

POLITICAL ECONOMY:
VOTERS, INFORMATION AND MEDIA
ECO334H1S WINTER 2018
THURSDAYS 2 TO 5 AT VC115

In this course, we will develop tools to analyze voters and the role of information in democracies. As such, we will model the interaction between media and voters, and evaluate theories of voter learning and bias using empirical literature on media and the political economy of media. We will explore the effects of innovations in information technology and evaluate how the empirical results square with the theory. We will study newspapers, radio, television, cable, the Internet and social media, and focus on empirical methods used to identify effects of media on voters.

The goal of this course is to apply a theoretical framework to effectively evaluate scholarly work on voter information and the political economy of media. The level of instruction is equivalent to a typical advanced microeconomics course applied to the study of media markets. Specifically, guided by the economics of supply and demand, the course will provide a new lens through which to understand the news produced by media and reasons you may choose to consume it.

The course assumes knowledge of Bayes' Rule as well as algebra of normal and uniform distributions. You are expected to read the course references before class to improve your learning experience as well as everyone else's. You will be required to apply strategies you have learned in class to problems sets, a midterm, presentation, and research proposal.

INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Yosh Halberstam, yosh.halberstam@utoronto.ca

Office: Department of Economics, GE 311

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00 to 12:00pm (by appointment only)

Tuesdays 3:30 to 4:30pm (drop in)

Appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance at:

<http://www.calendly.com/yosh/oh>

TEACHING ASSISTANT:

Marc-Antoine Schmidt, ma.schmidt@mail.utoronto.ca

Tutorial: Thursdays 4 to 5 at VC115

Office Hours: Wednesdays 10 to 11 at GE 213

EVALUATION:

Problem sets (2) - 20%

Midterm (1) - 30%

Quizzes (5) - 10%

Presentation (1) - 10%

Research proposal (1) - 30%

LECTURES:

The lectures will include class activities and discussions. There is no textbook for the course. In the first half of the semester, the lectures will develop a theoretical framework for analyzing subsequent empirical work presented in the second half of the course. Familiarity with basic concepts in probability theory (e.g., Bayes' rule) and econometrics (e.g., OLS and IV) is strongly recommended. There are 2-3 required readings per week and several suggested readings for each lecture. Guidance to specific sections in the readings in the form of questions or mathematical support will be posted on Blackboard.

TUTORIALS:

The tutorials aim to support what is covered in the lectures and the timeline for course assignments. In the weeks preceding the midterm, the tutorials will focus on problem solving and reviewing the economic theory. Following the midterm, the tutorials will support you in preparing for your presentation and research proposal as well as reviewing key econometric concepts integral to the empirical work we discuss in the lectures.

PROBLEM SETS:

There will be two problem sets that address the material covered in the lectures. The first problem set will be due before the midterm and the second after the midterm, on weeks 4 and 10.

The goal of the problems is to help you internalize some of the theoretical and empirical concepts obtained in class. To earn credit, you must hand in your work on time. There are no extensions. If you cannot make it to class, you may email your problem set to the TA no later than 2:00pm on the day it is due.

QUIZZES:

There will be 5 in-class graded quizzes (no makeups) given following the midterm. The quizzes will refer to that week's readings and are used to facilitate subsequent discussion and encourage class preparation as well as provide me with valuable feedback on your collective understanding. I will provide aggregate survey results when applicable and possible.

MIDTERM:

There will be a midterm in class on week 5 focusing on the theory. The midterm will include any material we address by then, including the readings we address in class. The midterm will comprise a mix of analytical problems, as well as multiple-choice and short essay questions.

PRESENTATION:

In the second half of the course, we will cover empirical studies that address the influence of media on voters and political outcomes. Groups of 2-3 students will be asked to contribute by discussing recent empirical work that is related to and builds on the required readings of the week. You will have 8-10 minutes to present a paper that cites one of the required readings, or a paper listed in the course references for that week but is not required (*) or suggested (#), and will be asked to prepare 6-8 slides that accompany your presentation. These slides should be emailed to me in PDF format no later than Wednesday at 2:00pm, the day before your presentation. A signup sheet will be accessible [here](#) after the midterm.

In your presentation, clearly explain how the paper you chose (a) relates to that week's reading, (b) makes use of data to contribute to our assessment of the reading, and (c) deepened your understanding of the reading (e.g., what do you understand more about x by reading y). Each group will be evaluated based on the three elements above, in addition to the timing and coherence of the presentation as well as the quality of the slides. To set expectations, the TA and I will be the first to present a paper together in Week 6, (at least) one week before the first student presentation.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL:

You will be asked to apply the skills you obtained in the class in a research proposal on a phenomenon related to voters and media, drawing from at least 5 academic sources. The writing assignment is a short (1,500-1,750 words) research proposal applying tools and results from the course to a question related to a key assigned topic we will cover in class. The focus is on applied methods, not literature. The topics will be assigned by reading week.

The assignment will be staged with two submissions, with an intervening peer assessment:

1. The first draft is due by Tuesday, March 6, at 11:00am.
2. Students will then be assigned three classmates' papers to read and provide constructive feedback and suggestions (using a form/rubric that I will provide). The deadline for providing the peer assessment is Friday, March 23, at 5:00pm.
3. Students will then have until Wednesday, April 4, at 2:00 pm to submit their final draft that incorporates any useful suggestions or insights from the peer review process. Included in this submission will be a short reflection (250-500 words) on the peer reviews received, as well as an explanation of any other revisions made between the first and second submissions.

The final grade for paper will be based on:

1. The first draft; (25%)
2. The peer assessments provided for other papers; (25%)
3. The final draft, including the self-assessment and explanation of the revisions to the first draft. (50%)

We will be using the software PeerScholar for the implementation of this assignment. The entire exercise is conducted online. Further details will be provided later in the course.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Date	Week	Topic(s)	Notes
Jan 4	1	Introduction	
Jan 11	2	Voter information	
Jan 18	3	Social learning	
Jan 25	4	Political economy of media	Problem set 1 due in class
Feb 1	5	Midterm	In class
Feb 8	6	Newspapers I	Presentation by Yosh and Marc
Feb 15	7	Newspapers II	Bring proposal outline to tutorial
Feb 22		No class	Reading week
Mar 1	8	Radio	
Mar 8	9	Television and cable I	First draft due March 6, 11:00am
Mar 15	10	Television and cable II	Problem set 2 due in class
Mar 22	11	The Internet	Peer assessment due March 23, 5:00pm
Mar 29	12	Social media and blogs	Troubleshoot assessments in tutorial
Apr 5		No class	Proposal due April 4, 2:00pm

COMMUNICATION AND RULES:

We will use Blackboard as our main repository for course materials and announcements. There are typically no extensions or make-ups. Penalty for lateness may range up to 10 percent of your assignment grade per day. The TA is your initial contact for any course logistics. Any appeal to reverse a TA decision must be filed to me in writing using no more than 250 words together with supporting documents where applicable.

PLAGIARISM:

Academic integrity is of utmost importance. Please be diligent to attribute any work that is not originally yours. Attribution is key to protecting the value of your degree and your hard work. Many current events where integrity-related issues have had serious consequences. Please consult the OSAI website on the student code of conduct: <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/students>