

GOV 342N • Public Choice

Unique # 38845
Spring, 2013
Meets: TTh 12:30pm-2pm WAG 214

Instructor: Scott Moser, Ph.D.
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Office hours: 9:30am-11am TTh and by appointment.

Website: BlackBoard (BB) will be used for communicating information and materials to students (<http://courses.utexas.edu>).ⁱ

Text(s):

[Sh] *Analyzing Politics* by Kenneth Shepsle published by W. W. Norton & Company (second edition) [required]

[Co] Selected sections of *The Strategic Constitution* by Robert Cooter published by Princeton University Press (2002). A 1999 version of the book is here:
<http://www.law.berkeley.edu/faculty/cooterr/PDFpapers/stratcon.PDF>

[Fa] Selected sections of *Electoral Systems: a Comparative Introduction* by David Farrell published by Palgrave Macmillan (available on Google books)

[BB] Additional materials, lecture notes, and articles will be posted on Blackboard

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. However, deviations announced to the class by the instructor will at times be necessary. Students are strongly advised to check BlackBoard regularly for class communications, updates and materials.

Course Overview and Goals

This course focuses on the role that political institutions play in political outcomes. Topics include: public goods and externalities, formation and behavior of groups, elementary game theory, operation of collective choice mechanisms via electoral systems (voting such as majority rule, plurality, quota systems, etc.) and principal agent problems. The topics covered illustrate that “the rules of the game” – the political institutions used -- at each step of the political process influence group outcomes and policies.

The essence of public choice involves groups of individuals selecting a *common* (ie collective) alternative (be it restaurant, movie, budget or policy). Hence, this course introduces students to the fundamentals of collective choice: “How are/ should group decisions be made?” “What does it mean for a group to decide ‘democratically?’” “Does voting lead to ‘good’ outcomes?”

A significant part of the course will focus on rational choice theory: how motivated goal-seeking political actors -- be they voters, candidates or interest groups -- behave. It is intended that the course will be of benefit to students interested in political institutions, electoral systems, social choice and political economy.

Specifically, the course will start with a discussion of the role and justification of government, the role of voting and democracy, present the ‘problem’ of collective choice (and various attempts to overcome it), and examine the relationship between voting and candidate behavior. Along the way, a variety of real-world voting procedures and electoral systems employed will be presented and examined. By the end of the course, students will be expected to: reason and reach logical conclusions; think critically about normative issues; analyze the strategic incentives particular political intuitions possess and behavior engendered.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on a combination of short answer and worked problems. Specifically, mastery of the material will be assessed via five (5) homeworks, two (2) in-class examinations and a final exam. Grades will not be rounded. Final grades will be made using the ‘plus-minus’ scale.

Final grades will be calculated as:
Final exam = 30%; midterm exams = 33%; Homework = 37%.

Homeworks will be posted on BB and students will generally have 1 week in which to complete and submit their work. Only legible, physical documents (ie “hard copies”) should be submitted.

There will be one optional 'make up' homework set the last week of class, in the event students missed one homework due date. Late homework will not be accepted.

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'), the ultimate responsibility for learning lies with the student. If you want to spend your time in other activities rather than attend lecture you are free to do so. **As such, there is simply no excuse for students attending lecture to text, check Facebook, sleep, etc.**

Barring legitimate, sanctioned and documented 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).

Topics

[suggested readings appear in brackets. Readings from Shepsle are chapters; readings from Cooter are page numbers of the online PDF document]

- Preliminaries and Methodological Approach
 - Role of Theories (positive, normative) [S 1]
 - Rational Choice [S 2]
 - Preferences and Individual choice [S 2]
 - Public Goods Security, Property, Law & Order, Utilities, Insurance. [S 10]
 - Public bads: Crime, Pollution, Congestion
 - Comparative institutions, rules of the game
 - Analyzing strategic situations: game theory
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- Cooperation and Collective Action
 - Cooperation: emergent; inducing [S 8]
 - The Logic of Collective Action [S 9]
 - social benefits, private costs
 - individual impact: probability and magnitude
 - paradox of public goods provision and tragedy of the commons
 - solutions to [S 9]
 - Theory of clubs or 'why join a club that would accept you?'
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- Collective Choice
 - Voting [Co pp 42–54]
 - Majority rule and cycles [S 4; Co pp73–77 & pp78–81]
 - Other voting methods: Borda, Plurality, Runoff, Approval [S 7]
 - Mays' theorem and Arrow's impossibility theorem [S 4]
 - Spatial voting model
 - rational, instrumental voting
 - single-peaked preferences
 - two-party, winner take all
 - competition and convergence: Median Voter Theorem [Co pp55–58]
 - extensions: turnout, alienation, primaries
 - multiple dimensions of preference
 - empirics [Co pp43–47]
 - Electoral Systems [F 1 & S 7]
 - Single member plurality [F 2.1–2.4]
 - Proportional representation [F 4.0–4.4]
 - Parliamentary Systems [S 16]
 - Institutions [S 11]
 - Legislative structure and procedures [S 12]
 - Courts, judges, other institutions [S 15]
 - Principal agent problems [S 13]

Schedule

Date:	Lecture / Reading:	Notes:
15-Jan-13		First Day of Class
29-Jan-13	HW due	
12-Feb-13	HW due	
21-Feb-13	Exam 1	
7-Mar-13	NO CLASS (conference)	
12-Mar-13	NO CLASS (spring break)	
14-Mar-13	NO CLASS (spring break)	
21-Mar-13	HW due	
9-Apr-13	Exam 2	
11-Apr-13	NO CLASS (conference)	
25-Apr-13	HW due	
2-May-13		Last day of class
Saturday, May 11, 7:00pm - 10:00pm	Final Exam	see http://registrar.utexas.edu/schedules/132/finals

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.

Emergency Evacuation Policy:

In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly.

Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax ([512-232-2759](tel:512-232-2759)), with "Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley" written in the subject line.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

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