Division: SOCIAL SCIENCES   **Department:** ECON

ECON 20710-01   Introductory Game Theory

Quarter: Autumn 2012   **Instructor:** Sonnenschein Hugo F

Number of Responses: 26
Number Enrolled: 31

COURSE EVALUATION COMMENTS

What were the instructor's strengths? Weaknesses?

Professor Sonnenschein is an awesome guy, and incredibly nice. He can answer questions when well prompted, but the course really really did not cover anything new at all besides a incredibly basic introduction to game theory. The one difficult topic, Auction Theory, was taught in one class by the TA who perhaps gave one of the most incomprehensible lectures I have ever witnessed. Fingers crossed that we`re not going to need to know it for the final, because I`m not even sure the TA knew it for the lecture.

Professor Sonnenschein gave interesting lectures that motivated intuitive thinking, but also formally introduced the standard/basic concepts in game theory. Logic in organizing the order of the topics was clear. Is extremely knowledgeable about the field and responded well to student questions. Occasionally called on people to keep the class attentive. Weaknesses: sometimes was rambly, spending a long time on introducing a topic. Went over simple things slowly and complex concepts too quickly.

If you`re contemplating taking this course, you should already have an extremely solid grasp of 201 game theory and beyond. I would recommend watching the Yale lectures before going into this. Sonnenschein suggests Rubenstein`s "Economics Fables" as optional reading, which gives some indication on how he teaches. He likes to focus on how these game theory structures might fail. His style has been described to me as "Econ Open Mic Night", which is apt. They were less lectures and more like discussions of the readings which he assumes you`ve read.

Sonnenschein is an awesome teacher. I really enjoyed this class and I really don`t think I can say how good it was. Toward the end I felt like we were a little rushed for time and very few people actually felt comfortable with ideas like weak sequential equilibrium, but overall it was a very good class. And Sonnenschein is the kind of teacher who tries to make sure that everyone understands something before he moves on, which I really appreciated. And he held a party at his house which was really fun. He`s a great guy and he`s got some awesome stories.

Hugo was very nice, but he went easy on us. Could have taught more material faster. Sometimes lost track of the class.

Professor Sonnenschein doubtlessly attempted to make the class as interesting as possible, but due to a huge misunderstanding of student abilities the class was extremely slow and frustrating.

Instructor cared about topic, was open to all sorts of approaches. Had tendency to wander a bit.

Prof. Sonnenschein definitely knows a lot about the materials and his lectures are full of examples that he designed to illustrate he mechanisms of game theory. Perhaps sometimes he is not very clear talking about how to solve the games. overall this is a great course.

Sometimes the lectures weren`t very clear.

Professor Sonnenschein does not pull any punches. He trusted us with complicated material and expected us to be able to learn most of it on our own. As such, his lectures were often spent complicating or pointing out problems with the different games and solution concepts covered by the course. This can be very interesting when you`re up to speed on the material, but kind of

frustrating if you aren`t. Professor Sonnenschein isn`t there to teach you about the material; he`s there to teach you why and how it can be wrong.

Professor Sonnenschein thoroughly deserves the respect he is accorded in the academic and UChicago community. His enthusiasm for the course content was contagious and he displayed a great attitude towards students throughout the course. He presented lectures in a clear and relaxed manner (oh does any else think he reminds them of the dad from American Pie??). The only potential weakness I saw was the ability to know for which topics the class was doing fine and could be sped through, and which required more time, detail and examples.

Prof Sonnenschein was wonderful. Truly one of the kindest, humblest and most approachable professors I`ve ever had. You can tell he really cares about his students.

What were the teaching assistant's or writing intern's strengths? Weaknesses?

He was incomprehensible to the max. Unprepared for TA sessions. Mumbled.

Raluca and Hanzhe were both good TAs. Hanzhe`s lecture on auctions lost most people though, I think. Could have spent more time explaining rather than writing down exactly what he said on the board. The solutions they provided were detailed and helpful.

Raluca did the grading, and I think she was the most helpful of the TAs. Hanzhe had a pretty serious language barrier. As in, it actually inhibited his communication ability with the class. I stopped going to TA sessions after the first week because they were so unhelpful and basically just confused me on material that I had been pretty comfortable with. I never really saw Martin.

Hanzhe was great, very available and friendly. Raluca and Martin were great too. Only weakness was Hanzhe`s lecture on auctions got bogged down in math.

Raluca was organized and timely, and was overall a good TA. Hanzhe was the worst TA I have encountered so far. His obvious lack of caring for the class and consistent lack of preparation were borderline insulting. That being said, he managed to make mistakes in the TA session that any man familiar with the subject and possessing a modest measure of intelligence could avoid with no preparation whatsoever. I believe that Hanzhe does not deserve to be a TA due to the lack of basic work ethics and sincerely hope that he does not get an opportunity to teach in this university ever again.

