

GOV 342N • Public Choice

Unique# 38547

Fall, 2010

Meets MWF 2:00pm-2:50pm GAR 0.132

Instructor: Scott Moser, Ph.D.

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Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 3-4:30pm, and by appointment.

Website: I plan to use blackboard for communicating information and materials to students (<http://courses.utexas.edu>).ⁱ

Text(s): *Populism against Liberalism* by William Riker (main required text) and additional materials posted on Blackboard.

Decisions and Elections; Explaining the Unexpected, by D. Saari (Cambridge University Press, 2001) [OPTIONAL]

Prerequisites: Some exposure to mathematical reasoning will be helpful. While there are no formal requirements, student should be comfortable with analytical reasoning (logic, basic mathematics, etc.). No sophisticated mathematics will be involved, but logical, rigorous thinking will be necessary.

Syllabi are important. This document is meant to serve as road map of the course, and to give students a clear idea of the expectations and policies they will be held to. Please read it carefully as it contains information vital to successful completion of the class.

Course Overview and Goals

This course is about how groups make choices. From friends deciding on a place for lunch to cities deciding on tax schemes, the essence of public choice involves groups of individuals selecting a *common* (ie collective) alternative (be it restaurant, movie, budget or policy). At its heart, questions of public choice are central to issues of governance. This course introduces students to the fundamentals of collective choice: “How are/ should collective decisions be made?” “What does it mean for a group to decide ‘democratically?’” “Does voting lead to ‘good’ outcomes?”

At a broad level, the goal of the course is for students to understand the possibilities and limitations of voting (and of Democracy more generally). Along the way, it is important that students learn some ideas and constructs of contemporary social science that are relevant to the study of government and politics. More specifically, a significant

part of the course will focus on voting theory – different ways groups may vote on options. Both the variety of different voting systems and their strengths and shortcomings will be examined.

I indent (hope!) the course to be of interest to students interested in political institutions, electoral systems, social choice and political philosophy. We will examine one view of democracy – and ask how attainable it is via voting.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on a combination to short essays and worked problems. Specifically, mastery of the material will be assessed via three (3) homework, two (2) in-class examinations and a final exam. Final grades will be calculated as: Final exam = 38%; midterm exams = 35%; Homework = 27%. There will be one optional 'make up' homework set the last week of class, in the event students missed one homework due date.

Attendance does not directly factor into grading (with the exception of exam days). While I will endeavor to make time in the class-room worthwhile (even `fun'), I believe that the ultimate responsibility for learning lies with the student. If you want to spend your time in other activities you are free to do so

Barring legitimate, sanctioned absence, I will not give make-up exams nor extend due dates. Unexcused missed assignments and exams will be recorded as a zero. However, university-sanctioned reasons for absence can be accommodated (see 'additional notices'), but I require notification as soon as possible in the semester (and appropriate documentation as it is available).

Schedule

GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Week	Topic / Activities
1	Course Description; Introduction
2-3	What do governments do? + Collective goods (lecture+ BB) + Why Democracy? (Ch 1)

VOTING

4	Homework #1 (due 7th class meeting – Sep. 8th) + Voting matters! (Ch. 2)
5-5.5	Majority voting (Ch. 3)
5.5-7	Types of voting (Ch. 4.A – 4.G) +
8	EXAM #1+ (15th class meeting, Monday Sep. 27th) +
9	Evaluating voting systems (Ch 4.H-I)
10	Homework #2

SOCIAL CHOICE AND MANIPULATION

10-12	<i>Social Choice?</i> (Ch. 5) EXAM #2 (30th class meeting, Monday Nov. 1)
12-14	Manipulation I – strategic voting (Ch. 6)
14-15	Manipulation II – agenda control (Ch. 7) + Homework #3 (24th class meeting, Monday October 18th)
16	Historical example: slavery (Ch. 9)

Final: Saturday, December 11, 9:00-12:00 noon

*Unless otherwise noted, exams and assignments will be held on the Monday of the week listed.

**Note, this schedule will depend on the level and progress of the class. I will do my best to adhere to the assignment and exam dates, but the topics and pace are subject to change, in response to the students.

Additional Notices

Documented Disability Statement:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone) or <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>

University of Texas Honor Code:

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

• See the following websites for more information:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/plagiarism/preventing.html>

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism>

Religious Holy Days:

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Exceptions can be made in extreme circumstance at the discretion of the instructor, subject to College of Liberal Arts and University regulations.

ⁱ If you are not registered via the registrar's office, or if you are auditing, see me to be given access to the course website.