

Course: PUPOL 100 Introduction to Public Policy
Instructor: Sanford Schram
Time: Tuesday 10:10 am-1pm
Room: Roosevelt House 304
Office: HW 1721
Hours: T 4-5 pm
Phone: 212-772-5682 (office), 610-772-5108 (cell)
Email: sanford.schram@hunter.cuny.edu

Description: This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamental theories and concepts of public policymaking process by applying them to the most important policy issues in the United States today. The course begins by providing context for its subject matter by starting with an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of public policy analysis and how it combines elements of thinking from political science, sociology, economics, public management, and other disciplines, including philosophy and literature as well as the natural sciences. Then, the course follows this introduction with consideration of the context in which U.S. public policy gets made, in particular by examining key aspects of the American political system that have influenced policy formulation and implementation in the U.S. historically. Special attention is given to the distinctive relationship in the U.S. of the government to the market system and how this affects agenda-setting or the process of deciding what public problems will get serious consideration as legitimate issues to be addressed by the public policymaking process. The second part of the course looks at key theories of the policymaking process (including theories of decision-making) and follows this with an examination of critical concepts for analyzing and evaluating public policy (with an emphasis on differences between economics and other social sciences). The third part of the course relies on the theoretical lenses developed in the prior weeks to turn to examining public policymaking in a number of critical policy areas. When examining these policies, we will be concerned with the role of politics in the policy process, with due consideration of the unique features of the American political environment and how our theories and concepts lead us to highlight dimensions of the policy process in the different policy areas. We will also be concerned with the substantive details of these policies, including both the current policies adopted by government, and as well important alternative (proposed) policies that have yet to be adopted by the federal government. Finally, we will attempt to arrive at some conclusions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the policies we will be studying. These evaluations will be based on the theoretical and conceptual issues raised in the first two parts of the course and will serve as foci of discussion and debate in the class sessions that follow. To facilitate this discussion, teams of students will be required to participate in a policy debate that will serve as the stimulus for our discussion and evaluation of the policy we are studying for each week. Students will also be required to participate in policy discussions through a course blog (discussed in more detail below). In addition to exams, students will submit a detailed policy memo based on their participation in debates.

Learning Goals:

The course is designed so that each student will have opportunity to:

- (1) improve critical thinking skills, including the capacity to grasp abstract concepts and theories regarding U.S. public policy;
- (2) develop a facility for using these abstract concepts and theories to deepen understanding of the facts of specific policies;
- (3) learn to use those facts to evaluate the validity of empirical claims about policy;
- (4) reconcile conflicting evidence and contrary positions about various policies, especially as expressed in the literature but also in public discourse;
- (5) improve public speaking skills and engage with others more reflexively in public policy debates; and
- (6) enhance writing skills, including in particular the ability to summarize the main points of arguments succinctly, explain theories clearly, use language precisely, demonstrate command of social science terminology related to public policy, and in the course of writing use abstract theories and concepts to deepen understanding of evidence for assessing public policies and alternatives.

Required Text: Michael Kraft and Scott Furlong, *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives*, 4th Edition. CQ Press, 2012. Available from Shakespeare Bookstore.

Course Requirements:

Midterm: 30%

Cumulative Final: 40%

Policy Debates: 15%

Overall Class Participation: 15%

Exams: There will be two take-home essay exams—a midterm and a cumulative final exam. Exam questions will be drawn from the readings and lecture material.

Debate Participation: For each of the policy areas that we will study, teams of 2 students will engage in a short debate concerning alternative sides of a specific policy issue. Each student will participate in one debate with a partner debating another 2-person team. We will devote the last 30-40 minutes of each week to debate once we start to examine specific policy areas. The student presentations should consume no more than 10-15 minutes for each side of the issue, leaving time for rebuttals and class discussion. Debate questions are listed on the syllabus for each week there is a debate. Students sign-up for debates in teams early in the semester to debate the opposing side that is distributed in class on the sign-up sheet. Students will be graded on their contribution as both a debater **AND** as an audience member. More information will be given in the form of a handout. Please note that *all students* are responsible for the material presented in class during these debates.