Hanzhe worked on too abstract a detail, especially given the language barrier. But he knew his stuff, and is a nice guy. No opinions on others.

Hanzhe is great. He gives a very clear lecture of auctions. Raluca is also very nice to talk to.

Hanzhe was hard to understand and gave us a bogus hint during the middle of the final...

I wish I could give an eval for the TAs before the midterm and an eval for the TAs after the midterm. Early in the course, they were generally organized and thorough, and they did a very nice review for the midterm that made the expectations very clear. Then things started to go downhill, and questions about the material were frequently met with blank stares, TA sessions were disorganized, and you often left feeling like you knew less than you did when you came in.

I think any of them individually could have done a good job, but having multiple was often confusing. Hanzhe is clearly brilliant but clarity during his TA sessions was often an issue. He could have benefited from better-planned sessions and proofread materials. Raluca was very nice and made an effort to plan her review sessions but I felt she was nervous and uncertain in spite of knowing the material.

Raluca was very helpful and sweet. Hanzhe was willing to answer questions but was not very good at explaining concepts that didn`t have to do with the algebra.

What, if anything, what would you change about this course and why?

I think that this class could have moved more quickly, especially early on. I felt that we spent a lot of time on very simple material.

The TA, the pace at which we learned. Spend more time on the complex stuff and not 8 weeks on the Prisoner`s Dilemma.

Grade more than 3 problems per assignment? Spend more time in the latter half of the course.

Get the trivial, full information games out of the way sooner. Cover Bayesian games and imperfect information more in depth.

Maybe the text? Osborne could be a little tedious at times. It`s a very careful treatment of the material, but also accordingly dense.

Cover more material! Cooperative games at least. Also matching.

The course does not fulfil any of the declared goals. All topics listed on the syllabus were covered in trivial cases only, and even when an opportunity to generalize presented itself professor Sonnenschein would chose to limit himself to some arbitrary chosen intermediate statement for no apparent reason. The class needs to be more theoretical in the begging, or else the set of tools available to analyze more complex problems in the end is forbiddingly limited.

More focus, either more or less theory (current balance not great.)

Make the difficulty of course more distributed. The start and the end of this course are more difficult. Also, provide more problem solving skills. Lastly, give a more standard lecture of game theory, start from rigorous definitions, mechanisms etc.

The stuff at the end about weak sequential equilibrium was really confusing. A more thorough treatment would have been helpful.

The end of the course is a jumble of different advanced topics taught in rapid succession. It was neat to see what`s out there, but I didn`t feel comfortable with any of them by the end of the course. It might be better to focus on just one or two and learn them thoroughly.

Unfortunately, the course panned out messily at times. I think this was due to the lack of organization and cohesion among the many TAs. While the TAs were mostly competent and hardworking, I felt discussion sessions were hit-or-miss and often lacked direction and clarity. The Chalk website was often a mess, with mis-numbering of problem sets and solutions variously spattered around the web. Hence my suggested improvements are to have one dedicated TA for the class (instead of 3-4) and streamline the distribution of review time and problem set solutions.

The lectures on auctions were very confusing, and there were no solutions posted to the problem set.

Is there any topic in this course that you wished you had had previous background in?

Nope

Not really. You need a decent foundation in probability and statistics, but it goes pretty well.

Probability for the auctions stuff.

Absolutely not. The class could be called self-contained if only there was any content.

No

I would say the course require you to study yourself. I think one should really do the readings before class so that prof. Sonnenschein`s class will become inspiring and illumating. Otherwise one can easily get lost.

No.

No

No

Which texts were most useful?

Textbook.

Osborne. Coursera was also a useful supplement.

I liked Reny and Jehle the best, but Osborne was ok.

J & R

The main textbook (Osborne) was sufficient for the material in class. No other text was extensively used.

I only really read Osborne. It`s great.

Osborn`s book is useful for providing intuitions and how to solve problems. Reny`s materials is more precise.

Osborne`s Introduction to Game Theory was generally clear, if a bit pedantic and repetitive, and it taught you all the game theory stuff you would need for a normal game theory course. It did, however, start to lose cohesion once you get to some of the more advanced topics. The Jehle-Reny treatment of game theory was more what Professor Sonnenschein was actually working with, but it could often be prohibitively dense.

Osborne had great examples and problems, although unclear on certain topics

Absolutely.

Which least?

n/a

Jehle and Reny..

Osborne wasn`t too helpful. Coursera reviews the trivial games (mixed and pure equilibria under full information)

Hanzhe`s class notes on auction theory were not helpful

Osbourne

Coursera videos. Not necessary at all.

They are all very useful and important for understanding the materials.

See above

How productive was class discussion?

Not particularly. It probably could`ve been if we did anything interesting.

Nice to see how people thought.

Very.

interesting, a lot of back and forth. good stuff for an econ class.

Not very.

Usually prof. Sonnenschein talk on class and occasionally called students.

