

# POLITICS AND SOCIETY

## POLITICAL SCIENCE 222

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:50 PM, 228 Natural Sciences  
Fall semester, 2010

Instructor: Jason Sorens

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1 to 5 PM and by appointment; 419 Park Hall

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## Course Description

This course is an advanced introduction to positive political theory, that is, general explanations for why politics works the way it does. We will explore both “rational choice” and sociological explanations of politics, with a focus on institutions and ideologies. A closely related but non-overlapping course is PSC316, the Politics of Political Choice, taught by Professor Palmer, which focuses more on voting behavior in mass publics.

In this course we develop theoretical tools to analyze the following topics: reasons for the existence of government, the collective pursuit of common goals, policy-making in legislatures, and reasons for political conflict and war. We will talk more about general explanations of these phenomena than about details concerning particular policy choices or political outcomes. The format of the course is a mix of lecture, discussion, student presentations, and classroom simulations and games. One of the central components of the course is an online Model Parliament simulation in which every student will be expected to participate regularly. We will be doing some simple game theory and making extensive use of basic algebra and two-axis graphs and charts.

## Course Requirements

The goal of this course is to give you a solid foundation in theories of politics, which will allow you to examine problems of human action analytically and develop general, causal explanations of observed patterns. These skills will prove useful in disciplines such as sociology, political science, and economics.

To keep up with the pace of the course, you must do **all** the reading for a particular “topic” **before** the lecture on that topic (see class schedule below). I will not waste time taking attendance, but you will need to be in class regularly in order to do well. If you have questions about the material early on, bring them to me right away, because if you get lost at the beginning, it will quickly become difficult for you to catch up.

## Readings

I have chosen the following two books for the course, both of which are available at the bookstore:

- Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior and Institutions*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).
- Axelrod, Robert, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

Shepsle and Bonchek is a general introduction to political economy for undergraduates, and it covers most of the topics we'll be studying, although sometimes only briefly. Axelrod's book on cooperation, along with the early game theory literature that inspired it, has radically influenced not only political science, but other social sciences and even evolutionary biology. In addition to the books, there are several required essay readings available in PDF format on the course's UBLearn site, marked with a number sign on the reading list below (#). Since there is no book that exactly covers the content of this class, attending lectures will be crucial for mastering the material.

## Grading

Your grade is determined by a series of 10 short-answer quizzes given throughout the semester (total share of final grade: 40%), by your participation in the online and in-class Model Parliament simulation (20%), and by a take-home essay final, due on **Monday December 20 at 4 PM** at my office (40%). Quizzes will take place at the beginning of class and cannot be made up, so be present and be on time. Instead of allowing you to make up quizzes for excused reasons, I will drop your three lowest quiz grades. The purpose of the quizzes is to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading and coming to class; they are in a short-answer format, so you will generally not be able to guess the right answers. Instead of a curve, there is a special grading scale for the quizzes: 81-100 counts as an A, 61-80 counts as a B, 41-60 counts as a C, 21-40 counts as a D, and 0-20 is an F. The median grade on these quizzes is typically between C and B-. The purpose of the Model Parliament is to give you a taste of real politics and to see how the ideas of the course play out in practice – but it only works if everyone participates. Finally, the final exam gives you a chance to tell me what you've learned in the class and synthesize ideas in your own way; the grading of the final exam depends largely on the quality of your arguments and your ability to see connections among concepts we have learned. I will not accept late final exams: you will have to take either an F or an Incomplete in the course if you do not hand in your final exam on time.

## Academic Integrity

I have noticed that many UB students are not adequately familiar with the scope, content, and importance of academic integrity. According to UB Rules and Regulations:

'The University has a responsibility to promote academic honesty and integrity and to develop procedures to deal effectively with instances of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect for others' academic endeavors. By placing their name on academic work, students certify the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments.'

