Course information:
Time: Thursday 9:30 - 12:30, Pond Lab 236

Contact information for Professor:
E-mail: sgolder@psu.edu
Office: 305 Pond Lab

Course Description

Political institutions create incentives that influence the strategic choices made by political actors. They are in some sense the “rules of the game” in political life, and are themselves created to solve political problems. Some of the general problems that institutions might resolve are the aggregation of preferences, collective action, and the delegation of power. Although we will begin by examining various institutional solutions individually, later in the course we will think about how they may be connected. For instance, solving a collective action problem may involve delegation. We will focus on the trade-offs involved in using institutions to construct order in society.

Many of the readings use game-theoretic models and/or statistical analyses. It is assumed that all of the students have had some experience with these approaches (ideally introductory classes in both game theory and econometrics). One objective of this course is to familiarize the students with some of the models that are often used in the institutions literature, as well as some of the econometric techniques and choices frequently applied when testing institutional theories. As part of your preparation for class, you are expected to spend a significant amount of time working your way though the models in the readings. We will also devote time in class to discuss both the formal and statistical models used in this literature. The second objective of the course is to give students an array of theoretical approaches for use in their own research. The general theories as well as the specific applications are designed to be relevant across political science subfields, and you are explicitly encouraged to explore the ways in which models traditionally used in one subfield might be useful in others.

Required Texts:

In addition to the books listed above, we will read articles, book chapters, and unpublished manuscripts. Some additional ‘recommended readings’ are listed below each topic on the schedule. These are included as a preliminary (and non-exhaustive) guide for further reading. The ‘background readings’ included for some weeks provide useful context for the required readings. It is assumed that you have seen the material contained in the background readings before (although it might have been from a different source). Please examine these readings so that you can determine the extent to which you need to review the concepts covered therein.

**Grading**

- Participation: 20%. All students are required to have completed the readings for each week before class begins, and everyone should be prepared to discuss the readings during class. Intelligent participation in departmental talks and at conferences will be highly valued throughout your professional career and you should practice this ability now. I expect you to provide evidence that you have done the readings in a thoughtful and careful manner.

- Discussion leadership: 20%. Each student will be assigned two seminars to lead. Students should prepare a list of discussion questions, and e-mail them to the rest of the class by 4 pm of the Tuesday before the class they lead. The depth of and preparation evidenced in these questions, along with the leading of the seminar itself, will determine the student’s grade.

- Final exam: 60%. The exam will be take-home and is due on December 17, 2013 by 4:00pm. The exam questions are attached to this syllabus.

**Schedule**

**APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INSTITUTIONS**

**Week 1: August 29 — Introduction.**

**BACKGROUND READING:**


**Week 2: September 5 — From Old to New Institutionalism.**

**REQUIRED READING:**


RECOMMENDED READING:

AGGREGATING PREFERENCES

Week 3: September 12 — Aggregation in the Absence of Institutions: Why Institutions are Needed.

BACKGROUND READING:

REQUIRED READING:

RECOMMENDED READING:

Week 4: September 19 — Elections, Voting Rules, and Party Systems: Spatial Location
REQUIRED READING:


RECOMMENDED READING:


BACKGROUND READING:


REQUIRED READING:


RECOMMENDED READING:

Week 6: October 3 — Coalition Formation: Parties and Governments.

BACKGROUND READING:
McCarty and Meirowitz. 2007. Political Game Theory. Cambridge. Chapter 7 (Section 8), and Chapter 10 (Section 3).

REQUIRED READING:

RECOMMENDED READING:


**COOPERATION/COORDINATION**

**Week 7: October 10** — Collective Action.

**REQUIRED READING:**


**RECOMMENDED READING:**


**Week 8: October 17** - Constitutions, Commitment, and Coordination.

**REQUIRED READING:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Week 9: October 24 — Identity I.**

**Background Reading:**

McCarty and Meirowitz. 2007. *Political Game Theory*. Chapter 9 (Section 6).

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**

Week 10: October 31 — Identity II.

**REQUIRED READING:**


**RECOMMENDED READING:**


Week 11: November 7 - Domestic Institutions and International Cooperation.

**BACKGROUND READING:**


**REQUIRED READING:**


**Recommended reading:**


**Agenda-Setting and Delegation**

**Week 12: November 14 — Setting the Agenda.**

**Background reading:**

McCarty and Meirowitz. 2007. *Political Game Theory*. Chapter 7 (Section 5) and Chapter 8 (Section 4).

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


**Week 13: November 21 — Legislative Delegation and Electoral Control.**

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**

Week 14: December 5 — Executive Delegation.

REQUIRED READING:


RECOMMENDED READING:


Week 15: December 12 — Summary discussion.

**Final exam due Tuesday, December 17.**
Additional Information

Academic Dishonesty
The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one’s work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe. All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity. In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: [http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Academic_Integrity/integrity.shtml](http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Academic_Integrity/integrity.shtml)

Disabilities
Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site at: [www.equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/) Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.
PL SC 551 Political Institutions

Take-home examination.

Due on December 17, 2008 prior to 4:00 pm (in my mailbox).

Instructions.

Your exam should be no longer than 12 single-spaced pages in total (not including the bibliography or cover page). It can be less. Use standard-size fonts and margins. Staple your exam in the top-left corner (no folders, fancy or otherwise), and put your name only on a cover page. There should be nothing on the rest of the pages that identifies you as the author in any way. This will allow me to grade the exams anonymously.

You should spend as much time/space on each part of the question as you think appropriate. I am not expecting that you will write an equal amount for each section (though, of course, you are free to do so). Incorporate the readings from the semester where relevant. You should feel free to lean more heavily on the readings most directly related to your current interests, though you are expected to incorporate other areas of the literature covered in class as well.

Question.

Institutions can be solutions to political problems. For each of the main classes of political problems listed below, explain what the problem is, and what types of institutions might be solutions. How do such institutions solve these problems? (Do some actors benefit more than others? Which problems might these institutions not solve?) Draw examples from the readings as appropriate.

- Preference aggregation.
- Cooperation/coordination.
- Agenda setting.
- Delegation.