PS 1514: Political Strategy in International Relations

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University of Pittsburgh
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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15
Benedum Hall G36
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30

Strategic interdependence dominates international relations—how one state behaves not only affects its own outcomes but other states' outcomes as well. Game theory has become a primary method of studying strategic interdependence. This class offers a brief primer in elementary game theory and then surveys the major formal findings in international relations, with focuses on explanations for war and design of international institutions.

Course Materials

Blackboard is difficult to work with. Thus, I will post all course materials on my website: https://williamspaniel.com/classes/ps-1514-2016/. Most importantly, this includes links to required readings and some recorded videos of lectures.

Evaluation

Students will take three in-class exams. Each will be worth 30% of the final grade. Class participation makes up the remaining 10%. After calculating that weighted average, a student's grade will be *no worse* than the following:

$94\% < x$: A
$90 < x \leq 94\%$: A-
$87\% < x \leq 90\%$: B+
$83\% < x \leq 87\%$: B
$80\% < x \leq 83\%$: B-
$77\% < x \leq 80\%$: C+
$73\% < x \leq 77\%$: C
$70\% < x \leq 73\%$: C-
$x \leq 70\%$: Non-passing grades

Exam Format

The majority of exam materials will be quantitative. The only way to learn quantitative material is through practice. At the beginning of each unit of the class, I will post a problem set to the course website. All the quantitative questions on the exams will come directly from these problem sets. You are free to work with your fellow students on them. Because you need to show all work on the exams, your focus should be to learn how to solve the problems, not to figure out the answers.

Late Work

Absent any university regulations that provide exceptions, no late work will be. My aim is to return grades as quickly as possible and discuss the correct answers in class. Late work from one student unjustly delays this process for everyone else.

Math Warning

Because this class is quantitative, you will have to do some math. (Gasp!) I do not expect you to know anything more than the University's minimum math requirements for admission. If you can solve the equation $3x = 5xy - 2$ for x, you know everything you need to excel in this class.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class. You and you alone are responsible for attending lectures and staying up-to-date.

Laptop Policy

Laptops are prohibited in class. Word processing is not useful for quantitative note taking. Please bring a pad of paper and a writing utensil.

Readings

You do not need to purchase any books for this course. However, you may find having a textbook useful for the first unit on game theory. I have two recommendations:

Game Theory 101: The Complete Textbook
Game Theory: An Open Access Textbook

The first one follows the lectures of the first unit of the course and does not use extraneous mathematical notation (pluses) but costs $5 for a digital copy and ~$14 for a physical copy (minuses). (I also wrote it. Unclear whether this is a plus or a minus.) The second one is free (plus) but does not follow the lectures of this course and has a lot of mathematical notation (minuses).

The readings and schedule below are subject to change, pending how fast we move through the material. Please see the website for links to the readings and an up-to-date schedule.

You will note that the number of readings for this class is substantially lower than your average political science class. This is because the majority of your workload will be doing the problem sets. Speaking of which:

Schedule

8/30: Introduction

9/1: No Class (American Political Science Association Conference)

9/6: Dominance

9/8: Nash Equilibrium

9/13: Mixed Strategies

9/15: Calculating Payoffs

9/20: Subgame Perfect Equilibrium

9/22: Comparative Statics

George Tsebelis. "The Abuse of Probability in Political Analysis: The Robinson Crusoe Fallacy."

9/27: Review

9/29: Midterm #1

10/4: Bargaining and War's Inefficiency Puzzle

James D. Fearon. "Rationalist Explanations for War."

10/6: Uncertainty and Cheap Talk

10/11 and 10/13: Peace Subsidies and Trade

Phil Arena and Anna O. Pechenkina. "External Subsidies and Lasting Peace."

10/18: No Class (Fall Break)

10/20: No Class (Peace Science Conference)

10/25: Convergence

R. Harrison Wagner. "Bargaining and War."

10/27: Preventive War

11/1: Negotiating over Weapons

Thomas Chadefaux. "Bargaining over Power: When Do Shifts in Power Lead to War?"

11/3: Catch Up

11/8: Midterm #2

11/10: Midterm Hand Back Day

11/15: The Iran Deal Part 1

11/17: The Iran Deal Part 2

11/22: Repeated Prisoner's Dilemma

Robert Axelrod. The Evolution of Cooperation. (The whole PDF.)

11/24: No Class (Thanksgiving)

11/29: Rubinstein Bargaining and Enforcement

Lisa Blaydes. "Rewarding Impatience: A Bargaining and Enforcement Model of OPEC."

12/1: Perverse Incentives and Mechanism Design

Mark Fey and Kris Ramsay. "Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict."

12/6: The UNSC and Outside Options

Erik Voeten. "Outside Options and the Logic of Security Council Action."

12/8: Bribery in the United Nations

12/13: Final