

Economics 286: Game Theory

Stanford University, Fall 2015

Mon, Wed 1:30 – 3:20 PM, Landau 218

<https://coursework.stanford.edu/portal/site/F15-ECON-286-01>

Syllabus version: August 22, 2015

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1 Overview

What this class is: This is an intermediate-level, mathematically oriented class in game theory, aimed at economics PhD students (but qualified students in other departments are very much welcome to attend). The goals are twofold: to provide technical tools for studying game-theoretic problems that arise in economic models, and to discuss conceptual issues in interpreting predictions made using game theory.

What this class is not:

- **A class just for micro theorists.** This class is meant to provide concepts and analytical tools useful in every area of economics (and beyond).
- **A first course in game theory.** Technically, the mathematical content will be developed in a way that doesn't presume game theory background; but in practice, if you haven't taken a previous game theory class it will be steep going. (The official prerequisite is ECON 203. If you have taken a different game theory class and are unsure if you are prepared, you are encouraged to discuss with me.)
- **An introduction to the research frontiers.** This is intended as a foundational course, although we will run across some relatively recent papers. ECON 290 or MGTECON 616 are more like "advanced topics" classes.

Textbooks: The main source for this class, which covers much (though not all) of the material, is the still-classic

- Drew Fudenberg and Jean Tirole, *Game Theory*, MIT Press, 1991.

Other books that will provide helpful reading for specific parts of the class are

- Drew Fudenberg and David Levine, *The Theory of Learning in Games*, MIT Press, 1998.
- Martin J. Osborne and Ariel Rubinstein, *A Course in Game Theory*, MIT Press, 1994.
- Donald M. Topkis, *Supermodularity and Complementarity*, Princeton University Press, 1998.

There are also a couple more recent books that overlap substantially with parts of the class. I haven't made them official materials for the course, and haven't referred directly to them on the reading list, but you might find them useful:

- George J. Mailath and Larry Samuelson, *Repeated Games and Reputations: Long-Run Relationships*, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Michael Maschler, Eilon Solan, and Shmuel Zamir, *Game Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

The course will also draw on assorted papers, as listed below. Note that in order to keep the reading list manageable I've only listed papers that are relatively central to the lecture material. These papers will also be linked from the CourseWork site. The lectures will periodically refer to other papers outside of this list as well.

Other materials: I will make written outlines of lectures available on the class website. I don't have fully detailed lecture notes to distribute; but if anyone would like to help create such a set of notes as a public good, I am happy to help coordinate.

Assignments: There will be two types of assignments.

- **Problem sets.** There will be four of these assigned (planned due dates 10/12, 10/26, 11/9, 11/30). Grading, and writing of official solutions, will be done collaboratively, and everyone who is enrolled for credit is expected to pitch in. More details will be issued with the first problem set.

The problem sets will offer a mix of pure theory and applications for you to choose from. On each problem set, you should participate in at least three problems —

where “participating” means either turning in a written solution, or helping with grading or with writing official solutions. However, you are encouraged to solve all the problems! They will help build your intuitions for the concepts in the course, and will also cover some classic results not covered in lecture.

- **Final projects.** These do not need to be original research. Instead, you should summarize and critically review several existing papers related to some topic from this course. You can choose either pure theory papers, or papers that do more applied modeling as long as they draw on some tools from the course. The intent is for you to dive into the literature on a topic you find interesting, and understand the motivating questions, the approaches that existing research has taken, and the challenges and possible limitations. These will be due 12/4. More instructions will emerge later.

2 Schedule of classes

The lectures will aim to adhere to the schedule below, but in practice there may be some adjustment.

2.1 First half: Static games

- 9/21, 9/23: Basics of static games, solution concepts, complete and incomplete information
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, chapters 1, 2, sections 6.1–6.6, 8.4
- 9/28: Zero-sum and potential games
 - Osborne & Rubinstein, section 2.5
 - Dov Monderer and Lloyd S. Shapley (1996), “Potential games,” *Games and Economic Behavior* 14 (1): 124–143
- 9/30, 10/5, 10/7: Supermodular games
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, section 12.3

- Paul Milgrom and John Roberts (1990), “Rationalizability, learning, and equilibrium in games with strategic complementarities,” *Econometrica* 58 (6): 1255–1277
 - Timothy Van Zandt and Xavier Vives (2007), “Monotone equilibria in Bayesian games of strategic complementarities,” *Journal of Economic Theory* 134 (1), 339–360
 - Susan Athey, Paul Milgrom and John Roberts (1998), “Robust comparative statics,” draft teaching notes, available online from <http://faculty-gsb.stanford.edu/athey/documents/draftmonograph98.pdf>
 - Topkis, chapter 2, sections 3.1–3.3, chapter 4
- 10/12, 10/14: Knowledge and rationality
 - Osborne & Rubinstein, chapter 5
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, chapter 14
 - Ariel Rubinstein (1989), “The electronic mail game: strategic behavior under ‘almost common knowledge,’ ” *American Economic Review* 79 (3): 385–391

2.2 Second half: Dynamic games and processes

- 10/19: Basics of dynamic games
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, chapter 3, sections 4.2, 8.1–8.3
- 10/21: Intuitive criterion, forward induction
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, sections 11.2–11.3
 - Elchanan Ben-Porath and Eddie Dekel (1992), “Signaling future actions and the potential for sacrifice,” *Journal of Economic Theory* 57 (1), 36–51
- 10/26, 10/28, 11/2, 11/4: Repeated games
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, sections 5.1, 5.5–5.6
 - Drew Fudenberg, David Levine, and Eric Maskin (1994), “The folk theorem with imperfect public information,” *Econometrica* 62 (5), 997–1039

- 11/9, 11/11: Reputation
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, sections 9.1–9.2
 - Jeffrey Ely and Juuso Välimäki (2003), “Bad reputation,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118 (3), 785–814
 - Jean Tirole (1996) “A theory of collective reputations (with applications to the persistence of corruption and to firm quality),” *Review of Economic Studies* 63 (1), 1–22

- 11/16, 11/18: Bargaining
 - Fudenberg & Tirole, section 4.4, chapter 10
 - Dilip Abreu and Faruk Gul (2000), “Bargaining and reputation,” *Econometrica* 68 (1), 85–117

- 11/30, 12/2: Evolutionary foundations
 - Fudenberg & Levine, sections 1.1–1.6, 2.1–2.4, 5.1–5.5
 - Julia Robinson (1951), “An iterative method of solving a game,” *Annals of Mathematics* 54 (2), 296–301
 - Dov Monderer and Lloyd S. Shapley (1996), “Fictitious play property for games with identical interests,” *Journal of Economic Theory* 68 (1), 258–265
 - Sergiu Hart and Yishay Mansour (2010), “How long to equilibrium? The communication complexity of uncoupled equilibrium procedures,” *Games and Economic Behavior* 69 (1), 107–126