Political-Economic Theories
PPPE6301

Fall 2017  Tue 7:00pm - 9:45pm  GR 4.208

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Office Hours: Tue 5:30pm-6:30pm

Course Description

How can long-dead Adam Smith help us explain sex trafficking of Thai women to Japan? What insights can Karl Marx provide for explaining the Financial Crisis of 2008? What can Schumpeter teach us about cartels in the Mexican Telecom Industry? This seminar provides a grand overview of the big thinkers in political economy — from Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, to John Maynard Keynes, Milton Friedman and Robert Lucas Jr., to Mancur Olson, Alexander Gerschenkron and Karl Polanyi, and many more. In addition to introducing these theories, each class explores their relevance to current times using case studies of real world scenarios.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The course objective is to enable students to evaluate the validity of competing arguments. After all, for any given topic, several legitimate positions can typically be adopted – even though they might contradict each other. Which of these positions is the ‘best’ position often depends on the criteria used to evaluate the problem: Is the objective to reduce costs or to uphold ethical standards? Is it about benefiting consumers or favoring producers? In other words, there might not be a ‘correct’ answer, but there might be a ‘best’ answer given certain criteria by which to judge a situation. To achieve this, the course offers students the opportunity to sharpen their analytical skills. Specifically, students will learn a) how to evaluate the theoretical merit of competing arguments, and b) how to obtain and understand empirical evidence to adjudicate between competing arguments.

By the end of this course, students should be able to make sense of messy real-world situations by examining competing arguments in a theoretically-informed and evidence-based way. Students will know how to identify competing answers; they will have learned how to determine appropriate criteria for judging their respective merit; and students will be able to evaluate rival hypotheses. To measure their progress with respect to these learning outcomes, students will write essays analyzing current real-world issues, including policy recommendations. Furthermore, students will present their findings verbally in the form of public presentations. Lastly, students will need to arrive at their own conclusions, and defend them, in the context of seminar-style discussions.

Teaching Method

Issues in political economy often offer no ‘correct’ answer but only a ‘best’ answer that are most appropriate given some criteria by which to evaluate the possible answers. Consequently, this course offers an opportunity to prepare for a career in settings where there are no clear-cut answers either, such
as consulting, finance and law. In addition to the analytical skills, skills such as teamwork, argumentation, writing and independent project management are required as well. I use teaching methods that offer the opportunity to develop these workplace-related skills while you are investigating Political Economy issues. For example, the class will be divided in teams that work together for the entire semester. During class time I frequently give small in-class assignments that need to be solved by the teams in order to facilitate your ability to work in a team. Further, I require students to produce written output such as short memos. These assignments convey basic writing and argumentation skills, which you need at your workplace later on. I subscribe to these teaching methods not only to prepare you for the workplace, but also from a pedagogical perspective. Research shows that student learning is enhanced by providing active learning opportunities. In other words, you will learn more if I engage you with tasks than if I would simply lecture to you.

**Assignments and Academic Calendar**

**Week 1 (8/22) – Introduction**

**Required**

none

**Recommended**


**Week 2 (8/29) – Classical economics: Smith**

**Required**


Lefteris Tsoulfidis. Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations. In *Competing Schools of Economic Thought*. Springer, October 2010. [3.3; 3.6-3.8.1]


**Recommended**


**Week 3 (9/5) – Classical economics: Malthus and Ricardo**

**Required**


**Recommended**

David Ricardo. On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation. August 1817. [Preface, Ch.1,2,7,8,32]


**Week 4 (9/12) – Marxist Economics**

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 5 (9/19) – Neoclassical Economics

Required


Recommended


Lefteris Tsoulfidis. The Structure of the Neoclassical Theory. In Competing Schools of Economic Thought. Springer, October 2010. [7.2-7.3]


R.L. Heilbroner. The worldly philosophers: the lives, times, and ideas of the great economic thinkers. Touchstone, 1999. [Ch. 7]
Week 6 (9/26) – Keynesian Economics

⇒ Due: Short Paper 1

Required


Recommended


Week 7 (10/3) – Return of the Classics

Required


**Recommended**


**Week 8 (10/10) – Economic approaches to politics**

**Required**


Recommended


Week 9 (10/17) – Political approaches to economics

Required


Recommended

Edward R Tufte. *Political control of the economy*. Princeton Univ Pr, 1980. [Ch.1]


Week 10 (10/24) – Power

Required


**Recommended**


Joseph A Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. George Allen & Unwin, May 1943. [Ch.7,8]


