

Analytical Politics I: Foundations

Professor Adam Zelizer

Spring 2025: Th 6:00-8:50pm

Course Details

- Location: TBD (@uchicago.edu)
- TA: TBD (@uchicago.edu)

Course Description

In this course, we study the goals of public policy, how to achieve them, and how politics shape public policy outcomes. We will consider questions such as: What should be the goals of public policy? How do we decide which goals to pursue? How do we achieve such goals? How do political institutions shape public policy outcomes? How does the strategic interaction of different societal groups with shared interests influence public policy outcomes?

Methodologically, the course introduces basic game theory. Game theory is the mathematical tool used to study situations of strategic interdependence, which is most of life. As such, it is critical for understanding the substantive issues discussed above. In addition, understanding basic game theory is a valuable skill in its own right for policy professionals.

Course Schedule

Part I: The Goals of Public Policy and How to Achieve Them

Collective Goals: What Should Be the Aim of Public Policy?

- **Week 1** – Introduction; Liberalism; Welfarism
 - Read: PEPP Preface, Introduction, Introduction to Part I
 - New Normative Theory Chapter on Canvas: Ch. 1 – 1.2 and 4.3–4.3.2
- **Week 2** – Egalitarianism; Collective Goals Wrap up
 - Read: New Normative Theory Chapter on Canvas: Ch. 1.3
 - Additional readings: Charles W. Mills. 2018. "Black Radical Kantianism". *Res Philosophica* 95(1)

- Margaret Urban Walker. 2015. "Making Reparations Possible: Theorizing Reparative Justice." In *Theorizing Transitional Justice*, Claudio Corradetti, Nir Eisikovits and Jack Volpe Rotondi (eds). London: Ashgate
- Problem Set 1 Distributed

Collective Decisions: How Should We Decide which Goals to Pursue?

- **Week 3** – Collective Decisions; Nash Equilibrium
 - Read: PEPP, Chapter 2, Appendix A
 - Problem Set 1 Due
 - Problem Set 2 Distributed

Collective Action: How Do We Achieve the Shared Policy Goals?

- **Week 4** – Collective Action: Coordination Problems; Externalities
 - Read: PEPP, Introduction to Part II; Chapter 4.1-4.4; Chapter 5
 - Listen: Nice White Parents Episode 1: The Book of Statuses. Podcast from the New York Times.
 - Problem Set 2 Due
- **Week 5** – Collective Action in Repeated Interactions
 - Read: PEPP, Chapter 4.6.3
 - Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, Chapter 1
- **Week 6** – Game Theory 2: Subgame Perfection
 - Read: PEPP, Appendix B.1-B.4
 - Problem Set 3 Distributed

Part II: How Politics Shape Policy

- **Week 7** – How Political Regimes Shape Policy; Selectorate Model
 - Read: PEPP, Chapter 11.1-11.4
 - George Ayittey. 1999. *Africa in Chaos*, Chapter 8. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Nancy Qian. 2015. “Making Progress on Foreign Aid.” *Annual Review of Economics* 7:277–308.
- Problem Set 3 Due
- **Week 8** – How Political Processes Shape Policy; Agenda Setting and Veto Players
 - Problem Set 4 Distributed
- **Week 9** – How the Organization of Political Pressure Groups Shape Policy; Concentrated and Diffuse Interests
 - Read: PEPP, Chapter 4.2.3
 - Problem Set 4 Due

Additional Course Information

Course Requirements

The course has three requirements:

- **Participation (10%)**
 - Students are expected to come to class prepared and participate in the discussions.
- **Problem Sets (60%)**
 - There will be four problem sets during the quarter. A few guidelines for the problem sets:
 - Problem sets must be turned in via the Gradescope link on Canvas by 6 PM (Central) on the day they are due.
 - We strongly encourage you to work in a problem set group. If you work in a group, you may turn in a single problem set for the whole group. Groups that turn in a joint problem set can be no larger than four people. If you turn in an individual problem set, it may not be identical to another student’s problem set.
- **Exam (30%)**
 - There will be one in-class midterm exam in the middle of the quarter. The exam will be graded on a numerical scale.

Grading and Evaluation

- **Regrade Policy:**

- Submit a regrade request in writing within one week of the exam or problem set being returned. Fully summarize what you believe the problems are and why. The TA will respond in writing. Note that your grade on that question can go up or down depending on the TA's findings. If you still have concerns, you may submit them in writing to the professor, who will issue a final grade.

- **Grading Curve:**

- Core courses at the Harris School are graded on a rough curve. The basic target distribution is:
 - * A [1/8], A- [1/4], B+ [1/4], B [1/4], B- or lower [1/8].

Academic Integrity

- The Harris School has a formal policy on academic integrity that you are expected to adhere to. Examples of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) turning in someone else's work as your own, copying solutions to past years' problem sets, and receiving any unapproved assistance on exams. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. All cases of cheating will be referred to the Dean of Students office, which may impose penalties per the Harris School Disciplinary Procedures. If you have any questions regarding what would or would not be considered academic dishonesty in this course, please do not hesitate to ask.

Use of AI

- We do not expect AI to be beneficial in this course. Nevertheless, any student using AI takes full responsibility for the accuracy of AI-generated content. Overreliance on AI content, without proper attribution, may lead to unintentional plagiarism, as LLM models have been accused of plagiarism. It may also limit the students' accumulation of skills and understanding of the material.

General Resources Available to Students

- Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook
- Student Wellness
- University Learning Resources

Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

- Harris School Policies
- University General Policies
- University Academic Policies
- Policies on audio and video recordings and deletion