

**GOVT 310: Game Theory and Politics**  
**Professor Larry Evans**  
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This is a course about how to manipulate social situations and institutions to your advantage. It is a general, non-technical introduction to game theory – the science of strategic and interdependent decision making. Although our focus is on game theory and politics, illustrations and applications also will be drawn from the law, economics, business, public policy, sports and card games.

*Game Theory and Politics* is an unusual class for several reasons. First, although game theory is emerging as an important unifying conceptual framework for the social sciences, this class is one of only two free standing courses on the topic offered by the various social science departments at William and Mary. Second, when game theory is offered at other institutions, it typically is taught at a relatively advanced and formal/mathematical level. In contrast, this class is appropriate for sophomores and juniors, and requires no math beyond high school algebra. Third, this course takes an explicitly interdisciplinary approach to social behavior and institutions.

My goal is for you to eventually view *Game Theory and Politics* as one of the most interesting, precise, and practical courses you have taken at the College of William and Mary. The readings are all superb. The lectures? Well, let's wait and see.

Attendance and class participation are required and will be considered in the final grade. Although lectures will sometimes parallel, sometimes diverge from the readings, students are expected to complete the reading assignments scheduled for a certain date before class on that date. Course requirements include a midterm exam, a final exam, a 10-12 page paper, and three short problem sets. The midterm will count 25 percent, the final will count 30 percent, the paper will count 20 percent, each problem set will count 5 percent, and the remaining 10 percent will be allocated to class participation.

Detailed information about the problem sets will be distributed as the class progresses. The paper will be comprised of two parts, each covering five pages. In the first part I will ask you to apply concepts from this course to some aspect of everyday life (job experiences, relationships with roommates or family members, driving to class, and so on). The second part of the paper will apply game-theoretic concepts to materials covered in one of the other courses that you have taken or are taking at William and Mary (such illustrations most often will be drawn from the social sciences, but this is not required; English majors, for instance, might choose to search for applications in major works of fiction).

Students should have access to the following books, which are available for purchase at the book store.

*Games of Strategy*, by Avinash Dixit and Susan Skeath [denoted below by D&S]

*The Evolution of Cooperation*, by Robert Axelrod

Remaining readings are on reserve in Swem Library or are available in my office for bulk copying.

### Syllabus

8/27	No assignment
9/1	D&S, Preface and Ch. 1
9/3	D&S, Ch. 2
9/8	D&S, Ch. 3
9/10	D&S, Ch. 4
9/15	D&S, Ch. 5
9/17	Barry Weingast, "The Policy Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 1977
9/22	D&S, Ch. 6
9/24	Kaare Strom, "The Presthus Debacle: Intraparty Politics and Bargaining Failure in Norway," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 1994
9/29	D&S, Ch. 7
10/1-10/8	Axelrod (entire book)
10/15	D&S, Ch. 8
10/20	D&S, Ch. 9
10/22	<b>Midterm Examination</b>
10/27	Selected application papers from past classes
10/29	D&S, Ch. 10
11/3	D&S, Ch. 11
11/5	David Laitin, "The Tower of Babel as a Coordination Game: Political Linguistics in Ghana," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 1994
11/10	Elinor Ostrom, "A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 1998
11/12	D&S, Ch. 12

11/17	D&S, Ch. 13
11/19	D&S, Ch. 14
	<b>Paper Drafts Due</b>
11/24	D&S, Ch. 15
12/1	D&S, Ch. 16
12/3	D&S, Ch. 17
	<b>Paper assignments due</b>
TBA	<b>Final Examination</b>