

Political Science 303
Public Policy Formation

Professor Peter May
Winter 2004

Tu, Th 9:30 – 11:20
Mary Gates Hall Rm. 231

Web page: <http://faculty.washington.edu/pmay/pols303>

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Office Hours: Th 1:30 – 3 pm

Course Description

This course is concerned with political aspects of public policymaking in the United States. It is designed for students with an interest in government or domestic policymaking. The course is intended to provide knowledge and skills for:

- Explaining why some issues become subjects for policymaking and others do not;
- Distinguishing politically feasible courses of action from those that are not;
- Understanding variability in policy "success" and "failure."

Classes consist of a mix of lecture and discussion concerning the assigned readings and the politics of different policy issues. As a prerequisite for this course, students are expected to have basic knowledge of the institutions and processes of American government.

Requirements

Grades will be based on two exams and a set of papers. The exams test for knowledge of the material presented in the readings and class, and will contain a mix of multiple choice and short essay questions. The papers provide opportunities to develop political analysis and critical thinking skills while also fulfilling university writing requirements. The requirements, their weight in computation of final grades, and due dates are as follows:

- Week 4 -- Political Analysis Topic Paper -- *Thursday, January 29th*
(performance for this graded as part of final political analysis paper)
- Week 5 -- First Exam (30%) – *Thursday, February 5th*
- Week 9 -- Political Analysis Paper (40%) – *Thursday, March 4th*
- Week 10 -- Second Exam (30%) – *Thursday, March 11th*

Political Analysis Paper. This required paper is to be a circa 10 page (typed, double space) political analysis of a policy issue and proposals that have either been introduced or have been recently enacted to address the issue. You are allowed to choose a topic of interest to you. More detailed guidelines for the topic and political analysis papers will be provided early in the quarter. These guidelines, a set of suggested topics, and sample papers are posted on the course website. The penalties for late papers are discussed as part of the guidelines.

Course Structure and Resources

The course will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays each for a two-hour block of time. The sessions will be a mix of lecture and discussion. Part of some sessions will be used to illustrate use of on-line and other resources to research the required paper. I view class sessions as integral to achieving the course objectives. Given that the paper and the exams are based on information imparted in class sessions, your performance will suffer if you do not regularly attend class. There are no TAs for this course.

The course web page is an important information resource for the course that contains updates about course activities and materials, and links to electronic resources for completing the required political analysis paper. Handouts that summarize the key points for the course will be posted each week on the course website. Daily class notes will not be posted on the website.

Texts and Other Materials

The required readings, available at the University Bookstore in paperback, are in order of use in the course:

(B) Thomas Birkland, *An Introduction to the Policy Process*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 2001.

(S) Theda Skocpol, *Boomerang, Health Care Reform and The Turn Against Government*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

(NC) Robert T. Nakamura and Thomas W. Church, *Taming Regulation, Superfund and the Challenge of Regulatory Reform*. Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003.

Several other items will be made available for downloading from the course web site. You are strongly encouraged to purchase each of the texts for the course. The texts have been requested to be placed on reserve at the undergraduate library. Additional items may be added to the course website throughout the quarter and will be announced in the weekly handout.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

For each week there will be a mix of theoretical and discussion materials. The letters in parentheses indicate the appropriate text keyed to the above listing of required books. Items marked with a (W) are to be posted on the course website.

PART I. PUBLIC POLICY FORMATION -- PERSPECTIVES

Week 1. Issues and Politics (week of January 5)

>Course Introduction

>What are public policies and different types of policies?

(B) Chapter 1, "The Study and Practice of Public Policy," pp. 3-25

Chapter 9 (part), "The Stages Model of Policy Making," pp 221-223.

Chapter 6, "Policies and Policy Types," pp. 132-149

Discussion: Current policy issues

Week 2. Policy Problems and Policy Design (week of January 12)

Note: This week's material illustrates the style of political analysis to be employed for the required paper.

>What constitutes policy design?

>What factors affect the design of a policy?

