

POLI 429: Seminar on Environmental Policy-Making

Professor Roy T. Meyers

Class meets MW 1-2:15 in 354 Public Policy

Office hours in 318 Public Policy: MW 11-12:45 and by appointment
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Course basics

This course will research how environmental policy is made and administered by the federal and state governments of the United States. I've underlined those words to distinguish our focus from environmental policy in itself. The [Wikipedia-cited definition](#) of environmental policy is a good one: “any [course of] action deliberately taken [or not taken] to manage human activities with a view to prevent, reduce, or mitigate harmful effects on nature and natural resources, and ensuring that man-made changes to the environment do not have harmful effects on humans.”

Environmental policy will be tremendously important during your lifetimes because of the risks presented by population growth, technological innovation, and consumption levels. It is a very complex policy area that often involves highly contentious politics. Environmental policy-making ranges broadly across the different institutions and processes of government, making it an ideal topic for learning about politics in a synthetic way. To make our class manageable, we will concentrate on the nuts and bolts of policy-making by U.S. federal and state governments, deemphasizing international policy-making on topics such as global warming, oceans exploitation, and biodiversity.

We will begin by assuming that you have no knowledge of the course topic--though those of you who have already developed expertise are encouraged to demonstrate that from the beginning. Throughout the semester, you will build knowledge by reading, participating in class discussions, and by finishing writing assignments that are focused on environmental policy issues currently in dispute in Maryland. These issues include septic system and land use regulation, watershed implementation plans, clean energy incentives, fisheries management, and fracking regulation.

The readings also discuss a wide number of important environmental policy issues from recent decades. The class schedule below lists these policy issues in parentheses for relevant sessions. We will also pay particular attention to policy analysis techniques that have special relevance to the environmental field. Last but not least, we will explore how advocates can increase the political feasibility of policies that would protect environmental values and human health.

My expectations for your work

As a 400-level seminar in political science, this course will emphasize learning together through research. On occasion, I will set up a topic with a short lecture. Most class time, however, will be spent on discussion and small-group work. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that you read all assigned readings prior to class, attend class regularly, and actively participate in discussions. You will also complete several short writing assignments in reaction to selected readings.

After the first few classes, individual students will be assigned to co-lead class discussions of assigned readings. To prepare for this responsibility, you should develop a list of questions you want to ask the class. These questions can highlight points in the reading that you found convincing or otherwise. E.g., for the 9/7 reading on the “park barrel,” I will ask: “Why was Phil Burton successful in passing the parks bill?” Your questions can also be about uncertainties suggested to you by the readings--ones that the class can then discuss and research. To do so, it would be very helpful if you could bring your computer to class, as we will jointly find and skim potentially helpful sources that may reduce those uncertainties. Note, however, that your computer should be used in class only for this purpose and for note-taking, and not to check email or for other tempting distractions.

All of the above will be worth half of your final grade; I will provide feedback on your performance at mid-semester.

Your main research products will be “issue briefs” on environmental policy issues important to Maryland. You will select these issues, and may write the briefs individually or as small groups. The purpose of the briefs is to explain to Maryland citizens the policy problems, proposed alternative solutions, and--most importantly--the administrative and political considerations relevant to your issue. The format will be web page. Given that format, you should use appropriate visuals, including video if you’d like, but the emphasis should be on well-written text. Length will be less important than the need for briefs to be based on good policy and political analysis, to be well-organized, and to include useful citations, including to course readings and to primary documents.

Portions of class sessions throughout the semester will be spent on research for the issue briefs; during the last three weeks of the semester, classes will be workshops entirely devoted to their preparation. The completed issue briefs will be worth the other half of your final grade.

Finally, we will have several guest speakers with extensive experience in MD environmental policy-making. Dependent on your schedules and interests, I also may arrange one or more field trips to environmental policy-making meetings. (Sorry, while I would love to spend some time outdoors, that’s for other courses like SCI 100. . .) Since such events are hard to predict in timing, the detailed class schedule below is subject to revision. Similarly, as new primary documents become available, I may substitute them into the syllabus/Blackboard site.

How to access readings

You should buy the two texts from the UMBC Bookstore or from an online vendor (note that the Kindle version of the first book is significantly cheaper than the print version):

Christopher McGrory Klyza and David Sousa, 2008. *American Environmental Policy, 1990-2006: Beyond Gridlock*. MIT Press, 978-0262612203. Abbreviated as “K & S” in class schedule below.

Michael R. Greenberg, 2008. *Environmental Policy Analysis and Practice*. Rutgers University Press, 978-0813542768. Abbreviated as “G” in class schedule below.

The other readings can be accessed through the “readings/links” tab of the course Blackboard (Bb) site, either as web links or as PDF files you may download.

