1. Course Description

Political institutions are created to solve general political problems, such as the aggregation of preferences or the delegation of power, and they create incentives that influence the choices made by politicians. The goal of this course is to introduce graduate students to research in the field of comparative institutional analysis. To that end, the course will discuss the causes and effects of major institutional structures in democracies. We will examine how ideas of representation, delegation, and accountability are embedded in democratic institutions and survey the literature on electoral rules, executive-legislative relations, party systems, and representation. The readings will focus on questions of institutional design, how and why institutions matter, the effects they have on policy outcomes and on the strategic behavior of governments, political parties, legislators, bureaucrats, and voters. Finally, a key goal of this course is to familiarize graduate students with some of the theoretical models used in the comparative institutional literature, as well as some of the methods used for testing institutional theories. To this end, the course includes a session solely dedicated to estimating ideology from legislative votes and speeches.
2. Course Materials

The following books are required and will be available for purchase in the McGill Bookstore (or you may choose to purchase them elsewhere):


There is no coursepack for this class. Most journal articles are available through the McGill library subscription. This syllabus includes links to JSTOR or the respective journal websites (you need to be logged in to the McGill network). Some forthcoming articles will be available on MyCourses.

3. Course Requirements

Grading for the course will be based on the following components:

- **Participation (15%)**
  Students are expected to attend all meetings, complete the assigned reading each week, and participate actively during class discussions. This means being prepared to summarize and discuss any required reading when called upon. These summaries should describe the approaches, their key arguments, debates, and evidence. In addition, you are expected to provide constructive feedback to the final research presentations that will take place during the last week. Finally, students should generate at least three questions suitable for each class discussion. **These questions should be emailed to the instructor before each meeting by Sunday 20:00 (no exceptions).**

- **Discussion-Presentation (5%)**
  Each student will serve as a discussion leader twice. Each presentation should be around 10-15 minutes, should describe key conceptual issues, define central arguments and debates, and identify methodological challenges. Topics will be assigned on the first day of class.
• **Short Essays (20%)**

Students will write three short papers commenting the readings for a particular week. The papers should highlight the strength and weaknesses of the central arguments. Also, the short essays should attempt to draw analytic linkages between the assigned readings and propose questions for further research. A good critique would include a suggestion for improving an analysis, e.g. an improved research design. A mere summary of the readings is insufficient. You are free to choose any week starting with week 3, but you cannot choose weeks for which you are a discussion leader. The papers should be 3 pages long (double spaced, standard margins and font, excluding bibliography). **Short essays are due at the beginning of the class that week (no exceptions).**

• **Research Paper (50%)**

The final requirement is a 20-25 page research paper to be handed in on **April 21, 2014**. The page requirement excludes bibliography, figures, and tables. The topic and research question should be directly related to the course. The research paper should involve original empirical work or the replication and extension of existing work. Literature reviews or papers with theoretical arguments that cannot be tested against data do not fulfil the requirements of the research project. The structure of the research paper should be modeled on an academic article, meaning your paper should include a description of the puzzle you are trying to solve, a discussion of the substantive importance of your question, a clear presentation of your theoretical argument and hypotheses, a methods and data section, and a discussion of the results.

You are expected to hand in a 3-page proposal for the final paper by **February 10** (email). It should describe the puzzle/research question, theoretical approach, and the data & methods you are planning to use. In particular, the proposal should demonstrate that you can get access to the data and carry out the analysis. Subsequently, I will meet individually with you to discuss your proposal and provide feedback.

• **Research Presentation (10%)**

On **April 7, 2014**, you will present your research to the class. Your paper need not be finished at this point, but you should have completed the relevant empirical analysis by now. This means: start your research project early. Your presentation will be modeled after a panel presentation at a conference. Other students will provide feedback to the presentation. This feedback should be respectful and offer constructive criticism, including ideas for how the research can be improved. You will then revise your paper and hand it in by **April 21** (no exceptions).

4. **A Note on Professional Presentation**

Good science also involves professional communication of research results. It is therefore essential that you focus on a professional presentation of your results including – but not limited to – a professional layout of text, a meaningful title, a complete and nicely formatted list of references, meaningful and professionally looking tables and publication-quality
graphs. Papers should be written in font size 12pt, double-spaced, and with at least 2.5cm margins on all sides. Tables and figures should be chosen and designed wisely.

A recommendation: learn to use \LaTeX while you can. It is a free typesetting software package and enables you to typeset and print your work at the highest typographical quality, using a predefined, professional layout. The main advantages of \LaTeX over normal word processors include professionally crafted layouts, support for typesetting of mathematical formulae in a convenient way (which makes formal theory papers easier to write), a few easy-to-understand commands that specify the logical structure of a document, more complex structures such as footnotes, references, table of contents, bibliographies that can all be generated easily, and free add-on packages for specific tasks (e.g. make a reference list adhere to the exact standards of a scientific journal). A short introduction can be found here.

5. Policies

Academic Integrity
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Submitting Written Work in French
In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Course Evaluations
End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available on Mercury, the online course evaluation system. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

Other issues
In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
6. Course Outline

Week 1 (6 January): Introduction and Basic Games

To do: pick topics for class presentations and the topic for week 12 (see note under week 12).


Week 2 (13 January): Problems in Democratic Governance: Group Choice, Collective Action, and Delegation

- Shepsle, Kenneth. Analyzing Politics. Parts II and III.


Week 3 (20 January): Democracy and Regime Types


Week 4 (27 January): Electoral Institutions: Origins


Week 5 (3 February): Electoral Institutions: Consequences


Week 6 (10 February): Parliaments and Coalition Formation


**Week 7 (17 February): Parliaments and Coalition Governance**


**Week 8 (24 February): Legislative Behavior**


— No class on March 3 —

**Week 9 (10 March): Parties and Elections**


**Week 10 (17 March): Measuring Ideology from Votes and Speeches**

*Note: We will split up the session into a lecture and a lab. In the lab session, we will learn how to extract ideal points from roll call votes and legislative speeches and talk about some of the benefits and pitfalls of doing so. Students should bring their laptops to class and pre-install R, a freely available language and environment for statistical computing and graphics. No prior knowledge of R is required. Additional details will be communicated in advance.*


**Week 11 (24 March): Law Implementation and Oversight**


**Week 12 (31 March): Topic of your choice**

*Note: The topic of this week will be chosen by you in order to accommodate your current research interests. I will assign readings based on your choice of topic. The following options are possible, but we can discuss others during week 1:*

Version: December 6, 2013
1. Representation and Ideological Congruence
2. Federalism and Bicameralism
3. Domestic Institutions and International Politics
4. The European Union

Week 13 (7 April): Research Presentations