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Fall 2007, Tues. and Thurs. 9:40-10:55
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3 and by appt.
www.rochester.edu/College/PSC/primo

PSC 107: Introduction to Positive Political Theory

Course Description

This course introduces students to positive political theory, a rigorous set of tools that helps clarify key questions in political science. Through examples drawn from all aspects of the political process (from elections to lawmaking to regulation) as well as from everyday life (where should we go for dinner?) and Hollywood (Russell Crowe and Reese Witherspoon as political scientists?), we will study how the rules of the game affect the decisions politicians make as well as the policy outcomes we observe.

Readings

There are two required books for the course: Shepsle and Bonchek's *Analyzing Politics* (SB) and Dixit and Nalebuff's *Thinking Strategically* (DN). Additional readings will be made available on e-reserves/Blackboard, via e-mail, or in class as necessary.

Course Requirements

- **Exams**
There will be three closed-book exams in the course on October 9, November 8, and December 13. There is no final exam. *Make-up exams are not given—no exceptions.*
- **Problem sets**
Problem sets will be assigned throughout the semester. While I strongly encourage you to work together on assignments, each student must prepare his or her own write-up. *Late homework will not be accepted.*

Grading

- *Exams* each count toward *thirty percent* of your grade.
- *Problem sets* will collectively count toward *ten percent* of your grade.

Sections and TAs

There will be optional sections held throughout the semester to clarify course concepts and review the answers to the problem sets. In addition, teaching assistants will hold office hours, providing you with another source for assistance with course material. Details about sections and the teaching assistants will be addressed in class early in the semester.

E-mail List

I will sometimes communicate with you by e-mail using a list automatically generated from addresses on file with the Registrar's Office (typically your @mail account). Blackboard may also be used for announcements; if this is done, I will let you know.

COURSE OUTLINE

*****dates for specific lectures are approximate; exam dates are set in stone*****

September 4: Introduction

TOPIC 1: Individual Preferences and Rationality

1. September 6

Reading: SB, chs. 1-2

TOPIC 2: Group Choice

2a. September 11: Voting Rules

Reading: SB, ch. 3 and pp. 167-177

2b. September 13 and 18: Condorcet's Paradox and Arrow's Impossibility Theorem

Reading: SB, ch. 4 (skip pp. 72-76)

2c. September 20, 25, and 27: The Spatial Model

Reading: SB, pp. 82-103

TOPIC 3: Game Theory

3a. October 2 and 4: Solving Basic Games

Reading: DN, pp. 1-86

EXAM 1 (covers Topics 1 and 2): October 9

3b. October 11: Experiments

Reading: None

TOPIC 4: Collective Action Problems

4a. October 16: Prisoner's Dilemma

Reading: DN, ch. 4; SB, ch. 8

4b. October 18: Voting and Other Multiperson Collective Action Problems

Reading: SB, ch. 9

TOPIC 5: Public Goods, Externalities, and the Commons

5a. October 23: Public Goods

Reading: SB, pp. 260-277

5b. October 25: Externalities and the Commons Problem

Reading: SB, pp. 278-287

5c. October 30: The Commons Problem

Reading: SB, pp. 288-296

TOPIC 6: Elections

6a. November 1 and 6: Candidate Location Models

Reading: SB, pp. 103-115; DN, pp. 248-250

EXAM 2 (covers Topics 3-5): November 8

6b. November 13: Electoral Systems

Reading: SB, pp. 177-184, 188-191

TOPIC 7: Legislatures

7a. November 15: Legislators

Reading: SB, ch. 6; DN, ch. 10

7b. November 20 and 27: Institutions and Rules

Reading: SB, pp. 115-133, chs. 11-12

TOPIC 8: Interbranch Bargaining

8. November 29 and December 4: Presidents, Bureaucrats, and the Courts

Reading: SB, ch. 15

December 6 and December 11: Review and Wrap-Up

EXAM 3 (covers Topics 6-8): December 13

There is no final exam.