Social Choice and Elections

Social Choice examines the structure of a fair voting system based on the preferences of individuals. Think of it as examining how a constitution could be engineered to satisfy certain democratic principles. These principles have to be mathematically consistent or they won’t work. The problem is pertinent to the creation of new governments, such as those after the Arab spring. Studying social choice should help students think about democracy analytically, objectively, and deeply.

We will ask how new democracies should structure their elections. Is proportional representation or voting in a single member districts more appropriate? What are the paradoxes of apportionment? Why do candidates always tend to be centrists in two party elections? Do the rules of a democratic process affect political outcomes, and if so, how? What kinds of systems, be they for electing national leaders or student council presidents, go furthest toward truly representing the wishes of the voters? These classic questions will be analyzed using formal analytical techniques – that is, using some simple logic and mathematics. Although we will go deeply, no prior understanding of formal theory or economic reasoning is required to master this course.

Virtual Office Hours

Email me at any time Monday – Friday. I will respond no later than 24 hours after the first contact and probably much sooner. It may take longer for a response if you email me through eLC. If you email after 8 pm, I probably won’t respond until morning. We can also meet via Zoom.

Technical Requirements for Course

This course is online and asynchronous, meaning you watch lectures on eLC and participate during a time of day that is convenient for you. Assignments have specific due dates. Having regular access to the Internet is necessary for the course. Don’t take tests on your phone. Phones are not reliable, particularly for the short answers questions. You will also need access to a computer that allows you to engage with course content like videos. If you don’t have these things, please reconsider taking this course.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services or crisis support. If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

**Grading**

Your grade consists of discussing readings in perusall, two flipgrid videos, two homework assignments, a mid-term exam, and a final exam. You are more than welcome to watch a recording of a class at any time, but you should try to keep up with the daily schedule listed below because assignments are due on a fixed day and time. Maymester comes extremely fast, making it really easy to fall behind. I assume you are mature enough to understand the consequences if you do. All assignments are posted on eLC.

I generally think of 90-100 as an A, 80-90 as a B, etc., but since the university started using a plus minus system I use the following scale for overall grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92 or above</td>
<td>A–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89.99</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82-87.99</td>
<td>B–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78-79.99</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>72-77.99</td>
<td>C–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68-69.99</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>62-67.99</td>
<td>D–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59.99 or below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perusall and Readings**

All required reading assignments will be posted on Perusall – a social e-reader which you can use for free. Perusall gets you to discuss the readings with other students. Each reading is considered an assignment that you read, question, and discuss. 10% of your grade will be based on your Perusall discussions. Students often ask, “how does Perusall grade me?” The simple answer is it grades reading and discussion. Focus on “discussion,” not posting, and pay attention to its nudges to get more points. Note, each assignment (a.k.a., each reading) should be completed before the relevant class. To enter Perusall, click on the Perusall link in ELC. You must start through ELC, at least the first time, to get your grade to sync with the gradebook.

**Flipgrid Video**

Flipgrid is a fun and easy way to interact with other students in an online class. We use it so to better engage with each other. My flipgrid videos break down into two types: deliberation videos (marked with a D) and polling videos. To get full credit, you need to create at least three of the four deliberation videos and at least five of the polling videos by their individual due dates. An introductory video counts as a deliberation video. Quality is not graded, but on-time completion is. Also if you are a rude to others, your video does not count toward your grade. This is an all or nothing grade worth 10% of your overall grade, but it can help you understand the material.
and help you feel less isolated. **To login to flipgrid you must use your UGA email address and chose “Continue with Microsoft.”** An introductory video will give you some details.

**Home Work Assignments**

You will be assigned two homework assignments, each worth 15% of your grade. These assignment will help you practice the analytic skills taught in the course and help you prepare for the exams. The first assignment is particularly time consuming, so please get started early.

**Exams**

The preponderance of your grade will come from a mid-term exam and a final exam. Both may contain multiple choice, fill in the blank, problem solving, and essay type questions worth 25% of your grade each. A review sheet for each is posted on eLC. The final is not cumulative. It only covers the material from the first day after the midterm to the end. Note: some questions may come from the readings not covered in lecture, so please read assignments. You might also want to work on the starred problems in the Hodge and Kilma chapters – the most important questions are listed under practice problems on eLC.

**Make-ups**

Homework assignments require a fair amount of analysis time. Please plan ahead to avoid turning them in late. **Homeworks will be lowered one letter grade for every day they are late and will not be accepted later than twenty-four hours after the due date.** Folks need their assignments back in a timely fashion to prepare for exams, etc. If an assignment is late, it would be a good idea to post it on ELC then e-mail me <dougherk@uga.edu> as soon as possible to avoid any unnecessary late penalties. Grades are lowered for every *day* they are late, not every class day they are late.

There are no makeup opportunities for the midterm or final. Because they can be taken over a window of time on a specific day, the timing should accommodate almost any schedule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERUSALL (reading and discussions)</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLIPGRID VIDEOS</td>
<td>most days</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOMEWORK 1 (apportionment)</td>
<td>June 14</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDTERM EXAM</td>
<td>June 18</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOMEWORK 2 (voting rules)</td>
<td>June 28</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL EXAM</td>
<td>July 3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Honesty

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing academic work. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. Also note that the course syllabus is a general plan for the course and that deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Readings

All readings will be made available through Perusall. The best way to learn this type of material is to solve problems on your own. The Hodge and Kilma text (on Perusall) is full of questions you can work through. Starred questions are answered at the end of each chapter. I recommend you work out each of those on your own. It will help. Most of the readings are shorter but analytical, which may require more than one read to be fully comprehended. Remember, if you work hard and complete all the readings, this should be a very rewarding course.

Disclaimer

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

I. INTRODUCTION

June 6 Introduction: Electoral Systems Around the World

II. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Paradox of Apportionment
June 7 - 11 *Hodge and Kilma, Ch 11, “Proportional (Mis)representation.”


III. PLURALITY RULE AND POPULAR ELECTIONS

The Median Voter Theorem
June 12 *Hinich and Munger, Ch 2, “The Spatial Model of Downs and Black,” Analytical Politics.
June 13  **May’s Theorem**
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 1, “What’s So Good about Majority Rule?”

**The Downsian Voter**

**Application: U.S. Presidential Elections**
*2020 election, ballotpedia
*2024 election, ballotpedia

June 17  Review Session, 6 pm - 7 pm eastern time, on Zoom. See overview for url.

June 18  **MIDTERM EXAM** – online exam that you can take anytime 8 am - 8 pm.

June 19  Juneteenth: No Class!

**IV. PROBLEMS WITH VOTING RULES**

**Plurality Rule, Pairwise Majority Rule**
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 2, “Le Pen, Nader, and Other Inconveniences”

**Other Voting Rules**
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 3, “Back into the Ring”

**Arrow’s Impossibility Theorem**
June 24  *Hodge and Kilma, Ch 4, “Trouble in Democracy” – focus on the strong form.
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 5, “Explaining the Impossible.”


**Ways out of Arrow’s Theorem**

**The Probability of Violating Voting Criteria**


July 2  Review Session, 6 pm - 7 pm, eastern time on Zoom. See overview for url.

July 3  **FINAL EXAM – online exam that you can take anytime 8 am - 8 pm.**