

ECONOMICS 4221
Political and Public Choice Economics
Spring 2020

Important!!!! Please note that ALL information contained in this syllabus, except the part under “additional notes” is crucial for the course, and therefore, subject to examination. In other words, anything from this syllabus could (and will) turn up on a quiz or exam!

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E-mail: mertens@colorado.edu Email is by far the best way to contact me. I check my email and respond (if time) every T,R and most M,W,F between 8:30 and 9am. If there is not enough time to respond to all emails during that time, then I will respond in the evening.

Web: canvas.colorado.edu

Office Hours: T, TH 12:15-1:45 & 3:15-3:45pm, and by appointment (give 2 weeks' notice).

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.

Prerequisites

Students must have completed ECON 1078, 1088, 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 **very** important that you fulfill the prerequisites **before** you take this course, and **still** understand the materials in the prerequisite. If you have any uncertainty as to whether you are under or over qualified to take the course, please talk to me ASAP. The prerequisites must be strictly enforced.

A strong math background will make this course easier. Math involves rigor and a way of thinking that facilitates economic thinking. In addition, graphs and simple mathematical descriptions of economic problems provide insights that would be difficult to convey with only words.

Policy on Cheating:

If you are suspected of cheating, I will immediately and without notification forward your case to the honor code office. This is actually the fairest way to proceed. In these instances, if I took it upon myself to make the decision of whether you violated the honor code, there could be bias involved. The honor code council has both students and faculty members, and they are trained to deal with these types of situations. I will accept the honor code decision as final. If the honor code finds that you did not violate the code, then there will be no repercussions, and all grades will be entered based on your submitted work. If you are found to have violated the honor code (see below), by both the honor code council and I, you will automatically fail the course!

Electronics in the Classroom

Laptops, tablets, and even phones can actually play a role and benefit learning in many types of classes. There are many pros and cons to allowing consistent use of these devices during the class period. However, it has become abundantly clear to me that these devices are more of a distraction than a learning aid in most situations. In addition, taking notes by hand has actually been shown to be [more effective than taking them on a laptop or tablet](#), and use of devices has been shown to [lower not only the grades of the users, but also of the surrounding students](#). Therefore, electronic devices will NOT be allowed in the classroom (this includes cell phone use for texting, etc.). **You especially cannot use any form of electronic device during Group-Led Discussions or Group Assignments (it defeats the purpose of working together). You should take a calculator to class on Group Assignment days and put your phone completely out of sight!** If you are expecting an important call or text, then simply put your phone on vibrate, sit near the door, and step out when the call/text comes through. Otherwise, keep your phone in your pocket/bag, and **not** on your desk (or I may ask you to put it away or leave the class). Of course, if you have a disability services related need for these devices they will be allowed – in that case notify me of your exception ASAP. Some people write out their notes into a tablet; in this case an exception may be made – again notify me ASAP.

Required Materials:

1. All of the readings for this class are from academic journals.
2. You will need a financial (not a graphing) calculator for some exams.

Class Format:

This class will be slightly different from many of your usual classes. Some terms for our class format might be “relatively learner-centered” or “semi-rotated”. Research on learning supports the use of these systems, and if I were to ignore them, I would be utilizing outdated and even defective teaching methods. For example, current research demonstrates that repetition helps strengthen neuronetworks and thus, increases long-term learning. Frequent problem solving, reviews and cumulative exams are all effective methods of beneficial repetition. Other research-backed effective systems are outlined below.

A Note on Learning Systems and Assessments

This course is a little more traditional than many of the other classes I teach. Lecture is still the primary component, but group assignments and discussions are taking on a slightly larger role. One of the most important changes from prior semesters is that all exams will be cumulative, and we will spend at least a little time reviewing for each exam. A little more detail on these systems is given below:

Learning systems:

1. Lecturing: explaining difficult material not easily learned on your own with text, groups, etc.
2. Exams: exams should be learning tools as well as assessment tools! We will go over each exam in depth in class. Reviewing exams is one area where in-class discussion and explanation are most effective. Just reading answers on a key has been shown to be one of the least effective methods to learn material. Therefore, exam reviews will be the one area of class where no notes, associated pictures, or keys will be posted.
3. Group-Led-Discussions: we will cover both classic and more recent relevant articles from scholarly journals. Group-led-discussions are a mix of presentations and discussions. The more creative you can be with these, the more you will get out of them (and the better will be your grade). Finding interesting ways to engage the class in discussion of these articles will teach you critical skills that will not only solidify the current information but will also aid in your learning for other classes. Presentation of material is one of the most instructive learning systems because:
 - a. *If you are going to inform others about what you know, you must first fully understand it yourselves. If you cannot explain a concept to others you may not fully understand it yourself.*
 - b. *You must research the topic, which may expose you to new ideas and sources of material. These sources could help in other coursework.*
 - c. *Most “real-world” careers require some form of presentation skills.*
 - d. *You will start to learn how to defend specific points of view in front of others. This is a critical professional skill!*
 - e. *Help you learn to organize information in a clear & concise way. Your audience will want to hear the most relevant information in the most clear and understandable fashion.*
 - f. *Help you learn presentation tools, formats and devices.*
 - g. *You learn how to practice presentations and fit information into a set time period (very important in business).*
 - h. *You can discern what it takes to teach others.*
 - i. *It will teach you how to respond to critical questions in front of others.*
 - j. *Learn to analytically and reasonably justify a specific economic rationale.*
4. Discussion: discussing the articles we cover will help make the information more concrete and add to long-term learning.
5. Group scholarship: we will work some practice problems in groups, which can help your understanding of the material whether you already understand it fairly well or are struggling a bit. I will announce the days for these problems at least a week in advance.
6. Self-study: reading the articles and solving the review questions.

