

**ECONOMICS 4221**  
**Political and Public Choice Economics**  
**Spring 2013**

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**Office Hours:** T,R 11am-12:10pm; T 2:45-5pm; Friday afternoons by appointment

**Course Overview:**

Political and public choice economics can be defined as the analysis of decision-making in non-traditional market settings, specifically political market settings, using economic models. Essentially, the individual utility-maximizing agent that acts in economic markets also acts in the political arena. Therefore, any policy outcomes are the product of interactions among individuals in political markets. In this framework, it is apparent that governmental decisions are the result of rational optimizing behavior, even if they do not lead to policies that maximize national welfare. The public choice field can be roughly divided into two subfields, institutional political economy and social choice theory. The former takes a look at the role of institutions in government outcomes from a positive (in the economic sense) point of view. The latter examines how different voting procedures affect incentives and thus results in a normative (welfare-oriented) sense.

This is an upper-level undergraduate course that demands a lot of work (reading and writing), but that work should result in a good understanding of the topic and fulfillment from learning. The issues we discuss are complex but they do lend themselves extremely well to critical thinking and rational inquiry, which are the guiding principles of this course. Our goal is to become and remain informed about the issues related to political and public choice economics and, even more importantly, acquire the ability to think about complex issues in a logical objective manner. Thinking critically is what permits us to differentiate between the illogical and the sensible, between the misleading use of statistics and anecdotal evidence, and the reasonable presentation of information.

[A more detailed outline of covered material is posted separately.](#)

**Text:**

Most of the readings for this class are from academic journals, but we will utilize *The Elgar Companion to Public Choice*, ed. William F. Shughart and Laura Razzolini. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2001. This text is optional.

**Prerequisites:**

Students must have completed ECON 2010, 2020, 3070 and 3818. I assume that you did not only take the class, but also that you understand and remember the content. It is also helpful to have some understanding of simple econometric analysis. The prerequisites must be strictly enforced.

**Grading:**

Class participation and attendance	15%
Article critique and presentation	12%
Semester project presentation	5%
Semester project paper	15%
Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	12%
Final exam	21%

I adhere strictly to the University guidelines on Incompletes (“An I is given only when students, *beyond their control*, have been unable to complete course requirements. A substantial amount of work must have been *satisfactorily completed* before approval for such a grade is completed.”). Bad grades, unsatisfactory performance, too many credit hours, work conflicts, etc. are not reasons for an incomplete.

**Article Presentations and Critiques, and Class Participation:**

For most of the course, I will lecture and present papers, but in the last few weeks you will divide into small groups for the presentation of papers each class. By working in groups you may gain extra insight into the theory of collective action and how well-made constitutional rules (or in this case, course rules) can increase social welfare. The groups presenting a paper will have studied them in great detail, but I expect the rest of the class to have read all of the papers and be ready to discuss them (most days there will be a short quiz on the readings that will count toward your participation grade). Rude and counter-productive behavior such as texting and having your laptop open during class discussion will severely damage your participation grade.

**Term Projects:**

Students will be required to work in small groups (or possibly individually\*) and choose a topic and examine it in a political economics or public choice setting. This leaves open a broad range of subject matter from which to choose, so you must submit a first-choice and second-choice topic to me by the end of the third week (1/31) and you must have an approved topic by the end of the fifth week (2/14). Your paper must emphasize the political economy or public choice aspects of the situation you are analyzing, and should most importantly be an analytical (NOT narrative) study. No paper should be longer than 8 pages (double spaced). More details on the paper are posted on the course website. Feel free to meet with me on a regular basis to discuss your paper.

Plagiarism is an academic offense and any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will be sanctioned. If you are unsure or uncertain about what constitutes either cheating or plagiarism, please consult me or the University of Colorado Catalog. To insure a level playing field on this front, all papers will be submitted to turnitin.com.

**Exams:**

There will be two exams and a cumulative final. Tests will consist of short-answer questions and some longer problems. To be fair to everybody, I will not answer ANY questions during exams (even about typos) – this puts everyone on equal footing during the exams. The exams (other than the final) will not be cumulative, but the material does build on itself so it is important to understand all of the concepts as we go. **Exams will be given in class on the days listed. Do NOT miss an exam. There will be NO makeup exams, and NO EXAMS WILL BE DROPPED!!**

**Exam Schedule:**

Exam I: Thursday, February 14<sup>th</sup>

Exam II: Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>

Final exam: Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> 1:30-4pm in our usual room.

If you have three or more final exams scheduled on the same day, you are entitled to arrange an alternative exam time for the **last** exam or exams scheduled on that day. To qualify for rescheduling final exam times, you must provide evidence that you have three or more exams on the same day, and arrangements must be made with your instructor no later than the end of the sixth week of the semester. Given the final exam schedule, it is actually not possible that our exam could be the third of three on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Grading Scale:**

<u>Your score</u>	<u>Grade</u>
92% to 100%	A
90% to 91%	A-
88% to 89%	B+
82% to 87%	B
80% to 81%	B-
78% to 79%	C+
72% to 77%	C
70% to 71%	C-
68% to 69%	D+
62% to 67%	D
60% to 61%	D-
Below 59.5%	F

**Additional Notes:***Honor Code*

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council ([honor@colorado.edu](mailto:honor@colorado.edu); 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Additional information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode>

*Disabilities*

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at [dsinfo@colorado.edu](mailto:dsinfo@colorado.edu).

If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links at [Disability Services website](#) and discuss your needs with your professor.

#### *Religious holidays*

A comprehensive calendar of the religious holidays most commonly observed by CU-Boulder students can be found at <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/> Review this list and the class syllabus. After reviewing the syllabus, please see the instructor if you believe that you need an accommodation for religious reasons. The instructor should be notified within the first two weeks of classes. Campus policy regarding religious observances states that faculty must make *reasonable* accommodation for them and in so doing, be careful not to inhibit or penalize those students who are exercising their rights to religious observance. For more information see [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac\\_relig.html](http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html)

#### *Code of Behavior*

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at [http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student\\_code](http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code)

#### *Policy on Discrimination and Harassment*

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>