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 158
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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/ps-1514-spring-2017/. Most importantly, this includes links to homeworks, required readings and recorded videos of selected 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; in past semesters, students working in groups generally received much better grades than students who worked alone. However, 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 accepted. 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.

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.

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 inequality $3x > 5xy - 2$ 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.

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

1/5: Introduction

1/10: Dominance

1/12: Nash Equilibrium

1/17: Mixed Strategies

1/19: Calculating Payoffs

1/24: Subgame Perfect Equilibrium

1/26: Comparative Statics

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

1/31: Review

2/2: Midterm #1

2/7 and 2/9: Bargaining and War's Inefficiency Puzzle

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

2/14: Uncertainty and Cheap Talk

2/14 and 2/16: Peace Subsidies and Trade

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

2/21: War as a Costly Process

R. Harrison Wagner. "Bargaining and War."

No class on 2/23 (Annual International Studies Association Conference)

2/28: Preventive War

3/2: Negotiating over Weapons

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

No class 3/7 or 3/9 (spring break)

3/14: Catch Up and Review

3/16: Midterm #2

3/21: Midterm Hand Back Day

3/23: The Iran Deal Part 1

3/28: The Iran Deal Part 2

No class on 3/30 (Nuclear Latency Conference)

4/4: Perverse Incentives and Mechanism Design

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

No class on 4/6 (Annual Midwest Political Science Conference)

4/11: Repeated Prisoner's Dilemma

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

4/13: Rubinstein Bargaining and Enforcement

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

4/18: The UNSC and Outside Options

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

4/20: Midterm #3