

**POLS 4073: Social Choice and Institutions**  
Baldwin 301  
MWF: 9:10-10:00

Spring 2025

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The best time to ask me questions is during class. If you have a question, rest assured that others have the same question. I am happy to make appointments to meet one-on-one or in small groups.

My Drop-In Hours are immediately after class. During Drop-In Hours, I'm happy to discuss almost anything.

### **Course Purpose and Design:**

Individual and collective choice are fundamental features of a social existence. Political choices typically occur within a governing *institutional framework*. That framework can be informal or intricately structured. A rigorously, structured presentation of all aspects of political choice within institutions enhances one's understanding of politics in general. We will begin with an exploration of individual choice. We will then consider the emergence of norms, conventions and institutions. Norms and conventions are often more informal and less structured than political institutions. In the last part of the course, we will focus on legislatures, bureaucracies, executives, and courts. By design, this course has a large amount of theory-oriented work, but your knowledge of social and political institutions in the U.S. gives you a great foothold. Indeed, this is a good time to review the relevant institutions chapters in your 1101 text.

This course introduces students to modern tools and techniques of formal analysis. We will strive to avoid armchair speculation, as the formal analysis in this class is deductively structured and logically based.

The course has two broad goals. Our first goal is to learn about theories of individual and collective choice. Our second goal is to apply those theories of choice and the tools and techniques discussed in class to current political circumstances and political institutions.

### **Grading:**

This class will include in-class simulations. For the simulations to work, I will need everyone's cooperation to insure we can complete everything within our 50-minute class period. Grades will be comprised of in-class participation, homework, attendance, pop quizzes, and simulations, 2 exams, 1 "think piece," and the final. Exams and the final are each weighted 20%. The "think piece" is worth 20%. The combination of in-class participation, homework, attendance, pop quizzes, and simulations is worth 20%. Regular attendance and active engagement are key to performing well on this section. The lowest exam or final score will be dropped. Upgrading will occur during the 1-4 class periods after the first and second exams. You must be present to receive upgrades.

The "think piece" is a 3-5 page paper that applies elements of this course to a current circumstance or historically relevant event related to an American political institution.

A's will be given to anyone receiving 93 or more points, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D 60-69, F 59 and below.

## Reading Material:

Shepsle's **Analyzing Politics** is a main text for the course. We will also use various sections of Gaus and Thrasher's **Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: An Introduction**. Pdfs will be posted on eLC. You can probably also find used copies of those books. There are numerous articles assigned as well. They are available either at <http://www.istor.org> or other on-line sources. I will try to provide pdfs for those materials, but I encourage you to familiarize yourself with various online and library search engines. Whether you find these materials or I distribute pdfs, you are responsible for downloading, printing, and reading the assigned material. Some of the reading is challenging, so keep that in mind as you allocate your time. You will not be overwhelmed by the number of pages to read. The trick is to engage the work so that you can comprehend and then master the assigned work. Given that the reading can be challenging, I strongly recommend that you take notes as you read. In the past, study teams have been helpful for students.

Even when there appears to be very little required reading, we cover a deceptively large amount of material. Strive to keep up.

## Final Issues:

This course presumes that you have mastered basic introductory material related to political science and American politics that you might find in a Pols 1101 course at the University of Georgia. For a refresher, I recommend Kernell and Jacobson's *The Logic of American Politics* but any text will do.

*All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. All academic work for this course must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and ignorance is not an acceptable defense.*

A course syllabus is a general plan for the course. If deviations become necessary, they will be announced to the class.

Make-up tests are seldom given. Given that I've taught well over 5000 students, consider whether your circumstances are extraordinary.

Late assignments are docked one letter grade for each day they are late. Weekends are two days long.

No phones.

No recording without express permission.

Other important announcements are on our eLC page.

**January 6, 8, and 10**

### **UTILITY THEORY: A FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL CHOICE**

*What do individuals need to make a rational choice? How do we choose? Are choices the same as goals? For valued items, more is generally better than less. Are there any limits to that notion?*

#### **CANONICAL MODELS OF CHOICE**

Shepsle, Chapters 1 and 2

Gaus and Thrasher, *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*, pp. 16-24

Rabushka and Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies*, pp. 49-52

**January 13, 15, and 17**

### **CONVENTIONS, NORMS, AND INSTITUTIONS**

*Who's Norm? Are norms and conventions helpful, optimal, or fair? How does Hume contrast with Hobbes and Locke? Gaus and Thrasher present two views of institutions. How does an institution as the "rules of the game" operate versus the "equilibrium view" of an institution?*

Gaus and Thrasher, Chapter 7

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/widen-highways-traffic.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/upshot/john-kasich-republican-nomination.html>

### **CUING OFF OTHERS or SOCIAL DEDUCTION**

Schelling, Chapter 7

**January 22 and 24**

### **CAN GOVERNMENTS OR NORMS EMERGE ENDOGENOUSLY**

*How does Axelrod alter the prisoners' dilemma? What is the shadow of the future? What are end-game effects?*

Gaus and Thrasher, pp. 103-111

Axelrod. 1984. Chapters 1 and 4 from *The Evolution of Cooperation*

**January 27 and 29**

Butler and Kousser. 2015. "How Do Public Goods Providers Play Public Goods Games?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 40:211-240.

