

## **PS 2704: Formal Political Theory II**

William Spaniel  
[williamspaniel@gmail.com](mailto:williamspaniel@gmail.com)

University of Pittsburgh  
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Class: Thursdays, 2:00-5:00  
Posvar 4430

Office Hours: Thursdays, Posvar 4446, 9:00-11:00

This is the second course of the formal theory sequence. In it, we switch gears from solving models to building models. We will begin with an overview of some of the core results in political science and modeling tools that are useful across topics. As the course progresses, students will create their own models and produce original research. The scope of this course is not to teach students to do pure theoretical work but rather how to use formal theory as an integral component of your methodological toolkit.

## **Purpose of This Class/Paper**

The main goal of this course is to write an original research paper. This paper must include a sophisticated formal model. The model must be original, though that does not preclude constructing a worthwhile extension to an existing paper. (The University's policies on plagiarism are in effect.) After fulfilling that requirement, students may structure their paper in a number of ways. Some examples include: (1) a long-form model that derives new empirical implications that help explain existing findings, (2) a traditional EITM paper that develops a model and then constructs a quantitative exploration of the findings, or (3) a model paired with a rich case study. My hope is that these papers will ultimately find a home in your dissertations, perhaps as the main theory chapter, or become standalone publications.

We will spend substantial class time discussing your projects as you develop them. It will therefore pay dividends to start thinking about what you want to model now. You should take advantage of the class time to solicit feedback and improve both the model and how it ties to the larger paper project.

The paper is due on December 13 at 3:00 pm under my door. It is imperative that you are not late, as I will be unable to grade them on time otherwise.

## **Participation**

Unlike Formal Theory I, students will spend a majority of the time in charge of the class. This will take three forms: working on proofs, presenting the main findings of published research, and sharing progress on their papers. For this to work, students must come to class prepared, ready to engage in the material, and willing to run into a lot of dead ends. When you play the proof game, you will lose far more often than you win. The solace is that you get an infinite number of take-backs. Accepting these facts now will save you a lot of pain later.

## **Problem Sets**

For what we do not have time to cover in class, I will assign three problem sets. You may work individually or collaboratively. The timing of these problem sets will depend on the flow of the class as well as other deadlines students face.

## **Evaluation**

I will weigh the above components in the following way: 20% for each problem set and 40% for the final paper.

## **Disabilities**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both myself and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union (412-648-7890), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

## **Disclaimer**

This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class. You alone are responsible for attending lecture and checking the website to stay up-to-date.

## **Tentative Course Outline**

**8/30: No Class (APSA)**

**9/6, 9/13, and 9/20: Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium**

Tsebelis: [The Abuse of Probability in Political Analysis: The Robinson Crusoe Fallacy](#)

**9/27, 10/4, 10/11: Bargaining**

Fearon: [Rationalist Explanations for War](#)

Gehlbach: [Formal Models of Domestic Politics](#)

**10/18: Model Building Session #1**

Clarke and Primo: [Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach](#)

Goemans and Spaniel: [Multimethod Research: A Case for Formal Theory](#)

Lorentzen, Fravel, and Paine: [Qualitative Investigation of Theoretical Models: The Value of Process Tracing](#)

Signorino: Strategic Interaction and the Statistical Analysis of International Conflict

**10/25: Mechanism Design**

Benoit: [The Gibbard-Satterthwaite Theorem: A Simple Proof](#)

Fey and Ramsay: [Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict](#)

**11/1: Contests**

Garfinkel and Skaperdas: [Economics of Conflict: An Overview](#)

Konrad: *Strategy and Dynamics in Contests*

**11/8: No Class (Peace Science)**

**11/15: Model Building Session #2**

Thompson: [The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory](#)

**11/22: No Class (Thanksgiving)**

**11/29: A Special Topic TBD**

**12/6: Model Building Session #3**

**12/13: Papers Due**