

Political Science 405a
Autumn 2007 M,W 1:30-3:20
Mary Gates Hall, Room 248

Professor Peter May
Office: Smith 221B; tel: 206-543-9842
email: pmay@u.washington.edu
course web page: <http://faculty.washington.edu/pmay/pols405>

American Politics Seminar: THE POLITICS OF RISK

This seminar examines risks that we each face on a daily basis or that occur infrequently but have catastrophic impacts. These include health and environmental harms, the threat of terrorism, and various natural hazards. In considering these risks, social scientists have attempted to answer a number of questions: How do our perceptions of risks vary? Why are some risks elevated to more attention than others? How do the media report risks? Why do policies addressing risks take the form they do?

As a seminar, we will consider social science theorizing about perceptions of risks, how risks enter the policy agenda, and political and policy responses to different risks within the United States. As the quarter goes on, we will devote greater amounts of time to student-initiated research projects concerning different risks. Participants are assumed to have a background in American politics (POLS 202 or equivalent) and ideally public policy processes (POLS 303 or equivalent).

Requirements

Your seminar performance will be evaluated as follows:

1. *Independent Research Paper (50 percent of grade)*. Your original research addressing the political and policy aspects of a risk that you choose to investigate. The paper is to be developed in stages: (1) a topic paper due during the 4th week (October 17); (2) a substantial draft of the final paper and short presentation during the 8th week (November 14); and (4) the research paper itself and a short in-class presentation about your findings on the date the paper is due (December 3). Each of the first two items will be graded either as “ahead of the game” (plus .2), “on target” (zero), or “time to get going” (minus .2). The final paper grade will be adjusted by the grade points listed in parentheses for each intermediate product (i.e., maximum of plus/minus .4) to a maximum grade on the final paper of 4.0. Failure to turn in either of these papers on time or at all will result for each instance in a 1.0 grade point reduction on the final paper. Failure to turn in the final paper on time will result in a late penalty of a 1.0 grade point reduction for each day the paper is late.
2. *Seminar Participation (25 percent of grade)*. Regular class attendance and participation are expected. Seminar participation will consist of in-class discussion along with two additional items that relate to your class participation grade:
 - *Electronic Reading Responses*. Beginning the 2nd week of the quarter and each week thereafter as indicated on the syllabus, you are required to post a response by 12n on the designated day through use of the UW Catalyst “Go Post” site (link on course web page). This requires access to the UW computer using your UW NetID. The response should be a reaction to the readings rather than a recounting of the content of the readings: What did you find puzzling? What did you find surprising? What did you find confusing? How do the readings relate to your experiences? This will be a class-only discussion board for which you are required to identify yourself in order to get credit for this participation.

- *Discussion leadership.* From time-to-time you may be asked to take the lead in discussing an aspect of a given week's topic.

An overall "participation grade" will be assigned, based on the quality of these items and your contribution to seminar discussion. Participation will be evaluated on a scale of "stellar contributions" (3.7 to 4.0), "solid contributions" (3.3 to 3.6), "acceptable contributions" (2.8 to 3.2), or "less than desired contributions" (2.7 or less).

3. *Take Home Final Exam (25 percent of grade).* Students will be asked to synthesize material from the course as part of a take-home final essay exam. The exam will be passed out on December 5 and will be due at 4 pm on December 10. (See instructions below for turning this in.)

Notes About the Research Paper

Each student is to develop an original research paper that addresses a risk or some aspect of risk politics in drawing from one or more themes in the course. The focus of the paper should not be one of the specific events or topics that we discuss in class, nor the same topic as one of the sample papers for the course. Examples of potential topics are:

- *Politics and policy for a particular risk* – development of a paper that discusses how politics and policy have evolved in addressing, or failing to address, a particular risk of interest to you (e.g., bioterrorism, chemical plant accidents, cyber terrorism, earthquakes, food safety, urban wildfires).
- *Response to disasters* – development of a paper that discusses the policy response to particular events and what, if anything, was learned with particular attention to the policy lessons.
- *Political and policy functions (and limits) of aspects of Homeland Security* (e.g., Border security, transportation security, port security).

You should feel free to develop the paper in a manner that you think is appropriate. The paper should not be viewed as a report that simply states "the facts" and outlines a history of a risk or the topic you are addressing. Instead, it is to be based on your original research using information and data that you have collected. The paper should contain a compelling analysis of your topic that incorporates the relevant social science perspectives we consider as a seminar. The particulars of your analysis and argument will depend on the subject matter.

