

POSC 442: The Politics of Human Differences: Diversity and Discrimination

Prof. Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra

Fall - 2023, M and W: 10:00 AM - 11:50 PM

Instructor: Prof. Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra (DMC 341)

Preferred Name: Prof. Varun

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Classroom Location: DMC 252

Sign Up for Office Hours: [Here](#)

Course Description

Diversity, equity, and inclusion has received significant attention in recent times by policymakers, corporations and the society at large. These initiatives stem from the fact that bias and discrimination in various forms is a reality for many. This advanced seminar style course is about the social scientific study of bias and discrimination. The course will cover techniques for identifying, assessing, and addressing bias and discrimination in various aspects of social, political, and business life.

Please note that this is a tentative outline of the syllabus, and things might change as we progress through the semester.

Objectives

Experience in/comfort with reading peer-reviewed paper with models, applied econometrics and experimental design is essential to succeed in this course. Note that this skill can be acquired with practice over the semester. This course will help you develop the knowledge and skills to (1) read critically and engage academic papers (2) take part in informed discussions. Students will be given many opportunities through class participation, presentations and exams to think critically about social scientific study of discrimination.

The course emphasizes critical reading and evaluation of evidence, the ability to synthesize quantitative and qualitative information to understand contemporary society and politics. These skills are highly valuable for anyone interested in going into law, public policy, government service, consulting, or any other field that requires critical thinking and numeracy.

Requirements, Grading, and Important Dates

1. Active classroom participation – 15%
2. In-class Group Presentations* – 25%
3. In-class Midterm I* – 20%
4. In-class Midterm II* – 20%
5. In-Class Midterm III OR creative component (see below)* – 20%

*You must take all three exams, and regularly present in the class to pass the course

Classroom Participation

Active, respectful, and thoughtful participation in class meetings is expected and necessary. Unexcused absences will result in a deduction in your class participation grade and will affect your ability to answer exam questions. I expect you to be actively engaged with the material, which means preparing questions and comments before class, answering your fellow students' and my questions, and otherwise being an engaged participant in class discussions.

Every week, a portion of the class will be dedicated to discussing “in the news” topics. One student (who is not presenting) will start the discussion with a “number” or any topic related to bias and discrimination (broadly defined) that is making headlines anywhere in the world. Students can use resources like newspapers (e.g., NYT, The Economist, LA Times, Financial Times, The Guardian etc.), podcasts or other relevant sources. The student will first present the context to the news item/“number” being discussed along with the source, provide background details relevant to the class, identify its significance, and explain why this is pertinent. This will lead to a class discussion on the topic.

In-class Group Presentations

Many readings come from empirical political science and economics. Some are tough, but I do not expect you to understand equations. In weeks where we don't have a lecture, students will read one article per class. Each article will be presented by a group of two students (we will form the groups in Week 3). The presentation is

scheduled for a duration of 30 minutes and should be created professionally.¹ It needs to provide a concise summary of the main question that the paper is trying to address, the context and background for the study, main results explained in simple language, main conclusion, and your personal insights about the paper.

This will be followed by an in-depth discussion on the paper and the presentation. Be well-prepared and ready to engage with your fellow students. Naturally, this means that you will be doing all the readings before class, asking critical questions during the class and engaging with your fellow classmates (be prepared to be cold-called).

Midterms I, II and III

All exams will be in-class, closed-book. The dates are available on the syllabus. **You must take all three exams to pass the course.**

If you do not want to do an in-class exam III, you can submit an original TikTok/Instagram Reel, a short video, or any other creative way to explain the ideas discussed throughout the semester on the day of exam III.

You can also opt to do a replication study instead of MidTerm III: This involves replicating an existing published political science/economics article. Tasks include downloading the relevant data, reproducing all the main tables, and conducting additional analysis to test the robustness of the results, possibly based on an alternative theory.

Please meet me during office hours after Mid-Term II if you are considering a replication study or the creative submission.

Week 1

08/21/2023 Class Logistics and Introductions

08/23/2023 Normative Frameworks: Lecture

Along with the lecture, we will also watch the following videos in class.

- Deontology: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_uUEaeqFog
- Trolley Problem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0pf6KcWYyw>
- Transplant Problem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upltypkg-SI>
- Veil of Ignorance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8GDEaJtbq4>
- Child Dying Here vs. Dying 5000 Miles Away: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGczdp0SE0c>

¹Extra credits for creating your presentation in L^AT_EX

- Freedom vs. Security: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL2LMTRoWlA>
- Libertarianism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRKl8_Do8hA

Week 2

08/28/2023 Collective Goals: Lecture

We will play the Trolley Problem Game (<https://neal.fun/absurd-trolley-problems/>), and discuss the following:

- Preference Aggregation
- Condorcet's Paradox
- Arrow's Theorem
- May's Theorem

08/30/2023 Constructing Race and Ethnicity in America

Chapters 1 and 2

Week 3

09/04/2023 No Class: Labor Day

09/06/2023 How to Read and Present, Forming Teams

Week 4

09/11/2023 What is a Model? Why do you need Models? Student Presentation and Discussions

