Course Purpose and Design: Strategic choice is an important element to most political decisions, indicating why rational choice methods are commonly employed throughout the social sciences. In short, a formal understanding of strategic choice is fundamental to politics and to political science. This course is designed to introduce students to the basics of rational choice theory. The course begins with formal analyses of individual and collective choice, which are fundamental features of collective decisionmaking and democratic governance.

This course will introduce you to some of the modern tools and techniques common in rational choice analyses. The formal analysis inherent to rational choice methods is deductively structured and logically based. Some of the mathematical models will be advanced. You may find that you understand some material in greater depth than other material. Hold fast to what you understand, and build from there.

The course has three goals. Our first goal is to learn about theories of individual and collective choice within a game theoretic framework. Such knowledge will make you a better consumer of rational choice research. Our second goal is to understand the application of such theories to various aspects of politics. Rational choice arguments are central to issues ranging from candidate strategy to the design of legislative systems. Our third goal is to develop our own applications of the tools and techniques discussed. Your papers should communicate your mastery of the appropriate material and concepts. The careful application of formal work will be a prominent concern throughout the course.

Grading: Grades will be based on 3 homework assignments, class participation (including 1-2 in class presentations), and a paper. One homework assignment will be an analytical essay, addressing 3-4 papers. A second homework will require you to create an annotated bibliography with 6-12 entries. Each entry should relate to a research topic of particular interest to you. The final homework is tbd. In addition to your presentations, your participation will be evaluated based on your thoughtful and prepared participation during seminars. Our obligations are to read the assigned readings carefully, to prepare discussion questions, and to think critically about how the various works fit together. Every class will proceed differently, so be flexible and always be prepared. Late in the semester students may present preliminary work related to their papers. Given the size of this class, we are in a position to finetune our attention on those topics of special interest to us. We are also in a position to work collaboratively on projects.

Reading Material: Shepsle’s *Analyzing Politics*, Dixit, Skeath, and Reiley’s *Games of Strategy*, Morrow’s *Game Theory for Political Science*, Stewart’s *Analyzing Congress*, McCarty and Meirowitz’s *Political Game Theory* are recommended. If you were to buy just a couple of books, you are probably best off with Shepsle’s and Dixit et al’s. If you already have some training in formal theory or game theory, consider buying McCarty and Meirowitz. Keep in mind, Shepsle is entry level—but very comprehensive. McCarty and Meirowitz is the most rigorous of the books on this list. If you are interested in Congress, Stewart’s work is an obvious choice. Morrow and
Dixit et al. are straightforward game theory texts that are less advanced than McCarty and Meirowitz.

The appendices in Morrow and McCarty and Meirowitz have very good math refreshers. Simon and Blume’s *Mathematics for Economists*, Wainwright and Chiang’s *Fundamental Methods of Mathematical Economics*, and Moore and Segal’s *A Mathematics Course for Political and Social Research* are reasonable references for those wanting more mathematics training.


*Most importantly*, reading assignments may be varied to accommodate the research interests of students. Therefore, the following readings are a guide—we might add or delete material. *

**PART I. CONSIDERING POLITICAL SCIENCE (Weeks 1-2)**


Laver, * Invitation to Politics*, ch 1-2

Recommended


**PART II. BUILDING BLOCKS AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS (Weeks 1-2)**

**PREFERENCES AND UTILITY THEORY: A FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL CHOICE**

**CANONICAL MODELS**
Shepsle, chapters 1 and 2.
Morrow, 1-2; McC&M, 2-3; Stewart, 1.

*Applications and Implications*
Groseclose. 2001. ”A Model of Candidate Location When One Candidate has a Valence Advantage.” *AJPS*. *

**NON-CANONICAL MODELS**
Scientific American: 160 -170. SKIM

Applications and Implications
APSR.

GROUP CHOICE: AGGREGATING INDIVIDUALS’ CHOICES (Week 3)

ARROW
Shepsle, chapters 3 and 4.
McC&M, 4; DS&R, 16.

