

# GOV 342N • Public Choice

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Unique# 38720

Fall, 2011

Meets: TTh 9:30am-11am JES A216A

Instructor: Scott Moser, Ph.D.

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Office hours: 11am-12:30pm TTh and by appointment.

Website: BlackBoard will be used for communicating information and materials to students (<http://courses.utexas.edu>).<sup>i</sup>

Text(s):

*Populism Against Liberalism* by William Riker published by Waveland Pr Inc [required]

*Analyzing Politics* by Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Bonchek published by W. W. Norton & Company (either first or second edition) [required]

Selected sections of *Electoral Systems: a Comparative Introduction* by David Farrell published by Palgrave Macmillan (available on Google books)

Additional materials posted on Blackboard

Prerequisites: Some exposure to mathematical reasoning will be helpful. While there are no formal requirements, student should be comfortable with analytical reasoning (logic, basic mathematics, etc.). No sophisticated mathematics will be involved, but logical, rigorous thinking will be necessary.

**Syllabi are important. This document is meant to serve as road map of the course, and to give students a clear idea of the expectations and policies they will be held to. Please read it carefully as it contains information vital to successful completion of the class.**

## Course Overview and Goals

This course is about how groups make choices. From friends deciding on a place for lunch to cities deciding on tax schemes, the essence of public choice involves groups of individuals selecting a *common* (ie collective) alternative (be it restaurant, movie, budget or policy). At its heart, questions of public choice are central to issues of governance. This course introduces students to the fundamentals of collective choice: “How are/should collective decisions be made?” “What does it mean for a group to decide ‘democratically?’” “Does voting lead to ‘good’ outcomes?”

At a broad level, the goal of the course is for students to understand the possibilities and limitations of voting (and of Democracy more generally). Along the way, it is important that students learn some ideas and constructs of contemporary social science that are relevant to the study of government and politics. More specifically, a significant part of the course will focus on voting theory – different ways groups may vote on collective options. Both the variety of different voting systems and their strengths and shortcomings will be examined. It is intended that the course will be of interest to students interested in political institutions, electoral systems, social choice and political philosophy.

Specifically, the course will start with a discussion of the role and justification of government, the role of voting and democracy, present the 'problem' of voting (and various attempts to overcome it), and examine the relationship between voting and candidate behavior. Along the way, a variety of real-world voting procedures and electoral systems employed will be presented and examined. By the end of the course, students will be expected to: be competent in various voting methods; understand and be able to articulate the properties, advantages and drawbacks of various voting rules; analyze different voting rules as they relate to voters' and candidates' incentives.

## Assessment

Assessment will be based on a combination of short essays and worked problems. Specifically, mastery of the material will be assessed via four (4) homeworks, two (2) in-class examinations and a final exam. Final grades will be calculated as: Final exam = 36%; midterm exams = 35%; Homework = 29%. There will be one optional 'make up' homework set the last week of class, in the event students missed one homework due date.

Attendance does not directly factor into grading (with the exception of exam days). While I will endeavor to make time in the class-room worthwhile (even 'fun'), the ultimate responsibility for learning lies with the student. If you want to spend your time in other activities rather than attend lecture you are free to do so. **As such, there is simply no excuse for students attending lecture to text, check Facebook, sleep, etc.**

Barring legitimate, sanctioned absence, I will not give make-up exams nor extend due dates. **Unexcused missed assignments and exams will be recorded as a zero.** However, university-sanctioned reasons for absence can be accommodated (see 'additional notices'), but I require notification as soon as possible in the semester (and appropriate documentation as it is available).

# Schedule

(0) PRELIMINARIES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	
i. [Ch. 1 and 2 Shepsle]	Week 1
(1) WHY GOVERNMENT? WHY DEMOCRACY?	Weeks 2 and 3
i. What do governments do?	
ii. Collective action and public goods [ch. 9 and 10 of Shepsle]	
iii. Why democracy? [ch. 1 Riker]	
1. Role of voting (Aldrich article)	
(2) VOTING AND ...	
a. ...DEMOCRACY	Week 3
i. Connection between voting and democracy	
ii. Voting matters! [ch. 2 Riker and ch3. Shepsle]	Week 4 (HW due)
iii. Simple majority voting and the 'problem' of voting: cyclical majorities [ch 4 Shepsle and ch 3 Riker]	Week 5
iv. Other types of voting rules I [ch. 4.A - 4.G Riker]	Week 6&7 NOTE:
EXAM IN WEEK 6	
v. Evaluating voting rules I [ch 4.H-4.I Riker, ch. 4-Arrow's thm: assumptions, Shepsle]	Week 8 (HW due)
vi. Arrow's Theorem [ch 4-Arrow's thm and its meaning, Shepsle]	Weeks 9 and 10
vii. Single-peaked preferences [ch. 5 Shepsle and Riker ]	Week 10 and 11
viii. Spatial voting	Week 11
b. ... OTHER ASPECTS	
i. Representation and stability [ch 1.2 Farrell]	Week 12 NOTE:
EXAM IN WEEK 12	
ii. Aspects of electoral systems [ch 1.3 Farrell]	Week 13
iii. Single member plurality [ch 2.1 and 2.4 Farrell]	Weeks 13 and 14
(HW due)	
iv. Proportional representation [ch 4.0-4.4 Farrell]	Weeks 14 and 15
v. Single transferable vote [ch 6 Farrell]	Weeks 15 and 16
(HW due)	

Final: Friday, December 9, 2:00-5:00 pm, location TBD. See <http://registrar.utexas.edu/schedules/119/finals>

\*Unless otherwise noted, exams and assignments will be held on the Monday of the week listed.

\*\*Note, this schedule will depend on the level and progress of the class. I will do my best to adhere to the assignment and exam dates, but the topics and pace are subject to change, in response to the students.

# Additional Notices

## **Documented Disability Statement:**

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone) or <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>

## **University of Texas Honor Code:**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

• See the following websites for more information:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/plagiarism/preventing.html>

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism>

## **Religious Holy Days:**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## **Emergency Evacuation Policy:**

In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax ([512-232-2759](tel:512-232-2759)), with "Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley" written in the subject line.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

Exceptions can be made in extreme circumstance at the discretion of the instructor, subject to College of Liberal Arts and University regulations.

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<sup>i</sup> If you are not registered via the registrar's office, or if you are auditing, see the instructor to be given access to the course website.