INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS

Course code	*POL101*
Course title	*Introduction to Politics*
Type of course	*Compulsory*
Study level	*1st*
Department	*Bachelor studies*
Year of study	*1st*
Semester	*Fall*
ECTS credits	*6: 24 hours of lectures, 24 hours of seminars, 112 hours of self-study, 2 hours of consultations*
Lecturer	*Dr. Vincentas Vobolevičius, vinvob@ism.lt*
Study form	*Full-time*
Prerequisites	*-*
Language	*English*

Annotation

This course introduces students to the key concepts, methodologies and fields of research in the contemporary political science, by employing the rational choice approach to analyzing politics. The general topics covered include the notion of human rationality, collective action problems, political entrepreneurship, voting, party competition and politics of coalition, as well as basic game-theory-based methods for the analysis of political phenomena.

Aim of the Course

This course is rather theoretical and methodological in its orientation. It does not aim to review a certain number of empirical findings regarding political events. Instead, students receive an overview of the scholarly thinking about political phenomena along with the basic game-theoretic tools that will enable an analytically rigorous exploration of political phenomena during the later courses of the Economics and Politics program.

Subject learning outcomes (SLO)	Study methods	Assessment methods
SLO1. To explain the concept of science and to use scientific method in formulating statements about political phenomena.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Midterm exam, homework grades
SLO2. To list and to comment on the implications of the assumption of human rationality in social sciences.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Midterm exam, homework grades
SLO3. To identify instances of the collective action problem (CAP) in social contexts and to propose solutions to the problem, including economic solutions, anarchic solutions and political solutions	Lectures, seminars, homework	Midterm exam, homework grades
SLO4. To explain the role of political entrepreneurs in solving the CAP. Explain the funding as well as the oversight of political entrepreneurs.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Final exam, homework grades
SLO5. To explain the implications of the Condorcet paradox, and related theoretical constructs for voting and public choice.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Final exam, homework grades
SLO6. To explain political institutions as agenda-setting mechanisms, designed to overcome the problems of vote aggregation	Lectures, seminars, homework	Final exam, homework grades
SLO7. To model basic principles of electoral competition among political parties.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Final exam, homework grades
SLO8. To model basic principles of coalition formation, maintenance and dissolution.	Lectures, seminars, homework	Final exam, homework grades

Quality issues

The lecturer assures a variety of teaching methods as well as modes of self-assessment. The feedback from students will always be highly valued and appreciated.

Cheating issues

The teaching and testing methods are chosen taking into account the purpose of the minimization of cheating opportunities. The ISM regulations on academic ethics are fully applied in the course.

Topics

Week	Topic	Contact Hours		Assignments
		Lecture	**Seminar**	
1	**Introduction** What is politics? What is science? Assumptions. Hypotheses. Verification of hypotheses. The rational choice approach to social modeling. Rational choice models of political science. Critiques of the rational choice approach.	2	2	Laver pp. 1 – 17
2	**The concept of rationality** What people want? Characteristics of rational preference orderings. Actions, outcomes and choices. Concept of utility. Utility functions. Uncertainty and orientation towards risk. Problems with utility theory.	2	2	Laver pp. 18 – 29 Homework 1
3	**The social interactions** Private v. Public goods. Production and consumption of goods. Modeling human interactions. Basic concepts of classical game theory. Games in extensive form. Games in strategic form.	2	2	Laver pp. 29 – 37 *Homework 2*
4	**Collective action problem** Rationality and consequences of free riding. Solutions to the problem of free riding: privatization, selective benefits and externalities. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and its critique. Incentive-compatible solutions to free riding. Two-person Prisoner's dilemma. Concept of equilibrium. Nash equilibrium.	2	2	Laver pp. 38 – 50 *Homework 3*
5	**Long-term interactions** The concept of conditional cooperation. Implicit assumptions and their violations. Rationality of punishing defectors. Bluffing and calling bluffs. Sub-game perfect equilibria. Backwards induction. Reputation. The Tragedy of the commons parable. Conditional cooperation in large groups of people and its shortcomings.	2	2	Laver pp. 50 – 67 *Homework 4*
6	**Political entrepreneurs** Political entrepreneurs as a solution to collective action problem. Who selects politicians? What do politicians do? Public goods v. political regimes. Principal – agent problem. Shirking and its prevention. The role of political rivals. Mixed strategies, and mixed-strategy equilibria.	2	2	Laver pp. 68 – 78 *Homework 5*
7	**Political entrepreneurs (cont.)** Limiting coercive power of the incumbents. Sustaining political opposition. The structure of competition between politicians. Payoffs for political entrepreneurs. The rationale behind political alliances.	2	2	Review for the midterm examination
8	**Voting** Interpretations of the role of elections. Downsian approach to modeling party competition. The paradox of voting. Rational choice attempts to explain voting.	2	2	Laver pp. 89 – 98 Edlin et. al. 2005
9	**Voting (cont.)** Deciding how to vote. Credibility of political promises. Choosing between different political "packages". Condorcet paradox and cyclical voting. Dimensions of voting. Spatial models of elections. Median voter theorem, its implications and limitations. Voting on multiple issues and reemergence of voting cycles. Voter pressure groups.	2	2	Laver pp. 98 – 109 *Homework 6*
10	**Party Competition** One dimension of ideology. Unconstrained two party competition. Dictatorship of the median voter. Constrained two party competition. The cost of changing policy positions. Voters' beliefs about politicians. Bayesian updating of beliefs. Effects of financial contributors on party competition.	2	2	Laver pp. 110 – 117 *Homework 7*
11	**Party Competition (cont.)** Multi-party competition. Collusion between parties in pre-electoral competition. Post-electoral considerations in multi-party competition. The entry of new political parties. Multi-dimensional ideologies. Modeling two-dimensional party competition.	2	2	Laver pp. 117 – 134 TBA

12	**The Politics after Elections** Office-seeking and policy seeking motivations. Reputation and motivations of politicians. Minimal winning coalitions. Policy-based coalitions. The concept of a walk-away value. Minority and oversized coalitions. One dimension of coalition policy. More dimensions of coalition policy. Cabinet portfolios and structure induced equilibria.	2	2	Laver pp. 135 – 152 TBA

Individual work and assessment:

TYPE	TOPICS	TOTAL HOURS	EVALUATION, %
Midterm Test	1-7	45	40
Final Exam	8-15	45	40
Homework Assignments	1-15	22	20
Consultations	1-15	2	
Total:		**112+2**	**100**

Course assignments and evaluation

Course requirements:

1. **Midterm test**
Midterm will be held in week 8 of the term, during the lecture. It will be a closed-book test, and will include multiple choice questions and problem-solving. It will count towards 40% of the final grade. The midterm test will be based on topics 1-7.

2. **Homework**
Students will be assigned homework that will be discussed in class during the seminar. Homework assignments, as well as participation in seminar discussions will be graded and will count towards 20% of the final grade.

3. **Final exam**
The final exam will count towards 40% of the final grade. It will be a closed-book test, including multiple choice questions and problem solving. It will test conceptual and analytical skills acquired in the course of the semester. The exam will be based on topics 8-15.

In case of a negative final grade, students are allowed a retake exam. It will cover all course material. The weight of a retake is 80%. Seminar participation cannot be re-done but its evaluation (if positive) is not annulled.

Main readings:

Laver, Michael. 1997. Private desires, political action: an invitation to the politics of rational choice. Sage Publications Ltd.

Additional readings:

TBA