

LDST 102: Social Foundations of Leadership

FALL 2026

TIME: Mon/Wed 9:00-10:15am
LOCATION: Jepson Hall 102
WEBSITE: [SOCIAL FNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP 202610 10361](https://socialfoundationsofleadership.org/2026/10/10361)

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Chris von Rueden
EMAIL: cvonrued@richmond.edu
OFFICE: Jepson Hall 235
OFFICE HOURS: Tues 10:00-12:00pm
Or by appointment on Zoom at a different time

ZOOM: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84575502410?pwd=K2E3N2NnZGxVaHpOaU9TVnArbStlQT094wLYKJ> (password)

Course Description:

This course is a continuation of LDST 101, but from the perspective of the social sciences (e.g. anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology, economics, behavioral biology). This course also satisfies the general education Social Inquiry requirement, via the following learning outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of theories and/or patterns of human behavior appropriate to the discipline.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to use appropriate methods to analyze human behavior.
3. Students will assess the limitations of the theories, explanations, and methods they study.

More specifically, the first half of the course will expose you to social science research on leadership and human political behavior more generally:

- How are our societies similar to other primate societies, particularly our closest relatives the chimpanzees and bonobos?
- What causes inter-group discrimination or conflict? We will explore the origins of ethnicity, gender, and political partisanship and how these group memberships can become sources of coalitional conflict.

- What enables us to coordinate and cooperate with each other and form large, stable societies? We will discuss the psychological motives that produce coordination and cooperation, as well as concepts like fairness and justice.

The second half of the course will have you simulate the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, as a case study in leadership and political coalitions competing for power. We will then think about ways leadership can bring about change in the policy arena today, including immigration, wealth inequality, and education.

The goal of the course is not only to expose students to the empirical study of leadership but also to stimulate them to think critically about human behavior and the design of our societies in general.

Course Format:

Most classes will consist of a mix of lecture and discussion. In addition, we will engage in various activities, particularly the reacting game *Chicago, 1968*. Lecture and discussion will build off **assigned readings, which must be completed BEFORE the day they are listed** (see Class Schedule below). The readings (and occasional viewing assignments) are either available on Canvas or linked in the syllabus. Readings include several chapters from the following books (it is recommended but not required you get copies of them):

- Pinker, S. (2025). *When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows...*
- Van Vugt, M. & Ahuja, A. (2011). *Selected: Why Some People Lead, Why Others Follow, and Why It Matters*.
- Muthukrishna, M. (2023). *A Theory of Everyone*.

BEFORE most class periods, you must also complete a quiz (on Canvas) on the readings assigned for that class day. During classtime, I strongly encourage you to comment, ask a question, or provoke discussion at any time. Recent lecture slides will become available on Canvas as a powerpoint file. I ask that you not leave during class-time unless you are in physical discomfort. **Use the bathrooms before you arrive to class.**

How you will be graded:

1. Discussion (15% of grade)

Your discussion grade will depend on you attending class, attending class on time, frequently participating in discussions, not leaving to use the bathroom during class, submitting required materials during our reacting game, presenting on readings when scheduled to do so, leading in-class debates when scheduled to do so, and participating in assigned out-of-class activities.

You may miss 3 classes (for any reason, including illness) without a penalty, so no need to email me when sick or otherwise unable to attend class.

Students will present on readings and lead in-class debates according to their presentation number. Sign up for your presentation number here:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/12WnqnDp3o0sicLooq7Ngu_oOSuR8kZer55kenX49Uew/edit?usp=sharing

In general, written assignments, reading presentations, and opening/closing arguments during debates will be graded on a three-point scale: didn't complete (0); minimal effort/thoughtfulness or didn't follow instructions (1); effortful/thoughtful and completed requirements (2).

a. Reading Presentations

When presenting on readings during Part 1 of the course, the **first** presenter should:

- briefly identify and explain the main points of the reading
- describe the evidence used to back up the main points (i.e. what kinds of sources or studies does the author rely on?)
- prepare one question to ask class members, that asks for clarification on some aspect of the reading or addresses something unexplained by the reading

When presenting on readings during Part 1 of the course, the **second** presenter should:

- compare and contrast the reading with material you've previously encountered in class
- discuss how you think the reading relates to the study of leadership
- prepare one question to ask class members, that connects the reading to current issues or events