Overall Class Participation: Your participation grade will be determined in three ways. First, I will regularly take attendance. Second, I will monitor your participation in class discussions. And third, I will monitor your participation in a course blog. The purpose of the course blog is to provide a forum for students to debate important policy questions that are posed each week in the syllabus under the heading “Point-Counterpoint.” You will have one week to participate in the discussion of each issue, beginning on Monday of the week in which the question is posed on the syllabus, through the following Sunday, after which we will move on to the next issue. Your participation in these debates will be judged based on the quality of your comments. That is, I will be looking for thoughtful comments that clearly indicate you have done some background reading on this issue. Your comments should be justified and defended based on the evidence/arguments presented in these background readings (or any other readings you might find on your own). *You are required to participate in a minimum of 6 blog discussions of your choice throughout the semester.* Your participation in the blog discussions will comprise half of your overall participation grade, while the other half will be determined by a combination of attendance and participation in class discussion.

Late Assignments and Make-Up Exams: The following are acceptable reasons for excused absences and late assignments: 1) serious illness; 2) illness or death of family member; 3) school trips; and 4) major religious holidays, and 5) other circumstances found by the instructor to be "reasonable cause for nonattendance." When there is an excused absence, students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work and/or exams. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of the absence, preferably in advance of the missed class. The burden of proof is on the student to provide sufficient documentation regarding the nature of the absence.

Academic Integrity, Cheating and Plagiarism: It is assumed that students in this course will work independently and that all work submitted for a grade is the work of that student. I consider the violation of this policy (including plagiarism) to be a very serious offense and will pursue any offense to the full extent permitted by the university.

Respect: Please do not talk to your neighbor during my lectures or when one of your colleagues is speaking. I realize you might occasionally miss a point in the lecture and might ask your neighbor what was said, and that is fine. What I will not tolerate is habitual gabbing while others are speaking.

Access: Should you require use of accommodation or assistance from Hunter College access services, please see: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/student-services/access>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I. Introduction: Understanding Public Policymaking in Context

9/3 Public Policy, Policy Analysis, and Politics

Kraft and Furlong – Chapter 1

9/10 *Context for U.S. Policymaking: Iron Triangles in a Market-Centered Society*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 2

Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

Part II. Theories of Public Policy Making: Key Concepts of Policy Analysis

9/17 *Theories of Public Policymaking: Rational-Comprehensive Decision-making vs. Incrementalism*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 3

Charles Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through,'" *Public Administration Review* 19(1959): 79-88.

9/24 *Key Concepts in Policy Analysis: Cost-Benefit Analysis vs. Political Adequation*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapters 4 and 6

Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), Chapter 1.

10/1 *Politics of Problem Definition: Social Construction of Target Populations*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 5

Sanford F. Schram and Joe Soss, "Success Stories: Welfare Reform, Policy Discourse, and the Politics of Research," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 557(2001): 49-65.

Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 87(1993): 334-347.

10/8 *Agenda-Setting and Non-decisions: Giving Voice to the Silences of Public Policy*

Rodger Cobb, Jennie-Keith Ross and Marc Howard Ross, "Agenda Building as a Comparative Process," *American Political Science Review*, 70(1976): 126-38.

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review*. 56 (1962): 947-952.

10/10 MID-TERM DISTRIBUTED

10/20 MID-TERM DUE BY 6 PM

Part III. Applying Theory to Practice: Debating Public Policies

10/22 *Economic Policy: What Policies Are Needed to Get Beyond the Effects of the Great Recession?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 7

10/29 *Health Care: Should Obamacare be Repealed?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 8

11/5 *Social Welfare: Has the 1996 Welfare Reform Helped or Hurt the Poor?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 9

11/12 *Education: Is Neoliberal Privatization (as in Charter Schools, Online Education, etc.) Good for Democracy?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 10

11/19 *Environmental Policy: Should We Adopt "Cap and Trade"?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 11

11/26 *Foreign Policy: Should We Continue the System of Surveillance Enacted with the Patriot Act?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 12

Part IV. Conclusion: Evaluating Public Policies and Assessing the U.S. Policy System

12/3 *Incrementalism in an Age of Gridlock: Can We Do Better?*

Kraft and Furlong, Chapter 13

12/10 NO CLASS—STUDY AND PAPER WRITING

Final Exam Week of 12/17 4 pm