For your research projects, one of my web pages has extensive links to environmental and public health policy resources: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/linkenviroph.htm>. Another page has useful links to Maryland government: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/linkmdstatebud.htm>. Both are also linked on the course Bb site.

Class schedule (again--this is subject to revision)

8/31 No class--I will be traveling to the annual conference of the American Political Science Association

9/5 No class--Labor Day

9/7 How political mobilization and leadership once created many new environmental statutes

Helen M. Ingram, David H. Colnic, and Dean E. Mann, 1995. “Interest Groups and Environmental Policy,” from James P. Lester, ed., *Environmental Politics and Policy*, second edition, Durham: Duke University Press, 115-145.

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

9/12 The current institutional context of environmental policy-making, emphasizing the decline of statutory change

K&S: series foreword, preface, chapters 1 and 2

G: pp. 234-236 on laws and regulations

9/14 Official descriptions of environmental policy initiatives

Read these carefully:

Bb: 90 day report, Part K <http://mlis.state.md.us/2011rs/90-Day-report/The90DayReport.pdf>

G: pp. 187-192 on environmental impact assessment

skim these:

EPA Learn the Issues <http://www.epa.gov/gateway/learn/>

CEQ Initiatives <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ceq/initiatives>

O'Malley environmental goals <http://www.governor.maryland.gov/environment.asp>

BayStat <http://www.baystat.maryland.gov/>

MDE <http://mde.maryland.gov/Pages/Home.aspx>

DNR <http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/>

9/19 Environmental policy-making within the economic growth paradigm, focusing on land use (brownfields)

G: introduction and chapter 1; pp. 224-227 on checklists; pp. 242-249 on changes in leadership and resources, explaining environmental policy

9/21 Policy history of “smart growth” in MD

James R. Cohen, 2002. “Maryland’s ‘Smart Growth’: Using Incentives to Combat Sprawl,” from Gregory Squires, ed., *Urban Sprawl: Causes, Consequences and Policy Responses*, Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 293-324.

John W. Frece, 2008. *Sprawl and Politics: The Inside Story of Smart Growth in Maryland*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 1-15, 57-62, 75-105.

9/26 Plan Maryland

Bb: <http://plan.maryland.gov/>

Writing assignment: What is your evaluation of Plan Maryland? Target length: 3 pages. Relate your evaluation to selected ideas in previous readings.

9/28 Media interpretation of health risks from the environment (environmental epidemiology and cancer clusters)

G: chapter 2; pp. 192-199 on risk analysis

10/3 Reporting and public opinion on fracking, with guest visit

Bb: selections from, and interpretations of *Gasland*

G: pp. 199-210 on content analysis and surveys

10/5 Appropriations--cuts, limitations, riders, earmarks--and legislative vetoes (timber salvage, ANWR)

K&S: chapter 3

Bb: CQ Weekly on current battles in Congress

Assignment: tentative proposal of topic for MD environmental policy issue brief, as individual or group. 1 page.

10/10 Executive orders and rule-making (antiquities, roadless areas, new source air and CO2)

K&S: chapter 4

G: pp. 236-238 on executive orders

10/12 Deference to and rejection of scientific expertise (gasoline additives)

G: chapter 3

10/17 The same regarding economic expertise (nuclear weapons waste)

G: chapter 4; pp. 212-223 on life cycle costs, regional economic impact, natural resource damage assessment; pp. 227-233 on cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis, optimization and simulation

Assignment: Based on the readings to date, how well does our political system incorporate the findings of science, whether “hard” or “soft” (that is, natural and physical sciences or social sciences?) Target: 5 pages. Again, use relevant ideas and evidence from readings.

10/19 Regulatory review

Bb: Sunstein’s OIRA proposal and responses

10/24 Courts (biodiversity; wilderness; particulates)

G: pp. 238-241 on court decisions

K&S: chapter 5

10/26 MD court cases (water quality)

Bb: on watershed implementation plan, and on transportation trust fund TMDL compliance

10/31 Administrative attempts at innovation and collaboration (habitat conservation; gasoline and ethanol)

K&S: chapter 6

11/2 Interest groups and fisheries management

Bb: Bay rockfish success, oyster failure

Bb: Atlantic fishery management councils and catch shares

11/7 Ethical choices given uncertainty over time (pesticides, genetically modified organisms, nuclear power)

G: chapters 5 and 6

11/9 States as policy leaders (climate change; water quality; land preservation)

K&S: chapter 7

11/14 RGGI and offshore wind power

K&S: chapter 8

Bb: revised legislative proposal on wind?

11/16 Visit from Heather Barthel, Director for Policy and Legislation, Maryland Department of the Environment (and UMBC political science alum)

Assignment: prepare questions for her.

Issue brief workshops:

11/21 Full-time work on issue briefs

11/23 No class--day before thanksgiving

11/28, 30 and 12/5, 7 Full-time work on issue briefs

12/12 Last class--present final web sites