Each presenter should take around 10 minutes, including your leading of discussion surrounding your prepared question. Also, use online presentation software (**paste your presentation link to the class [google doc](#) before the start of class, and make sure you make the link publicly available**). You can contact me before you are due to present if you want guidance, but don't feel like you need to be an expert. I will not grade the accuracy of the presentations, but the effort you put into them and how well you address the presentation requirements will factor into your discussion grade.

b. In-class Debates

Part 3 of the course will consist of a series of in-class debates. For each debate, some of you will act as debate leaders (**see the class [google doc](#)**). Debate leaders will give a **5 minute** opening statement (pro or con) or a **5 minute** closing statement (pro or con). Do not use presentation software. In between the opening and closing statements, **other members of each team must participate at least once** by providing evidence or arguments in favor of their position. Debate leaders coordinate their team members' participation, **and teams must take turns speaking**. Those students not assigned to teams for a particular debate will act as judges.

c. Out-of-class assignments

On select weeks (see Class Schedule and Assignments section), you will engage in activities (coordinated with group members) more akin to the lifestyles of traditional societies. **You will find your group assignments and must log your progress on activities on the class [google doc](#).**

- ***Knowledge of local flora/fauna.*** Sometime during the week, your group will walk the length of the eco-corridor on campus and identify 5 tree species, 15 non-tree plant species, and 10 animal species. Send me a photo of you all doing so with a list of the species you observed.
- ***Exercise.*** Each day, your group must complete 40k steps.
- ***Collective religious ritual.*** Sometime during the week, your group will attend and participate together in a religious ritual. Also, send me a photo of you all doing so.
- ***No ultra-processed foods.***
 - sweetened beverages: sodas, energy drinks, sweetened juices
 - packaged snacks: chips, pretzels, crackers
 - candy and desserts
 - mass-produced baked goods: packaged bread, tortillas, bagels
 - sugary breakfast: sweetened cereals, flavored yogurt, energy bars
 - processed meat: hot dogs, bacon, sausage, deli meats
 - convenience food: instant soup/noodles, frozen dinners
 - fast food: fries/onion rings, hamburgers, pizza, fried chicken
- ***No cell phone or social media.*** Each day, at least one group member must refrain from using cell phones and social media.

2. Quizzes (25% of grade)

By 9:00am of the majority of class days (see Class Schedule and Assignments section), you will take a short quiz (on Canvas) on the readings assigned for that class day. Quizzes are open-book and can be completed with the assistance of other students currently in the class. Quizzes become available online at the end of the previous class. The quizzes will consist of multiple choice or short answer questions. You will have 30 minutes to complete each quiz, and you must complete each quiz in one sitting. You are not able to attempt the same quiz more than once. At the end of the semester, you may drop your lowest quiz grade. **Missed quizzes (for any reason, including illness) count towards the quiz you may drop.**

3. Midterm Exam (30% of grade)

The midterm exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions having you compare and contrast material we've read and discussed.

4. Final Exam (30% of grade)

The final exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions having you compare and contrast material we've read and discussed. The final exam is cumulative but will emphasize the latter half of the course.

Notes:

1. **COVID-19/Flu:** If you have any symptoms that may indicate COVID-19 or flu (e.g. cough, aches, unusual fatigue) do not come to class that day and get tested for COVID-19. I will help you make up the material you missed.
2. **Generative AI:** For this course, the use of generative artificial intelligence tools (such as but not limited to ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and rewriting tools like Grammarly, QuillBot, and Wordtune) is considered unauthorized assistance, and using them in connection with any reading or any assignment **will be a violation of academic integrity**. This includes the use of AI for any stage of an assignment from conception to completion.
3. **Plagiarism/Cheating/Academic Integrity:** As a University of Richmond student, you commit yourself to academic integrity. This means that the work you present is your own: no student is to use, rely on or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission). For this course, such unauthorized assistance **includes use of AI to assist with any reading or at any stage of an assignment, or consultation of tests or quizzes provided by students from past classes**. If I suspect and find evidence of an academic integrity violation, you may be reported to the Director of Student Conduct. For more, see here: https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/AcademicIntegrityGuide_Students.pdf

4. **Electronic Devices:** laptop computers and phones are in general **not allowed** during classtime (excepting a disability accommodation requiring use of a laptop computer to take notes). You may use a tablet if it is kept flat on your desk/table, for purposes of notetaking or to refer to notes when presenting. On some occasions I may ask everyone to bring a laptop to class, particularly for our midterm and final exams.
 5. **Awarding of Credit:** To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html
 6. **Religious Accommodation:** Students should notify me within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html
 7. **Disability Accommodation:** Students who are approved for academic accommodations must: 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to me via the Disability Services Student Portal, and 2) Talk with me to create an accommodation implementation plan within the first two weeks of classes. <https://disability.richmond.edu/>
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Campus Resources:

