

Political Science 310 (online)
AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY
Fall 2026

Steven Greene
Caldwell 209C
email: shgreene@ncsu.edu
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 2-3 and 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 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

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

Assignment Deadlines

Midterm 1: September 28 – 30, 2026

Midterm 2: October 28 – 29, 2026

Paper Assignment: November 22, 2026

Final: December 2 – 4, 2026

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/> Remote proctoring is also available, though there are fees involved and you must coordinate with DELTA. <https://testing-services.delta.ncsu.edu/testing-services-remote/online-proctoring/>

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.

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.**

Additionally, following submission of your paper, you will engage in a brief, recorded, AI conversation to ensure that you have done the key mental work—researching, thinking, synthesizing—of the paper. You are allowed to use AI tools to assist you in writing your paper, but it is essential that you come to have a deeper understanding of your chosen policy issue and how it relates to course concepts. This assessment ensures this learning has occurred and authenticates your familiarity with your own analysis. If this assessment provides reason to question your authentic knowledge of your paper, you may lose up to three letter grades

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. 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 the instructor.

Disability

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with the Disability Resource Office at Holmes Hall, Suite 304, 2751 Cates Avenue, Campus Box 7509, 919-515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation (NCSU [REG 02.20.01](#)).

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

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"*

Demsas, "Who Really Runs America?"*

Planet Money, "Mr. Jones' Act"*

Lectures 4 – 5

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"*

Lectures 6 – 8

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..."^

Lectures 8 – 9

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..."*

Midterm I (deadline September 25)

Lectures 10 – 12

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”*

Lectures 13 – 15

Health Care

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

Lectures 16 – 17

Education

Foerstel, “Politics and Education”*
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”*
Kahloon, “America Is Sliding Toward Illiteracy”*
Green, “Inside the Trump Administration’s Assault on Higher Education”*

Midterm II (deadline October 30)

Lectures 18 – 20

Social Welfare

Layne, “Funding Retirement”*
Novicoff, “The Social Security Reckoning Is Finally Coming”*
Chang, “Living in a poor neighborhood changes everything...”*
Lowrey, “The War on Poverty Is Over. Rich People Won.”*
Yglesias, “Don't overthink poverty in the United States”*
DeParle, “Study May Undercut Idea That Cash Payments to Poor...”*

Lectures 20 – 23

Criminal Justice Policy

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

Lectures 23 – 25

Immigration

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

Lecture 25

Social Issues

Nowell, “Transgender Rights”*
Rhodes, “Abortion”*
Saad, “Broader Support for Abortion Rights Continues Post-Dobbs”*
Demsas, “The Abortion Policy Most Americans Want”*
Ranji, “Key Facts on Abortion in the United States”*

Lecture 26

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”*

Final Exam (deadline December 4)