COURSE SYLLABUS
PSC 761: AMERICAN POLITICAL FRONTIERS

Spring 2006        Prof. Charles J. Finocchiaro
Tuesdays 4:00 - 6:50 Office:  422 Park Hall
502 Park Hall      Phone: 645-2251 ext. 422
University at Buffalo  E-mail: finocchi@buffalo.edu

COURSE OVERVIEW:
This course provides an introduction to social choice theory as applied to American politics. As a branch of positive political theory, social (or public choice) theory seeks to explain a variety of political and economic phenomena by making an assumption (or a set of assumptions) and then analyzing how actors behave. Some of the more prominent questions and issues in this area deal with collective action (e.g., interest group formation), the spatial theory of voting (and voting rules more generally), and institutional rules and development. Despite the course number, this is an introductory-level course that is appropriate for anyone with an interest in either positive theory (and as such, it is a nice complement to game theory) or political institutions, voting, and elections. The seminar will also provide a foundation for further coursework in subfields like legislative politics which draw heavily on the social choice tradition. The reading list is a mix of the “classics” and their critics, alongside more recent applied work in American politics.

COURSE MATERIALS:
The readings for the course will be drawn from the list of books below, as well as a number of journal articles and chapters from edited volumes. Required books are available for purchase from the usual sources and are also on 2-hour/overnight reserve in the library. Unless indicated otherwise, the remaining assigned readings can be downloaded from JSTOR. The readings not available from JSTOR may be accessed through the UB Libraries course reserve system at: ulib.buffalo.edu or via UBlearns. All of these sites require you to logon from a UB IP address or to verify your identity. Please bear in mind that readings may be added or dropped and the syllabus and schedule may be altered at my discretion. Any changes will be announced in class and by e-mail.

Required Books:

Green and Shapiro, Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory (Yale 1994) ISBN: 0300066368
One of the following two:


**Recommended Books:**


* Good introduction to social choice theory and its application in political science.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION:**

Course grades will be based on three components, each comprising one-third of the total. [1] Since this is a graduate-level reading course, students are expected to come to class each week prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings. The extent and quality of participation in class discussion, including leading the discussion on the days corresponding to submission of a critical review, will make up the first component. [2] Students will on at least two occasions (possibly more, depending on final enrollment) write a critical review of the literature assigned for the week. These reviews need not be excessively long (6-7 pages is probably adequate), but they should analytically synthesize and critique the literature in the particular area of focus. More effort and attention should be focused on analysis and criticism and very little on summarization. [3] Students will also complete a more lengthy writing assignment. This project involves selecting a particular area of research (or topic) in which a public choice perspective has been applied and tracing the evolution of the literature both within and outside this paradigm. The paper should have two major themes: a cogent, critical review of the body of literature and a discussion of unresolved issues that are open for further research. This last component, while not necessarily involving a research design, could certainly lay the groundwork for a future research project. This paper is due Wednesday, May 3 (approximately one week after the last class session).

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, ACCESSIBILITY, ETC.:**

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will be sanctioned to the fullest extent possible under UB policy. Additionally, students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner. These and other expectations are discussed in more detail in the Graduate School Policies and Procedures (www.grad.buffalo.edu/grad-docs/policies/) as well as in the Student Rules and Regulations (www.ub-judiciary.buffalo.edu/art1.shtml).

Students with special needs that require accommodation should meet personally with the professor as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester.

**OFFICE HOURS:**

Tuesdays from 8:45 to 11:15 and 2:00 to 3:00; Thursdays from 11:00 to 11:30
**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

* Indicates the material is available through the UB Libraries course reserve system or posted on UBlearns.

**January 17: Introduction**


**January 24: Overview**


**SPATIAL MODELS**

**January 31: Spatial Models I**


**February 7: Spatial Models II & Extensions to the Downsian Model**

Downs, Ch. 7-16

Hinich and Munger, Ch. 3-4, 6, 8

**February 14: Applications**


**GROUP CHOICE**

**February 21: Voting Rules, Agenda Setting, and Sophisticated Voting I**


**February 28: Voting Rules, Agenda Setting, and Sophisticated Voting II**

Hinich and Munger, Ch. 5

Riker, Ch. 6-10

**March 7: Applications**


**March 21: Institutional Analysis**


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* Although each student will read portions of both books, you will be responsible for reading only one of the two in its entirety.
COLLECTIVE ACTION

March 28: Collective Action I


April 4: Collective Action II

Olson, Ch. 4-6


April 11: Applications

Aldrich, Ch. 6-9


ASSESSMENTS

April 18: Critics


April 25: Responses to the Critics and Other Perspectives


**Final Paper Due: Wednesday, May 3, no later than 5pm**