- Clarke and Primo (2007) [Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach](#)
 - Presentation by Dina and Madison
- *Optional Reading*: Ariel Rubinstein (2006) [Dilemmas of an Economic Theorist](#)

09/13/2023 Taste Based Discrimination: Student Presentation and Discussions

- [Taste Based Discrimination](#) (Reading available on Blackboard: Look for "Taste-Based Discrimination" in the Content tab)
 - Presentation by Jessiyah, Triston and Gabi
- *Optional Reading*: [Becker's Economics of Discrimination](#) (Reading available on Blackboard. Look for "Becker's Model" in the Content tab)

Week 5

09/18/2023 Statistical Discrimination: Student Presentation and Discussions

- [Statistical Discrimination](#) (Reading is available on Blackboard. Look for “Statistical Discrimination” in the Content tab)
 - Presentation by River and Arya
- *Optional Reading*: Phelps (1972) [The Statistical Theory of Racism and Sexism](#)
- *Optional Reading*: Aigner and Cain (1977) [Statistical Theories of Discrimination in Labor Markets](#)

09/20/2023 Statistical and Taste Based Discrimination: Lecture, Student Presentation and Discussions

- [Taste or Statistical?](#)
 - Presentation by Leia, Lianna and Ani
- Brief lecture by Prof on Occupational Crowding. [Occupational Segregation, Wages and Profits When Employers Discriminate by Race or Sex](#)
- Midterm Review

Week 6

09/25/2023 Detecting Discrimination: Student Presentation and Discussions

- [Evidence on Discrimination in Employment: Codes of Color, Codes of Gender](#)
 - Presentation by Haik and Harutyun
- *Optional Reading*: [Detecting Discrimination:](#)

09/27/2023 In-Class Midterm I

Week 7

10/02/2023 Ethnic and Racial Inequalities I: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004). [Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination.](#)
 - Presentation by Nikka and Ashley

10/04/2023 Ethnic and Racial Inequalities II: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, Weinstein (2007) [Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?](#)
 - Presentation by James and Glen

Week 8

10/09/2023 Gender Inequalities I: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Amartya Sen: [Manyfaces of Gender Inequality and Missing Women](#) (Reading available on Blackboard. Look for “Amartya Sen Gender Inequality” in the Content tab)
 - Presentation by Raveena and Meekal

10/11/2023 Gender Inequalities II: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Bhavnani (2009). [Do Electoral Quotas Work after They Are Withdrawn? Evidence from a Natural Experiment in India](#)
 - Presentation by Leia, Lianna, and Ani

Enjoy the Fall Break, but watch these two movies! Article 15 on Netflix 13th on Netflix

Week 9

10/16/2023 Discussion on Article 15 and 13th

- 13th: <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80091741>
- Article 15: <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81154455>

10/18/2023 Weighing Consequences and Being Fair

- Malhotra and Shotts(2022) Chapters 6, and 8 [Leading With Values](#)
 - Presentation by Dina and Madison

Week 10

10/23/2023 Implicit Discrimination: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Bertrand, Chugh, and Mullainathan (2005). [Implicit Discrimination](#)

- Presentation by Glen and James
- Implicit Association Exercise (in class!)

10/25/2023 Algorithmic Fairness and Bias I: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Johnson (2021). [Algorithmic bias: on the implicit biases of social technology](#)
 - Presentation by Nikka and Ashley

Week 11

10/30/2023 Algorithmic Fairness and Bias II: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Hedden (2021) [On statistical criteria of algorithmic fairness](#)
 - Presentation by Triston, Jessiyah, and Gabby
- Midterm Review

11/01/2023 In-Class Midterm II

Week 12

11/06/2023 Looks: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Mobius and Rosenblat (2006). [Why Beauty Matters](#)
 - Presentation by River and Arya

11/08/2023 Sports: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Price and Wolfers (2010). [Racial Discrimination Among NBA Referees](#)
 - Presentation by Haik and Harutyun

Week 13

11/13/2023 Sports: Student Presentation and Discussions

- Parsons, Sulaeman, Yates, and Hamermesh (2011). [Strike Three: Discrimination, Incentives, and Evaluation](#)
 - Presentation by Raveena and Meekal

11/15/2023 Ethics of Experiments: Discussions

- Phillips (2021) [Ethics of field experiments](#)

Week 14

11/20/2023 In the News Discussions and What are your Core Values?

11/22/2023 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break!

Week 15

11/27/2023 Discussing Core Values, Summary of Topics Covered. Class Discussion, No Presentations!

- Arrow (1998) [What Has Economics to Say about Racial Discrimination?](#)
- Figart and Mutari (2005). [Rereading Becker: Contextualizing the Development of Discrimination Theory](#)
- Midterm Review

11/29/2023 In-Class Midterm III or Creative Submission

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

eeotix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

osas.usc.edu

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-3340 or otfp@med.usc.edu
chan.usc.edu/otfp

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.