Syllabus, Ec717: Mechanism Design and Contract Theory

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Spring 2020, Boston University Department of Economics

This forms one half of Ec717, which I will teach in February and March 2020. The other half on organizational economics will be taught by Andy Newman in January and April.

My intention is to expose you to recent work on mechanism design and contract theory. I will focus on three sets of topics: (a) Robust Incentives and Complexity: designing incentives and mechanisms when principal and agents may not share a common prior, or where contract design need to incorporate costs of complexity and communication; (b) Hierarchies, Delegation and Collusion: delegation of decision-making authority within organizations, and control of collusion; (c) Relational Contracts, where external enforcement is not available and contracts need to be self-enforcing via long term relationships.

Class: T, Th 2-315pm, SSW315.

Office Hours: M2-330, Th11-1230 (Room 500A, 264 Bay State Road)

Course website: http://people.bu.edu/dilipm/ec717/717hmpg.html

Prerequisites: First Year PhD courses in micro (Ec701, 703) or equivalent

Grading: Class presentations, participation and research proposal. Wednesdays (545-830 pm) can be used if necessary for class or research proposal presentations.

Academic Conduct: You are expected to know and understand the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean's Office.

Sessions and Readings: (* denotes suitable for class presentation)

1. Robust Incentives (Feb 4, 6, 11, 13)

G. Carroll (2015), Robustness and Linear Contracts, American Economic Review.

2. Complexity and Communication Costs (Feb 20, 25, 27, March 3)


*F. Herweg and K. Schmidt (2018), Procurement with Unforeseen Contingencies, working paper, University of Munich.  
https://www.et.econ.uni-muenchen.de/personen/professor/schmidt/publikationen/papers/procurement.pdf

3. Hierarchies, Delegation and Collusion (March 5, 17, 19, 24)


https://www.et.econ.uni-muenchen.de/personen/professor/schmidt/publikationen/index.html

4. Relational Contracts (March 26, 31)

J Levin (2003), Relational Incentive Contracts, American Economic Review.

*S. Chassang (2010), Building Routines: Learning, Cooperation and the Dynamics of Incomplete Relational Contracts, American Economic Review.