

**CAS EC403(B1)**  
**Game Theory**

**Boston University**  
**Fall 2026**

**DR HSUEH-LING HUYNH** TEL: 1-617-353-6823 EMAIL: [hlhuynh@bu.edu](mailto:hlhuynh@bu.edu)  
**OFFICE HOURS:** (IN PERSON) TU 1-2:30 PM & TH 5:30-7 PM SSW 309, 270 BAY STATE RD.  
(REMOTE) TU 1-2:30 PM ONLINE VIA ZOOM  
(Web link to online office hours will be provided on the course website.)

**LECTURES:** TU TH 3:30 - 4:45 PM CAS B20

**TEXT:** Avinash Dixit, Susan Skeath & David McAdams,  
*Games of Strategy* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), W.W. Norton 2025

**GRADE:** Exam 1 [25%] + Exam 2 [25%] + Exam 3 [50%]  
\*\*\* No make-up exams will be given. \*\*\*

(Coverage, format and logistics of the exams will be announced in class and on the course website.)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The origins of modern game theory and its application to economics can be traced back to the 1830's, when the mathematician Antoine Augustin Cournot wrote his now famous model of duopoly, but for a century its development was fitful and slow. After the appearance of John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern's 'Theory of Games and Economic Behavior' in 1944, interest and research in the subject underwent a phase of rapid and extensive growth. It is now regarded by economists and social scientists as a central theory of human strategic interaction, and in recent years it has even entered the conversations of an educated public.

In this introductory course, we will study the logical and analytic underpinnings of game theory. From the rigorous formulation of models of interaction and the concept of strategies, we will move on to the positive and normative assertions of game theory – Nash Equilibrium, Iterated Deletion of Dominated Strategies, Rationalizability, Sub-game Perfection, Evolutionary Stability, etc., and examine assumptions about human decision and social institutions that may support these assertions. Many of these ideas have been motivated by economic phenomena, which still provide the best illustrations of game theory as well as inspirations for game theorists.

It is also well known that game theory frequently makes predictions which appear to be at odds with observed human behavior, whether seen in natural settings or deliberate experiments. We will discuss some of these findings, and may occasionally engage in experimentation ourselves. However, even when we feel that game theory fails to deliver empirically sound predictions or prescriptions, a useful way to understand why it may be so is to scrutinize its assumptions and logic as closely and deeply as we can.

Being an advanced undergraduate course intended for economists, the student is assumed to come equipped with basic knowledge of economic theory and mathematics (including some calculus and probability theory), but most important of all is her/his ability and willingness to think clearly and logically.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:** See attached.

**COURSE WEBSITE:** <http://learn.bu.edu/> (BLACKBOARD)

**ACADEMIC CONDUCT:** It is the student's responsibility to read, understand and observe the *Academic Conduct Code* (<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>, also available from CAS Advising and Student Academic Life). Cases of suspected misconduct will be referred to the Dean's Office. Furthermore, acts of plagiarism or cheating will be penalized with failing grades.

**BU HUB LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

EC403 can fulfill the learning outcome of any one of the following Hub areas.

- **Social Inquiry II –**

In a *strategic interaction*, outcomes are determined jointly and not unilaterally. Thus the success of an individual's decision will depend on her correct beliefs about the actions (and beliefs) of *other* decision-makers. This is a fundamental aspect of social and economic phenomena, and Game Theory is a systematic analysis of strategic interactions. Formal theoretical models are constructed to understand the complex realities of economic, social and political interactions and institutions.

The exact conclusions drawn from these models can then be used to predict behavior, guide decisions, or inform policies. Applications range from industrial organization (e.g. the competitive or collusive behavior of powerful firms in different industries, and the regulation of such industries), corporate governance (e.g. the design of effective contracts), financial markets (e.g. the origins of speculative trades), to the understanding of social norms (e.g. how repeated interactions or third-party sanction can sustain cooperative behavior even amongst selfish agents).

These models also provide testable conclusions: by comparing the 'rational' predictions of game theory with observed phenomena (under natural or experimental conditions) the student can gauge the soundness and realism of the model's underlying assumptions, and reveal deep-seated complexities of human behavior.