**Week 11 (10/31) – State**

⇒ *Due: Short Paper 2*

**Required**


**Recommended**


**Week 12 (11/7) – History**

**Required**

A. Gerschenkron. *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*. Routledge, 1962. [Ch.1]


**Recommended**


**Week 13 (11/14) – Culture**

**Required**


**Recommended**


K. Polanyi. The great transformation: Economic and political origins of our time. New York: Rinehart, 1944. [Ch.3,4,5,6]


**Week 14 (11/21) – no class (Thanksgiving)**

**Week 15 (11/28) – Comparative Capitalisms**

⇒ *Due: Short Paper 3*

**Required**


**Recommended**


Week 16 (12/05) – Dissertation Workshop

No readings

Structure of Class

Each class has several components:

1. Each week, prior to class, you will need to submit several items on eLearning.
   - You will need to submit two “why” questions about the readings. These questions should be pretty specific, and they should focus on the theory proposed (not the personal background of the author, etc.). For example, “I don’t understand why the author argues that A follows B - could we clarify this issue?”, “Why does the author think that X is going to happen, because from my understanding Y is much more likely?”, or “Why does B follow from A for author X while author Y apparently has a very different take on this?”. You don’t need to know the answers, but you should expect that I will ask you to clarify your questions.
   - In addition, you will need to upload a recent newspaper article (within the past two years) that is related to the readings. You will need to provide a short paragraph explaining how the newspaper article is relevant for this week’s topic (Is it an example for article X? Does it contradict the predictions of article Y? etc.).

   The deadline for the two questions, the newspaper article, and the paragraph connecting the newspaper article to the readings is 11:59pm the day prior to class.

2. Your questions and the newspaper article will be used to create an agenda for a discussion of the readings assigned for that week. We will use the first part of the class time for this discussion. Here we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of each article.

3. After a short break we will change gears in the second part of class: Using case-studies, we will think about how the insights from our discussion can be applied to real world scenarios. Sometimes we will use the time instead to discuss your research project for this class.

4. I will conclude the class by reviewing the key ‘take-away’ points from this class and provide some guidance regarding the readings for the following week.

Grading Policy

This course will use several types of assignments to assess your learning.

- 3 Short Papers (50 points each = 150 points): One of the key skills required of each graduate student is to ask good questions and think of several potential answers. The short paper provides an opportunity to sharpen these skills. The paper has three parts. First, it requires you to identify an empirical puzzle in the news of the past year. For example, two neighboring countries that share the same political system, same geographical location, same cultural background might behave very differently when confronted with a particular phenomenon. Second, you are asked to derive a research question from this puzzle. For example, why did Ecuador obtain a loan from the Chinese while neighboring Colombia did not? Third, you will need to come up with three competing hypotheses that each could provide an answer to the research question. These three hypotheses must be closely related to three different approaches discussed in class. The short papers have a word limit of 1750 words.
• Class Attendance and Participation (100 points): Class participation is essential for this course’s success — particularly during the Round-of-Questions and the theoretical discussion. As such, students’ final grades will depend in large part on their preparation, participation in class discussion, and general contribution to the course’s intellectual climate.

The final course grade calculation therefore consists of the following components:

• 3 short papers: 150 points
• Dissertation Workshop: 50 points
• Participation: 50 points
• Total: 250 points

Note: Please consider the course policies on late work, missed exams, and grade disputes at the end of this document.

Expectations

What I expect of my students

• Willingness to work: As a general rule, one credit represents three hours of academic work per week (including lectures, laboratories, recitations, discussion groups, field work, study, and so on), averaged over the semester. In other words, you need to invest time into this course, otherwise the benefits and the grades you get might not be what you want.

• Classroom etiquette: You are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to the class session for which they are scheduled. Lectures and discussions will not duplicate, but instead will build on, and hence assume prior familiarity with the assigned readings. Your active, informed, and civil participation in discussion and class activities is expected. You are responsible for remaining attentive in class, arriving prepared to discuss course materials, and respecting other members of the class as you and they participate.

• Obligations to other students: You will be assigned to a team of about 5 students that will work together the entire semester. Each team will have the opportunity to agree on how the teamwork should happen. You are expected to work with your teammates in the manner that all team members agreed upon.

• Course policies: Please read the course policies at the end of this syllabus. They facilitate a learning experience that is as efficient and effective as possible. Further, they represent the professional code of conduct in the real world.

What you can expect from the instructor

• I offer a learning environment that challenges you in order to provide opportunities for growth. I will be prepared to the best of my abilities.

