

**POLS 4073: Social Choice and Institutions**  
Caldwell 102  
MWF: 9:10-10:00

Fall 2025

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Political Science  
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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.

Drop-In Hours: Wednesday 3:00-4:00

### **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 (including homework, attendance, pop quizzes, and simulations), exams, and one writing exercise. Exams 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%. Each absence results in 3 points being debited from the participation grade. Everyone gets 2 free absences, no questions asked. Regular attendance and active engagement are key to enjoying the class and performing well.

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.jstor.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.

## Other Items:

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 will be made in class or on our eLC page.

- By enrolling in this class, you agree that you will
  - fully engage all assigned materials and listen carefully during class, to one another and to the instructor.
  - adhere to the policies noted in this syllabus and to do your best to be a good, productive, and honest student.
  - agree to work with the instructor to make sure that you have a positive learning experience and a rewarding course outcome.
  - strive every day to stay on top of your work.

**August 13, 15, and 18**

## **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. 49-55

**August 20, 22, and 25**

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

*What are norms? 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

**August 27 and 29**

## **PUBLIC GOODS**

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

**September 3 and 5**

## **EXTERNALITIES AND PROPERTY RIGHTS**

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

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

**September 8 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.

**September 15**

Leeson. 2009. "The Laws of Lawlessness." *J. of Legal Studies* 38:471-503.

**September 17**

## **FIRST IN-CLASS EXAM**

**September 19, 22, 24, and 26**

## **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

**September 29 and October 1**

**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)

**October 3, 6, and 8**

**SPATIAL MODELS OF INSTITUTIONS AND 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*. \*\*\*

**October 10, 13, and 15**

**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

**October 17, 20, and 22**

**LEGISLATURES, LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR**

*Twenty 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

Jones, 1968. "Joseph G. Cannon and Howard W. Smith: An Essay on the Limits of Leadership in the House of Representatives." *J. of Politics* 30:617-646.

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

**October 24**

**Review of Legislatures as Needed**

**October 27**

**SECOND IN-CLASS EXAM**

**October 29, November 3, and 5**

**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.

**November 7 and 10**

**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.

**November 12, 14, and 17**

**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.

**November 19 and 21**

## **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.

**November 24**

## **THIRD IN-CLASS EXAM**

**December 1 and 2**

Final Presentations and Review

This syllabus will contain many items required by the Board of Regents, the University of Georgia, or bodies affiliated with them. Of course, you'll also see some items designed by me.

Here are some of the latest updates regarding important resources. **Free tutoring, Academic coaching, Presentation help**, as well as means to help students facing **Financial hardships** and **Food insecurity and other challenges**. For quick reference, see this **consolidated list of student resources**.

### **Institutional Competencies:**

Required competencies include Critical Thinking (CT), Analytical Thinking (AT), and Communication (C)

CT: The ability to pursue and comprehensively evaluate information before accepting or establishing a conclusion, decision, or action.

AT: The ability to reason, interpret, analyze, and solve problems from a wide array of authentic contexts.

C: The ability to effectively develop, express, and exchange ideas in written, oral, or visual form.

These competencies are tied to student learning outcomes (SLOs).

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

SLO #1: Students will learn to articulate theoretical concepts related to decisionmaking in political institutions. (CT, C)

SLO #2: Students will apply advanced theoretical frameworks to American political institutions and procedures. (AT)

SLO #3: Students will examine an array of approaches to political analysis. (AT)

SLO #4: Students will critically assess strategic behaviors by political actors, showing an ability to communicate findings in written, verbal, and graphical formats.  
(CT, AT)

SLO #5: Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in rigorous analysis of American politics without concern of partisanship. (C)

**Extra Credit:**

There are no extra credit assignments in this course. Put forth your best effort and communicate with me if you're having trouble with the material.

**Additional Notes:**

- 1) Education requires that one fully engage challenging material. Come to class prepared and on time, ready to contribute to a thriving learning environment. This is your time to shine.
- 2) Much learning is cooperative and interactive in nature. Strive to participate. I will feel free to call on students.
- 3) **UGA Honor Code:** "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at [honesty.uga.edu](https://honesty.uga.edu).
- 4) If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations, you must register for services with the UGA Accessibility and Testing. If you have documentation for such accommodations from A&T, please present it to me as soon as possible. A&T can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, by calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting <https://accessibility.uga.edu/>.
- 5) By using available student resources, you can enrich your University of Georgia experiences. The Office for Student Success and Achievement provides a range of resources, including study tips, tutoring, and workshops, to help students develop solid learning strategies (<https://ossa.uga.edu/>). The Writing Center (<https://www.libs.uga.edu/mlc/study-research/writing-center>) offer resources to assist students with their research and writing.
- 6) A course syllabus is a general plan for the course. Deviations announced to the class might be necessary.
- 7) Make-up tests are seldom given. Any make-up work must be scheduled within a week of the initial date of the exam or assignment.
- 8) Guidelines for your etiquette are straightforward. Treat everyone with respect. As a first step, avoid behaviors that others might find distracting including texting, excessive chatting, surfing, twerking, and knitting with loud needles.
- 9) Remember that even if you're not interested in politics, politics is interested in you!
- 10) FERPA Notice: The Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants students certain information privacy rights. See the registrar's explanation at <https://reg.uga.edu/general-information/ferpa/>.
- 11) Well-being Resources: UGA Well-Being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community. Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu>. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the Embark@UGA program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity. UGA provides both clinical and non-



clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: <https://well-being.uga.edu>
- Student Care and Outreach: <https://sco.uga.edu>
- University Health Center: <https://healthcenter.uga.edu>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: <https://caps.uga.edu> or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273.
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: <https://healthpromotion.uga.edu>

12) Artificial Intelligence-Based Software: Students are allowed to use generative AI software for academic work in this course, provided they document its use. This includes specifying the software used, the extent of its use, and how it contributed to the final product. AI-generated content must be cited appropriately, and students should include a brief reflection on how the AI tool helped them and what they learned from using it. The work must remain original, with AI not replacing critical thinking or personal effort. Instructors will evaluate both the content and the documentation of AI use, considering proper documentation in grading. Failure to document AI use may result in penalties, including reduced grades or academic disciplinary actions. Cases of suspected misuse will be reviewed by the academic integrity committee. (This paragraph was generated with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot).

### **Dates to Remember**

**August 13:** First Day of Classes

**August 13-19:** Drop/Add Period

**September 1:** Labor Day (No classes)

**October 31:** Fall Break (No classes)

**November 12:** Withdrawal Deadline

**November 26-28:** Thanksgiving Break (No classes)

**December 2:** Friday Schedule in Effect

**December 3:** Reading Day

**December 4-10:** Final Exams

**December 15:** Grades Due at Noon