

**Public Choice
ECON 410
Summer 2020**

Class Time and Location:

Tuesday, 7:00 – 9:30 P.M. (George Washington University Campus, Room TBD)

Friday, 12:30 – 3:00 P.M. (George Mason University Arlington Campus, Room TBD)

Professor Rosolino Candela

Email Address: rcandela@gmu.edu

Office Location: Arlington Campus, Mercatus Center, 4th Floor of Metropolitan Building
(across from Van Metre Hall)

Office Hours: Meetings to be scheduled by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:

Since World War II, governments around the world, including Western democracies, have been allocating between one-third and one-half of their country's total product through collective-political institutions rather than through markets. Until that time, however, economists were primarily (though not exclusively) devoting their efforts to understanding the operation of markets. It was in this context that the field of study in economics, known today as public choice, emerged, for which its co-founders, James M. Buchanan, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1986, and Gordon Tullock was recognized as a Member of the American Political Science Review Hall of Fame in 1996 and a Distinguished Fellow of the American Economic Association in 1998.

This course investigates the foundations of public choice. Broadly defined, public choice refers to the application of economics to non-market settings, particularly political decision-making. The “building blocks” of economics upon which we will construct our *understanding* of the outcomes of political decision-making are the following: (1) methodological individualism, (2) rational choice, and (3) politics-as-exchange. The overall objective of this course, therefore, will be to use the basic foundations of economic analysis to understand how alternative political institutions incentivize the decisions of individuals operating in political settings.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics: The Roots of Government Failure*. Oakland, CA: The Independent Institute.

COURSE STRUCTURE & GRADING:

Courses will be a mix of lecture and open discussion. Students are responsible for taking notes. I do not make my lecture notes available. If a student misses class, it is their responsibility to obtain the lecture notes from a classmate.

Your final grade is based on quizzes (20%), a midterm exam (35%), and a final exam (45%). No additional credit is available.

Quizzes: There will be 5 quizzes, which will be held every Tuesday at the beginning of class (NOT including the first day of class and exam days). Each quiz will be based on the readings and class lecture from the previous week. There are no makeup quizzes, and students must be on time to receive a quiz. Once collected, quizzes will not be distributed to latecomers.

Midterm exam: The midterm exam will be administered in class on Tuesday, July 7, 2020. The exam will include *all* material covered up until that point in time.

Final exam: The final exam will be administered on Tuesday, July 28, 2019 from 7:00- 9:30 P.M. This exam date and time is set by the University and is non-negotiable. The final exam is comprehensive and will include *all* material covered throughout the semester.

Your letter grade will be assigned based on the weighted value of your quizzes and exams as follows:

A+ 96-100;	A 91-95;	A- 90-86
B+ 85-81;	B 80-76;	B- 75-71
C+ 70-68;	C 67-65;	C- 64-60

SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS:

If you require any special accommodations, please see me immediately following the first class so that we can work together to make sure that you have what you need to succeed in this course.

POLICY REGARDING AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING & PICTURES:

For the privacy and comfort of your fellow students, audio and video recordings, as well as photography, is strictly prohibited during class.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Cheating will not be tolerated and can result in a failing grade, dismissal from class, and expulsion from the university. If I suspect you of cheating, I will seek the appropriate punishment under George Mason University guidelines. Please review the [George Mason University Honor System and Code](#).

Readings and Class Lecture Schedule

Please be sure to read all materials before class every week. You are expected to complete all assigned readings before the class date in which we will discuss them. Your quizzes will reflect what we will discuss that day and you coming prepared.

SCHEDULED OUTLINE OF COURSE EVENTS

PART I: MARKET FAILURES AND POLITICAL SOLUTIONS: ORTHODOXY

1. Market Failure and Government Intervention (Tuesday, June 9, NO QUIZ)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 5–33.

2. Political Presuppositions of the Idealized State (Friday, June 12)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 35–48.

PART II: IN DISPRAISE OF POLITICS: SOME PUBLIC CHOICE

3. Undemocratic Side of Democracy (Tuesday, June 16)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 49–84.

4. Pathological Politics: The Anatomy of Government Failure (Friday, June 19)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 85–110.

5. Politics of Free and Forced Rides: Providing Public Goods (Tuesday, June 23)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 111–128.

PART III: UNDERSTANDING PROPERTY, MARKETS, THE FIRM, AND THE LAW

6. Private Property and Public Choice (Friday, June 26)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 129–152.

7. Rediscovering Markets, Competition, and the Firm (Tuesday, June 30)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 153–168.

8. No Class, University Closed (Friday, July 3)

9. Midterm Exam (Tuesday, July 7)

10. Public Choice and the Law (Friday, July 10)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 169–184.

PART IV: CASE STUDIES IN THE ANATOMY OF GOVERNMENT FAILURE

11. Political Pursuit of Private Gain: Producer-Rigged Markets & Consumer Protection (Tuesday, July 14)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 185–217.

12. Political Pursuit of Private Gain: Government Exploitation, Government Schools, & Mediocrity (Friday, July 17)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 219–251.

13. Political Pursuit of Private Gain: Environmental Goods & Coercive Redistribution (Tuesday, July 21)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 253–298.

14. Micro-Politics of Macro-Instability & Concluding Political Implications of Public Choice (Friday, July 24)

Simmons, Randy T. 2011. *Beyond Politics*, pp. 299–337.

15. Final Exam (Tuesday, July 28)