- **Quantitative Reasoning II –**

In this course, students are given ample opportunities to hone their quantitative and analytical skills. Formally, 'games' are precise mathematical constructs; and they are the theoretical models used to understand the socio-economic phenomena or questions that arise in specific applications. In order to make predictions or derive conclusions according to game theory, rigorous logical analyses are conducted and mathematical methods are used. These include algebra, calculus, and probability theory. Symbolic manipulations, graphical representation, and computations form an integral part of the exposition and processing of game-theoretical ideas. However, a full appreciation of the intellectual source and power of game theory also calls for imagination, intuition, and an abiding interest in society, economy, and human nature.

- **Critical Thinking (from the Intellectual Toolkit) –**

Game theory provides a perfect illustration on how the scientific method is applied to social science. It is a rigorous, elegant, and insightful exercise in translating real-life experience and informal observations about social and strategic interactions into formal language and formal theories.

This practice inspires and enables the student to undertake critical examination of a wide range of socio-economic phenomena, as well as intuitive ideas that have been advanced to explain or regulate social phenomena (including a lot of conventional wisdom, dogmas and gut-reactions). For example: "Does the enlightened pursuit of individual self-interests lead to socially efficient outcomes?" The analysis of competitive markets suggests that this can be true, whereas the "prisoners' dilemma" exposes conditions under which it may fail.

**ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT OUTCOMES:**

EC403 can fulfill the elective requirements for the following undergraduate majors: BA in Economics, BA in Economics and Mathematics, BA in Computer Science and Economics, and (the BA portion of) BA/MS in Quantitative Economics; and also for the undergraduate minor in Economics. Majors in other fields should consult academic advisors in their own departments.

**COURSE SCHEDULE** Details of this schedule are subject to change. Registered students can log into the course website at <http://learn.bu.edu/>. You should visit this website frequently to get the latest course schedule, check announcements, obtain class material and verify your personal grading record. Recordings and notes from the lectures will also be posted there if they are available.

- ◆ LECTURE complements READING and self-study. They are not substitutes. To do well in this course, you must understand both thoroughly.
- ◆ HOMEWORK problems are specified as follows: “S2.1” refers to Solved Exercise S1 at the end of Chapter 2 of Dixit-Skeath-McAdams, while U2.3 refers to the Unsolved Exercise U3 in the same chapter. “S3.1- 3.5” means “S3.1, S3.2, S3.3, S3.4 and S3.5”. Additional problems may be given out in class or on the course website from time to time.
- ◆ SOLUTION to the homework problems and exams will be posted on the course website. But you will not benefit from the solutions unless you have worked seriously on the problems.
- ◆ An EXAM will test your comprehensive understanding of the course material up to the time of the exam.

| DATE    | LECTURE                                                                                                                                                           | READING  | HOMEWORK                                                              |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Th9/03  | <b>Game Theory and Strategic Interactions</b><br>Model of Strategic Interactions:<br>(1) Game Form and Payoffs<br>(2) Predicting Play and Giving Strategic Advice | Ch. 1, 2 | S2.1-2.2, U2.3-2.4                                                    |
| Tu9/08  | <b>Extensive-form/ Sequential-move Games &amp; Backward Induction</b><br>Backward Induction and the problems it raises                                            | Ch. 3    | S3.1-3.5                                                              |
| Th9/10  | Model of the Decision Maker:<br>(1) Individual preference and optimizing behavior<br>(2) Knowing the preferences and rationality of others                        |          | U3.5-3.10                                                             |
| Tu9/15  | What is a Strategy? Actions by self and Beliefs about others<br><b>Strategic-form (Normal-form)/Simultaneous-move Games &amp; Nash Equilibrium</b>                |          |                                                                       |
| Th9/17  | Normal-form Games with Complete Information                                                                                                                       | Ch. 4    | S4.1-4.8, U4.1-4.8                                                    |
| Tu9/22  | Nash Equilibrium and the problems it raises                                                                                                                       |          | S4.9-4.14                                                             |
| Th9/24  | Dominant and Dominated Strategies                                                                                                                                 |          | U4.9-4.14                                                             |
| Tu9/29  | Iterated Deletion of Dominated Strategies                                                                                                                         |          |                                                                       |
| Th10/01 | Relationship between Games in Extensive and Strategic Forms<br>Maximin and Rationalizable Strategies                                                              | Ch. 5    | S5.4-5.6, U5.5-5.7                                                    |
|         | <b>Game Theory and Economic Behavior</b>                                                                                                                          |          |                                                                       |
| Tu10/06 | Continuous strategies and best-response functions                                                                                                                 | Ch. 5    | S5.1-5.3, S5.7-5.9, U5.8-5.10                                         |
| Th10/08 | Cournot's Model of Quantity-Setting Oligopoly<br>Bertrand and Hotelling's Models of Price-Setting Oligopoly                                                       |          | Review relevant parts of your<br>Intermediate Microeconomics textbook |
| Tu10/13 | <Substitute Monday Schedule: No Class & No Office Hours>                                                                                                          |          |                                                                       |