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

Weinstein Learning Center (<https://wlc.richmond.edu/>):

- **Academic Skills Coaching** Meet with a professional staff member who will collaborate with you to assess and develop your academic and life skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, and more).
- **Content Tutoring** Peer consultants offer assistance in specific courses and subject areas. They are available for appointments (in-person and virtual) and drop-in sessions. See schedules at wlc.richmond.edu for supported courses and drop-in times.
- **English Language Learning** Attend one-on-one or group consultations, workshops, and other services focused on English, academic, and/or intercultural skills.
- **Quantitative and Programming Resources** Peer consultants and professional staff offer workshops or one-on-one appointments to build quantitative and programming skills and provide statistical assistance for research projects.
- **Speech and Communication** Prepare and practice for academic presentations, speaking engagements, and other occasions of public expression. Peer consultants offer recording, playback, and coaching for both individual and group presentations. Students can expect recommendations regarding clarity, organization, style, and delivery.
- **Technology Learning** Visit our student lab dedicated to supporting digital media projects. Services include camera checkout, video/audio recording assistance, use of virtual reality equipment, poster printing, 3D printing and modeling, and consultation services on a variety of software.
- **Writing** Assists student writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Meet with peer consultants who can offer feedback on written work and suggest pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies.

Boatwright Library Research Librarians: (library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides](http://libguides.richmond.edu) (libguides.richmond.edu). Students can [contact an individual librarian](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) (library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html) or ask a librarian for help via email (library@richmond.edu), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html) (library.richmond.edu/chat.html).

Career Services: (careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services: (caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling, skills-building classes, therapy groups, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services: (disability.richmond.edu): Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodation. Disability Services can be reached at disability@richmond.edu or 804-662-5001.

Class Schedule and Assignments

PART 1: The NATURE of HUMAN SOCIALITY and LEADERSHIP

Aug 24 **Introductions**

Aug 26 **Coordination and Cooperation**

- *Reading:* Pinker, S. (2025). *When Everyone Knows that Everyone Knows...*, Chapter 1.

-----*Exercise week*-----

Aug 31 **Strategic Games**

- *Reading:* Pinker, S. (2025). *When Everyone Knows that Everyone Knows...*, Chapter 3.
- *Quiz*
- *Written Reflection:* Why are you interested in leadership studies?

Sep 2 **Social Relationships**

- *Reading:* Pinker, S. (2025). *When Everyone Knows that Everyone Knows...*, Chapter 5.
- *Quiz*

-----*Knowledge of local flora/fauna week*-----

Sep 7

NO CLASS (Labor Day)

- *Viewing:* A CEO's tale
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/UUubXLtBPw>
- *Viewing:* A folk singer's tale
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6vjaimSK4E>
- *Viewing:* An economist's tale
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DbbLKySxa1t/>
- *Written Reflection:* Do you agree with the positions of your representatives to Congress on "right-to-work" laws?

Sep 9

In-class game (bring laptop)

- *Reading:* Raihani, N. (2021). *The Social Instinct*, Chapters 11-12 (only)
- *Quiz*
- *Viewing:* Rational choice theory: Collective action problems
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3KlqxYhDbk>

-----No cell phone or social media week-----

Sep 14

Why Leadership?

- *Reading:* Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011). *Selected*, Chapter 2
- *Quiz*
- *Written Reflection:* Compare an experience you had as a leader with the coordination games in Pinker Chapters 3 and 5.

Sep 15

Jepson Leadership Forum (5:30pm, Queally Center)

Sep 16

Why Followership?

- *Reading:* Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011). *Selected*, Chapter 3
- *Quiz*

-----Religious ritual week-----

Sep 21

From Despotism to Democracy

- *Reading:* Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011). *Selected*, Chapter 4
- *Viewing:* Episode 1 of Chimp Empire on Netflix
<https://www.netflix.com/title/81311783>
- *Quiz*

Sep 23

From Democracy to Despotism

- *Reading:* Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011). *Selected*, Chapter 5
- *Quiz*

