

**Political Science 310**  
**AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY**  
Fall 2025

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2-3; and by appointment

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### **Course Description**

This course covers the basic policies and controversies in contemporary American public policy. We begin with how policy actors interact to create policy in the United States. Subsequently, we will cover major areas of policy debate. We will examine primarily longstanding areas of policy debates, but we will also pay attention to policy debates in the news.

### **Readings**

*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* public policy coverage  
NCSU Libraries On-line reserve (\* indicates required readings; ^ indicates recommended)

In order to get the most out of the lectures *it is important that you do the assigned reading prior to the appropriate class period*. You should read a national on-line newspaper daily to stay abreast of current events, especially those related to public policy. NCSU offers free *New York Times* subscriptions.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students should be able to...

- 1) Understand the roles of various governmental and non-governmental actors in creating policy
- 2) Assess the effectiveness of policy using social science concepts
- 3) Apply knowledge of the policy process to contemporary policy debates
- 4) Understand the key issues in major areas of American public policy

### **Requirements and Grading**

- Midterm I, Midterm II, and non-cumulative final exam (20% each)
- Class Participation (15%)
- Paper assignment (25%)

### **Participation**

Class participation is an *integral* part of the class. At minimum, this means good attendance. Students are also expected to be attentive during lectures and to ask questions and contribute comments to class discussions. *You should come to each class having read the required assignment and prepared to discuss and/or write about the issues raised by the readings*. It is also your responsibility to remain abreast of current events in American politics, especially as they apply to public policy. *The New York Times and The Washington Post* provide the most extensive and thorough coverage of political matters. If you want to receive an A for participation, you need to 1) have excellent attendance; 2) contribute regularly to class discussions, and; 3) clearly demonstrate knowledge of assigned readings and current events (including on in-class writing assignments).

### **Classroom Recording**

You need to be in class when at all possible. Recordings exist as backup for excused absences and emergencies. You can be granted access to any missed classes if you contact me with a valid excuse.

## **Paper Assignment**

Choose a domestic policy area of national concern that interests you and investigate a proposal for policy reform within this area. You should choose a fairly narrow proposal for reform (e.g., clean air or clean water, not environmental policy; children's health, not health care policy; food stamps, not social welfare policy; school funding or teacher competency, not education policy) This should be a reform proposal-- not policy already in place. What are the basics of the proposed reform? What are the key issues involved? What are the costs and benefits of the proposed reform? What might be some unintended consequences of the reform? What are the prospects for this reform in becoming law? To the extent appropriate, use course material to help address these questions. Make sure you use reasonably objective sources to assess the potential efficacy of reforms and their costs and benefits. **8 pages maximum.** *Due November 19.* On the due date, you will be expected to participate in an in-class activity assessing your authentic authorship.

You are responsible for the full details of the assignment available at <http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/shgreene/PS310/PaperInfo.htm>.

## **Late Policy**

It is expected that exams will be taken and assignments turned in when they are scheduled on the syllabus. There will be a 20-point penalty for failure to take an exam at the required time and a 1/3 letter grade per day penalty for written assignments. If you miss an exam, the re-scheduling must take place at the convenience of the instructor. Written assignments are due at the *beginning* of class. To avoid penalties you need to let the instructor know of valid, exigent circumstances *before* the assigned time.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to complete their assignments with due regard to academic integrity. In order to do so they should familiarize themselves with the relevant sections of the student code of conduct (Sections 7-13). By signing, all work submitted on paper, or by identifying themselves in work submitted electronically, students affirm that they neither gave nor received unauthorized aid.

## **Laptop policy**

Due to the considerable evidence that laptops in classrooms can harm the learning environment by distracting you and your classmates while also leading to less learning than handwritten notes, laptops should not be used in class. Exceptions may be made due to special circumstances or in accordance with NCSU disability accommodations.

## **Disability**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653. NCSU policy at: [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic\\_affairs/courses\\_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php)

## **AI Policy**

You may use AI tools as research assistants and writing aids—to find sources (verify them independently), improve clarity, brainstorm ideas, or organize notes. However, AI cannot substitute for your own critical thinking and analysis. The core principle: when you submit work with your name on it, the ideas, arguments, and analysis should be genuinely yours. Using AI to generate your arguments or write substantial portions undermines the purpose of your education—developing your ability to think critically about political science and communicate effectively. Think of AI like a research librarian: helpful for finding materials and refining your work, but the intellectual labor of understanding, analyzing, and arguing must be your own. If unsure about your AI use, ask: "Am I still doing the thinking, or is the AI doing it for me?" You are building skills that will serve you long after this course ends.

## Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

**August 18**

### **Course Introduction**

Klein, "How politics makes us stupid"\*  
Muir, "The Three Types of Binary Thinking"\*  
Matthews, "The book that changed how I think about thinking"\*  
Hidden Brain, "The Double Standard" ^

**August 20 – 25**

### **The Context of Public Policy**

Rinfret et al. chapter 1, "The Foundation"\*  
Rinfret et al. chapter 2, "The Policy Process"\*  
Kraft et al., "Assessing policy alternatives"\*  
Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons"\*  
Demsas, "Who Really Runs America?"\*  
Planet Money, "Mr. Jones' Act"\*

**August 27 – Sept 3**  
(no class September 1)

### **Government Institutions and Policy Making: Congress and the President; Federalism**

Magtulis, "How Trump unleashed executive power"\*  
Levin, "The Missing Branch"\*  
Galston, "Is the growth of executive power a threat to democracy?"\*  
Karlsson, "Divided we stand: The rise of political animosity"\*

