. May 20, 2014. <u>The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency, explained</u>. *Vox*.
- Jack Goldsmith. January 20, 2025. <u>The Trump 2.0 Executive Orders Will Take Time to Sort Out. Executive Functions.</u>
- Jack Goldsmith. January 21, 2025. The Risks In Trump's Barrage of Executive Orders.
 Executive Functions.
- Jack Goldsmith. January 28, 2025. <u>Maximum Executive Power and the Fate of the Unitary Executive</u>. *Executive Functions*.

4/23/2025: Are the Courts Making It All Up As They Go?

- UAP, Are the Courts Making It Up As They Go?
- Jeffrey M. Jones. October 3, 2024. <u>Party Divisions in Views of Supreme Court Keep Ratings Low.</u> *Gallup*.

Optional

- Jack Goldsmith and Steve Vladek. May 16, 2023. <u>The Lawfare Podcast: The Shadow Docket</u>. *The Lawfare Podcast*.

Week 4 Section

04/28/2025: Is the Deep State Real?

- UAP, <u>Is the "Deep State" Real?</u>
- Joe Davidson. December 13, 2024. <u>Trump allies, opponents prepare to battle over plans for at-will workforce</u>. *Washington Post*.

04/30/2025: Catch Up Day, Exam Review

- We'll use this time to catch up on lectures if we fall behind.
- We'll also have time to address any questions you have.

Week 5 NO SECTION

05/05/2025: Exam 1

05/07/2025: Obviously, My Political Opinions Are Correct. So Why Doesn't Everyone Agree with Me?

- UAP, Obviously, My Political Opinions Are Correct. So Why Doesn't Everyone Agree with Me?
- Pew Research Center. April 26, 2018. What do you know about the U.S. government? Take the quiz (no cheating!) and read the article.
- Alexander Kustov. January 3, 2025. Good to Know: <u>The public is a thermostat</u>. *Good Authority*.
- Michael Tesler. November 3, 2023. Why the U.S. border wall is getting more and more popular. Good Authority.
- Alexander Kustov and James Dennison. August 26, 2024. <u>Good to Know: Issue importance in politics.</u> *Good Authority*.
- John Sides. September 27, 2024. <u>Misinformation might not be the real problem in politics</u>. *Good Authority*.

Week 6 Section

05/12/2025: Is Polling Broken?

- UAP, Is Polling Broken?
- Nathaniel Rakich. September 16, 2024. <u>How to read political polls in 2024</u>. *FiveThirtyEight.* (or listen to the podcast version).
- Andrew Mercer. September 8, 2016. <u>5 key things to know about the margin of error in</u> election polls. *Pew Research Center*.
- Josh Clinton. October 28, 2024. <u>Poll results depend on pollster choices as much as voters' decisions</u>. *Good Authority*.

05/14/2025: Political Scientists Love Parties. But You Probably Hate Them.

- UAP, Political Scientists Love Parties. But You Probably Hate Them.
- Sahil Chinoy, August 8, 2019. <u>Quiz: Let Us Predict Whether You're a Democrat or a Republican</u>. New York Times. (Take the quiz and read the article).
- Mark Wickham-Jones. July 24, 2018. <u>This 1950 political science report keeps popping up in the news. Here's the story behind it.</u> *The Washington Post*.

Week 7 Section

05/19/2025: Who Decides Who Decides?

- UAP, Who Decides Who Decides?
- G. Elliott Morris, Amina Brown and Katie Marriner. December 12, 2024. Where Have All the Democrats Gone? 538.
- John Sides. November 18, 2024. <u>How to think about the "racial realignment" in U.S. politics</u>. *Good Authority*.
- John Sides. May 12, 2025. <u>Do moderate candidates really do better in elections?</u> Good Authority.
- Shane Goldmacher. May 24, 2025. How Donald Trump Has Remade America's Political Landscape. New York Times.

05/21/2025: Local Politics, National Problems

- UAP, Local Politics, National Problems.
- Dan Hopkins. June 6, 2018. <u>All Politics Is National Because All Media Is National</u>. *FiveThrityEight*.
- John Sides. March 7, 2025. <u>Are Democrats too beholden to small donors?</u> *Good Authority*.

Week 8 Section

05/26/2025: NO CLASS, MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

05/28/2025: Can't We All Just Get Along (No!)

- UAP, Can't We All Just Get Along (No!).
- Steven Smith. June 15, 2021. Note 3. The Search for Causes. Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics.
- Frances Lee. January 9, 2014. <u>American politics is more competitive than ever. That's making partisanship worse.</u> Washington Post.
- Optional: Geoffrey Skelley and Holly Fuong. June 14, 2022. <u>3 In 10 Americans Named Political Polarization As A Top Issue Facing The Country</u>. *FiveThirtyEight*.