The paper is expected to be approximately 15 pages in length (double spaced) with appropriate citation of key sources and reference listing. Examples of papers will be discussed in class. As the quarter progresses, tips about researching the paper will be discussed in class (see syllabus entries).

Plagiarism Warning and Other Cautionary Advice

This is a seminar for which students are expected to undertake original research. Parts of various course sessions will be devoted to guidance about crafting a topic, identifying relevant information, analyzing relevant trends, and writing your paper. Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion are essential aspects of this process. Should you choose otherwise, not only will your participation and exam grade suffer but you will miss important advice and feedback about the final paper. As well, it is important that you both identify a topic and begin your research about it early in the quarter. Your final grade will suffer if you are lax about class attendance or engaging the paper early and consistently throughout the quarter; be forewarned.

Instances of plagiarism will be taken seriously. This can take multiple forms that include using another's words without proper citation, using another's ideas without attribution, and quoting

from sources without using quotation marks. You are expected to have full citations, including those of internet-based sources, for your papers—including intermediate papers. We will address proper citation formats in class.

The papers for the course are serious research undertakings for which you are asked to rely on scholarly sources and to analyze information that you collect. Put differently, research like this is not simply reporting what others say or found. Sources like Wikipedia, general websites, and use of popular magazines are not credible information sources.

Required Readings

The following paperback books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore:

Thomas Birkland, *Lessons of Disasters*. Georgetown University Press, 2006.

Christopher Cooper and Robert Block, *Disaster, Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security* Times Books, 2006.

Donald Kettl, *System under Stress, Homeland Security and American Politics 2nd ed.* CQ Press, 2007

Additional material in the form of journal articles, conference papers, and Internet resources will be posted on the course web site for access by class members only.

SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

Items marked CW are posted on the course web site. The remaining items are from the books for the course.

PART I. PERSPECTIVES ABOUT RISK

Week 1: Course Introduction

September 26

Week 2. Conducting Research for the Course & Risk Perspectives

October 1 and 3

Conducting research -- October 1 meet in the POLS computer lab 220 Smith Hall.

This session will introduce seminar participants to course resources and to relevant materials for conducting research for the required paper.

Regular seminar – October 3 meet in the normal classroom.

Post electronic response to readings by 12n October 3

What do you fear and why? We will discuss research about the psychology of risk perceptions.

(CW) Paul Slovic and Elke U. Weber. 2002. “Perception of Risk Posed by Extreme Events” Paper presented at the workshop on “Risk Management Strategies in An Uncertain World,” Palisades, NY, April; 21pp.

(CW) Robin M. Hogarth. 2001. “Insurance and Safety After September 11th, Has the World Become a ‘Riskier’ Place?” New York: Social Science Research Council, 9pp; accessed on 7/18/2002 at <http://www.ssrc.org/sept11.essays/hogarth.htm>

Week 3. Risks as Policy Agenda Items

October 8 and 10

Post electronic response to readings by 12n October 8

The material for this week considers the way that risks enter onto policy agendas with particular attention to the emergence of the threat of terrorism.

(CW) Thomas A. Birkland. 1998. "Focusing Events, Mobilization, and Agenda Setting," *Journal of Public Policy* 18(1): 53-74.

(CW) Thomas A. Birkland. 2002. "'The World Changed Today': Agenda-Setting and Policy Change in the Wake of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks," *Review of Policy Research* 21(2): 179-200.

(CW) Charles Davis. 2005. "Western Wildfires: A Policy Change Perspective," *Review of Policy Research* 23(1): 115-127.

(CW) Peter J. May, Joshua Sapotichne, and Samuel Workman. 2007. "Policy Disruption Across Subsystems: Terrorism, Public Risks, and Homeland Security," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 31-September 2, 2007.

>Tips: Studying Agenda Setting for Risks and Disasters

Week 4. Social Construction of Risk & Media Influences

October 15 and 17

Post electronic response to readings due 12n October 15

Topic paper due at start of class on October 17 – be prepared to provide a short statement in class about your proposed topic

This week's material considers the social construction of risk and the media's role in shaping discourse about risks.

(CW) Roger E. Kasperson and Jeanne X. Kasperson. 1996. "The Social Amplification and Attenuation of Risk," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 545 (May): 95-105.

(CW) Dorothy Nelkin. 1989. "Communicating Technological Risk: The Social Construction of Risk Perception," *Annual Review of Public Health* 10: 95-113.