Class discussion was fun, but it often didn`t feel `productive` in the sense that I learned much from it.

Pretty good. Some serious that-kids but even they were mostly productive contributors

How has this course contributed to your education?

If myself and another person are ever arrested, and the police do not have enough information for a conviction, so they separate the us, and offer us both the same deal: "If one of us testifies against the other, and the other remains silent, the betrayer goes free and the one that remains silent gets a one-year sentence. If both of us remain silent, both are sentenced to only one month in jail on a minor charge. If each of us `rats out` the other, each receives a three-month sentence." I will know exactly what to do.

Gave me a good formal introduction to game theory.

I know how to predict how robots behave.

Taught me to reason able games and incentives. Also considering how constructing mechanisms is important to reconciling different preferences.

Left more time for other classes.

yes, I understood now some mechanisms of game theory.

This class was very easy for the first 8 weeks or so. Hugo is a great professor and an incredibly nice guy, but he covered the topics very slowly for my taste. "Honors" or "Accelerated" or whatever they label the class with is a misnomer. Game Theory is cool and all, but I learned more from skilling a Game Theory textbook over a summer two years ago than I did from this quarter. The class is kind of fun, fairly easy, and interesting. I`d highly recommend it, but don`t expect this to be your "hard class" for the quarter. The textbook (Osborne) sucks. It`s terrible. Do not buy it if at all possible. ~ Andrew "NO RULES" Burchill.

I now know that any social choice function with more than 3 options is either manipulable or dictatorial. This knowledge legitimately comes in handy when you`re in a group that needs to make a decision.

Improved my understanding of game theory as a field and helped me think about situations from a game-theoretic perspective

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Why did you take this course? (circle all that apply):

Core requirement	0 (0%)
Instructor reputation	5 (42%)
Faculty member recommended it	2 (17%)
Concentration requirement	1 (8%)

Meets at a convenient time	1 (8%)
A student recommended it	3 (25%)
Topic interests me	11 (92%)
Concentration elective	12 (100%)

In summary, I had a strong desire to take this course. (circle one)

Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (36%)	9 (64%)

How many hours per week did you spend on this course?

Low Answer: 4   Average Answer: 7.63333333333   High Answer: 12

What proportion of classes did you attend?

None: 0 (0%)   25%: 0 (0%)   50%: 0 (0%)   75%: 4 (27%)   All: 11 (73%)

Were the time demands of this course reasonable?

Yes: 15 (100%)   No: 0 (0%)

THE INSTRUCTOR

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
Organized the course clearly.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	7 (50%)	3 (21%)
Presented clear lectures.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	8 (57%)	2 (14%)
Held my attention and made this course interesting.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	6 (43%)
Stimulated and facilitated questions and discussions.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	4 (29%)	7 (50%)
Responded well to student questions.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (36%)	8 (57%)
Was available outside of class.	5 (36%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	5 (36%)
Was helpful during office hours.	9 (64%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)
Motivated independent thinking.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	8 (57%)

THE READINGS

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
Fulfilled the objective of the course.	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (29%)	4 (29%)	4 (29%)
Were reasonable in number.	2 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (23%)	4 (31%)	4 (31%)

Were appropriately difficult.	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	5 (36%)

	N/A	None	25%	50%	75%	100%
Approximately how much of the reading did you do?	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	6 (43%)	2 (14%)

THE ASSIGNMENTS

	N/A	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
How helpful were the lectures and discussions in preparing for exams and completing assignments?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	9 (64%)	2 (14%)
How appropriately were the requirements of the course proportioned to course goals?	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (21%)	5 (36%)	5 (36%)
How well did the requirements contribute to the goals of the course?	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	4 (29%)	5 (36%)	4 (29%)
How timely and useful was feedback on assignments and exams?	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	8 (57%)	3 (21%)
How fairly were the assignments graded?	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	4 (29%)	7 (50%)

OVERALL

	N/A	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
This course met my expectations.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	5 (36%)	5 (36%)
This course provided me with new insight and knowledge.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	4 (29%)	8 (57%)
This course provided me with useful skills.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	6 (43%)
The content of this course was presented at an appropriate level.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)	6 (43%)
I put my best effort into this course.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	6 (43%)
The class had a high level of morale/enthusiasm.	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	6 (43%)	5 (36%)

THE TEACHING ASSISTANT(S)

	N/A	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
Were available outside of class.	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	3 (23%)	3 (23%)	3 (23%)

Were helpful with assignments.

| | 2 (15%) | 1 (8%) | 2 (15%) | 3 (23%) | 2 (15%) | 3 (23%) |

DISCUSSION SECTIONS, PROBLEM SESSIONS, WRITING TUTORIALS

	N/A	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
Were well coordinated with this course and contributed to it.	2 (17%)	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	1 (8%)	2 (17%)
Provided well-designed materials.	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	2 (17%)

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