



UNIVERSITY OF
MICHIGAN

Winter 2019 Instructor Report With Comments of POLSCI 681-002: Intermed Game Theory for Samuel Baltz

Project Title: **Winter 2019 Teaching Evaluation**

Course Audience: **15**

Responses Received: **10**

Response Ratio: **66.7%**

Report Comments

This report is a summary that tabulates all quantitative ratings on a single page. Results from the open-ended questions appear at the end of this report. Ratings are from the Winter 2019 teaching evaluations of POLSCI 681-002: Intermed Game Theory.

Prepared by: **Office of the Registrar**

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Responses to the University-wide questions about the course:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	University-Wide Median	School/College Median
This course advanced my understanding of the subject matter. (Q1631)	6	4	0	0	0	0	4.7	4.5	4.6
My interest in the subject has increased because of this course. (Q1632)	6	4	0	0	0	0	4.7	4.2	4.4
I knew what was expected of me in this course.(Q1633)	6	2	2	0	0	0	4.7	4.5	4.6
Overall, this was an excellent course.(Q1)	7	1	2	0	0	0	4.8	4.2	4.5
I had a strong desire to take this course.(Q4)	5	2	3	0	0	0	4.5	4.0	4.3
As compared with other courses of equal credit, the workload for this course was... (SA=Much Lighter to SD=Much Heavier)	0	1	6	2	1	0	2.8	3.0	3.0

Responses to the University-wide questions about the instructor:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	University-Wide Median	School/College Median
Overall, Samuel Baltz was an excellent teacher.	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.5	4.7
Samuel Baltz seemed well prepared for class meetings.	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.8	4.8
Samuel Baltz explained material clearly.	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.6	4.7
Samuel Baltz treated students with respect.	8	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.8	4.9

Responses to additional questions about the course:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	University-Wide Median
I gained a good understanding of concepts/principles in this field. (Q121)	4	4	2	0	0	0	4.3	4.3
I learned to identify main points and central issues in this field. (Q123)	5	4	0	1	0	0	4.5	4.4
I developed ability to carry out original research in this area. (Q128)	3	4	0	3	0	0	4.0	4.3
I developed an ability to evaluate new work in this field. (Q129)	3	5	1	1	0	0	4.1	4.4
Writing assignments were interesting and stimulating. (Q319)	3	2	0	0	0	5	4.7	4.0
Reading assignments seemed carefully chosen. (Q326)	2	5	0	1	0	2	4.1	4.1
Students felt comfortable asking questions. (Q892)	5	4	1	0	0	0	4.5	4.6
My expected grade in this course is (SA=A;A=B;N=C;D=D;SD=E)	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.8

Responses to additional questions about the instructor:

	SA	A	N	D	SD	N/A	Your Median	University-Wide Median
Samuel Baltz stressed important points in lectures/discussions. (Q203)	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.6
Samuel Baltz acknowledged all questions insofar as possible. (Q216)	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.7
Samuel Baltz was willing to meet and help students outside class. (Q219)	9	1	0	0	0	0	4.9	4.7

The medians are calculated from Winter 2019 data. University-wide medians are based on all UM classes in which an item was used. The school/college medians in this report are based on classes that are graduate level with enrollment of 16 to 74 in Division of Social Sciences in the College of LS&A.

Written Comments

Comment on the quality of instruction in this course. (Q900)

