

**MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS CRITICS**  
**POLITICAL SCIENCE 104**  
**MICRO-ESSAY #1**

Write a 750-900 word essay on the following topic. Your essay is due in CLA 251 by 4 PM on MONDAY September 12. Please include a title (not on a separate page), single space, and use both sides of a single sheet of paper. Also, please include a word count.

*Is it unjust to consider race or ethnicity in university admissions?*

Be sure to use direct quotations from the Sandel reading to bolster your argument and to cite the page number in parentheses after the quotation. Also, address at least one of the following topics: the diversity argument, the self-ownership argument, or the roles luck and talent play in moral desert. Finally, be sure to include at least one claim-objection-rejoinder sequence.

**What do I mean by a micro-essay?**

*Micro-essays are short (650-850) persuasive essays in which the writer explores a specific issue, problem, or puzzle shared by a group of readers. In our case, the group of readers is our class. Your audience is your classmates.*

*It is best to begin with a one sentence restatement of the problem you are going to address and to then launch immediately into your first claim, e.g., "John Rawls argues that talents do not justify deserving a university admission because talents are an accident of birth; this is true because..." or "John Rawls' view that the individual gains accruing from talent are not morally deserved ignores the role that effort plays in educational success; this is problematic because..."*

*In the sentences above, "this is true" or "this is problematic" are claims you are making. In a micro-essay it is important to realize that (1) claims are statements you want to persuade your reader to accept, and that (2) claims need to be supported with evidence or logical inference to be persuasive.*

**What do I mean by a claim-objection-rejoinder sequence?**

*Technically, a claim is the conclusion of an argument. Thus the claim: "Socrates is mortal" is really the conclusion of an argument based on reasoning from certain empirical premises. Making the reasoning explicit, I would say: "Socrates is a man, and all men are mortal. Therefore Socrates is mortal." The statements about Socrates being a man and all men being mortal are empirical observations; the claim that Socrates is mortal is a logical deduction that follows transitively. A is a subset of B; all Bs have the quality C; therefore, A has the quality C.*

*To be persuasive, it is crucial that you defend your claims with evidence and reasoning. It is also important to understand that many claims about the world which matter to us are **contested** and do not follow straightforwardly, i.e., as logically deductive conclusions based on uncontested empirical premises. **In fact, each essay you write for this class will feature questions that arise***

*from contested claims. Thus it is incumbent on you to indicate to your reader that you understand there is more than one plausible answer to the question under debate.*

*This is sometimes called arguing from both sides of a question. It requires that you supply an objection to your claim. An objection is simply a claim (complete with evidence and reasoning in its support) that offers a reason that counts against believing the claim you just articulated. Thus, after defending on moral grounds Rawls' idea that talent is an accident of birth, you might entertain the following objection. "But Dworkin's argument on admissions policies--applying Rawls' view of moral desert to education—runs into a practical problem: if the talented don't deserve their admissions, teachers will have a hard time explaining why they do deserve their grades. For example, ...."*

*If you can't think of a reply to this objection, then it should become your claim, and your original claim should become an objection. Replies to objections are called rejoinders. You might reply to the above by noting: "Dworkin claims that universities should be free to define their mission to best improve their students, which may very well include teaching them to doubt the meritocratic claims they make for themselves."*

*Essays that include claim-objection-rejoinder sequences attempt to understand an issue from more than one perspective. Consequently, they have a better chance of understanding what the debate is all about. Such essays are much more likely to be persuasive than those in which the ideas of those who disagree with you—and there will often be disagreement in the analysis of values—are dismissed out of hand. If you ignore what your opponents are saying, they are likely to feel that you have missed their point.*