Applications, Implications, and Extensions
Penn, Patty, Gailmard. 2011. “Manipulation and Single-Peakedness.” AJPS. *
Identity Choice.” JOP 70(4).
Jeong, Miller, Schofield, and Sened. 2011. “Cracks in the Opposition:
Immigration as a Wedge Issue...” AJPS 55:511-525.
Jeong, Miller, and Sened. 2009. “Closing the Deal: Negotiating Civil Rights
Review 77:734-747.
Riker. Liberalism against Populism, esp ch 9. FOR REFERENCE
Dahl. Preface to Democratic Theory. FOR REFERENCE
Schattschneider. Semisovereign People. FOR REFERENCE

LIBERALISM
Economy 78:152-7.

ELECTIONS, MAJORITY RULE, and ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS

There are literally hundreds of works in these areas. The following is a smattering.

Shepsle, chapter 5.
Morrow, 5; Stewart, 1-2.

Relevance of John C. Calhoun’s Theory for Institutional Design.”
Groseclose. 2001. “A Model of Candidate Location When One Candidate has a
Valence Advantage.” AJPS. *
Motivations, Uncertainty, and Convergence.” AJPS. *

SOME REFERENCES FOR SPATIAL MODELS OF ELECTIONS
Downs. An Economic Theory of Democracy. This is the classic!

**SOCIAL MECHANISMS AND INCENTIVE BASED BEHAVIORS**

Books like Schelling’s *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* and Hardin’s *Collective Action* fit in nicely in this section. They are “easy reads” but they contain considerable depth. Rasmusen’s *Games and Information* would also fit nicely here.

FADS and CONFORMITY
Schelling. *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*.

SELECTION ISSUES
DS&R, 9.

SORTING ISSUES

RENT SEEKING AND COMPENSATION MODELS
McM, Ch. 11; DS&R, 17.

**PART III. EMERGENCE OF INSTITUTIONS**

Ainsworth and Li. 2009. “Interests, Groups, and Information Aggregation,” in *A
Bridge too Far.

PART IV. CLEARLY STRUCTURED POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

ORGANIZATIONS and BUREAUCRACIES
Shepsle, chapter 13.


FOR REFERENCE
Ronald Coase’s work on social cost and property rights is highly recommended. The interested reader can follow-up with work by Alchian and Demsetz. Sened’s The Political Institution of Private Property is also recommended.

LEGISLATURES AND STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR
There are literally hundreds of good articles in this area. Substitutions should be anticipated. Depending on student interest, we may add work by Gilligan and Krehbiel and Shepsle, Shepsle and Weingast, and Weingast and Marshal. We may also add gridlock work.

Shepsle, chapters 5, 6, 11, and 12.
Stewart, 1, 2, and 8; Morrow, 5; McM, Ch 7.
Ainsworth and Hall. N.d. “Strategic Incrementalism.”

DELEGATION AND APPROPRIATIONS

Weingast. 19xx. “Universalism in Congress.” AJPS.

BARGAINING AND DEBATE MODELS

Morrow, 5; DS&R, 18; McM, Ch 10.
Ingberman and Yao. 1991. “Presidential Commitment and the Veto.” AJPS.
Glazer and Rubinstein. 2001. Debates and Decisions: On a Rationale of
EXECUTIVES AND LEGISLATURES


PARTIES


AGENDAS

Denzau, Riker, and Shepsle. “Powell Amendment” APSR.

RULES

COURTS AND JUDGES

Shepsle, chapter 15.
Fox and Stephenson. 2011. “Judicial Review as a Response to Political Posturing.” APSR.

SIGNALING GAMES AND INTEREST GROUP ACTIVITY

One set of models of interest group activity is built on signaling games. Other models may be added as times allows and interest warrants.

McM, 8, Morrow, 7, 8.

Gordon and Hafer. 2007. “Corporate Influence and the Regulatory Mandate.” JOP.

FOR REFERENCE
Kollman’s Outside Lobbying. Grossman and Helpman’s Special Interest Politics.