

Pols 4073 Social Choice and Institutions

Fall 2026

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Baldwin 308

The best time to ask questions is in class. Other students likely have questions similar to yours. The best time to catch me for a more personal chat is right after class. The best time to see me in my office is during my office hours.

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00-4:00 and by appointment

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 consider the emergence of norms, conventions and institutions. Norms and conventions will undergird our exploration of individual choice. Norms and conventions are less formal and less structured than political institutions. Nonetheless, institutions whither without clear norms and conventions. 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 class period. Grades will be comprised of in-class participation (including any homework, attendance, pop quizzes, and simulations), exams, and one paper. Exams are each weighted 20%. The paper 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 class preparation, attendance, and active engagement are key to enjoying the class and performing well.

The paper (@ 5 pages) should apply elements of this course to a current circumstance or historically relevant event related to an American political institution. Topics should be approved by me.

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. You can probably also find used copies of those books. There are numerous articles assigned as well. They are available at <http://www.jstor.org> or other on-line sources. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with various online and library search engines. 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.

We cover a deceptively large amount of material. Strive to keep up with the reading.

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, Jacobson, Kousser, Vavreck, and Johnson'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. Deviations will be necessary, and they will be announced to the class.

Make-up tests are seldom given. Consider whether your circumstances are extraordinary or a matter of convenience.

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

No phones, no brain rot.

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.

Weeks of 8/17 and 8/24

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>

Week of 8/31

CUING OFF OTHERS or SOCIAL DEDUCTION

Schelling, Chapter 7

PUBLIC GOODS

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

9/9 First In-Class Exam

Week of 9/7

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

Week of 9/14

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.

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

Weeks 9/21 and 9/28

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

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

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 (2nd edition: read to page 99)

10/5 Second In-Class Exam

Week of 10/5

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 (2nd edition: read to page 123)

*** This is a good time to review relevant chapters from your Pols 1101 text. I like Kernell, et al. *Logic of American Politics*. ***

Week of 10/12

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

Week of 10/19

TRANSPARENCY: ROLL CALL VOTING, SUNSHINE REQUIREMENTS, AND TELEVISED PROCEEDINGS

Lynch and Madonna. "Origins of Recorded Voting: Searching for Balance."

Lynch, Madonna, and Vick. "The Erosion of "Regular Order" in the U.S. House: A Historical Examination of Special Rules."

Wessel. "What is Reconciliation in Congress?" Brookings 01/13/2025.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-reconciliation-in-congress/>

Fenno. "The Senate through the Looking Glass: The Debate over Television." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14:313-348.

LEGISLATURES, LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR

On October 3rd, 2023, 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.

Week of 10/26

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 tradeoffs 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 2nd edition).

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

Week of 11/2

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.

Week of 11/9

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.

Peck and Jenkins. "The 'Flip-Side' of Delegation: Examining Congressional Reassertion Efforts. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/reader/read-online/7327d30a-cfe5-4897a10a-dbd531acc58b/chapter/pdf?context=ubx>

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

Week of 11/16

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.

11/18 Third In-Class Exam

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. You are obligated to abide by the UGA Honor Code and all its revisions.
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 706542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting <https://accessibility.uga.edu/>.

SKILLS AND OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS COURSE.

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 form 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)

Some Final Notes to Consider:

1. 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.
2. A course syllabus is a general plan for the course. Deviations announced to the class might be necessary.
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. Remember that even if you're not interested in politics, politics is interested in you!
6. 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/generalinformation/ferpa/>.
7. 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 706-5428479 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.
 - a. Well-being Resources: <https://well-being.uga.edu>
 - b. Student Care and Outreach: <https://sco.uga.edu>
 - c. University Health Center: <https://healthcenter.uga.edu>
 - d. Counseling and Psychiatric Services: <https://caps.uga.edu> or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706542-2273.
 - e. Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: <https://healthpromotion.uga.edu>
8. 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).
9. Here are some resources that might be helpful: **Free tutoring, Academic coaching, Presentation help**, as well as help for students facing **Financial hardships** or **Food insecurity and other challenges**. For quick reference, see this **consolidated list of student resources**.