| DATE                          | LECTURE                                                 | READING  | HOMEWORK                         |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------|
| Th10/15                       | Economic Externalities and Collective Actions           | Ch. 11   | S11.1, S11.4, U11.4-11.6         |
|                               | Rubinstein-Stahl Bargaining Model                       | Ch. 17   | S17.1, U17.1, U17.3              |
| Tu10/20 <u>EXAM 1</u>         | <i>Exam covers course material through 10/15</i>        |          |                                  |
| Th10/22                       | Auctions                                                | Ch. 15   | S15.3-15.6, U15.3-15.6           |
|                               | Public Decisions and Voting                             | Ch. 16   | S16.1-16.2, U16.5, U16.7         |
|                               | <b>Extensive-form Games with Imperfect Information</b>  |          |                                  |
| Tu10/27                       | Multi-stage Games, Inferences about the Past            | Ch. 6    | S6.1-6.7, U6.1-6.7               |
| Th10/29                       | Subgame Perfect Equilibrium and Sequential Rationality  |          | S6.8-6.12, U6.8-6.12, U6.13-6.14 |
|                               | <b>Mixed Strategy</b>                                   |          |                                  |
| Tu11/03                       | Mixed Strategies: Tax Evasion and Random Audits         | Ch. 7    | S7.1-7.10                        |
|                               | Interpretations of Mixed Strategies                     |          | U7.1-7.13                        |
| Th11/05                       | Correlated Equilibrium                                  |          |                                  |
|                               | <b>Strategic-form Games with Incomplete Information</b> |          |                                  |
| Tu11/10                       | Decision under Uncertainty:                             | Ch. 8, 9 | S8.2-8.4, S8.6-8.8               |
|                               | (1) Expected Payoffs                                    |          | U8.2-8.4, U8.7-8.9               |
|                               | (2) Prior Beliefs and Factual Information               |          | S9.3-9.6, U9.7-9.8               |
| Th11/12                       | Signaling and Screening                                 |          | U9.6, U9.9                       |
| Tu11/17 <u>EXAM 2</u>         | <i>Exam covers course material through 11/12</i>        |          |                                  |
| Th11/19                       | Brinkmanship and Commitment                             | Ch. 13   | S13.1, S13.4-13.5, U13.          |
|                               | <b>Repeated Interaction and Social Interaction</b>      |          |                                  |
| Tu11/24                       | Reward and Punishment                                   | Ch. 10   | S10.2-10.3, S10.5, S10.7         |
|                               | Repeated Games & Mutual Sanction                        |          | U10.1-10.2, U10.5-10.8           |
| Th11/26                       | <Thanksgiving Recess: No Class & No Office Hours>       |          |                                  |
| Tu12/01                       | Promises and Threats: Are they credible?                |          |                                  |
| Th12/03                       | Social Norms & Third-party Sanction                     |          |                                  |
|                               | <b>Evolution of Behavior and Belief</b>                 |          |                                  |
| Tu12/08                       | Population Dynamics:                                    | Ch. 12   | S12.2, S12.7-12.8                |
|                               | (1) Replication & Statistical Equilibrium               |          |                                  |
|                               | (2) Random Perturbation & Selection                     |          | S12.9-12.11                      |
| Th12/10                       | Evolutionary Stability                                  |          | U12.1, U12.2, U12.6, U12.8       |
| Th12/17 <u>EXAM 3</u> <3-5pm> | <i>Exam covers material from the whole course</i>       |          |                                  |

\*Final exam schedule is subject to confirmation or change by the University Registrar's