(CW) Jon Palfreman. 2006. "A Tale of Two Fears: Exploring Media Depictions of Nuclear Power and Global Warming," *Review of Policy Research* 23(1): 23-43.

(CW) Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski. 2006. "Metaphor Matters: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 604: 57-81.

>Tips: Studying Media Coverage of Risk and Disasters

PART II. RISK POLITICS – DISASTER RESPONSES

Week 5. Politics of Disasters – Hurricane Katrina Response

October 22 and 24

Post electronic response to readings due 12n October 22

We consider different commentary about the response to Hurricane Katrina in addressing aspects of the politics of disasters.

Cooper and Block, *Disaster...* Part II “Catastrophe” Chapters 5-9, pp 95-217.

(CW) U.S. House, Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate Hurricane Katrina, 2006. “A Failure of Initiative” – executive summary 6pp.

>Tips: Studying Risk Policy and Politics

Week 6. Politics and Policies – Institutional Conflicts

October 29 and 31

Post electronic response to readings due 12n October 29

This week’s material addresses the conflicts among different institutions – White House, the Congress, and the bureaucracy – in addressing risks and accepting blame.

Cooper and Block, *Disaster...* Part III “Flotsam and Jetsam” Chapters 10-13, pp 221-306.

(CW) Peter Dreier. 2006. “Katrina and Power in America,” *Urban Affairs Review* 41(4): 528-549.

(CW) Richard. T. Sylves, 2006. “President Bush and Hurricane Katrina: A Presidential Leadership Study,” *ANNALS AAPSS* 604: 26-56.

(CW) William L. Waugh, Jr., 2006. “The Political Costs of Failure in the Katrina and Rita Disasters,” *ANNALS AAPSS* 604: 10-25.

>Tips: Refining Risk Papers

Week 7. Learning From Disasters

November 5 and 7

Post electronic response to readings due 12n November 5

This week’s material addresses the extent to which learning occurs after disasters and catastrophes that results in “better” policy.

Thomas Birkland, *Lessons of Disaster*, entire book

Week 8. Draft Final Papers & Breathing Room

November 14 [November 12 is a holiday]

Draft final paper due November 14

This week’s class session will be devoted to short reports on the final papers and tips for successful completion of the papers.

PART III. HOMELAND SECURITY POLICY AND POLITICS

Week 9. Homeland Security Policy and Politics

November 19 [no class November 21]

Post electronic response to readings due 12n November 19

Donald Kettl, *System under Stress*; Chapter 2, "Coordination Dilemmas"; Chapter 3 "Reshaping the Bureaucracy"; Chapter 5 "Political Costs of Managing Risks"; Chapter 7 "Gauging the Stress Test"

(CW) John Muller. 2004. "A False Sense of Insecurity?" *Regulation* (Fall): 42-46.

Week 10. Homeland Security – Bureaucratic Perspectives

November 26 and 28

Post electronic response to readings due 12n November 26

(CW) Paul C. Light. 2007. "The Homeland Security Hash," *Wilson Quarterly* 31(2): 36-44.

(CW) Richard S. Conley. 2006. "Reform, Reorganization, and the Renaissance of the Managerial Presidency: The Impact of 9/11 on the Executive Establishment," *Policy and Politics* 34(2): 304-342.

(CW) Peter J. May and Samuel Workman. 2007. "The Paradox of Issue Attention: Homeland Security and the Bush Administration," draft chapter for edited volume on the Bush Administration and Bureaucracy. Seattle: Center for American Politics and Public Policy, University of Washington, 31pp.

November 28 – sign up for individual consultations on final paper, no class

Week 11. Student Papers, Wrapping Up, & Take-Home Exam

December 3 and 5

Research Papers Due December 3 AT CLASS TIME --

Note the severe penalty of 1.0 grade point reduction for each day the paper is late. We will use the December 3rd session for short presentations of key observations from student papers.

Take Home Exam discussed and passed out December 5 in class, due December 10, 4pm. Responses are due via submission with the UW Catalyst Collect It feature (linked in the course website) no later than 4pm December 10th. Emails of the take home exam will not be accepted, nor will copies slipped under my door or turned in to the Political Science Department office. Any response not turned in using the Collect It posting by 4pm on the due date will receive a grade of 0.0. This is a firm deadline. This time established for turning in the written material corresponds to the scheduled in-class examination time for this course. There will be a 2 hour time limit for your working on the exam, exclusive of typing, for the take-home exam.