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, Padlet videos, two homework assignments, a mid-term exam, and a final exam. You can watch recordings of a class at any time, but you should try to keep up with the daily schedule because assignments are due on a fixed day and time. Summer Session 1 goes by 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 ever since the university started using a plus minus system I have used the following scale for overall grades:

		A	92 or above	A−	90-91.99
B+	88-89.99	B	82-87.99	B−	80-81.99
C+	78-79.99	C	72-77.99	C−	70-71.99
D+	68-69.99	D	62-67.99	D−	60-61.99
F	59.99 or below				

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 Presuall, 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.

Padlet Video

Padlet 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 Padlet videos come in two types: deliberation videos (marked with a D) and polling videos. To get full credit, you need to create at least three 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. An introductory lecture 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.

<u>Make-ups</u>

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.

	Date	Percent of Grade
PERUSALL (reading and discussions)	every day	10%
FLIPGRID VIDEOS	most days	10%
HOMEWORK 1 (apportionment)	June 13	15%
MIDTERM EXAM	June 17	25%
HOMEWORK 2 (voting rules)	June 27	15%
FINAL EXAM	July 3	25%

<u>Student Honesty</u>

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.

AI Software

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, like ChatGPT or Copilot, is strictly prohibited for any part of an assignment or test, including brainstorming, writing, or editing. This policy facilitates your learning of social choice, which may require some struggling.

Readings

All readings are 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 5   **Introduction: Electoral Systems Around the World**
              *David Farrell, (2001) *Electoral Systems*, pp. 1-12.

II. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

              Paradox of Apportionment
June 6 - 10   *Hodge and Kilma, Ch 11, "Proportional (Mis)representation."

              Recommended: Balinski and Young, 2001, *Fair Representation.* Washington,
                  D.C.: Brookings Institution Press – book on course reserve.

III. PLURALITY RULE AND POPULAR ELECTIONS

              The Median Voter Theorem
June 11   *Hinich and Munger, Ch 2, "The Spatial Model of Downs and Black," *Analytical
                  Politics*.

June 12	**May's Theorem**
	*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 1, "What's So Good about Majority Rule?"
	*Mueller, "May's theorem on Majority Rule," *Public Choice III* – the correct statement of May's theorem.

The Downsian Voter

June 13   *Downs, Anthony 1957. "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy," *Journal of Political Economy*, 65(2): 135-150.
Application: U.S. Presidential Elections
*2020 election, ballotopedia
*2024 election, ballotopedia

June 16   Review Session, 6 pm - 7 pm eastern time, on Zoom. See overview for url.

June 17   **MIDTERM EXAM** – online exam that you can take anytime 8 am - 8 pm.

IV. PROBLEMS WITH VOTING RULES

Plurality Rule, Pairwise Majority Rule

June 18   *Scientific America, "Ranking Candidates Is More Accurate Than Voting," October 6, 2008.
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 2, "Le Pen, Nader, and Other Inconveniences"

June 19   Juneteenth: No Class!

Other Voting Rules

June 20   *NPR News, "Ranked-Choice Voting Gets A Prime-Time Shot Under New York City's Bright Lights," June 23, 2021.
*The Center for Elections Science, "The Limits of Ranked-Choice Voting," February 7, 2019.
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 3, "Back into the Ring"

Arrow's Impossibility Theorem

June 23   *Hodge and Kilma, Ch 4, "Trouble in Democracy" – focus on the strong form.
*Hodge and Kilma, Ch 5, "Explaining the Impossible."

June 24   *Sen, Amartya "Collective Rationality," *Collective Choice and Social Welfare,* Ch 3, pp. 33-40 – the correct statement of Arrow's theorem.

Ways out of Arrow's Theorem

June 25   *Vickrey, William, "Utility, Strategy, and Social Decision Rules," in Brian Barry and Russell Hardin Eds. *Rational Man and Irrational Society*, pp. 343-353.

Recommended: Russell Hardin, "Public Choice Versus Democracy" in Copp, Hampton, and Roemer eds., *The Idea of Democracy*, pp. 157-172 – on ELC.

The Probability of Violating Voting Criteria

June 26 - 27   *Dougherty and Heckelman, "The Probability of Violating Arrow's Conditions," *European Journal of Political Economy*.

June 30 -   *Dougherty and Edward, Ch 6, "Electoral Decision Making," The Calculus of
   July 1   *Consent and Constitutional Design*.

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.**