PSC 107: Introduction to Positive Political Theory

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University of Rochester
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Tuesday and Thursday, 11:05-12:15
Dewey 2162

Office Hours: Thursdays, Harkness Hall 323, 12:30-1:30

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to positive political theory, a rigorous set of tools that will help you view politics in a new way and challenge conventional wisdom in the process. We use these tools to address two broad sets of questions. 1.) In institution-free society (anarchy) how can agents obtain cooperation and, under what conditions might the construction of formal political institutions like states help achieve these outcomes?   2.) How does democracy emerge and, when it does, how are preferences aggregated by democratic institutions?

Evaluation

Grades have three components: six problem sets, recitation, and a final exam. The problem sets are worth 10%. Each will test your ability to think strategically about basic problems in politics and will ask you to become familiar with several commonly used datasets. There will be two in-class exams each worth 20%.

All problem sets and exams will be graded blind. That is, to be assured you are evaluated fairly, instead of submitting assignments with your name attached, you will submit them with your student ID#. No late problem sets or exams will be accepted. If you want to challenge your grade you can. However, if upon re-assessment your grade does not improve (it stays the same or decreases) you will be docked one-half of a letter grade (e.g. you will go from a B to a B-).

Course Materials

I will post all course materials on blackboard. Most importantly, this includes links to required readings and PDFs of lecture slides. There are no required books for this course.

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.

<div align="center">**COURSE OUTLINE**</div>

<div align="center">*****dates for specific lectures are approximate; exam dates are set in stone*****</div>

TOPIC 1 – What are Models and Why Use Them?
Date: January 18, 23
Reading:
Rubenstein chs. 0-1; Angrist & Pitschke ch 1

January 25 – *Experiment for Professor Geomans*

TOPIC 2 – Cooperation, Conflict, and the State
Reading: North (1991) ch 1; Carniero

       TOPIC 2a – Coordination
       Date: January 29
       Reading: Rousseau 18-21

       TOPIC 2b – Conflict
       Date: February 1, 6, 13
       Reading: Hobbes XVII-XVIII; Ostrom c3h 1

February 8 *Class Canceled*

       TOPIC 2c – The Shadow of the Future
       Date: February 15, 20
       Reading: Olson ch 1 ; Boix (2015) ch 1; Axelrod chs 1, 4

       TOPIC 2d – Bargaining
       Date: February 22, 27, March 1
       Reading: Fearon (1995)

March 6 *Midterm Exam*

TOPIC 3 – Political Regimes

       TOPIC 3a – What is Democracy & Empirical Patterns

Date: March 8
Reading: Dahl, Boix, Miller Rosato (2013).

TOPIC 3b – Commitment Problems and Democracy
Date: *March 20, 22*
Reading: Downs; Boix (2003) ch 1; Weingast (1997)

TOPIC 3c – Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy
Date: March 27,
Reading: Pzerworski TBD

TOPIC 4 – Elections

TOPIC 4a – Spatial Models
Date: March 29, April 3
Reading: Shepsle and Bonchek TBD

TOPIC 4b – Elections as a Principal Agent Problem
Date: April 10, 12
Reading: Fearon (1999)

April 5 *Class Canceled*

TOPIC 4c – Social Choice
Date: April 17, 19
Reading: Shepsle and Bonchek TBD

TOPIC 5 – Legislative Politics

TOPIC 5a – Bargaining Within and Between Branches
Date: April 26
Reading: Khreibil TBD, Cameron TBD

(BONUS LECTURE – IF WE HAVE TIME)

TOPIC 6 – Why Vote?

      TOPIC 6a – Rational Turnout?
      Reading: Riker & Ordeshook, Gerber & Green

May 1 *Final Exam*