Week 9 Section

06/02/2025: Democracy's Delicate Balance

- UAP, Democracy's Delicate Balance.

- Dan Balz and Clara Ence Morse. August 18, 2023. <u>American democracy is cracking.</u> <u>These forces help explain why.</u> Washington Post.
- Sam Levine and Andrew Witherspoon. November 20, 2023. <u>'Deliberate and anti-democratic': Wisconsin grapples with partisan gerrymandering.</u> The Guardian.
- John Sides. September 10, 2024. <u>Are we exaggerating populism's threat to democracy?</u> Good Authority.

06/04/2025: Catch Up Day, Exam Review

- We'll use this time to catch up on lectures if we fall behind.
- We'll also have time to address any questions you have.

Week 10 Section

06/13/2025: Exam 2

- Please note, the exam will take place in our usual classroom, but <u>at 11:30 AM on Friday</u> instead of the usual meeting time.
- Also note, this exam will be exactly like the midterm both in structure and timing. We will only use 50 minutes (we will not use the full exam time); the exam will finish at 12:20 PM.

Grading Scale

Your final grade in this class will be determined according to the following scale. Please do not email me at the end of the quarter asking if I can round your 93.4 to a 93.5. I will not.

Letter Grade	Range	
A+	100%	96.5%
А	< 96.5%	93.5%
A-	< 93.5%	89.5%
B+	< 89.5%	86.5%
В	< 86.5%	83.5%
B-	< 83.5%	79.5%
C+	< 79.5%	76.5%

С	< 76.5%	73.5%
C-	< 73.5%	69.5%
D	< 69.5%	59.5%
F	< 59.5%	0%

Additional Resources

<u>Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)</u> refers to the academic standards students must maintain to remain eligible for federal, state, and institutional financial aid. If you are receiving financial aid, please ensure you review the <u>SAP requirements and the appeals process</u>.

These additional resources come from the UCSD Political Science Department:

Inclusive Classroom Statement

The TAs and I are fully committed to creating a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspectives, experiences, and identities. We urge each of you to contribute your unique perspectives to discussions of course questions, themes, and materials so that we can learn from them, and from each other. If you should ever feel excluded, or unable to fully participate in our class for any reason, please let me know, or please consult the Department's "Report and Issue" page for additional campus resources to support you, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond.

Additional resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond, may be found here:

https://diversity.ucsd.edu/

https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html

https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.ht

Resources to Support Student Learning

Library Help, eReserves and research tools: https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/triton-ed.html

Writing Hub: https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html

Supplemental Instruction:

https://aah.ucsd.edu/supplemental-instruction-study-group/index.html

Tutoring: https://aah.ucsd.edu/content-tutoring/index.html

Mental Health Services: https://caps.ucsd.edu

Community Centers: Learn about the different ways UC San Diego explores, supports, and celebrates the many cultures that make up our diverse community. https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html

Academic Advising

Students who have academic advising questions related to the Political Science major, should contact the department's Undergraduate Advisor, Emilie Hines, via the Virtual Advising Center. Academic advising questions often include (but are not limited to): add/drop deadlines, course enrollment policies, planning major and minor requirements, quarter-by-quarter plans, department petitions and paperwork, and referrals to campus and student support services.

Additional resources to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom, and beyond:

Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion 858.822.3542 | diversity@ucsd.edu | https://diversity.ucsd.edu/ https://students.ucsd.edu/student-life/diversity/index.html https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html

Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination https://ophd.ucsd.edu/ophd@ucsd.edu or (858) 534-8298

UCSD Office of the Ombuds https://ombuds.ucsd.edu/ To reach a Confidential Ombudsperson, please call 858-534-0777.

UCSD's Principles of Community

To foster the best possible working and learning environment, UC San Diego strives to maintain a climate of fairness, cooperation, and professionalism. These principles of community are vital to the success of the University and the well being of its constituents. UC San Diego faculty, staff, and students are expected to practice these basic principles as individuals and in groups. The Principles of Community (https://ucsd.edu/about/principles.html) and the Student Code of Conduct(https://students.ucsd.edu/_files/student-conduct/ucsandiego-student-conduct-code_i nterim-revisions1-16-18.pdf) support equity, diversity, and inclusion in our classroom.

Food Support for Students:

If you are skipping and stretching meals, or having difficulties affording or accessing food, you may be eligible for CalFresh, California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, that can provide up to \$292 a month in free money on a debit card to buy food. Students can apply at benefitscal.com/r/ucsandiegocalfresh.

The Hub Basic Needs Center empowers all students by connecting them to resources for food, stable housing and financial literacy. Visit their site at basicneeds.ucsd.edu.

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