

PUBL 601: The Political and Social Context of the Policy Process, Fall 2011

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Course Objectives

The graduate catalog describes this course as:

designed to introduce students to the processes by which policy is made in the United States. It introduces students to the policy-making system, including the institutional, structural and political contexts, as well as the policy-making environment. The various stages of the policy-making process from problem definition and agenda-setting to implementation are examined and discussed, and important theories and models of policy-making are presented. Significant concepts relating to the political analysis of public policy are discussed, such as the social construction of problems, group demands, political influence and resources, motivations and incentive for political behavior and political feasibility.

To make this task manageable, we will focus on American domestic policy and national government and politics (though a few readings address state government and politics). The readings are drawn from a massive literature that is stocked with both accepted findings and massive disagreements. The latter could be viewed as an indictment of political science as a discipline. But is also the natural result of trying to understand a very complex process in which participants often act strategically, sometimes intelligently and sometimes not, under highly variable conditions. And just as importantly, observers of politics almost always have some strong political and policy preferences that substantially affect understanding of the process. (Those observers whose preferences affect political understanding include you and me, a topic we will cover on 9/7.)

Therefore, this course is not designed to set out the "major truths" of the politics of policy-making." Rather, the course is designed to help you use build a craft expertise--the ability to do practical political analysis for public policy advocacy, evaluation, and management. That requires the selection of appropriate political knowledge for particular policy-making situations.

That craft expertise can also be enhanced by an ability to find and interpret quality political science analysis related to policy-making.

Assignments and Grading

Students are expected to have done all of the required reading before class, and to attend class regularly and participate in class. The reading load is necessarily heavy in terms of page length, but most readings are very accessible.

Participation will be 20% of your final grade. Participation includes careful listening, speaking in discussions, and asking questions if you are confused. I encourage you to challenge my position if you disagree with it. I will exercise my academic freedom to express my own views at times, and when you disagree, you should be absolutely confident that I will not penalize you. If you bring a laptop to class, I hope that you will avoid being distracted by it, and I also ask that you use cellphones/texting only for family emergencies. There will be a 10-minute break in each class.

Weekly writing assignments will make up another 40% of the final grade. These are due by email to meyers@umbc.edu by 8 a.m. the morning of class. They may be in the body of your email or an attachment, and should be 1 to 2 pages long. Some of these assignments are labeled as “reaction” assignments in the weekly schedule. They are intended to assure that you read carefully, to help me organize the discussion, and to understand any questions you may have. I expect that class discussion will bring to your attention ideas that you did not think about while writing your assignment; don’t worry about not having written about everything that could be relevant in such a short assignment.

Other weekly writing assignments ask you to conduct practical political analysis on a current policy issue of your choice; these are labeled as “workshop” assignments. The remaining 40% of the final grade is a final paper on the politics of your policy issue. It is due the last class of the semester, and should be about 15 double-spaced pages long, plus references and any graphics.

The paper should be a political strategy memo addressed to a client--a person or organization, real or imagined. It must give advice on the realistic political strategy that is most likely to result in successful adoption, implementation, or termination of a policy. This policy area should involve either national or state government domestic policy in the United States. For those of you who are employed in this policy area, your topic should not be your primary focus at work. For those of you who are doctoral students, you might benefit from picking a policy related to the subject on which you are thinking about writing your dissertation.

Your paper should draw on ideas and readings covered in the course, and from other academic and practical sources besides those included in syllabus. Some class periods will be devoted to helping you learn how to identify useful sources. You may find that one of my web pages will

provide a useful head start: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/linkampol.htm>. Most class periods will include workshop sections where students will discuss their projects.

My expectations for your writing style are the same in both the weekly assignments and the final paper. Papers should use clear and concise language. Employ jargon only when necessary, and explain its meaning. Pages should be numbered. The final paper should be well-organized and use sub-headings. I am indifferent to citation style as long as one is used consistently. You are obligated to act ethically in conducting your work, and in particular, to not commit plagiarism. For my guidance on this matter, see: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/plag.htm>.

Readings

There are four required texts:

Paul Pierson and Jacob S. Hacker, 2010. *Winner-Take-All Politics*. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster.

John W. Kingdon, 2011. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, updated second edition. Boston: Longman.

Frank R. Baumgartner, et.al., 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Paul Manna, 2011. *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

The program has purchased access to two JFK Case Program case studies. All other readings are available from the course Blackboard site, or on the web from links in the syllabus.