**September 8 – 10**

### **Government Institutions and Policy Making: The Courts, Interest Groups, and the Bureaucracy**

Johnson, "To avoid irrelevancy, the US Supreme Court must..."\*  
Mayyasi, "The Stanford Professor Who Fought the Tax Lobby"\*  
Lowrey, "The Time Tax"\*  
Prokop, "The real reason DOGE failed isn't what you think"\*  
Yeung, "America's Food Safety System Failed to Stop a Salmonella..." ^

**September 15 – 17**

### **The Environment & Energy**

Maimann, "Climate Change"\*  
Plumer, "How the G.O.P. Bill Will Reshape America's Energy Landscape"\*  
Smith, "Would you rather have cheap energy, or stupid culture wars?"\*  
Tyson, "What the data says about Americans' views of climate change"\*  
Thompson, "American Energy Policy Cannot Afford to Be This Dumb"\*  
Wallace-Wells, "Air Pollution Kills 10 Million People a Year..."\*

**September 22**

### **Midterm I**

**September 24 – Oct 1**

### **Economic Policy**

Lopez, "How Much Does America Spend?"\*  
Woods, "A primer on the Federal Reserve's independence"\*  
Matthews, "The US government has to start paying for things again"\*  
Rattner, "How Bad Is This Bill? The Answer in 10 Charts."\*  
Parlapiano, "The Programs You'd Have to Cut to Balance the Budget"\*  
Chait, "Biden Wants to Tax Billionaires Because U.S. Politics..."\*  
Riedl, "I'm a Conservative Economist. Here Are 6 Reasons Trump's..."\*  
Thompson, "Trump's Tariffs Haven't Killed the U.S. Economy..."\*  
Yglesias, "Four trade deficit myths hurting the economy"\*

**October 6 – 15**  
(Fall Break Oct 13)

### **Health Care**

Scott, “9 things Americans need to learn from the rest of the world...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Thompson, “Why American Health Care Is a “Broken System””<sup>\*</sup>  
Carroll, “I Studied Five Countries’ Health Care Systems...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Yglesias, “A bold plan to fix health care”<sup>\*</sup>  
LaBlanc, “Tackling Healthcare’s Big Business with Elisabeth Rosenthal”<sup>\*</sup>  
Sanger-Katz, “How the G.O.P. Bill Saves Money: Paperwork...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lowery, “Annoying People to Death”<sup>\*</sup>

**October 20 – 22**

### **Education**

Foerstel, “Politics and Education”<sup>\*</sup>  
Smith, “The U.S. education system gets decent value for money”<sup>\*</sup>  
Yglesias, “The strange death of education reform, part one”<sup>\*</sup>  
Yglesias, “The strange death of education reform, part two”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lieberman, “Private School Choice Will Keep Expanding in 2025..”<sup>\*</sup>  
MacGillis, “How Religious Schools Became a Billion-Dollar Drain...”<sup>\*</sup>

**October 27**

### **Midterm II**

**October 29 – Nov 3**

### **Social Welfare**

Mantel, “Social Security”<sup>\*</sup>  
Chang, “Living in a poor neighborhood changes everything...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lowrey, “The War on Poverty Is Over. Rich People Won.”<sup>\*</sup>  
Yglesias, “Don’t overthink poverty in the United States”<sup>\*</sup>  
DeParle, “Expanded Safety Net Drives Sharp Drop in Child Poverty”<sup>\*</sup>  
DeParle, “Trump’s Bill Slashes the Safety Net That Many Republican...”<sup>\*</sup>

**November 5 – 12**

### **Criminal Justice Policy**

Greenblatt, “Criminal Justice Reform Backlash”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lopez, “Nearly Half of America’s Murderers Get Away With It”<sup>\*</sup>  
Demsas, “The Evidence on Policing and Crime”<sup>\*</sup>  
Kristoff, “A Smarter Way to Reduce Gun Deaths”<sup>\*</sup>  
Yglesias, “The best way to end mass incarceration is to catch more criminals”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lopez, “Can San Francisco Solve Its Drug Crisis?”<sup>\*</sup>  
Lehman, “What Was The War on Drugs? Part V”<sup>\*</sup>  
Eisen, “Northern European Prisons Illustrate Focus on Dignity”<sup>\*</sup>  
Humphreys, “America’s Incarceration Rate Is About to Fall Off a Cliff”<sup>\*</sup>  
Klein, “This Is a Very Weird Moment in the History of Drug Laws”<sup>^</sup>  
NYT, “America Has Lost the War on Drugs. Here’s What Needs...”<sup>^</sup>

**November 17 – 19**

### **Immigration**

Dickerson, “America Never Wanted the Tired, Poor, Huddled Masses”<sup>\*</sup>  
Smith, “The U.S. cannot afford to turn against immigration”<sup>\*</sup>  
Karma, “The Truth About Immigration and the American Worker”<sup>\*</sup>  
Loweree, “Do Politicians Realize How Difficult and Rare Immigrating...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Watson and Zars, “100 days of immigration under the second Trump...”<sup>\*</sup>  
Soler, “Surprise, there’s an unlikely immigration consensus in America”<sup>\*</sup>  
*Paper due at beginning of class November 19*

**November 24**

**Social Issues**

Nowell, "Transgender Rights"\*

Rhodes, "Abortion"\*

Saad, "Gender Gaps on Abortion Reach Historic Highs"\*

Demas, "The Abortion Policy Most Americans Want"\*

Ranji, "Key Facts on Abortion in the United States"

**November 26**

**No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday**

**December 1**

**Equality: Race and Gender**

Kliff, "The truth about the gender wage gap" \*

Horowitch, "The Race-Blind College-Admissions Era Is Off..."\*

Kahloon, "What We Miss When We Talk About the Racial Wealth Gap"\*

**December 10, 1:00-2:30pm Final Exam**