

# POLI112A: Economic Theories of Political Behavior

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00 - 6.20, WLH 2205

**Prof. Federica Izzo**

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays 3:15-4:45

## Course Description

This course introduces students to rational choice theory and game theory as tools to analyze political phenomena. These frameworks will be applied to investigate topics such as electoral competition, the functioning of legislatures and the emergence of democratic institutions.

## Prerequisites

The course has no prerequisites, and it requires no previous knowledge of game theory or mathematics beyond what is typically taught in high school.

## Course Material

Most of the readings come from two textbooks:

- An introduction to Game Theory, by Martin Osborne
- Analyzing Politics (Rationality, Behavior and Institutions), by Ken Shepsle and Mark Boncheck

Both are available to be purchased in hard copy. The Osborne book is also available as .pdf here:

<https://www.economics.utoronto.ca/osborne/igt/>

Additional readings (either articles or book chapters) will be available as .pdf on ereserves.

## Assessment

Grades are determined as follows:

- Problem set, due on 10/15 (at the beginning of the class): **15%**
- Midterm, on 10/31: **20%**
- Group exercise, in class on 11/19, 11/21 and 11/26 (possible date change following online survey): **15%**
- Final exam, on 12/13: **50%**

1. The problem set will cover all contents from the course to that date, from both readings and lectures. The problem set is due at the beginning of the class. Late problem sets will not be accepted.

2. The midterm exam will be held in class. All content from the course to that date, from readings and lecture, are covered by this exam. This includes material also covered in the problem set.

3. The group exercise will be structured as follows: you will be divided into groups of 6 students each. On 11/21, each group will be assigned a question (i.e., what do you think is the cause of this specific political phenomenon? or how do you think politicians will behave under this scenario?). The course material will give you the tools to address the questions, but you will not find the exact answer there. Your task is therefore to think through the question using the frameworks and concepts covered during the course, and prepare a short presentation to illustrate your answer (more details on this in due time). Presentations will be delivered on 11/26. Each group will be graded as a whole (i.e., all members of the group will receive the same grade).

4. The final exam will be held during the assigned finals slot (12/13). All content from the course to that date, from readings and lecture, are covered. This includes material from prior to the midterm.

## Course Policies

*Code of Conduct.* I would like this course to be an enjoyable learning experience for us all. To this end, I have two requests:

1. Please arrive on time and don't leave early. Late arrivals and early departures make noise and distract. Please plan accordingly.
2. Please turn cell phones to silent and put them away. They are a temptation to you and a distraction to others.

*Academic Integrity.* Students in this course are expected to comply with UCSDs Policy on Integrity of Scholarship. In particular, plagiarism is considered a dishonest practice and a serious academic offense. Hence, there will be a zero tolerance policy with respect to these practices: any student violating the obligation of academic integrity during the term will automatically fail the class. For more resources and information on academic integrity, see <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.html>

*Disabilities.* Students with University-documented learning disabilities should inform their teaching assistant as soon as possible of their needs. Further, students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>). Students are required to discuss accommodation arrangements with instructors and OSD liaisons in the department well in advance of any exams or assignments. The OSD Liaison for the Department of Political Science is Joanna Peralta; please connect with her via in-person advising (SSB 301) or the Virtual Advising Center as soon as possible.

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

### **September 26: Introduction**

Readings:

- Shepsle, chapters 1 and 2

### **October 1: Preference aggregation and manipulation**

Readings:

- Shepsle, chapters 3 and 4

- Dowding, Keith. “Can Populism Be Defended? William Riker, Gerry Mackie and the Interpretation of Democracy 1.” *Government and Opposition* 41.3 (2006): 327-346

### **October 3: Median voter theorem and spatial elections**

Readings:

- Shepsle, chapter 5 pages 82-90 and 102-115

### **October 8 and 10: Intro to game theory, static games**

Readings:

- Osborne, chapter 2 and 3.3
- Austen-Smith, David. “Economic methods in positive political theory.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. 2006.

### **October 15: Static games, exercises**

Readings:

- Osborne, chapter 2 and 3.3

### **October 17: Intro to game theory, dynamic games**

Readings:

- Osborne, chapter 5 and 6.1, 6.3, 6.4

### **October 22: Dynamic games, exercises**

Readings:

- Osborne, chapter 5 and 6.1, 6.3, 6.4

## **October 24 and 29: Electoral accountability**

Readings:

- Ashworth, Scott. “Electoral accountability: recent theoretical and empirical work.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 183-201.

## **October 31: Midterm**

## **November 5: Forms of government**

Readings:

- Persson, Torsten, and Guido Enrico Tabellini. *The economic effects of constitutions*. MIT press, 2005, chapter 2
- Hellwig, Timothy, and David Samuels. “Electoral accountability and the variety of democratic regimes.” *British Journal of Political Science* 38.1 (2008): 65-90.

## **November 7: Legislative politics**

Readings:

- Shepsle, chapter 5 page 115-136
- Tsebelis, George. *Veto players: How political institutions work*. Princeton University Press, 2002, chapters 1.1. and 1.2 (optional, more advanced)

## **November 12: Leadership and focal points**

Readings:

- Myerson, Roger B. “Learning from Schelling’s strategy of conflict.” *Journal of Economic Literature* 47.4 (2009): 1109-25.

## **November 14: Democratization**

Readings:

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy, part 1

## **November 19: Class exercise**

Dividing into groups and getting started on questions

## **November 21: Class exercise**

Continuing to work on questions

## **November 26: Class exercise (presentations)**

Group presentations

## **December 3: Recap and revision**

Revision and your chance to ask any remaining questions

## **December 5: Recap and revision**

Revision and your chance to ask any remaining questions