Lane Kenworthy

Soci 124: The Good Society

University of California-San Diego
Winter 2024-25
Tu Th 5:00-6:20pm, Warren Lecture Hall 2207

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<div align="center">COURSE DESCRIPTION</div>

This course examines the history and performance of key policies and institutions in the United States and other rich democratic countries, with an emphasis on the following questions:

- In thinking about what a "good society" would consist of, philosophers, social scientists, policy makers, and ordinary citizens point to liberty, democracy, prosperity, economic security, opportunity, community, safety, health, and happiness, among others. How can we decide which of these, if any, to prioritize?
- What evidence should we use in judging whether one society is better than another?
- How much progress have humans made? On which outcomes? What are the causes of progress?
- What institutions and policies are most conducive to human flourishing?
- To what extent are there tradeoffs? For instance, can policies and institutions reduce poverty only by restricting liberty?
- Are there grounds for thinking that institutions or policies not yet tried would do better than the best ones currently in existence?

Materials and requirements:

- Readings and videos are available via Canvas.
- Class will be part lecture and part discussion. Attendance is mandatory.
- For each module, beginning with the third, you will take a 10-question quiz, accessed via Canvas, on the readings and videos.
- Once each week you'll write a short comment on the questions, evidence, and conclusions covered in class, and you'll write responses to the comments of two other students.
- As a group, you'll explore and prepare a short report on a radical proposal to help make the United States a better society.

<div align="center">SCHEDULE</div>

Here are the topics we'll cover. The full schedule is in Canvas.

- Week 1. Module 1: Life in the good society
- Week 1. Module 2: Affluence
- Required class attendance, quizzes, and discussion board posts begin in week 2
- Week 2. Module 3: Liberalism

- Week 2. Module 4: Social democratic capitalism
- Week 3. Module 5: Social democratic America
- Week 3. Deliberative advisory assembly discussion #1
- Week 4. Module 6: How to get there
- Week 4. Module 7: Can we have a good society without strong labor unions?
- Week 5. Module 8: Cities
- Week 5. Deliberative advisory assembly discussion #2
- Week 6. Module 9: Will government steering boost economic growth?
- Week 6. Module 10: Should we have a universal basic income?
- Week 7. Module 11: Should income and wealth equality be a priority?
- Week 7. Deliberative advisory assembly discussion #3
- Week 8. Module 12: Does capitalist finance do more harm than good?
- Week 8. Module 13: Would more public ownership be better?
- Week 9. Module 14: Do we want economic democracy?
- Week 9. Deliberative advisory assembly discussion #4
- Week 10. Module 15: Does a capitalist economy permit truly democratic politics?
- Week 10. Module 16: Can community flourish in modern capitalism?
- Exam week. Deliberative advisory assembly project document due

COURSE AIMS

Here's what you should get from this course:

- *Substantive knowledge.* The course aims to improve your understanding of the topics we cover.
- *Approaching issues scientifically (this is often called "critical thinking").* This means examining evidence and reasoning from that evidence rather than relying solely on theory, ethical beliefs, or anecdotes. Social science often is similar to detective work, with the social scientist more like Sherlock Holmes than like a chemist in a lab. Seldom is the story simple, and rarely do we have the exact evidence we would need in order to be strongly confident about our conclusion. So we use various types of data, and we may deploy a mixture of analytical methods. We ask: "What would we expect to observe if a particular hypothesis were true? Is that what we in fact observe? If so or if not, what does that tell us about the answer to our question?" Then we piece together a conclusion from multiple imperfect and incomplete bits of evidence. For each reading, video, or podcast, focus on the question(s) being posed, the answer(s) given, the key pieces of evidence, and the way the author reasons in reaching a conclusion.
- *Working in groups.* A good bit of life — in a job, in a family, and in other contexts

— involves working with other people to accomplish a goal. The deliberative advisory assembly project in this course aims to improve your group-work comfort and skill.

- *Good argument.* The course is designed to improve your ability to develop and convey effective argument. Keys include focusing on a specific question, formulating a clear proposal or position, making use of relevant evidence, addressing potential objections and counterarguments, and communicating clearly.
- *Written communication.* Good writing usually comes from two things. The first is clear thinking. But writing isn't just a way to express what you're thinking; it's a way to clarify your thinking. Don't wait until you have it all figured out before beginning to write. Start writing; doing so will help you develop your thoughts. The second key is extensive editing. Write a draft. Then edit it. Then edit it again. And again. (For a helpful guide to good writing, see this.) If you struggle with writing, you're like virtually everyone else. The course aims to help you improve, by practicing.
- *Concision.* Information and opinion are plentiful these days, so brevity is a valuable skill. The writing assignments for the course are short, so you'll need to focus on the information and argument that is most relevant or useful.
- *Comfort with quantitative data.* A generation ago there was a scarcity of numerical data. Now we have an abundance: data are everywhere. That's a good thing, because data are key to answering important questions about society. You will encounter lots of quantitative data in this course, often in graphical form. If you aren't already comfortable interpreting such data and reasoning from them, by the end of the course you should be.

COURSE MATERIALS

Most of the readings are from a digital textbook: Lane Kenworthy, *The Good Society*. It's online and free. Direct links to the chapters, and to additional required readings and videos, are in Canvas.

There are separate readings for the deliberative advisory assembly project.

GRADING

Course grades will be determined as follows. See below for details.

- 10%: class attendance
- 25%: quizzes
- 40%: discussion board comments and responses
- 25%: deliberative advisory assembly project (group grade)

Each of these will be graded on a scale of 0 to 100. So your numerical course grade is calculated as: (class attendance x .10) + (quizzes x .25) + (discussion board comments and responses x .40) + (deliberative advisory assembly project x .25).