Academic dishonesty includes:

- (a) Previously submitted work: submitting academically required material that has been previously submitted in whole or in substantial part in another course, without prior and expressed consent of the instructor;
- (b) Plagiarism: copying or receiving material from a source or sources and submitting this material as one's own without acknowledging the particular debts to the source (quotations, paraphrases, basic ideas), or otherwise representing the work of another as one's own;
- (c) Cheating: receiving information, or soliciting information, from another student or other unauthorized source, or giving information to another student, with the intent to deceive while completing an examination or individual assignment;
- (d) Falsification of academic materials: fabricating laboratory materials, notes, reports, or any forms of computer data; forging an instructor's name or initials; resubmitting an examination or assignment for reevaluation which has been altered without the instructor's authorization; or submitting a report, paper, materials, computer data, or examination (or any considerable part thereof) prepared by any person other than the student responsible for the assignment;
- (e) Misrepresentation of documents: Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any University or Official document, record, or instrument of identification.
- (f) Confidential academic materials: procurement, distribution or acceptance of examinations, laboratory results without prior and expressed consent of the instructor.
- (g) Selling academic assignments: No person shall, for financial consideration, or the promise or financial consideration, prepare, offer to prepare, cause to be prepared, sell or offer for sale to any person any written material which the seller knows, is informed or has reason to believe is intended for submission as a dissertation or thesis, term paper, essay, report or other written assignment by a student in a university, college, academy, school or other educational institution to such institution or to a course, seminar or degree program held by such institution.
- (h) Selling computer assignments: No person shall sell or offer for sale to any person enrolled in the State University of New York any computer assignment, or any assistance in the preparation, research, or writing of a computer assignment intended for submission in fulfillment of any academic requirement.

UB guidelines currently provide the instructor with a wide range of discretion as to the penalties to pursue for any violation of academic integrity. For clear and particularly serious violations of academic integrity such as cheating, my policy, with no exceptions, is to fail the student in the course. For lesser violations such as low-degree plagiarism, severe point deductions, up to failure of the assignment, is standard. Regarding plagiarism, please note that **you must cite every idea or piece of evidence in your paper that you derived from someone else.** In addition, encyclopedias such as Wikipedia and biased publications from activist organizations are not acceptable sources for scholarly research, although they may well be appropriate places to begin your research. Use primary sources such as news articles for establishing facts and refereed, published research for establishing generally accepted relationships and ideas.

## Schedule of Topics and Readings

1. Introduction to important course concepts (Aug 31)
2. Individual rationality and efficiency  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapters 1 & 2. (Sep 2)  
*Quiz #1*
3. The relationship between efficiency and justice  
Amartya Sen (1970), "The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal," *Journal of Political Economy* 78 (1): 152-157. (Sep 7) #  
  
*No class Sep 9 – Rosh Hashanah*  
  
John Rawls (1958), "Justice as Fairness," *The Philosophical Review* 67 (2): 164-194, parts 2, 3, 6, and 7 only (pp. 165-174, 184-193). (Sep 14) #  
*Quiz #2*
4. Individual preferences, group decisions  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 3. (Sep 16)
5. Arrow's impossibility theorem  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 4. (Sep 21)
6. Majority rule  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 5. (Sep 23)  
*Quiz #3*
7. From political philosophies to ideologies  
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters XIII, XVII, XVIII, XXIX. (Sep 28) #  
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapters II, VII, VIII. (Sep 30) #  
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Parts I, II. (Oct 5) #  
*No reading Oct 7 - Model Parliament forums open.*  
*Quiz #4*
8. Voting rules  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 7. (Oct 12)  
*No class Oct 14 – class cancelled.*  
  
No reading: Model Parliament Session I. (Oct 19)
9. Electoral systems  
Kathleen Bawn, "The Logic of Institutional Preferences." (Oct 21) #  
*Quiz #5*  
Gary Cox, "Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems." (Oct 26) #

10. The Prisoner's Dilemma I: The problem  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 8. (Oct 28)  
*Quiz #6*  
Axelrod, Preface and Part I. (Nov 2)
11. The Prisoner's Dilemma II: Public goods and externalities  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 10. (Nov 4)  
*Quiz #7*  
No reading Nov 9.
12. The Prisoner's Dilemma III: Cooperation under anarchy  
Axelrod, Parts II and V. (Nov 11)  
*Quiz #8*
13. Bargaining in legislatures and parliaments  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 11. (Nov 16)  
  
No reading: Model Parliament Session II. (Nov 18)  
  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapters 12 & 16. (Nov 23)  
*Quiz #9*  
  
*No class Nov 25 – Fall recess*
14. Bureaucracy  
Shepsle & Bonchek, chapter 13. (Nov 30)  
  
No reading: Model Parliament Session III. (Dec 2)
15. War and conflict  
James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War." (Dec 7) #  
*Quiz #10*
16. Systems of government  
George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems." (Dec 9) #  
*Short Model Parliament Session IV.*