

Politics and Society

Political Science 222

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:20 PM, 4 Clemens

Fall semester, 2009

Instructor: Jason Sorens

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9 AM to 1 PM and by appointment; 419 Park Hall

Email: jsorens@buffalo.edu

Course Description

This course is an advanced introduction to positive political theory, that is, general explanations for why politics works the way it does. We will explore both “rational choice” and sociological explanations of politics, with a focus on institutions and ideologies. A closely related but non-overlapping course is PSC316, the Politics of Political Choice, taught by Professor Palmer, which focuses more on voting behavior in mass publics.

In this course we develop theoretical tools to analyze the following topics: reasons for the existence of government, the collective pursuit of common goals, policy-making in legislatures, and reasons for political conflict and war. We will talk more about general explanations of these phenomena than about details concerning particular policy choices or political outcomes. The format of the course is a mix of lecture, discussion, student presentations, and classroom simulations and games. One of the central components of the course is an online Model Parliament simulation in which every student will be expected to participate regularly. We will be doing some simple game theory and making extensive use of basic algebra and two-axis graphs and charts.

Course Requirements

The goal of this course is to give you a solid foundation in theories of politics, which will allow you to examine problems of human action analytically and develop general, causal explanations of observed patterns. These skills will prove useful in disciplines such as sociology, political science, and economics.

To keep up with the pace of the course, you must do **all** the reading for a particular “topic” **before** the lecture on that topic (see class schedule below). I will not waste time taking attendance, but you will need to be in class regularly in order to do well. If you have questions about the material early on, bring them to me right away, because if you get lost at the beginning, it will quickly become difficult for you to catch up.

Readings

I have chosen the following two books for the course, both of which are available at the bookstore:

Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior and Institutions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

Axelrod, Robert, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Shepsle and Bonchek is a general introduction to political economy for undergraduates, and it covers almost all of the topics we'll be studying, although sometimes only briefly. Axelrod's book on cooperation, along with the early game theory literature that inspired it, has radically influenced not only political science, but other social sciences and even evolutionary biology. In addition to the books, there are several required essay readings available in PDF format on the course's UBLearn site, marked with a number sign on the reading list below (#). Since there is no book that exactly covers the content of this class, attending lectures will be crucial for mastering the material.

A useful reference or instructional book for those having trouble with the game theory is Morrow's *Game Theory for Political Scientists*, which I have placed on reserve in the undergraduate library.

Grading

Your grade is determined by a series of ten short-answer quizzes given throughout the semester (total share of final grade: 40%), by your participation in the online and in-class Model Parliament simulation (20%), and by a take-home essay final, due on Monday **December 21 at 4 PM** at my office (40%). Quizzes will take place at the beginning of class and cannot be made up for any non-excused reason, so be present and be on time. I will not accept late final exams: you will have to take either an F or an Incomplete in the course if you do not hand in your final exam on time.

Academic Integrity

I have noticed that many UB students are not adequately familiar with the scope, content, and importance of academic integrity. According to UB Rules and Regulations:

'The University has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect for others' academic endeavors. By placing their name on academic work, students certify the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments.'

Academic dishonesty includes:

- (a) Previously submitted work: submitting academically required material that has been previously submitted in whole or in substantial part in another course, without prior and expressed consent of the instructor;
- (b) Plagiarism: copying or receiving material from a source or sources and submitting this material as one's own without acknowledging the particular debts

to the source (quotations, paraphrases, basic ideas), or otherwise representing the work of another as one's own;

(c) Cheating: receiving information, or soliciting information, from another student or other unauthorized source, or giving information to another student, with the intent to deceive while completing an examination or individual assignment;

(d) Falsification of academic materials: fabricating laboratory materials, notes, reports, or any forms of computer data; forging an instructor's name or initials; resubmitting an examination or assignment for reevaluation which has been altered without the instructor's authorization; or submitting a report, paper, materials, computer data, or examination (or any considerable part thereof) prepared by any person other than the student responsible for the assignment;

(e) Misrepresentation of documents: Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any University or Official document, record, or instrument of identification.

