

# DESIGNING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Spring 2017

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<b>Instructor:</b> Michael Gibilisco	<b>Time:</b> MW 11:50-13:05
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**Objectives:** Why does the U.S. Constitution feature separation of powers and protect states' rights? Should the Senate have a filibuster? When can Congress agree on the best policy for the country (and what does "best" even mean)? This course uses a rigorous set of tools including game theory to help students understand the structure of American government. With these tools, we will study U.S. electoral systems, Congress, federalism, and the courts, with a focus on understanding how the country has tried to overcome the challenges of group decision making and the inevitable conflicts that arise between the branches of government. Students will leave the course with a deeper understanding of how rules and strategy shape U.S. democracy.

I have two goals when teaching this course. Primarily, we use rational choice theory to understand how the rules of American political institutions affect the behavior of citizens and politicians and the policies they adopt. As such, we cover major problems in organizing groups such as collective action problems, coordination problems, and conflicting values, and apply these topics to the study of American politics. Secondly, we review modern techniques used in rational choice and institutional analysis including social choice and game theory.

**Prerequisites:** There are no formal mathematical prerequisites for the course, although some familiarity with logical/mathematical reasoning will be necessary. All that is required is command of high school algebra and a willingness to learn new tools and applications, including very introductory treatments of probability theory, game theory, integrals, derivatives, *etc.* If you appear to be having trouble with the material, please meet with me as soon as possible.

**Office Hours:** I will hold office hours on Mondays between 2–4pm. Please email me if you would like to meet outside these times. My office is 334 Harkness Hall.

**Course Materials:** This class is primarily lecture based, and I will publish slides on Blackboard after lectures for reference. In addition, having regular access to the following books is important:

- *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, 2nd Edition, by Kenneth A. Shepsle (New York: W.W. Norton).
- *Games of Strategy*, 4th Edition, by Avinash K. Dixit and Susan Skeath (New York: W.W. Norton).

## Tentative Course Outline:

Deciding whether or not to vote

- Chapters 1 and 2 in Shepsle
- "The Paradox of Not Voting" Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974) *American Political Science Review*, 68.2, pp. 525–536

Majority rule

- Condorcet's Paradox; Shepsle: Chapters 3

- Median Voter Theorem; Shepsle: Chapters 4
- McKelvey's Chaos Theorem; Shepsle: Chapters 5
- "Gatekeeping and Monopoly Power of Committees: An Analysis of Sincere and Sophisticated Behavior" Denzau and MacKay (1974) *American Journal of Political Science*, 27.4, pp. 740-761

#### Game theory introduction

- Normal form games; D&S: Chapters 4,5,8
- Strategic form games; D&S: Chapters 3

#### Bargaining in the federal government

- Romer–Rosenthal Bargaining
- "Pivots" Chapter 12, Krehbiel (1998) in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, Eds: Weingast and Wittman, Oxford: The University of Oxford Press, pp. 1–48.
- "Fair Play in Assemblies" Gibilisco (2015) *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 10.2, pp. 275–320.
- *Veto Bargaining*, Chapters 1 & 4 Cameron (2000) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- "Bargaining in Legislatures" Baron and Ferejohn (1989) *American Political Science Review*, 83.4, pp. 1181-1206

#### Decentralization and Public Goods

- Shepsle: Chapters 9, 10; D&S: Chapter 11
- "Centralized Versus Decentralized Provision of Local Public Goods: A Political Economy Approach" Besley and Coate, *Journal of Public Economics*, 87.12, pp. 2611-2637
- "Political Decentralization and Economic Reform: A Game-Theoretic Analysis" Treisman (1999) *American Journal of Political Science*, 43.2, pp. 488-517.
- Prisoner's dilemma; D&S: Chapter 10
- "Valuing Exit Options," Bednar (2007) *Publius*, 37.2, pp. 190–208.

#### Delegation and Bureaucracy

- S&B: Chapter 13
- "Divided Government and the Design of Administrative Procedures: A Formal Model and Empirical Test" Epstein and O'Halloran (1996) *Journal of Politics*, 58.2, pp. 373-397.
- "A Formal Model of the Politics of Delegation in a Separation of Powers System" Volden (2002) *American Journal of Political Science*, 46.1, pp. 111-133.

#### Models of courts and judges

- S&B: Chapter 15
- "Game Theory, Legal History, and the Origins of Judicial Review: A Revisionist Analysis of *Marbury v. Madison*," Clinton (1994) *American Journal of Political Science*, 38.2, pp. 285-302.
- "Certiorari and Compliance in the Judicial Hierarchy," Lax (2003) *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15.1: pp. 61–86.

**Grading Policy:** There will be three take home exams, each of which will be worth 30% of your grade. In addition, participation in class will comprise the remaining 10%.

The exams will include two types of questions. One type will test your comprehension of the technical material, albeit at an introductory level. The second type will be an essay question, requiring you to read a non-technical piece of writing and interpret the argument in light of a class lecture. The length of the essay answer should be between 250–750 words. You must work independently on the exam, and this precludes discussing the exam with your colleagues. Because exams require additional reading, I will cancel *one* class the week of the exam. The *tentative* exam dates are as follows:

1. Exam 1: Feb. 21–28
2. Exam 2: March 28–April 4
3. Exam 3: Finals week

If you are entitled to examination accommodation, please coordinate with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in advance of the examination. Students will not be able to obtain accommodations directly from the instructor or the teaching assistant.

**Class Policy:** Regular attendance is essential and expected. If you need to miss a class, please discuss this with me as soon as something arises.

**Academic Honesty:** All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation.

**Disclaimer:** The schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to ensure better student learning.