In case you have very little knowledge of the basics of American government and would like a reference source, you may find it worthwhile to buy a textbook. One that has more policy content than most is Ginsberg, et.al., *We the People*, from W.W. Norton. Former Senator Bob Graham has also authored a wonderful, activist-oriented book called *America, The Owner's Manual: Making Government Work for You*, 2010, CQ Press.

Class Schedule

8/31 Class canceled because of my attendance at annual conference of the American Political Science Association

But reading Hacker and Pierson, covering pp. 1-91.

And after doing so, by Saturday, 9/3, respond to the prompts on the Bb discussion board page.

9/7 Class structure in policy making; ideologies

Hacker and Pierson, rest of book.

After finishing the book, take an ideology self-test at: <http://people-press.org/typology/quiz/> to see how you are categorized. Keep track of how many of the forced choice questions for which you quickly agreed with one option over the other, compared to those where you weren't satisfied with having only two options.

Reaction: How well have Hacker and Pierson described and supported their "organizational advantage" explanation for growing income inequality in the U.S.?

9/14 Some standard models of the policy process--interests and pluralism, incrementalism, policy stages, multiple streams, and punctuated equilibrium; their relationship to formal institutions of government; overview of methods for studying policy process

Deborah Stone, 2002. "Interests," from *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, revised edition. N.Y.: Norton, 210-231.

Kingdon, chapters 1-4, appendix

Baumgartner, et.al., chapters 1-2, appendix; and browse through <http://lobby.la.psu.edu/>

Workshop: Choose a policy area on which you will focus your political analysis over the semester. Prepare a brief policy problem definition and identify your preferred policy response. Then identify as specifically as you can two major interests on this issue--one that is closest to your position and one that is farthest from it.

9/21 Problem attention in politics; political interpretations of policy indicators and policy evaluations

Kingdon, chapter 5

Baumgartner, et.al., chapters 3-4

Workshop: Identify the most important policy indicators and/or evaluations relevant to your workshop issue, and describe how they are typically interpreted by the major interests you identified last week.

9/28 Partisanship and policy: the attentive and active public; polarization; spatial models; strategic disagreement; veto players, pivot points, and the filibuster
(note this is Rosh Hashanah eve)

Baumgartner, et.al., chapter 5

Alan I. Abramowitz, 2010. *The Disappearing Center*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 15-83.

Henry E. Brady, 2011. "The Art of Political Science: Spatial Diagrams as Iconic and Revelatory," *Perspectives on Politics*, 9: June, 311-331.

John B. Gilmour, 1995. *Strategic Disagreement*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 15-50 Optional: 51-95.

Reaction: What do you think about the argument now commonly made among pundits that we need more compromise and centrism in policy-making?

10/5 Policy cycles; public knowledge of policy and political responsiveness; framing

Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, 2010. "The Thermostatic Model," from *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy*. N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 22-42.

Stone, 2002, "Symbols," 137-162.

Brian C. Tringali, 2009. "Message Testing in the Twenty-First Century," in Dennis W. Johnson, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Political Management*. N.Y.: Routledge, 113-125.

Frank Luntz, 2010. "The Language of Financial Reform," *The Word Doctors*, Alexandria, Virginia, January.

Jennifer Jerit, 2009. "How Predictive Appeals Affect Policy Opinions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 53: April, 411-426.

Douglas B. Harris, 2010. "Partisan Framing in Legislative Debates," from Brian F. Schaffner and Patrick J. Sellers, *Winning with Words*, N.Y.: Routledge, 41-59.

Lawrence R. Jacobs and Suzanne Mettler, 2011. "Structural Framing: Health Care Reform and Changing American Politics," paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, September 1-4.

Workshop: Search through polling data at <http://www.pollingreport.com> in search of information about how your policy position might be best framed.

10/12 Policy argumentation to elites; policy learning and diffusion; legislative specialization

Kingdon, chapter 6

Baumgartner, et.al., chapters 6-9

William K. Muir, Jr., 1982. "How the Specialist System Taught Wisdom," from *Legislature: California's School for Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 81-100.

Workshop: Identify the committees of jurisdiction and responsible executive agencies for your issue. Pick from these the organization that is most critical for your political success, and describe how it might be convinced of your position, using concepts from the readings.