• I encourage you to explore your own ideas in response to the assigned tasks. I will be open-minded in responding to your ideas and suggestions. I will offer constructive feedback.

• I am open to constructive feedback from you on my performance. If you have ideas or suggestions, please do not hesitate to discuss them with me. I am committed to make this the best possible classroom experience.

Course Policies
Late work

- Late papers, projects, homework, and other assignments: With regard to papers, projects and other out-of-class assignments, my late-policy is two-fold. First, due dates are due dates. Late work will be subjected to a penalty in the form of points deducted. This deduction will increase exponentially with lateness. More specifically, I will deduct 20% of the points achieved for a 12 hours delay, 50% for 24 hours, and 100% for more than 48 hours. This policy is justified as all deadlines are announced at the beginning of the semester in the syllabus (and the fact that your future boss will not be impressed if you cannot finish work assignments on time). Please note that it is always possible to hand in an assignment early.

- Incomplete coursework: Incompletes will be granted only in the case of documented long-term illness, and if you and I jointly complete the required paperwork with the Undergraduate Associate Dean of EPPS, which is available here: http://catalog.utdallas.edu/2013/undergraduate/policies/academic#incomplete-grades

- Extra credit: Extra credit activities or coursework resubmission will not be permitted. Do your best the first time around.

Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to do their own assigned work. If it is determined that a student has engaged in any form of Academic Dishonesty, he or she may be given an F or an N for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be grounds for awarding a grade of F or N for the entire course.

Sexual Harassment

University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the University Policy Statement (http://www.utdallas.edu/legal/title9/contactharass.html and http://www.utdallas.edu/hrm/er/complaints/harassment.php). This is a serious offense, and I feel strongly about addressing it. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the Dean of Students, Office of Student Life, Student Union Room 1, phone 972-883-6391 or email gene.fitch@utdallas.edu. However, I also want you to know that you can also talk to me as well about any issues that come up.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Participants with special needs are strongly encouraged to talk to me as soon as possible to gain maximum access to course information. It is important to me that everyone who wants to take this class is not prevented from doing so due to special needs. University policy is to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disability conditions (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, or systemic) that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Student AccessAbility and their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. The Office of Student AccessAbility is located in SSB 3.200. Staff can be reached at studentaccess@utdallas.edu or by calling 972-883-2098. For more information see http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/

Please note, however, that if you have any concerns regarding how special needs might affect the assessment of your performance, you have to talk to me prior to the date of the assessment. I cannot make grade adjustments after the fact.
Statement regarding diversity

I strongly believe that diversity is an asset rather than a liability. For one, in a globalized world you will be exposed to people who are different from you. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that people who are different in almost all cases bring something valuable to the table: Experiences that you can learn from, insights that were not apparent to you, skills that you do not have, or knowledge that you can benefit from. It is my intention to create a learning environment in this class that allows everyone to share their unique strengths. This is not only my personal belief. After all, research shows that the best work is usually produced by groups that combine the different comparative advantages of their group members.

I therefore emphasize that I will welcome anyone to my class, regardless of your sexual orientation, religious observances, political orientation, physical characteristics, cultural background, nationality, or any other characteristic. I recognize that I myself am not perfect, but I promise you to make every effort. If you have any concerns with respect to your acceptance in the classroom I strongly encourage you to talk with me.

Technology in the classroom

Laptops are allowed and even encouraged in the classroom. Bring yours to classes, as we will frequently use it for group activities and short in-class writing assignments. However, I do expect you to use the laptop for activities related to the class only. That is, no gaming, no facebook, no emails, no chatting. I reserve the right to administer sanctions if your behavior does not align with these expectations.

However, any other technological items such as cell phones, Ipods, MP3 players, pagers, and PDAs need to be turned OFF during class. That’s right: turn it off, rather than just setting it to vibrate. The purpose for this policy is that I want to minimize distractions during class. I do want you to be focused on the learning activities that will be going on. If I notice that you are not paying attention but instead are focused on your cell phone I reserve the right to do something about it.

Further, you are not allowed to make video- or audio-recordings of the classes without my prior permission. I reserve the right to legal action in case I observe you doing so. The reason why the dialogue between professors and students should stay within the closed community of the classroom is simple. After all, academic freedom and completely honest communication in the classroom requires a certain degree of privacy for all the people in the classroom. Students and teachers alike need to be able to be frank, and they need to express their emotions honestly. A video- or audio recording will seriously impede the willingness of students to come forward and engage in an open and honest discussion.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus. Please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies for these policies.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.