

POLI 288: Strategy and Politics

Fall 2010

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Office Hours: Monday 11:00am-Noon; Thursday 2pm-3pm

Course Overview

This class offers an introduction to “positive political theory.” Loosely speaking, positive political theory consists of the application of rational choice analysis (or “economic” models) to the study of political phenomena. Questions we will consider include: Is it meaningful to talk about “what citizens want” in politics? Is there anything special or desirable about majority rule? How important are the arcane legislative rules by which Congress functions in determining public policy? Why is it so difficult to overthrow oppressive regimes? How are constitutions enforced? To answer these questions, we will employ simple models that can sharpen our intuition, and sometimes lead to surprising and unexpected insights. While no advanced mathematical background is required, you will need to be familiar with algebra and basic geometric reasoning. It also helps if you enjoy logic puzzles!

By the end of the semester, you will not only have gained new insights into a range of important political phenomena. You will also have acquired a new analytic perspective that will allow you to think about politics from a more nuanced and critical vantage point.

Readings

There is one required textbook, available at the campus bookstore:

1. [•Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Boncheck. Analyzing Politics. New York: Norton.](#)

There will be additional readings available through this website or the blackboard page for this course. See the semester schedule below for details.

GRADES AND EVALUATION

Grades will be determined based on a midterm exam, a cumulative final exam, two abstracts (~4 pages), a short paper (~6 pages), and class participation. Details on the abstracts and paper assignment will be provided in class.

Midterm Exam: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Abstracts and Paper: 30%

Class Participation: 10%

Course grades will be determined according to the following grading scale:

A: 93-100 A-: 90-92 B+: 88-89 B: 83-87
B-: 80-82 C+: 78-79 C: 73-77 C-: 70-72
D+: 68-69 D: 63-67 D-: 60-62 F: 0-59

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Students and faculty at UNC are governed by the Honor Code, and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student who is caught attempting to represent someone else's work as their own or to cheat in any other manner will be subject to university discipline under the Honor Code. If

you have any questions regarding this policy, you can refer to the University Code of Conduct [by clicking here](#).

STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGES

Students with challenges who require individualized testing or other accommodations should identify themselves and express their needs during the first week of the semester. Where the challenge is not immediately apparent, verification will be required.

(TENTATIVE) SEMESTER SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (8/24 and 8/26): Introduction

1. •Shepsle and Bonchek - Chapters 1 and 2

WEEK 2 (8/31 and 9/2 - no class on 9/2): Preferences, Strategy, and Models

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 3

WEEK 3 (9/7 and 9/9 - no class on 9/9): Social Choice

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 4, pp.39-62

WEEK 4 (9/14 and 9/16): Social Choice

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 4, pp.63-81 (new edition pp.67-89)
2. •[William Riker. 1982. Liberalism Against Populism. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press. Chapter 10: "Liberalism, Populism, and the Theory of Social Choice."](#)

WEEK 5 (9/21 and 9/23): The Spatial Model

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 5, pp.82-114 (new edition pp.90-123)

WEEK 6 (9/28 and 9/30): Agenda Setting

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 5, pp.115-136 (new edition pp.124-155)
2. •[John Huber. 1996. "The Vote of Confidence in Parliamentary Democracies." American Political Science Review 90:269-82.](#)

WEEK 7 (10/5 and 10/7): Strategic Voting

1. •Shepsle and Boncheck - Chapter 6
2. •[William Riker. 1986. Art of Political Manipulation. Chapter 2: "Chauncey DePew and the Seventeenth Amendment."](#)

WEEK 8 (10/12 and 10/14 - no class on 10/12 (University Day)):

1. • Midterm Exam on Thursday, 10/14

WEEK 9 (10/19 and 10/21 - no class on 10/21 (Fall Break)): Veto Bargaining

1. •[Charles Cameron. 2000. Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 4.](#)

WEEK 10 (10/26 and 10/28): Cooperation

1. • Shepsle and Bonchek, Chapter 8
2. •[Robert Axelrod. 1984. The Evolution of Cooperation. Chapter 4: "The Live-and-Let-Live System in Trench Warfare in World War I."](#)

WEEK 11 (11/2 and 11/4): Collective Action

1. • Shepsle and Bonchek, Chapter 9
2. •[Rasma Karklins and Roger Petersen. 1993. "Decision Calculus of Protestors and Regimes." Journal of Politics 55:588-615.](#)

WEEK 12 (11/9 and 11/11): Public Goods and the Commons

1. • Shepsle and Bonchek, Chapter 10
2. •[Elinor Ostrom. 1990. Governing the Commons. Chapter 1: "Reflections on the Commons."](#)
3. •[Gordon Tullock. 1971. "Public Decisions as Public Goods." Journal of Political Economy 79: 913-18.](#)

WEEK 13 (11/16 and 11/18): Democratic Challenges

1. •[Gordon Tullock. 1967. "Political Ignorance." In Gordon Tullock. The Economics of Politics. Indianapolis. Liberty Fund Press.](#)
2. •[Gordon Tullock. 2000. "Some Further Thoughts on Voting." Public Choice 104: 181-2.](#)

3. [•Gordon Tullock. 1967. "The Politics of Persuasion." In Gordon Tullock. The Economics of Politics. Indianapolis. Liberty Fund Press.](#)
4. [•Gordon Tullock. 1994. "Democracy As It Really Is." In Gordon Tullock. The Economics of Politics. Indianapolis. Liberty Fund Press.](#)

WEEK 14 (11/23 and 11/25 - no class on 11/25 (Thanksgiving)): Constitutionalism

1. [•James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. The Calculus of Consent. Chapter 6: "A Generalized Economic Theory of Constitutions."](#)

WEEK 15 (11/30 and 12/2 - no class on 12/2): Credible Commitment

1. [•Thomas Schelling. 1966. Arms and Influence. Chapter 2: "The Art of Commitment."](#)
2. [•Douglass North and Barry Weingast. 1989. "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England." Journal of Economic History 49: 803-32.](#)

WEEK 16 (12/7): Review

FINAL EXAM THURSDAY DECEMBER 16 AT NOON

