

PSCI 107
Introduction to Positive Political Theory
Spring 2026

Instructor

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Description

This course introduces students to Positive Political Theory (PPT), a set of tools that helps clarify key questions in political science. Through examples drawn from all aspects of the politics (elections, lawmaking, policymaking, bureaucracy, protest, lobbying, bribery, propaganda, wars, coups, riots, etc. etc. etc.), we will explore how political scientists use PPT to explore conjectures and hypotheses about how politics might work.

Class Meetings

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-1:45, Dewey Hall, Room 1101

Grading

Your grade depends on two things: **in-class exams**, and **participation in problem-solving sessions**.

There are 4 in-class exams:

- Module 1 Exam, February 17, 12:30 - 1:45, Dewey Hall, Room 1101
- Module 2 Exam, March 31, 12:30 - 1:45, Dewey Hall, Room 1101
- Module 3 Exam, April 28, 12:30 - 1:45, Dewey Hall, Room 1101
- Final Exam, May 10, 8:30am - 11:30am, location TBD

Problem solving sessions take place at the scheduled time and place of the recitation section for which you are registered. The actual dates of the recitation sessions at which participation counts towards your grade are listed on the course Blackboard site.

You get a score on a 100-point scale for each of the four exams. These 100-point are scores averaged to compute your **overall exam score**. (Thus all exams, including the final, are equally weighted.) You get an **overall participation score** on a 100-point scale for participation in the problem-solving sessions, given as follows:

Percentage of scheduled problem-solving sessions you attend	Overall participation score
80% or more	100
greater than or equal to 50%, less than 80%	90
less than 50%	0

Based on your exam and participation scores, you earn an **overall course score** as follows: If your overall exam score is **less than** your overall participation score, your overall course score is given by:

$$0.8 \times \text{overall exam score} + 0.2 \times \text{overall participation score}$$

If instead your overall exam score is **greater than or equal to** your overall participation score, your overall course score is equal to your overall exam score. (In words: Your overall participation score counts for 20% of your grade if it is higher than your overall exam score. Otherwise your overall exam score counts for 100% of your grade.)

Your overall course score determines your course letter grade as follows:

Overall course score	Course letter grade
greater than or equal to 94	A
greater than or equal to 88, less than 94	A-
greater than or equal to 82, less than 88	B+
greater than or equal to 76, less than 82	B
greater than or equal to 70, less than 76	B-
greater than or equal to 64, less than 70	C+
greater than or equal to 58, less than 64	C
greater than or equal to 52, less than 58	C-
greater than or equal to 46, less than 52	D+
greater than or equal to 40, less than 46	D
greater than or equal to 34, less than 40	D-

Overall course score	Course letter grade
less than 34	E

Resources for Succeeding

As you can see, your letter grade is almost entirely dependent on your performance on the four exams. Here are the resource available to you (in order of importance) for learning what's required to succeed on the exams:

- **Free online textbook.** [at this link](#). The textbook is divided into eight “lessons”. Each lesson includes a series of un-graded exercises called “Checks of Understanding” (abbreviated as “COU”s). The course schedule on Blackboard specifies the lessons and COUs you should plan to work through on your own during each week of the semester. **Nothing you can do in this course will have a greater impact on your exam performance than the time you spend on your own or with your peers reading the lessons and working through the COUs.** If you want a good grade in this course, set aside 3-4 hours each week for this.
- **Practice Exams.** There are a collection of practice exams on the course blackboard site. The practice exams are not especially useful as tools for learning the material when you encounter it. But they **are** useful for assessing your readiness for each exam **after** you have worked through the lessons and COUs the exam covers. If you want a good grade in this course, you should plan to complete all the relevant practice exams during the week prior to each scheduled exam.
- **Problem Solving Sessions.** These take place during the recitation section for which you are registered. The purpose of these sessions is to provide you with a fun, supportive environment in which to deepen your mastery of the material. In each one, the TA facilitating that session will guide the group through solving one “warm up” problem that covers a foundational skill, and then a “challenge” that applies multiple skills to a difficult problem. Your participation score for the course is determined by the percentage of these sessions you attend.
- **Class Meetings.** Each class meeting will feature an interactive lecture that covers a selection of the material from the portion of the online textbook. Lectures are a great way to see the same material from the textbook applied to additional applications and examples. You can expect the lectures to enhance and deepen the understanding you develop from working through the textbook on your own. But attending lecture will not be sufficient by itself to succeed on the exams.

- **Office Hours.** The instructor holds office hours on Thursdays from 2:00 - 3:15. Office hours are a good place to go if you'd like some clarification about a concept or technique that you struggled with when working through the online textbook or practice exams.

Other Info

Course Objectives

Positive Political Theory (PPT) is a collection of techniques used in political science research for building models that depict political processes. Most political scientists use PPT in their research, and results and assumptions from PPT models are assumed knowledge in many conversations between political scientists about their research. This course seeks to enhance students' ability to learn from and participate in political science research by building their familiarity with foundational PPT techniques and conventions.

Prerequisites

None.

Credit Hours

4.

Required Course Materials

None.

Academic Honesty Requirements

All of the requirements of [the Academic Honesty Policy of the School of Arts & Sciences](#) apply to this course. Most importantly, exams in the course are closed-note and closed-book and must be completed completely independently. Suspected violations of this requirement will be reported as required by AS&E's Academic Honesty Policy.

Disability Resources

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall; www.rochester.edu/college/disability.

For students with Office of Disability (ODR) approved testing accommodations, the course instructor has made arrangements with ODR for their proctoring assistance for this class. Students must make requests for accommodated exams directly with ODR following the deadlines listed in ODR Testing Policies.

Credit Hour Policy Statement

This course follows the College credit hour policy for four-credit courses.