Welcome to the course website for GOV 1015: Strategic Models of Politics!

In this course, we will explore a rational approach to the study of politics. The course will focus on the intuition behind important formal models in political science from a wide range of applications. As we progress through the semester, students will gain familiarity with the tools of formal modeling through four written assignments. At the end of the semester, they will assess the strengths and limitations of this approach in a final essay.

Download the draft syllabus here.

Note from the instructor:

I used to teach a traditional game theory course. It was a great experience, but - over time - a couple of things became clear. First, when students are focused on the "how to" of solving problem sets and exams, it is very easy to lose sight of the intuition that formal models are intended to build. Second, most of the "aha" moments students have revolve around the logic of strategic models starting to click, rather than the nuts and bolts of solving them.

This is a new kind of game theory course. It isn't missing any of the fundamentals, but the focus is different. The course will challenge you to think strategically and to identify core conflicts and strategic incentives in wide-ranging situations. You will have the opportunity to apply game theoretic insights to any topic that interests you. The course will also push you to develop your own ideas about what we can (and can't) learn from strategic models. Yes, there will be some math. Yes, I will show you how to solve important types of game theory models. But even if you never look at - let alone solve - another game theory model after your finish this course, I hope it will change the way you think about strategic interactions in the real-world, no matter where your interests lie.

Instructor Info:

- Contact: sarah_hummel@g.harvard.edu
- Office Hours:
  - Mondays 1:30-2:30pm (in-person, CGIS South 313)
  - Fridays 2-3pm (virtual, Zoom link)

First half hour is by appointment (sign up here); Second half hour is drop-in.