(f) Confidential academic materials: procurement, distribution or acceptance of examinations, laboratory results without prior and expressed consent of the instructor.

(g) Selling academic assignments: No person shall, for financial consideration, or the promise or financial consideration, prepare, offer to prepare, cause to be prepared, sell or offer for sale to any person any written material which the seller knows, is informed or has reason to believe is intended for submission as a dissertation or thesis, term paper, essay, report or other written assignment by a student in a university, college, academy, school or other educational institution to such institution or to a course, seminar or degree program held by such institution.

(h) Selling computer assignments: No person shall sell or offer for sale to any person enrolled in the State University of New York any computer assignment, or any assistance in the preparation, research, or writing of a computer assignment intended for submission in fulfillment of any academic requirement.

UB guidelines currently provide the instructor with a wide range of discretion as to the penalties to pursue for any violation of academic integrity. For clear and particularly serious violations of academic integrity such as cheating, my policy, with no exceptions, is to fail the student in the course. For lesser violations such as low-degree plagiarism, severe point deductions, up to failure of the assignment, is standard. Regarding plagiarism, please note that **you must cite every idea or piece of evidence in your paper that you derived from someone else**. In addition, encyclopedias such as Wikipedia and biased publications from activist organizations are not acceptable sources for scholarly research, although they may well be appropriate places to begin your research. Use primary sources such as news articles for establishing facts and refereed, published research for establishing generally accepted relationships and ideas.

Topics

1. Introduction to important course concepts (Sep 1)
2. Individual rationality and efficiency

Shepsle and Bonchek, chapters 1 & 2. (Sep 3)
Quiz #1

3. The relationship between efficiency and justice
Amartya Sen (1970), "The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal," *Journal of Political Economy* 78 (1): 152-157. (Sep 8) #
John Rawls (1958), "Justice as Fairness," *The Philosophical Review* 67 (2): 164-194, parts 2, 3, 6, and 7 only (pp. 165-174, 184-193) (Sep 10) #

4. Individual preferences, group decisions
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 3. (Sep 15)
Quiz #2

5. Arrow's impossibility theorem
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 4. (Sep 17)

6. Majority rule
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 5. (Sep 22)
No reading Sep 24
Quiz #3

7. From political philosophies to ideologies
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XIII, XVII, XVIII, XXIX (Sep 29) #
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapters II, VII, VIII (Oct 1) #
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Parts I, II (Oct 6) #
Quiz #4
No reading Oct 8 – Model Parliament forums open

8. Voting rules
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 7. (Oct 13)

No reading: Model Parliament Session I (Oct 15)

9. Electoral systems
Kathleen Bawn, "The Logic of Institutional Preferences." (Oct 20) #
Gary Cox, "Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems." (Oct 22) #
Quiz #5

10. The Prisoner's Dilemma I: The Problem
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 8. (Oct 27)
Axelrod, Preface and Part I. (Oct 29)
Quiz #6

11. The Prisoner's Dilemma II: Public Goods and Externalities
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 10. (Nov 3)
No reading Nov 5

12. The Prisoner's Dilemma III: Cooperation Under Anarchy
Axelrod, Parts II and V. (Nov 10)
Quiz #7

13. Bargaining in Legislatures & Parliaments
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 11. (Nov 12)
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapters 12 & 16 (Nov 17)
Quiz #8

No reading: Model Parliament Session II (Nov 19)

12. Bureaucracy (Nov 24)
Shepsle and Bonchek, chapter 13.
(no class 11/26: Fall Recess)

13. War and Conflict
James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War." (Dec 1) #
Quiz #9

No reading: Model Parliament Session III (Dec 3)

14. Systems of Government
George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems." (Dec 8) #
Barry Weingast, "Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of
Law." (Dec 10) #
Quiz #10
Short Model Parliament Session IV.