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Fall 2008, Tues. and Thurs. 9:40-10:55
Office Hours: Mon. 1-3 and by appt.
www.rochester.edu/College/PSC/primo

PSC 107: Introduction to Positive Political Theory

Course Description
Why do we always hear about "gridlock" paralyzing the federal government? When politicians talk about what "the people want" or "the public interest," what do they actually mean? Is there an electoral system that is best for a country or state? Is it ever rational to vote? These are some of the questions we will tackle in this course using positive political theory, a rigorous set of tools that will help you view politics in a new way and challenge the conventional wisdom in the process. Through examples drawn from all aspects of politics, from elections to lawmaking to regulation, as well as from everyday life, we will study the challenges of group decision making and the ways in which rules influence outcomes.

Blackboard
I use Blackboard to send out announcements and post readings and other course materials. These announcements are also sent to the e-mail address you have on file with the College. You can access Blackboard at http://my.rochester.edu.

Readings
There is one required textbook for the course: Shepsle and Bonchek's *Analyzing Politics* (SB). Readings for Topic 3 (Game Theory) will be made available on Blackboard under the Reserves link on the course page. Any readings added during the semester will be made available on Blackboard under the Course Materials link.

Course Requirements
- *Exams*
  There will be three closed-book exams in the course on October 7, November 6, and December 11. 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.

Recitations and TAs
There will be optional recitations 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 additional assistance with course material. Details about recitations and the teaching assistants will be addressed in class early in the semester.

COURSE OUTLINE
dates for specific lectures are approximate; exam dates are set in stone

September 2: Introduction

TOPIC 1: Individual Preferences and Rationality

1. September 4
   Reading: SB, chs. 1-2

TOPIC 2: Group Choice

2a. September 9 and 11: Voting Rules
   Reading: SB, ch. 3 and pp. 167-177

2b. September 11 and 16: Condorcet's Paradox and Arrow's Impossibility Theorem
   Reading: SB, ch. 4 (skip pp. 72-76)

2c. September 18, 23, and 25: The Spatial Model
   Reading: SB, pp. 82-103

TOPIC 3: Game Theory

3a. September 30 and October 2: Solving Basic Games
   Reading: Dixit and Skeath (Reserves—Blackboard)

EXAM 1 (covers Topics 1 and 2): October 7

3b. October 9: Experiments and Behavioral Economics
   Reading: Adler (Reserves—Blackboard)
             Basu (Reserves—Blackboard)
             Gandel (Reserves—Blackboard)

TOPIC 4: Collective Action Problems

4a. October 14: Prisoner's Dilemma
   Reading: SB, ch. 8

4b. October 16 and 21: 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 28: 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 4 and 11: Candidate Location Models
    Reading: SB, pp. 103-115

EXAM 2 (covers Topics 3-5): November 6

6b. November 13: Electoral Systems
    Reading: SB, pp. 177-184, 188-191

6c. November 18: Electoral Reform
    Reading: To be announced

TOPIC 7: Legislatures

7a. November 20: Legislators
    Reading: SB, ch. 6

7b. November 25, December 2 and 4: Institutions and Rules
    Reading: SB, pp. 115-133, chs. 11-12

December 9: Course Wrap-Up and Review

EXAM 3 (covers Topics 6-7): December 11

There is no final exam.