10/19 How a bill really becomes a law; the potential of executive leadership; universalism and targeting

Barbara Sinclair, 2007. "The 2005 Energy Bill. . ." and "Medicare/Prescription Drug Legislation. . .," from *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S Congress*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 139-186.

John Jacobs, 1995. "Park Barrel," from *A Rage for Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 351-379.

Lawrence R. Jacobs and Desmond S. King, 2010. "Varieties of Obamaism: Structure, Agency, and the Obama Presidency," *Perspectives on Politics*, 8: 3, 793-802.

Reaction: your choice.

10/26 Coalitions and mobilization; the policy window; blame, credit, and traceability; divided we govern?

Calvin Naito and Esther Scott, 1990. "Against All Odds: The Campaign in Congress for Japanese American Redress," JFK Case Program

Michael Pertschuk, 2010. *The DeMarco Factor*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 29-87.

Kingdon, remainder

R. Douglas Arnold, 1990. *The Logic of Congressional Action*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 14-15, 37-59.

Workshop: Identify the most important strategic choice for your issue.

11/2 Policy modification and termination

Forrest Maltzman and Charles R. Shipan, 2008. "Change, Continuity, and the Evolution of the Law," *American Journal of Political Science*, 52: 2, April, 252-267.

Christopher R. Berry, Barry C. Burden, and William G. Howell, 2010. "After Enactment: The Lives and Deaths of Federal Programs," *American Journal of Political Science*, 54: 1, January, 1-17.

Esther Scott, 1995. "Catastrophic Health Insurance for the Elderly," JFK Case Program.

Mark A. Peterson, 2011. "It Was a Different Time: Obama and the Unique Opportunity for Health Care Reform," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law*, 36: June, 429-436.

Reaction: What does research suggest about whether and how the Affordable Care Act may be amended or terminated?

11/9 Implementation theory and practice

Manna, through p. 119

Workshop: This reading illustrates how academics often review important literature on a subject. Identify an approach or work cited in the reading that seems most relevant to implementation challenges for your workshop policy.

11/16 More on federalism--laboratories, convoys, and graveyards; regulatory review

Manna, chapter 7 (chapter 6 is optional)

Michele McNeil, 2011. "Obama Gives Go-Ahead for NCLB Waivers to States," *Education Week*, August 8, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/08/obama_gives_go-ahead_for_waivers.html

Jocelyn M. Johnson, 2008. "Welfare Reform: A Devolutionary Success?," from Timothy J. Conlan and Paul L. Posner, eds. *Intergovernmental Management for the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 124-156.

Frank J. Thompson and Courtney Burke, 2007. "Executive Federalism and Medicaid Demonstration Waivers: Implications for Policy and Democratic Process," *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law*, 32: December, 971-1004.

Lilliard E. Richardson, Jr. and David J. Houston, 2008. "Federalism and Safety on America's Highways," *Publius*, 39: 1, 117-137.

Reaction: Is the federal government trying to do too much, too little, or?

11/23 Class canceled--Thanksgiving eve

11/30 Judicial politics of policy; remedial law and rights politics

Gerald N. Rosenberg, 2008. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?*, second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-39, 339-382, continue to 419 if interested.

Christopher McGrory Klyza and David J. Sousa, 2008. "From 'Who Has Standing?' to 'Who Is Left Standing?': The Courts and Environmental Policy in the Era of Gridlock,"

from *American Environmental Policy, 1990-2006*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 153-194.

Workshop: Identify any legal issues related to your policy issue that might affect whether you would choose to focus on the courts as a political arena or instead avoid them.

12/7 Institutional and procedural reform; path dependence vs. discursive institutionalism; political movements

A short reading on political movements, tbd

Baumgartner, et.al., rest of book

Bruce Ackerman and Ian Ayres, 2002. *Voting with Dollars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 3-54.

Scan through this web site below to learn a bit about the *Citizens United* case: <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/citizens-united-v-federal-election-commission/>

Reaction: Much of what you have learned in this course would suggest that the proposal by Ackerman and Ayres is not politically feasible. Under what conditions and/or due to what actions might the approach become more feasible?

12/14 Final class--scheduled for the "study day" before finals

Final papers due.

Brief in-class summaries of papers by authors. Among our discussion topics: Of the concepts covered in course, which one was most important for your paper? And what was the greatest political uncertainty related to writing your paper?

Class evaluations.