

ECON 410
Public Choice
George Mason University
Summer 2021

Professor: Deric Tilson

Office hours: Wednesdays 10am-11:30am, location TBA

Email: wtilson@gmu.edu

Time: Monday-Thursday 1:30pm-3:35pm

Location: Merton 1200

Objectives: The lectures and readings in this course are designed to familiarize students with the fundamentals of Public Choice. In the very broad sense, this covers the economics of politics and aspects of nonmarket decision making. The course draws from the founding documents to the latest peer-reviewed articles so that students can grasp the origin, core concepts, and ongoing debates in the field. In effect, students should leave this course with not only the ability read the applied political economy literature, but to apply the tools offered by Public Choice to understanding the world around them.

Texts: The following texts are required for the course. I've chosen these as they are basic requirements for understanding the origin of public choice and offer counterpoints to each other. Ideally, you will have started reading the books prior to the start of class.

- *The Calculus of Consent* - James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (TCC)
- *Governing the Commons* - Elinor Ostrom (GC)
- Various readings, podcasts, and videos will be assigned throughout the course.

Grades: Your grade will be composed of the following components:

- Daily Quizzes: 20%
- Discussion: 20%
- Book Review: 30%
- Final Exam: 30%

Course Outline: This is meant to be a general map of the course. I'll assign chapters/readings for the week, and each day we will discuss them. There is some flexibility in the design of the course; some things will be added and dropped depending on where our discussions take us. Expect to read 200 pages +/- each week. A more thorough reading list will be handed out at the start of the course.

Week	Reading/Topics for Discussion
Week 1 - Introduction to Public Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- EconLib Summary of Public Choice- TCC Chapters 1-8- Human Action- Theories of groups

Week 2 - The Logic of Collective Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short review of Game Theory - TCC 9-17 - Voting and bargaining - Excerpt from The Logic of Collective Action
Week 3 – Democracy and The Commons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TCC 18-20 - Hardin’s Tragedy of the Commons - GC Chapters 1 and 2 - Public goods - Demsetz on Property Rights
Week 4 – Analyzing Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GC Chapters 3 and 4 - Environmental economics - Complex systems - Emergent order - Due: Book report
Week 5 – Applications of Public Choice and Nonmarket Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GC Chapters 5 and 6 - Fragility of systems - Final Exam Review - Final Exam

Potential books to review:

*If you would like to choose a book outside this list, I will have to approve it in advance.

Anarchy, State, and Utopia – Nozick

The Federalist Papers – Hamilton

The Anti-Federalist Papers – Ketcham

The Limits of liberty – Buchanan

Free to Choose – Milton and Rose Friedman

The Logic of Collective Action – Olson

The Dictator’s Handbook – Bruce Bueno de Mesquita

Why Nations Fail – Acemoglu and Robinson

Crisi and Leviathan – Higgs

The Logic of the Law – Tullock

A Farewell to Alms – Sen

The Death and Life of the Great American Cities – Jacobs

The Color of Law – Rothstein

The Costs of War – Denson

Thinking in Systems – Meadows

Bootleggers and Baptists – Smith

Cost and Choice – Buchanan

In the First Circle – Solzhenitsyn

Origins of the Common Law – Hogue

The Tyranny of Experts – Easterly

Wealth, Poverty, and Politics - Sowell

Intellectuals and Society – Sowell

The Law - Bastiat

Electronic Devices: You may use a laptop or tablet for class related purposes. I understand that many people need to have their phones accessible throughout the day. If you need to use your phone please do so outside of the classroom. The exception for this is use of MobLab for attendance and quizzes.

Honor Code: Students are expected to understand and adhere to the honor code of George Mason University. Students may neither give nor receive help from other students or from other sources during exams or quizzes. Students are obligated to report any violations observed.

Disability Policy: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-933-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.