PPHA 31610
Analytical Politics II: Political Institutions
(Winter 2021)

VERY PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGES

- Instructors:
  - Luis Martinez - luismartinez@uchicago.edu, Keller 2011
  - Adam Zelizer - zelizer@uchicago.edu, Keller 3009

Course Description

This course introduces students to core topics and concepts on the role of political institutions in policy-making. The course develops fundamental theoretical and empirical tools for exploring policy-making and democratic performance. Lessons about political institutions will be understood from the perspective of a policy entrepreneur—that is, an individual or organization that develops strategy in order to advance policy change in legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

Logistics

As part of the University of Chicago’s and the Harris School’s efforts to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the course will be entirely virtual.

Every week students are expected to:

1. Watch pre-recorded lecture material on the week’s topic and do an assignment (problem set) on this material.

2. Participate in a virtual discussion session with the instructor. For this session, there will be a required reading that the students are expected to read in advance.

3. Participate in a weekly session with their assigned Teaching Assistant (TA).

Pre-recorded lectures

We will post on Canvas before each week a set of videos that we expect the students to watch. These videos will amount to approximately 40 minutes of viewing time per week. In these videos, we will focus on the more technical aspects of the course material and provide detailed walkthroughs of theoretical models, as well as discuss some empirical applications. Students will have an opportunity to ask questions about this material in office hours (instructor and TA) as well as in the TA sessions.
Discussion sessions

Each student will sign up for a weekly discussion session with one of the course instructors. These sessions last 80 minutes. For each session, there will be a required reading that the students are expected to read in advance. The reading is meant to connect the more theoretical aspects discussed in the lectures with real-world applications in policy-making. We are still sorting out the details, but it is likely that we will assign a group of students each week (5 approx.) to lead the discussion.

TA sessions

Each student will sign up for a weekly session with one of the course Teaching Assistants (TAs). These sessions will last 80 minutes. Before each session, students are expected to work on an assignment regarding the previous week’s topic, which they will have to hand in. A subset of these assignments will be marked and will contribute to the student’s final grade. These assignments will be solved and discussed during the session. TA sessions also provide an opportunity for students to ask further questions about the lecture material.

Evaluations

Besides the weekly assignments and participation in the discussion sessions, students will be assessed on two writing assignments. The first one will be due halfway through the course (i.e. midterms) and the second will be due after the end of lectures (i.e. finals). These will be short texts of no more than two pages, in which the students will argue in favor of a specific policy position, in the spirit of a policy memo or an op-ed.

Students’ final grade will be a weighted average of the different assignments: first written assignment (25%), second written assignment (25%), participation in discussion sessions (25%), problem sets (25%).

Course Outline

Week 1: The Spatial model of politics

Week 2: The Spatial Model in Action: Income Inequality and Taxation

Week 3: Controlling Politicians: Electoral Accountability

Week 4: The Role of the Media in Politics

Week 5: Electoral Systems

Week 6: Political Participation

Week 7: Special interests: Money and Lobbying

Week 8: Dynamic Inconsistency and the Politics of Reform

Week 9: Incentives and the Performance of Bureaucrats