Your letter grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- 96.67 to 100 = A+
- 93.34 to 96.66 = A
- 90 to 93.33 = A−
- 86.67 to 89.99 = B+
- 83.34 to 86.66 = B
- 80 to 83.33 = B−
- 76.67 to 79.99 = C+
- 73.34 to 76.66 = C
- 70 to 73.33 = C−
- 60 to 69.99 = D
- below 60 = F

There will be no extra-credit projects or assignments.

CLASS AND ATTENDANCE

In class we'll discuss questions, evidence, and reasoning on that day's topic. You'll find this much more interesting and informative if you've read/watched the materials before class.

No laptops, tablets, or phones in the classroom. The evidence suggests that college students tend to learn more when *not* using electronics during class. If you want to take notes, use pen and paper. If you need an exception to this policy, please see me.

In weeks 2 through 10, class attendance is required. You don't have to talk, but you must show up.

Grading for attendance:

- 100: 17 or 18 days
- 95: 16 days
- 90: 15 days
- 80: 14 days
- 70: 13 days
- 60: 12 days

- 50: 11 days
- 40: 10 days
- 30: 9 days
- 20: 8 days
- 10: 7 days
- 0: 0 to 6 days

QUIZZES

For each module, beginning with the third, you will take a short quiz on the readings and videos. Each quiz will have 10 multiple choice or true/false questions. There will be 14 quizzes; only your highest 12 grades will count.

The quizzes are posted on Canvas. Each quiz will be available for 48 hours, from 12:01am on the first day until 11:59pm on the second day. Once you begin a quiz, you'll have 30 minutes to complete it.

The quizzes are open-note open-computer.

If you have the Canvas app, you can take the quizzes using your phone.

You can skip a quiz, which will reduce the number of quizzes that count for your overall quiz grade, if you have to miss it for any of the following three reasons: (1) holidays or special events observed by organized religions (for students who show affiliation with that particular religion), (2) absences pre-approved by the UCSD Dean of Students (or Dean's designee), (3) extended illness (this requires a doctor's note). I will need written verification of the circumstances.

DISCUSSION BOARD COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

Each week, beginning in week 2, you'll write a short comment on the questions, evidence, and conclusions explored in class and in the course materials and post it to a discussion board on Canvas. These are due at 11:59pm on Thursdays. You will also write brief responses to the comments of two other students. These responses are due at 11:59pm on Sundays. You have to post your own comment before you're allowed to see the comments posted by other students.

Comments should address something in the course materials, should engage with evidence, and should be written well. Here are a few examples, just to give you a feel. You don't need to follow these examples; this is just to provide some ideas in case you aren't sure what is expected.

- The core conclusion in Tuesday's lecture was interesting, but I'm not convinced, because it overlooked ….
- In lecture Professor Kenworthy showed a graph of poverty rates over time and said the trend supports a conclusion that government social policy reduces poverty. But it seems to me that's wrong because ….
- In today's reading, the author argues that women's freedom increased because more were entering paid work. If that were true, I think we'd expect to see …, but there's no mention of this.

If you have the Canvas app, you can post your comment and responses using your phone. But don't write as though you're texting or tweeting. Write real sentences and use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Grading for each discussion board comment and responses:

- 100: comment and two responses submitted, excellent quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 95: comment and two responses submitted, very good quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 85: comment and two responses submitted, good quality, well written, comment includes evidence
- 75: comment and two responses submitted but low quality or poorly written or comment doesn't include evidence
- 60: comment submitted but only one response
- 50: comment submitted but no responses
- 0: no comment submitted

There will be 9 discussion boards. Only your 8 highest grades will count.

DELIBERATIVE ADVISORY ASSEMBLY PROJECT

As a group, you will research, discuss, and offer a recommendation on the following proposed law for the United States: *Since its last major immigration law reform, in 1986, the US government has allowed 1 million people per year, on average, to legally immigrate to the country. From 2026 through 2028 the number will be 5 million per year. From 2029 to 2035 it will be 10 million per year. From 2036 forward it will be at least 15 million per year. Each year approximately 10% of these legal immigrants will be chosen based on projected economic contribution, 10% on family connections, 5% on contribution to diversity, and the remaining 75% via refugee/asylee status and/or a lottery.*

Readings and other materials are available via Canvas.

You'll decide how to divide up the reading, writing, editing, and any other tasks.

You'll prepare a short report stating the most important fact-based findings about the proposal, the strongest pro and con arguments, and your recommendation as to whether the proposed law should or shouldn't be enacted.

- Submit your report as a Microsoft Word document.
- Length: No more than 1,000 words (excluding charts, tables, and footnotes).
- Formatting: single-space, 12-point font size, 1-inch top and bottom margins and 2-inch side margins.
- Graphs and tables: You don't need to include any. If you do, limit it to a maximum of two.
- Use footnotes (not a reference list or bibliography) to give credit to anyone from whom you borrow evidence or argument. I'm not picky about the formatting of the footnotes, but include the author(s), title, and year rather than just an internet address.

You will receive a group grade for this project.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students are encouraged to share intellectual views and discuss freely the principles and applications of course materials. However, graded work must be the product of independent effort unless otherwise instructed. Students are expected to adhere to UC San Diego academic integrity policy.

SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Students who need special accommodation or services should contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). You must register and request that the OSD send me official notification of your accommodation needs as soon as possible. Please meet with me to discuss accommodations and how the course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Information here, other than the grade and attendance policy, may be subject to change with advance notice as deemed appropriate by the instructor.