(B) Chapter 7, "Policy Design and Policy Tools," pp. 150-176.

(W) Homeless materials

Discussion: Policies for the homeless

Week 3. Dynamics of Agenda Setting and Issue Emergence (week of January 19)

>What constitutes the public and policy agendas?

>How do presidents select issues and attempt to shape agendas?

(B) Chapter 5, "Agenda Setting, Power, and Interest Groups," pp. 105-131.

Chapter 9 (part), "Kingdon's Streams Metaphor," pp. 223-225.

Discussion: National policy agendas / Priorities in State of Union Address

Week 4. Agenda Setting Continued –Media and Other Influences (week of January 26)

Class will meet this week only on January 29th. Normal class time on January 27th will be set aside for individual consultations regarding the topic papers due this week.

Political analysis topic paper due at class, Thursday 29 January.

>What role do the media play in shaping agendas?

Discussion: Media coverage of current issues.

Week 5. Policy Change (week of February 2)

First Exam in class Thursday, February 5th.

>What is policy change? How stable are policies?

>What affects the scope of policy change?

(B) Chapter 9 (parts), “Rational-Comprehensive Decision-Making” and “Incrementalism,” pp 209-214; “Punctuated Equilibrium,” pp 227-228.

Discussion: exam review

PART II. POLITICAL ANALYSES OF POLICY PROPOSALS

Week 6. Political Environments Part I – Mapping Coalitions (week of February 9)

Note: This is essential material for completing the required paper.

>How can interest groups and their positions be identified?

>How can one assess the political feasibility of a set of policy proposals?

>How did interest group alignments affect health care reform politics?

(B) Chapter 4 (part), “Unofficial Actors and Their Roles in Public Policy,” pp. 77-94.

(W) P. May, “Policy Maps and Political Feasibility”

(S) Chapter 1 – 3, pp. 20-106

Discussion: Mapping of interest groups.

Week 7. Political Environments Part II – Theoretical Perspectives (week of February 16)

>How do political scientists characterize the political environment?

>What are healthy and unhealthy political environments?

>How did advocacy coalitions mobilize against health care reform?

(B) Chapter 4 (part), “Subgovernments, Issue Networks, and Domains,” pp. 94-104; Chapter 9 (part) “The Advocacy Coalition Framework,” pp. 224-227.

(S) Chapter 4-5, pp. 107-172.

Discussion: Political environments & toward wrapping up papers

Week 8. The Drama of Policy Enactment (week of February 23)

Class will meet this week only on February 24th. Normal class time on February 26th will be set aside for individual consultations regarding the papers that are due next week.

- >How does the American system of governance shape policy opportunities?
- >How do the realities of policy enactment differ from idealized Congressional process?
- >What did policymaking for health care reform look like?

(B) Chapter 2, “The Historical and Structural Context of Public Policymaking,” pp. 26-48; Chapter 3 (part), “Official Actors and Their Roles in Public Policy,” pp. 49-64.

Discussion: Congressional treatment of health care reform proposals.

PART III. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, SUCCESS, AND FAILURE

Week 9. Policy Implementation (week of March 1)

Political analysis papers due at class, Thursday, March 4th.

- >What is policy implementation?
- >What affects implementation prospects?

(B) Chapter 3 (part), “Administrative agencies,” pp. 64-73;
Chapter 8 (part), “Policy Implementation,” pp. 177-187.

(NC) Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-59) with emphasis on Chapter 4, “The Essential Superfund”

Discussion: Superfund and implementation pathologies.

Week 10. Policy Success and Failure (week of March 8)

Second Exam, Thursday March 11th

- >What is policy "failure" or "success"?
- >What are the different forms of policy learning?
- >Reconsidering policy processes and the study of public policy

(B) Chapter 8 (part), “Policy Failure and Learning,” pp. 187-193.

(NC) Chapters 5-7 (pp. 60-108) with emphasis on Chapter 6, “Succeeding at Regulatory Reform”

Discussion: Policy Learning and Superfund; Exam review.