

Tutorials in Social and Political Sciences

September-January

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Course description

The tutorial combines theory and empirical evidence to examine some core mechanisms in the social and political sciences and their application to substantive issues. From a theoretical perspective, we take a social mechanisms approach and from an empirical perspective we focus on results that prioritise causal inference and have robust results.

The course is 30 hours long and is divided into 12 two-hour tutorial sessions. Students are expected to read the required materials before the tutorial and to be ready to discuss them in-class with the others and the instructor who will vary throughout the tutorial. Tutorials will be held once every week.

Each week we highlight some puzzles that are relevant to the tutorial. Students must submit a short essay each week (maximum 800 words) by 12 noon one day before class that discusses one of the puzzles. They can also choose to introduce a puzzle that the readings have made them think about and address it in their essay. Students should draw on the readings in their essays. They can also highlight additional questions or points that they wish to discuss during class in their essays. We will then discuss the literature, essays, and puzzles together during the tutorial.

At the end of the tutorial sessions, there will be a 6 hour puzzle workshop day. Students will work on puzzles of their own before coming to the workshop that will be discussed together in the workshop. Students are encouraged to use the Tutorials in SPS to start thinking about and discussing their dissertations.

Assessment

Students are assessed on a combination of their weekly essays and in-class participation and on their participation in the final puzzle workshop.

Required text

The core resource for the tutorials is *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Elster, 2007). We will return to this source throughout the course.

Course outline

1. Rationality and a core challenge
2. Limits of rationality: framing, heuristics and biases
3. Strategic interaction and game theory
4. Signalling
5. Prosocial behaviours
6. Conflict
7. Social norms
8. Diffusion processes
9. Constraints and agency: mechanisms of social stratification
10. Cumulative (dis)advantage and social stratification
11. The construction of public problems
12. Voting behaviour

13. Puzzle workshop