The last ten years or so have seen a major revolution in the social sciences. Instead of trying to discover and test grand “covering laws” that have universal validity and tremendous scope—think Newton’s gravity or Einstein’s relativity—the social sciences are in the process of switching to more narrow and middle-range theories and explanations, often referred to as causal mechanisms.

In the bulk of this course students will be introduced to formal reasoning in an informal manner. However, I will introduce students to some very basic heuristics formal models to show the power and potential of this approach. We will examine one particular mechanism each week and see how it has been applied in international political economy and/or security studies. We will explore several substantive themes, such as the “democratic peace,” ethnic conflict and international trade to illustrate the mechanisms and cumulative potential of this research approach.

**Course Requirements** Students are of course required to read all the material; be ready to summarize each paper in a cogent paragraph or two; and participate in class discussion. Participation in the seminar comprises a third of your grade. Participation includes participation in class discussions, as well as one group class presentations. Thus, each student is required to work in a group format and present and lead the discussion on one class.

A midterm exam counts for another third of your grade, and a final exam counts for the final a third of your grade. The final exam is given during the period scheduled by the University. In particular instances, students may substitute a serious research paper for the final. Students interested in the research paper option should approach me no later than one week after the mid-term.

**Academic Integrity**
Be familiar with the University’s policies on academic integrity and disciplinary action (http://www.rochester.edu/living/urhere/handbook/discipline2.html#XII). Violators of University regulations on academic integrity will be dealt with severely, which means that your grade will suffer, and I will forward your case to the Chair of the College Board on Academic Honesty.

**Teaching Assistants:**

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**Texts**

I will provide a hand-out with the typed up lecture notes, currently about 75 pages. I will provide these twice during the semester, once the week before the Mid-term and the second time before the Final.

The following books should be in the bookstore:


Readings not included in one of the texts can be found through one of the online databases or on the library’s course web page. These readings are listed in the syllabus in italics. In addition, I expect students to read one of the following newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Financial Times*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine, Die Zeit, Le Monde diplomatique* or a comparable international paper.
Course Outline

Tuesday September 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Tuesday September 8

2. Causal Mechanisms


Tuesday September 15

3. Rational Choice and Strategic Choice


Tuesday September 22

4. The Prisoner's Dilemma

Tuesday September 29

5. Coordination


Tuesday October 6

6. Coordination; Tipping Models


Optional


Tuesday October 13

7. Commitment Problems

Tuesday October 23

8. **Mid Term Exam**

Tuesday October 27

9. **Bargaining**


Tuesday November 3

10. **Signalling (Tying Hands, Sinking Costs)**


Tuesday November 10

11. **Principal-Agent Models**

12. **Selection Effects**


Tuesday November 24

13. **Institutions in International Relations**


Tuesday December 1

14. **Psychological Mechanisms**

Tuesday December 8: Last Day of Class

15. Psychological Mechanisms


Friday December 18th at 12:30

16. Final Exam
Questions to consider in formulating and evaluating social science research

1. *What is the central question?*
   - Why is it important (theoretically, substantively)?
   - What is being explained (what is the dependent variable and how does it vary)?
   - How does this phenomenon present a puzzle?

2. *What is the central answer?*
   - What is doing the explaining (what are the independent variables and how do they vary)?
   - What are the hypotheses, i.e., what is the relationship between independent and dependent variables, what kind of change in the independent variable causes what kind of change in the dependent variable?
   - What are the causal mechanisms, i.e., why are the independent and dependent variables so related?
   - How do the independent variables relate to each other?
   - What assumptions does your theory make?
   - Is the theory falsifiable in concept?
   - What does this explanation add to our understanding of the question?

3. *What are the possible alternative explanations?*
   - What assumptions are you making about the direction of causality?
   - What other explanations might there be for the phenomenon of study, and to what degree do they conflict with the central answer?
   - Could the hypothesized relationships have occurred by chance?

4. *Why are the possible alternative explanations wrong?*
   - What is the logical structure of the alternative explanations (compare 2)?
   - What is the empirical evidence?

5. *What is the relationship between the theory and the evidence?*
   - What does the research design allow to vary, i.e., in this design are the explanations variables or constants?
   - What does your research design hold constant, i.e., does it help to rule out the alternative competing explanations?
   - How are the theoretical constructs represented empirically, i.e., how do you know it when you see it (measurement)?

6. *How do the empirical conclusions relate to the theory?*
   - How confident are you about the theory in light of the evidence?
   - How widely do the conclusions generalize, i.e., what might be the limitations of the study?
   - What does the provisionally accepted or revised theory say about questions of broader importance?