Comments
Samuel is an excellent GSI.
This course was not exactly what I expected, but it was still good. As someone who does not have any background in game theory, Scott's lectures sometimes went over my head. They tended to be a bit disorganized and very fast-paced. In addition, the lecture notes were often quite sparse to the point that if you missed something important in class, you could not rely on the lecture notes to fill you in 100%. All that being said, Scott was very good at providing practical take-aways and examples for every concept he taught, which helped make the big ideas understandable even when the math wasn't. I do think that the pace and style of the class was intimidating to the point that people who wanted to ask questions sometimes did not. Additionally the homework assignments were often unclear or had typos that seriously interfered with students' abilities to complete them well; luckily they were graded liberally. Many of the difficulties of the lectures were balanced by the helpfulness of the sections. Samuel is an excellent teacher who explains complex mathematical ideas simply and clearly. He makes math accessible to all types of learners by using visuals and creative real-world examples. He also creates a relaxed environment in the classroom that makes students comfortable to ask questions. I would not hesitate to take any class with Samuel in the future. I have only one suggestion: Providing more feedback on homework and/or posting solution sets for the homework. However, this was pretty much infeasible for this particular class given the subjective nature of the homework and the large volume of assignments Samuel had to grade. Finally, I'd like to emphasize how well the lectures and sections ultimately worked together in my opinion. While the lectures gave us a bird's eye overview of many interesting topics in game theory that we might encounter or wish to use in the future, the sections gave us the worm's eye details of the basic mathematical concepts in game theory that I at least lacked and was not getting from the lectures. I'm not sure the course was designed that way, but it worked out well in the end thanks to Samuel's initiative in crafting the sections.
I really enjoyed this course, despite the often odd structure of the course. I found that, because of Samuel's decision to restructure the flow of discussion section, I was able to learn about the basics of Game Theory in section and more complex applications in lecture, which I enjoyed.
Samuel is an excellent instructor. He's available for questions, both in office hours and via email. He's continually gone above and beyond his duty as a GSI, creating additional resources for students, explaining concepts carefully & clearly, and clarifying unclear homework questions. I especially appreciate that he changed the plan of his section to meet the needs of his students.
While I do wish that homework had had some sort of answer guide, I understand the decisions that Samuel made regarding the homework, and the course more broadly, and appreciate that he put so much time and effort into making this class as rewarding for students as possible.
While Scott Page was a fairly engaging lecturer with good examples for teaching concepts, he has some weaknesses as a teacher that adversely affected the quality of instruction in the course. Primarily, the lecture notes were riddled with errors. They were so bad that I could not trust them if I needed to refer back to them even six months from now to review a concept from a course. The problems with these course notes were not limited to small issues either. The problem sets at the end of the lecture notes weren't spared. Nor were the major examples that the questions in the problem set referred to in those lecture notes. Often, it looked like the lecture notes got hurriedly pumped out and were incomplete with huge portions of the course material missing. I recall being highly frustrated with the week on Perfect Bayesian Nash Equilibriums because the information on those equilibria and ones similar to them spanned a whole half page for three different types of equilibria. There was no mention of Chinese Buffet processes, Indian Buffet processes, or Polya processes in the notes. Just generally incompleteness was a huge issue. I think the reason the course notes suffered is that by trade and training Scott is a modeler. Being a good modeler means having the ability to look at something complicated and distill it down to its main ideas. The problem is that Scott applies that skill to problem sets and lecture notes by often omitting critical details from the problem sets or omitting steps from the notes that he may not think are important, but matter for comprehension. And forget subscripts and superscripts. Those become a crapshoot. In addition, Scott's office hours felt unwelcoming. Most weeks he would randomly post when his office hours were on Canvas rather than sticking to what was in the syllabus. In addition, I visited Scott once during office hours and I felt like I was an interruption to him rather than welcomed to ask questions and seek help. I could go on, but it sufficeth me to say that Scott would have run this class into the ground.
Samuel was an angel. This class would have been so much worse if not for his long-suffering and tireless endeavors to help us students understand. Scott threw so much garbage at him and Samuel took it in stride. As a GSI, he was willing to make authoritative interpretations of what Scott's vague problem sets meant giving us students a direction. He spent time with us correcting the errors in the lecture notes so that we could use them as a guide. He was always available during office hours and responsive to email questions even long after office hours were over. Samuel even once made an office "house call" on me to make sure that I was understanding a concept that he knew was a difficult one that week. Scott's feedback on problem sets was pretty

Comments

helpful. Scott's general lackadaisical approach to the class made a large burden for ensuring that students came away with useful skills fall to Samuel. He succeeded and more. I appreciated his decision in section to diverge from lecture and focus on ensuring that we could find a Nash Equilibrium and perform basic game theory skills that one should have after taking this level of course. Samuel was always prepared for section and I can't express how grateful I am to him for the time and effort he put in to make this class not a total disaster that it would have been if left to Scott Page's devices. I should also mention that I have now had the privilege of having Samuel as a GSI twice. The first context was not a methods course which demonstrates that he's not only got a depth of knowledge on math and statistics, but that he has a wide breadth of abilities to teach highly varied courses. If any potential future employer of Samuel ever reads this review of Samuel, I cannot recommend him highly enough as a skilled instructor. You'd be hard-pressed to do better than hiring him. I'd hire him long before I'd hire myself.

The printed guides were immensely helpful. Framing our approach to games as a procedure was the first moment that I felt like I could start to "do" things with games— going beyond the intuition and implications of a game to make it interactive was a highlight.

Samuel is a great GSI for this class. He's always very well prepared for sections. His instruction is clear and helpful. He's super responsive to question in class and office hours, as well as via email.

Scott is a great professor very approachable. But my learning experience could have been better if we spent more time on the foundations of game theory.

Section for game theory was honestly the key for me learning to understand the topic and gaining a practical and accurate understanding of what the field has to offer my research interests. Samuel was an excellent instructor, who went out of his way to make himself available to students and always offered meaningful advice and support. His teaching ability is outstanding.