

## PSC 281/ECO 282 Introduction to Positive Political Theory

Spring, 1998  
T, Th 9:40-10:55  
Dewey 4162

Professor Duggan  
Office: Harkness 320b  
Hours: T, Th 1:00 - 2:30

The course is an introduction to the “rational choice” approach to understanding political phenomena, such as: the properties of majority rule and other voting systems, vote trading in legislatures, the provision of “public goods,” manipulation of the voting agenda, etc. We will adhere to fairly high standards of analytical rigor. Though there are no formal prerequisites for the course, some facility with mathematics or knowledge of microeconomics will be expected of students.

*Readings:* The lectures will be based mainly on the textbook, *Analyzing Politics*, by Shepse and Bonchek, supplemented by readings from *Public Choice II*, by Mueller, and readings on reserve at the library.

*Course work:* Work in the course will consist of readings from textbooks and the reserve library; from four to six homeworks assigned every two to three weeks; possibly some short quizzes throughout the semester; a mid-term; and a final. One or two homeworks may take the form of a short essay.

The worst of the homework grades will be dropped, and, for this reason, I will not accept late homeworks. (If you come to me with pressing circumstances, like illness, *before* an assignment is due, we may be able to work out an alternative arrangement.)

Note: Because I drop the worst homework grade, the homework policy provides you with some insurance against random disasters (like, “I forgot the homework was due.”); you should try not to take advantage of it too early in the semester.

*Grading:* Final grades will be determined on the basis of course work with the following weights: 20% homework, 30% mid-term, 40% final, and 10% participation. Your “participation” mark will depend on attendance,

participation in class (asking/answering questions), quizzes (if any), and generally demonstrating an interest in the material.

*Tentative outline:* Below, I list the main topics to be covered during the semester, along with required and optional readings.

1. Preference, choice, and rationality.
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch.s 2 and 3.
2. Voting rules — What should society do?
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch.s 4 (pp.49-62) and 7.
  - “An Introduction to Vote Counting Schemes,” Jonathan Levin and Barry Nalebuff, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9: 3-26, 1995.
  - Part II, *The Theory of Committees and Elections*, Duncan Black, Kluwer, 1958.
  - Mueller, Ch.s 4, 5 (A-B), 7, and 8.
3. May’s theorem and Arrow’s theorem.
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 4 (pp.63-79).
  - Mueller, Ch.s 20 and 6.
4. Single-peakedness and the median voter theorem.
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 4 (pp.79-81) and Ch. 5 (pp.82-91).
  - Mueller, Ch. 5 (C).
5. Spatial model and the core.
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 5 (pp.91-103).
  - Mueller, Ch. 5 (D-E, I-L).
6. Game theory and the Downsian model.
  - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 5 (pp.103-136).
  - *Game Theory for Applied Economists*, Robert Gibbons, Princeton, 1992, Ch.s 1 and 2.

- Mueller, Ch. 10.
7. Strategic manipulation.
    - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 6 (pp.137-155).
  8. Sophisticated voting and agenda manipulation.
    - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch. 6 (pp.155-165).
    - “Political Resource Allocation, Controlled Agendas, and the Status Quo,” Thomas Romer and Howard Rosenthal, *Public Choice*, 33: 27-43, 1978.
  9. Collective action.
    - Shepsle and Bonchek, Ch.s 8-10.
    - Mueller, Ch. 16.