Designing American Democracy

Spring 2018

Instructor:	Greg Sasso	**Time:**	MW 11:50-13:05
Email:	gsasso@ur.rochester.edu	**Place:**	Morey Hall 525

Objectives: When can Congress agree on the best policy for the country (and what does "best" even mean)? How does the electoral college affect Presidential campaigns? How does the Supreme Court choose what cases to hear? This course uses a rigorous set of tools including game theory to help students understand the structure of American government. With these tools, we will study US electoral systems, Congress, the Presidency and the executive branch, federalism, and the courts, with a focus on the challenges of group decision making and the inevitable conflicts that arise between the branches of government. Students will leave the course with a deeper understanding of how rules and strategy shape U.S. democracy.

I have two goals when teaching this course. Primarily, we use rational choice theory to understand how the rules of American political institutions affect the strategic choices made by citizens and politicians and these choices affect policies and outcomes. As such, we cover major problems in organizing groups such as collective action problems, coordination problems, and conflicting values, and apply these topics to the study of American politics and institutions. Secondarily, we review and learn modern techniques used in rational choice and institutional analysis including social choice and game theory.

Prerequisites: There are no formal mathematical prerequisites for the course, although some familiarity with logical/mathematical reasoning will be necessary. All that is required is command of high school algebra and a willingness to learn new tools and applications, including very introductory treatments of probability , game theory, and calculus, *etc.* If you appear to be having trouble with the material, please meet with me as soon as possible.

Office Hours: I will hold office hours on Wednesdays between 2–4pm. Please email me if you would like to meet outside these times. My office is 109D Harkness Hall (within the Wallis Institute).

Course Materials: This class is primarily lecture based, and I will publish slides on Blackboard for reference. In addition, having regular access to the following books is important:

- *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, 2nd Edition, by Kenneth A. Shepsle (New York: W.W. Norton).

- *An Introduction to Game Theory*, by Martin J. Osborne (New York: Oxford University Press).

All other materials (journal articles, book chapters, etc) will be posted on Blackboard.

Tentative Course Outline:

Introduction to Rational Choice

- Chapters 1 and 2 in Shepsle, Chapter 1 in Osborne

Game Theory Introduction

- Normal form games; Osborne: Chapters 2, 3

- Extensive form games; Osborne: Chapters 5, 6

Voting and Majority rule

- Shepsle: Chapters 3, 4 & 5 (until "Spatial models of Legislatures")

Voting and Electoral Systems

- Shepsle: Chapters 6, 7

- *Analyzing Elections*, Chapter 4, Morton (2006)

Bargaining in the Federal Government

- Shepsle: Chapters 5 (just "Spatial models of Legislatures")

- "Political resource allocation, controlled agendas, and the status quo" Romer and Rosenthal (1978) *Public Choice*, 33.4, pp. 27–43.

- *Pivotal Politics*, Chapter 2, Krehbiel (1998)

Decentralization and Public Goods

- Shepsle: Chapters 9, 10

- "Centralized Versus Decentralized Provision of Local Public Goods: A Political Economy Approach" Besley and Coate (2003) *Journal of Public Economics*, 87.12, pp. 2611-2637

- "Political Decentralization and Economic Reform: A Game-Theoretic Analysis" Treisman (1999) *American Journal of Political Science*, 43.2, pp. 488-517.

Delegation and Bureaucracy

- Shepsle: Chapter 13

- *Delegating Powers*, Chapters 2 and 3, Epstein and O'Halloran (1999)

- *Deliberate Discretion*, Chapter 4, Huber and Shipan (2002)

Models of Courts and Judges

- Shepsle: Chapter 15

- "Game Theory, Legal History, and the Origins of Judicial Review: A Revisionist Analysis of Marbury v. Madison," Clinton (1994) *American Journal of Political Science*, 38.2, pp. 285-302.

- "Certiorari and Compliance in the Judicial Hierarchy," Lax (2003) *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15.1: pp. 61–86.

Grading Policy: There will be four problem sets, each of which will be worth 15% of your grade. There will be a final worth 30% of your grade. In addition, participation in class will comprise the remaining 10%.

Problem sets will include two types of questions. One type will test your comprehension of the technical material. The second type will be a short essay question, requiring you to read a non-technical piece of writing and interpret the argument in light of the models we have studied in class. The length of the essay answer should be between 250–750 words.

Problem sets will generally be non-accumulative. You may work in groups of up to 3 on the problem sets, but each person must submit their own copy. Problem Sets will be handed out during class and will be due at the start of class in one week. Late problem sets will not be accepted unless it has been cleared before hand.

If you are entitled to examination accommodation, please coordinate with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in advance of the examination. Students will not be able to obtain accommodations directly from the instructor.

Class Policy: Regular attendance is essential and expected. If you need to miss a class, please discuss this with me as soon as something arises.

Academic Honesty: All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochesters Academic Honesty Policy. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation.

Disclaimer: The schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to ensure better student learning.