

Economics 4221
Political and Public Choice Economics
Spring 2024

Instructor: Dr. Billy Mertens

Office: Econ 12 and Zoom: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/5838330659>

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Email is by far the best way to contact me. I check my email and respond (if time) two times every weekday. Once in the morning (typically between 8:30 and 9am, but sometimes earlier). There is typically not enough time to respond to all emails during that time, so I try to respond in the afternoon. I typically do not check emails at other times or over the weekend, but there are some exceptions such as exam times. We can set up times to Zoom over the weekend if you give me plenty (2 weeks) of advance notice.

Web: canvas.colorado.edu

Office Hours: T 12:15 – 2:15pm in person (Econ 12), R 1:15 – 2:15pm on Zoom

Course Description:

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 looks 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.

Prerequisites:

Students must have completed ECON 3070 and ECON 1088 (or its equivalent). 3818 is recommended but not required. It is NOT sufficient to take these courses concurrently. You not only need to have taken the class, but you must also understand and remember the content. The prerequisites must be strictly enforced – if you did not do well in 3070, it will be difficult to do well in this course!

While this is not a micro-theory course, economics without theory is not economics. You will need micro theory to understand and explain some of the topics. Some of the theory and terms you will need to know include: the *theory of the firm*, the *theory of the consumer*, *efficiency*, when

the market equilibrium will and won't be efficient, *market failure*

More Information on Assessment:

Exams

There will be three cumulative exams and a cumulative final. These will be given in class on the days listed. No exams will be dropped. 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. Tests will consist of short-answer questions and some longer problems. The exams will all be cumulative, and the material does build on itself, so it is important to understand all the concepts as we go. **Exams will be given in class on the days listed. If you miss an exam with a valid excuse (e.g., illness), then the weight of your final will be increased. Please do Not feel the need to try and reschedule an exam no matter the reason you miss one. We simply reweight the final in all circumstances. If you know in advance that you will miss an exam, sometimes we can arrange for you to take it a day or two early. Note that the exam dates below are not tentative exams will be given in class on the days listed. NO EXAMS WILL BE DROPPED!!**

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:

| Your Score | Grade |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 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:

Classroom Behavior

Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care site also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.

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