

# ECON 353: Public Choice, Spring 2014

**Class meetings:** 203 Olin, 4:40-6:00pm, Tuesday and Thursday

**Instructor:** James Green-Armytage                      e-mail: armytage@bard.edu

Office: 211 Albee                      Hours: Tues & Thurs 3-4pm; Weds 2-3pm; by appointment

**Course web site:** <http://inside.bard.edu/~armytage/pcs14>

## Text

Dennis C. Mueller, *Public Choice III*

## Approximate course schedule

### Unit one: Election rules

Single-winner election rules, including plurality, Hare, Borda, Condorcet systems, etc.

Multiple-winner election rules, including block voting, party list, single transferable vote, etc.

Evaluation of voting rules by axiomatic and statistical properties.

**First test: Thursday, February 27**

### Unit two: Models of government behavior

Rationale of government: efficiency and equity

Properties of majority rule

Two-party competition and multi-party competition

Rent-seeking, bureaucracy, and dictatorship

**Second test: Thursday, April 10**

### Unit three: Application and exploration

Particular topics to be determined

**Third test: Tuesday, May 20** (last day of class)

First draft of research paper: due by Tuesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>

Second draft of research paper: due by Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>

## Approximate grading scheme:

Test 1: 17%

Test 2: 18%

Test 3: 20%

Problem sets: 5%

Attendance, participation, reflection papers: 20%

Final paper: 20%

## Remarks on assignments and grading

- The tests are a mixture of calculation, graphing, and written responses. They are cumulative, with an emphasis on recent material. The problem sets will help you to prepare for the tests.
- To make exam scores into exam grades, I first express each score as a fraction of the total number of points possible to get the raw score, and then raise the raw score to a fractional power to get the curved score. I calibrate the fractional power according to the difficulty of the exam, but I consider something on the order of 0.5 or 0.6 to be fairly standard. Then, scores from 0.9 to 1.0 are As, scores from 0.8 to 0.9 are Bs, etc. For example, a score of 36 points out of a possible 48 on an exam would be a raw score of 75%, and then a curved score of approximately 87% if I raised 0.75 to the power 0.5. A curved score of 87% is near the boundary between B and B+.
- To calculate your final grade, I begin with the average of your exam grades, and then adjust it upward or downward as needed to account for the quality of your class participation and written work.
- The final paper has two components: (1) lit review, and (2) original research. Both should stem from a common research question. That is, the lit review component should give a comprehensive account of what others in the academic literature have done to address this question, and the original research component should discuss and implement an independent analysis that addresses it in a new way, extending the current literature. You should choose a research question that pertains to public choice, and use some public choice methods and literature, though you are also free to bring in literature from other disciplines such as political science, economics, law, philosophy, etc.