**January 31 and February 3**

### **EXTERNALITIES AND PROPERTY RIGHTS**

*What are externalities and how do laws affect their distribution? What are property rights? Does property need to be tangible?*

Stiglitz. *The Price of Inequality*, Chapter 7  
Gaus and Thrasher, pp. 99-103

**February 5, 7, and 10**

### **HOW AND WHY DO CONTRACTS EMERGE**

*How are risks and contracts related? How are laws and contracts related? What are transaction costs? What are hold up potentials? What is a moral hazard?*

Cheung. 1969. "Transaction Costs, Risk Aversion, and the Choice of Contractual Arrangements." *Journal of Law and Economics* 12:23-42.

Umbeck. 1977. "A Theory of Contract Choice and the California Gold Rush." *Journal of Law and Economics* 20:421-37.

**February 12**

### **BIG PICTURE REVIEW**

**February 14**

### **FIRST IN-CLASS EXAM**

**February 17, 19, 21, and 24**

### **GROUP PREFERENCES BY AGGREGATING INDIVIDUALS' PREFERENCES**

*In what sense is a social choice function a function? Why is the Arrow result called an impossibility theorem? What are some of the implications of Arrow's theorem?*

Shepsle, Chapters 3 and 4

**February 26 and 28**

### **ARROW V. BLACK**

*How does Black find an equilibrium when Arrow cannot? Do Black's restrictions seem empirically valid? Is there anything special about MR? Are non-MR procedures reasonable for democratically governed societies?*

Shepsle, Chapter 4 and 5 to page 91 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition: read to page 99)

**SPRING BREAK:** Did I tell you about the postcard competition?

**March 10 and 12**

### **SPATIAL MODELS OF MAJORITY RULE**

Can we aggregate multidimensional choices in the same fashion as single dimensional ones? Which properties remain and which disappear?

Shepsle, Chapter 5 to page 115 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition: read to page 123)

\*\*\* This is a good time to review relevant chapters from your Pols 1101 text. I like Kernell and Jacobson's *Logic of American Politics*. \*\*\*

**March 14, 17, and 19**

### **APPLICATIONS TO LEGISLATURES AND COMMITTEES**

*Which institution is addressed in the first article of the U.S. Constitution? Which article of the Constitution is the longest?*

Shepsle, finish Chapter 5  
Stewart, Chapter 1, pp 3-35.

**March 21, 24, and 26**

### **LEGISLATURES, LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR**

*Fourteen months ago what happened to Speaker McCarthy? How was Speaker McCarthy affected by a Pareto condition? Hmm, would members of Congress ever behave strategically? What does Gibbard mean by manipulation? Can we come up with a mechanism that is invulnerable to manipulation?*

Shepsle, Chapters 6, 11, and 12

Denzau, Riker, and Shepsle. 1985. "Farquharson and Fenno: Sophisticated Voting and Home Style." *American Political Science Review* 79:117-134.

**March 28**

**Review of Legislatures**

**March 31**

**SECOND IN-CLASS EXAM**

**April 2**

**CONTRACTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND BUREAUCRACIES Part I**

*In what sense are contracts like institutions? In what sense are firms like bureaucracies? In what sense is efficiency meaningful? What are some organizational dysfunctions? What trade-offs does one face when trying to constrain those dysfunctions?*

Knott and Miller, Chapter 6

Shepsle, Chapter 13. Skip the "Niskanen" sections from 346-355 (408-417 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

Moe. 1984. "The New Economics of Organization." *American Journal of Political Science* 28:739-777.

**April 4**

**Library Day**

**April 7 and 9**

**CONTRACTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND BUREAUCRACIES Part II**

*How is expertise displayed? How is it controlled?*

Hammond and Miller. 1985. "A Social Choice Perspective on Expertise and Authority in Bureaucracy." *American Journal of Political Science* 29: 1-28.

**April 11, 14, and 16**

**PRESIDENTS AND LEGISLATURES**

*What are unilateral actions? How can presidents move policy unilaterally? What are the implications of unilateral executive actions?*

Howell, William G. 2005. "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35:417-39.

Moe and Howell. 1999. "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29:850-73.

Kelley and Marshall. 2009. "Threats as Coordinated Strategies Assessing Presidential Power: Signing Statements and Veto." *American Politics Research* 37: 508-33.

**April 18, 21, and 23**

## **COURTS & JUDGES**

*How do courts affect policy?*

Shepsle, Chapter 15

Kornhauser. 1992. "Modeling Collegial Courts. II. Legal Doctrine." *J. of Law Economics and Organization* 8:3:441-470.

Bonneau, Hammond, Maltzman, and Wahlbeck. 2007. "Agenda Control, the Median Justice, and the Majority Opinion on the U.S. Supreme Court." *American Journal of Political Science* 51:890-905. Ignore the empirical section.

**April 25 and 28**

**Catch-up and Review**