Assessment systems:

1. Cumulative Exams: shown to improve learning more than virtually every other technique. As noted above, exams are a part of the learning process, not just a part of assessment – we will go over every exam (except, unfortunately, the final) in class. *It is important to review and relearn the material as we build upon that information. This increases long-term learning!* There will be three exams and a cumulative final. All exams are cumulative, and the material does build on itself, so it is important to understand all of the concepts as we go.
2. Group-Led Discussion: to give incentives for giving high quality discussions and informing the class, these will be graded.
3. Quizzes on Article Readings: to motivate actually reading the articles. Since this is an upper-level course involving much discussion, your quiz grade can be improved by your efforts to

add to that discussion. This is a “be here” class – if you put in the effort, you will do well. If you prefer a class where you can just get the notes, skip a lot of classes and take some tests, then another course would be more appropriate.

4. Group assignments will account for part of your grade (see below).

More Information on Assessment:

Exams: There will be two (cumulative) exams and a cumulative final. Tests will consist of short-answer questions and some longer problems. These will be given in class on the days listed. If you miss an exam with a valid excuse (e.g. a note from your doctor or Wardenburg), then the weight of your final will be increased. Undocumented illnesses do not count as valid excuses (as long as this is not in conflict with a University policy). **Note that the exam dates below are not tentative – exams will be given in class on the days listed. NO EXAMS WILL BE DROPPED!!**

Exam Schedule:

Exam I: Tuesday, February 25th

Exam II: Tuesday, April 14th

Final exam: Sunday, May 3rd at 4:30pm in our usual room.

Final Exam Conflicts

Official University Policy states that: 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 tenth week of the semester (before spring break).

Group Assignments:

These cooperative learning exercises (detailed above) are extremely important. The group assignment dates are listed in the course outline. It is important not to miss these days without an excused absence. The object of these assignments is to work together and engage your brains in the learning process. The goal is NOT to try and finish the assignments quickly, or in most cases, to even finish them at all. You will receive a passing score of 75% just for being present and working on the in-class problems with your group. Also, any group-work that you submit with the names of all members of your group listed by last name in alphabetical order, will receive an additional 10%. Any day that no cell phone of any member of your group is visible, your group will receive an additional 10%. Lastly, if I never see your cell phone during class throughout the entire semester, your overall grade for these assignments will be raised another 5%. Additionally, I will sometimes have a random member of a random group demonstrate a problem at the board, and if you are a member of the group that presents, it can raise your grade for that assignment.

Group-Led Article Discussions, Quizzes and Participation

We will review several relevant academic articles on different issues in political and public choice economics. You will be required to understand these articles, and you will work in teams to present and lead a discussion on one of the articles. When you are not in the discussion-leading group you are still expected to have read the article and there will be a short quiz.

Fortunately, the fields of public choice and political economy have some journals that are very 'readable' at the undergraduate level. Your goal with the group-led discussions is to make one article of your choosing very understandable to the class. The class will have read the article (there will be a short quiz on the readings that will count toward the final grade), so it is your job to make the paper even more clear, and primarily to motivate a successful discussion about the article. You should try and answer questions as the author would. It is not your job to critique the article – all of the articles have already been critiqued by PhD referees before being published. However, if you find follow-up articles that critique the paper it is fine (and even encouraged) to cite those articles. The groups leading the discussion will have studied their paper in great detail, but I expect the rest of the class to have read all of the papers and be ready to discuss them – rude and counter-productive behavior such as texting and having your laptop open during class discussion will *severely* damage your own presentation grade.

I have a list of articles from which you can choose, or you may choose one of your own. If you choose your own, then I suggest you find a paper published in the journal *Public Choice*. Be sure **not** to choose an editorial or something that is mostly an econometric study. I must approve all paper choices.

The class will take a roughly 10-minute quiz at the beginning of the hour to be sure everyone is ready to discuss, and during that time, you will set-up and prepare your discussion (you get 125% for that day's quiz!). Participation/discussion on GLD days will add to your quiz grade. You should be able to keep the class engaged in discussion for 30 to 40 minutes (30 minute minimum; if you think you might need more than 40 minutes, just let me know in advance). **You will be graded down if you cannot keep the class engaged in an interesting and informative discussion about the paper for that time. If you choose to have an activity or game as a part of your GLD, it is important to have that activity portray what is being explained in the article (there should not be much uncertainty, unless the paper calls for it).** I will also discuss some major points of the paper after the GLD, or on the following class day. More guidance for the GLDs is posted separately.

