

Political Science 310
AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY
Fall 2024 (online)

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2-3; by appointment

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 or *The Washington Post* on-line
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

- Two midterms and one non-cumulative final exam (65%)
- Paper assignment (25%)
- On-line participation (10%)

Assignment Deadlines

Midterm 1: September 25 – 26, 2024

Midterm 2: October 30 – 31, 2024

Paper Assignment: November 22, 2024

Final: December 4 – 6, 2024

Grading will be on the following scale: A+≥97.0%; A≥93.0%; A-≥90.0%; B+≥87.0%; B≥83.0%; B-≥ 80.0%; C+≥77.0%; C≥73.0%; C-≥70.0%; D+≥67.0%; D≥63.0%; D-≥60.0%; F<60.0%

Exam Procedures

Exams will be administered online using Moodle and **proctored** at the NCSU Delta Testing Services. **Make an appointment for your exams as soon as you can.** Services are open 8:30am-7:00pm on scheduled days. Exams are closed book/notes. You are limited to 75 minutes to complete the exam. Appointments are in 90 minute blocks, but you will only be allowed 75 minutes for the exam. For off-campus proctoring, you must arrange with DELTA in a timely manner: <https://testing-services.delta.ncsu.edu/testing-services-remote/off-campus-testing-guidelines/>

On-line participation

Just because this class does not take place in a classroom does not mean you get out of participating. This course will have a discussion forum set up on Moodle. Within this forum, the class will discuss policy-related current events as well as some of the more controversial aspects of the class material. These forums will be monitored by me for both the quantity and quality of your posts. To receive an A for participation, you will need to post at least two *quality* comments each week. At least one of these comments must be a response to a posting from another student or the instructor. You need to be *consistently* engaged in this forum. If you ignore it for several weeks, you *cannot* make up for missed time by being particularly active.

Current Political Events

You *will* be responsible for keeping abreast of current political events during the Fall 2024 semester. You should rely primarily upon the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (or other high-quality, journalistic outlets) for this information. You will be responsible for knowing major policy-related current events on your assignments and exams.

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

Metacognitive self-reflection: Answer the following questions in approximately two additional pages at the end of your assignment. How/why did you choose the sources you did? Which were most valuable and why? How did your understanding of the issue change over the course of working on the assignment? What do you think are the strongest and weakest aspects of your argument? What is something doing this research made you want to learn more about?

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. The paper assignment is due at 11:59pm of the due date. 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. Collaboration on assignments among students may only occur when explicitly authorized by an instructor.

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

Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

Lecture 1

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" ^

Lectures 2 – 4

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"*
Gurian-Sherman, "CAFO's Uncovered"*
Planet Money, "Mr. Jones' Act"*

Lectures 4 – 6

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

Dickerson, "The Hardest Job in the World"*
Koerth, "Our Radicalized Republic"*

Lectures 6 – 8

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

Gass, "Supreme Court is US 'decider.'"*
Mayyasi, "The Stanford Professor Who Fought the Tax Lobby"*
Lowrey, "The Time Tax"*
Yeung, "America's Food Safety System Failed to Stop a Salmonella..."*

Lectures 8 – 9

The Environment & Energy

Ellicot, "Climate Change"*
Isaacs-Thomas, "What the Inflation Reduction Act does for green energy"*
McKibben, "A case for climate optimism"*
Tyson, "What the data says about Americans' views of climate change"*
Wallace-Wells, "Air Pollution Kills 10 Million People a Year..."*

MIDTERM I (Deadline September 26)

Lectures 10 – 13

Economic Policy

Price, "Inequality in America"*
Matthews, "The US government has to start paying for things again"*
Lowrey, "It Turns Out That the Debt Matters After All"*
Parlapiano, "The Programs You'd Have to Cut to Balance the Budget"*
Cassidy, "How to make Trump and the wealthy pay their taxes"*
Chait, "Biden Wants to Tax Billionaires Because U.S. Politics..."*

Lectures 13 – 16

Health Care

Gaffney, "How Medical Bills Harm Us All"*
Scott, "9 things Americans need to learn from the rest of the world..."*
Sanger-Katz, "Obamacare Is Here to Stay..."*
Rosenthal, "American Way of Birth, costliest in the world"*
Carroll, "I Studied Five Countries' Health Care Systems..."*
Yglesias, "A bold plan to fix health care"*

Lectures 16 – 17

Education

Greenblatt, “Public Schools' Challenges”^{*}
Chait, “Indoctrination Nation”^{*}
Smith, “The U.S. education system gets decent value for money”^{*}
Yglesias, “The strange death of education reform, part one”^{*}
Yglesias, “The strange death of education reform, part two”^{*}
Collier, “Student Debt”^{*}

MIDTERM II (Deadline October 31)

Lectures 18 – 20

Social Welfare

Mantel, “Social Security”^{*}
Chang, “Living in a poor neighborhood changes everything...”^{*}
Schaefer and Edin “A Simple Approach to Ending Extreme Poverty”^{*}
Lowrey, “The War on Poverty Is Over. Rich People Won.”^{*}
Yglesias, “Don't overthink poverty in the United States”^{*}
DeParle, “Expanded Safety Net Drives Sharp Drop in Child Poverty”^{*}

Lectures 20 – 23

Criminal Justice Policy

Greenblatt, “Crime in America”^{*}
Yglesias, “Defund police is a bad idea, not a bad slogan”^{*}
Bokat-Lindell, “Why America Can't Fix Its Gun Violence Crisis”^{*}
Kristoff, “A Smarter Way to Reduce Gun Deaths”^{*}
NYT, “America Has Lost the War on Drugs. Here's What Needs...”^{*}
Yglesias, “The best way to end mass incarceration is to catch more criminals”^{*}
Lopez, “The Perils of Legalization”^{*}
Lopez, “From Portugal to Portland”^{*}
Faioloa, “Once hailed for decriminalizing drugs, Portugal is now having...”[^]

Lectures 23 – 24

Immigration

Dickerson, “America Never Wanted the Tired, Poor, Huddled Masses”^{*}
Ellicot, “Immigration Overhaul”^{*}
Smith, “The U.S. cannot afford to turn against immigration”^{*}
Demsas, “How Deterrence Policies Create Border Chaos”^{*}
Edsall, “The ‘Third Rail of American Politics’ Is Still Electrifying”^{*}
Loweree, “Do Politicians Realize How Difficult and Rare Immigrating...”^{*}
Davidson, “Debunking the myth of the job-stealing immigrant”[^]

Lecture 24 – 26

Social Issues

Roepe, “LGBTQ Rights”^{*}
Rosenkrantz, “Abortion Post-Roe”^{*}
Saad, “Broader Support for Abortion Rights Continues Post-Dobbs”^{*}
Demsas, “The Abortion Policy Most Americans Want”^{*}
Diamant, “What the data says about abortion in the U.S.”^{*}

Lectures 26

Equality: Race and Gender

Kliff, “The truth about the gender wage gap”^{*}
Kahlenberg, “The Affirmative Action That Colleges Really Need”^{*}
Rothstein, “The Problem With Wealth-Based Affirmative Action”^{*}
Coates, “The Case for Reparations”^{*}

FINAL EXAM (Deadline December 6)