Introduction: This course is intended to be a first graduate-level introduction to what is known, variously, as positive political theory, formal political theory, or rational choice theory (as applied to politics). The course assumes you are not familiar with either mathematical (or “formal”) theorizing or rational choice theory. Thus, we will begin at the beginning, as it were. In addition, students are assumed to have varying levels of exposure to mathematical and logical analysis, and no particular background is assumed. We will, however, adjust the level and pace of the course to reflect actual background. The course does rest on the assumption that all students are willing to learn mathematical, logical, and formal theoretic reasoning.

Nature of the Questions Addressed in the Course: Rational choice accounts of politics are ancient. Putting them in the form you will encounter them is not so ancient. It could be said that a social science first had such a basis in or about the Marshallian revolution in Economics (hence about a century ago), with most of the formal basis of the work we will be considered becoming clear and systematic around 1950, and thus for a half century (roughly speaking, that is when rational choice theory took much of its current form). Conveniently, that is also when the first serious applications to Political Science occurred. That “early” work was generally done by economists, or at least those in Economics. Rational choice entered Political Science and political scientists began to use and to be trained in it in the late 1960s, mostly through the efforts of William H. Riker as scholar and as founder of the Ph.D. program at the University of Rochester.

This course covers two basic questions. The first is about individual choice: Why, from a choice theoretic approach, do people reason, believe, and choose as they do? The second question concerns the political area in which rational choice theory was first and remains most fully applied: Why does democracy work as it does, given how people reason, believe, and (especially) choose as they are understood to do theoretically? Rational choice theory has been applied to many other problems and areas, but the classic works, questions, and results, are in the field of democratic politics.

The course begins with a section on decision theory (a term being used very broadly), which is the individual choice theory part. In this section, we will cover ordinal and cardinal utility functions, critiques of either or both, alternatives that arise from what is known as “behavioral decision theory,” and applications, especially to the question of turnout to the vote. Subsequent topics will include social choice theory, spatial modeling,
and theories of democratic institutional politics (sometimes called the “new institutionalism”). Additional topics will be chosen depending upon your interest.

Syllabus and Readings: I am hoping to run this course primarily through Blackboard. This syllabus and its evolution over time will be posted on the course pages there. Go to: http://blackboard.duke.edu/. A small number of readings will be handed out in class. The rest will be posted on Blackboard. (I am assuming that they will have to be posted and taken down fairly promptly. Otherwise, the course will take up too much space. Therefore, you will have to be reasonably prompt in downloading pdf files with the readings.)

Assignments: I intend to have a midterm and final (essay, take-home). This is a seminar, so participation will also be important. Additional or substitute bases for grading will be based on your needs and concerns.
Reading List, under Construction

(Timing tentative and ambitious)

Jan. 8 Introduction

Individual Decision, Choice Theories

Ordinal Preferences

13 Sen, Chaps. 1 and 1*

15 Sen, Chaps. 1 and 1*, Brady and Ansolabehere (APSR, March, 1989)

Cardinal Utility

22 Luce & Raiffa, handout, or comparable source for cardinal utility

Applications to Turnout

22, 27 Aldrich, (AJPS, 1993); Riker and Ordeshook (APSR, 1968), Ferejohn and Fiorina (APSR, 1974)

29 Continuation, add Palfrey and Rosenthal (APSR, 1985)

Behavioral Decision Theory

Feb 5, 10 Simon (APSR), Kahneman and Tversky (AER), Rabin, Bendor and Diermeier, Charness and Rabin

Social Choice Theory

10, 12 Sen (Collective Choice Rules) 2 and 2*, Riker, 2 and 3

17, 19 Sen (Arrow’s Theorem) 3 and 3*, Riker 5

24 Strategy-Proofness: Gibbard and Satterhwaite, Riker, 6

Spatial Models

26 Davis, Hinich, Ordeshook (APSR, 1970), Kramer, McKelvey (spatial)

March 3, 5 McKelvey (chaos), Grofman and Feld, Riker 7

New Institutionalism
**Median Voter**

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**Institutions and Endogenity**

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<td>Shepsle (AJPS Feb, 1979);</td>
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