If you are not leading the GLD that day, then **you cannot use any form of electronic device during Group-Led Discussions (it is rude to those leading the activities). If you use them on those days, you will automatically receive a zero for that day's quiz.** If you are expecting an important call or text, then simply put your phone on vibrate, sit near the door, and step out when the call/text comes through.

There will also be quizzes on some days that we will be covering already posted notes. On those days, you should read the notes in advance and be ready to discuss the topics involved. **On all quizzes, I use the No-Nonsense rule, meaning that if you did not do the required reading, it is better for you to simply state that than to try and guess your way through the quiz. You may use handwritten (not photocopied) notes of your own for quizzes. Quizzes are given at the beginning of class, so do Not be late!**

Attendance Policy

There are many studies showing a clear relationship between class attendance and student achievement. For this reason, there is a strict attendance policy for this course. Attendance will be taken on most days. If at any point after the first two weeks, your absences account for more than 19.5% of the course days to that point in the term (see examples below), then you will be asked to withdraw from the class. If you do not withdraw, you will receive a failing grade. Please note that staying in a course despite a failing grade will not help you in terms of student loans (they are on to that), and typically does not help in terms of scholarships or visas. If I tell you it is a good idea to

withdraw, you should withdraw!! A sign-in sheet will be circulated daily *when necessary*. **It is your responsibility to make sure that you have signed in for each class (having someone else sign your name is a violation of the honor code).** Due to new policy, I have added on to the days you can miss because Wardenburg would rather not have you just stop by to pick up an excuse form. **The added days are meant to include absence due to a “one-off” illness, family emergencies, etc.** If you must miss an extended period of time (e.g. due to extended illness), please let me know ASAP, and we will make arrangements.

In addition, you will be administratively dropped if you do not attend each (all) of the first 3 days of class.

Examples of attendance policy violation:

1. If you miss more than one day in the first 5 weeks, you would be in violation.
2. If you miss more than two days in the first 7 weeks, you would be in violation.
3. If you miss more than three days in the first 10 weeks, you would be in violation.
4. If you miss more than five days in the semester, you would be in violation.

Grading:

Group Assignments	7%
Article Quizzes (& Participation)	24%
Group-Led Discussion	10%
Exam 1	17%
Exam 2	20%
Final exam	22%

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.

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-

Additional Notes:

Accommodation for Disabilities

All faculty assume responsibility for ensuring that their individual courses and content are accessible to all students. Please utilize principles of Universal Design when creating new courses; otherwise, make appropriate alterations to existing material to accommodate students who require assistance. You may contact our Universal Instructional Design Consultant on [the Academic Technology Design Team](#) in the Office of Information Technology for more information by calling 303-735-4357 (5-HELP).

Faculty consultations with an Access Coordinator in [Disability Services](#) serve as an opportunity to provide clarity and guidance regarding the implementation of accommodations and working with students with disabilities. To request an appointment with an Access Coordinator, contact Disability Services at dsinfo@colorado.edu or 303-492-8671

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#) (www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/students). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website and discuss your needs with your professor.

Religious Holidays

It is the responsibility of every instructor to explain clearly her or his procedures about absences due to religious observances in the course syllabus so that all students are fully informed, in writing, near the beginning of each semester's classes. [Campus policy regarding religious observances](#) states that faculty *must* make reasonable accommodations for students and in so doing, be careful not to inhibit or penalize those students who are exercising their rights to religious observance. Faculty should be aware that a given religious holiday may be observed with very different levels of attentiveness by different members of the same religious group and thus may require careful consideration to the particulars of each individual case.

For more information on the religious holidays most commonly observed by CU Boulder students consult the [online interfaith calendar](#).

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, *{{insert your procedures here}}* See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Classroom Behavior

Faculty and students should be aware of the campus [Classroom and Course-Related Behavior policy](#) which describes examples of unacceptable classroom behavior and provides information on how to handle such circumstances should they arise. Faculty are encouraged to address the issue of classroom behavior in the syllabus, and to understand their [professional rights and duties](#).

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 race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. 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. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. CU's Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking or related retaliation. CU Boulder's Discrimination and Harassment Policy prohibits discrimination, harassment or related retaliation based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct under either policy should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127. Information about the OIEC, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment or related retaliation can be found at the [OIEC website](#).

Honor Code

The Boulder campus has an [Academic Integrity Policy](#) and a [student Honor Code](#); individual faculty members are expected to familiarize themselves with its tenets and follow the approved procedures should violations be perceived. The campus has been working diligently to make this process work better and to provide guidance on 'gray areas' at the [Honor Code website](#).

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to [the academic integrity policy](#). Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code Council as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

Any University policies that are in conflict with my own policies will supersede my policy!

A reply from one student to another on the discussion board for one of my colleague's online classes: "If you read the course syllabus you will find the answer to your questions. If you do not understand what you read, I recommend you read multiple times. After reading the syllabus if you still have questions come back and I will try to help you as much as possible."



**WHAT IF I TOLD
YOU**

**THE INFORMATION YOU SEEK IS IN
THE SYLLABUS?**