-----No ultra-processed food week-----

- Sep 28 **Intergroup Conflict**
- *Reading:* Boyer (2018). *Minds Make Societies*, Chapter 1.
 - *Quiz*
 - *Written Reflection:* in what ways do your clothing choices and musical tastes signal your political views, class, and ethnicity?
- Sep 30 **Patriarchy**
- *Reading:* von Rueden, C. (2023). Patriarchy and its origins.
 - *Quiz*
- Oct 5 **Review for Midterm Exam**
- *Viewing:* Episode 2 (“Rainforest Queens”) of *Queens*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9c9H2bdnvPI>
- Oct 7 **MIDTERM EXAM**
- Oct 12 **NO CLASS (Fall Break)**
- Oct 14 **Politics**
- *Reading:* Pinsof (Dec. 9, 2024). Arguing is bullshit.
<https://www.everythingisbullshit.blog/p/arguing-is-bullshit>
 - *Reading:* Petersen, M.B. (2020). The evolutionary psychology of mass mobilization: how disinformation and demagogues coordinate rather than manipulate. *Current Opinion in Psychology*.
 - *Written Reflection:* what politically divisive beliefs do you hold and why?
- PART 2: CHICAGO, 1968**
- Oct 19 **Setup**
- *Reading:* Chicago, 1968 game book, pg. 1-64
 - *Optional Viewing:* *Trial of the Chicago 7* on Netflix
 - *Written Reflection:* Chicago, 1968 Role Questionnaire (**due by 5pm**)
- Oct 21 **Setup**
- *Reading:* Chicago, 1968 game book, pg. 66-155.
 - *Written Reflection:* Chicago, 1968 Character Investigation responses
 - *Quiz*
- Oct 26 **Parts 1-2**
- *Newspaper Column:* Wicker, Trohan (post to Canvas by 5pm the day **before** class)

- *Speech*: Daley, Bond, Hoffman, Hayden (post to Canvas **after** class)
- Oct 26 **Jepson Leadership Forum** (5:30pm, Jepson Alumni Center)
- Oct 28 **Parts 3-4**
- *TV Interview*: Rather, Saarinen (play live)
 - *Newsweek Interview*: Bruno (post to Canvas by 5pm the day **before** class)
 - *Speech*: Humphrey, Inouye, Byrd, Dellinger, Abzug, Gregory (post to Canvas **after** class)
- Nov 2 **Part 5**
- *Speech*: McCarthy, Connally (post to Canvas **after** class)
- Nov 4 **Parts 6-7**
- *Newspaper Column*: Wicker, Trohan (post to Canvas by 5pm the day **before** class)
 - *Newsweek Interview*: Bruno (post to Canvas by 5pm the day **before** class)
 - *TV Interview*: Rather, Saarinen (play live)
 - *Speech*: Muskie, Rothstein, Boudin (post to Canvas **after** class)
- Nov 9 **Debriefing**
- *Reading*: Chicago, 1968 The Aftermath
 - *Written Reflection*: **at least 1000 words** reflecting on Chicago, 1968 (per instructions in your role sheet, and also connecting to ideas from **at least three readings from earlier in the course**)

PART 3: RETHINKING POLICY

- Nov 11 **Immigration**
- *Reading*: Muthukrishna, M. (2023). *A Theory of Everyone*, Chapter 7, pp. 219-260.
 - *Quiz*
 - *In-Class Debate*: The US adopt a points-based immigration system (like Australia)
- Nov 16 **Governance**
- *Reading*: Muthukrishna, M. (2023). *A Theory of Everyone*, Chapter 8, pp. 261-282.
 - *Quiz*
 - *In-Class Debate*: The US should adopt compulsory voting
- Nov 18 **Wealth Inequality**
- *Reading*: Muthukrishna, M. (2023). *A Theory of Everyone*, Chapter 9, pp. 283-313.

	▪ <i>Quiz</i> ▪ <i>In-Class Debate:</i> The US should adopt a land value tax
Nov 23	NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
Nov 25	NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
Nov 30	Innovation ▪ <i>Reading:</i> Muthukrishna, M. (2023). <i>A Theory of Everyone</i>, Chapter 10-11, pp. 314-343. ▪ <i>Quiz</i> ▪ <i>In-Class Debate:</i> The University of Richmond should reinstate the SAT
Dec 2	Gender Roles ▪ <i>Reading:</i> Fisher, M. et al. (2026). But what of women? A look at some of the implications of men's unequal outcomes. <i>Politics and the Life Sciences</i>. ▪ <i>Quiz</i> ▪ <i>In-Class Debate:</i> The University of Richmond should increase affirmative action for men
Dec 7	Review for Final Exam
Dec 15	FINAL EXAM (9am-12pm, in the classroom, on Canvas)