

# Public Policy Formation

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 320**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
**Spring 2007**

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Class Meets: Online

**Introduction:** This course provides an introduction to the study of public policy formation by focusing on major emphases in the literature and providing a survey of basic public policy concepts and processes. We will look not only at the mechanics of the public policy process, but also at the various actors, those who influence or seek to influence policy, in government, business and the citizenry. We will also focus on how the field might contribute to central theoretical issues in political science, such as democracy, representation and responsiveness as well as effectiveness and efficiency. These issues often revolve around questions of who has power and what are the relationships among institutions, rules, and norms in the allocation of the advantages and disadvantages in the policy process. This course has several objectives. Students should be able to define public policy and recognize government action/inaction on behalf of citizens; identify and compare competing explanatory models; identify and place major political actors and institutional features of the policymaking process; critically assess policy initiatives and evaluate public policy, and finally, improve students' critical thinking and writing skills.

## **Texts:**

- Kenneth Bickers and John T. Williams, *Public Policy Analysis*, 2001.
- Thomas Dye, *Top Down Policy Making*, 2001.
- Elaine Sharp, *The Sometime Connection: Public Opinion and Social Policy*, 1999.
- Other Readings (available on electronic reserves and WebCT):
  - 1) Cochran, Clarke, et al. 2003. American Public Policy: Chapter 4 – Economic Issues: Taxing, Spending, and Budgeting (Lied Library Electronic Reserves)
  - 2) Stella Z. Theodoulou and Chris Kofins. 2004. Defense Policy in *The Art of the Game: Understanding American Public Policy Making*

**Copies of the texts are available at the UNLV bookstore. A copy of each book has been placed on 2 hour reserve at the Lied Library**

**Participation:** 5% of your grade will be based on your participation in the discussion board. It is expected that students respond at least once to the discussion questions that the instructor has posted and the response must be within one week of the scheduled discussion question (For example, the discussion question for week 1/lecture 1 is due by January 24<sup>th</sup>). It will be your responsibility to check the discussion board on a regular basis.

**Exams:** There will be a midterm and a final exam. They will be based on the assigned readings and lectures. Late exams are not accepted except for emergency situations and the reason must be documented (police report for an accident, doctor's letter for a serious illness on official letterhead). In regard to the observance of a religious holiday, University policy states that students must notify the instructor about anticipated absences by the last day of late registration (January 22) to be assured the opportunity to make up missed work. Late exams will be marked down a full grade for every day (24 hour period) late.

**Quizzes:** 7 pop quizzes will be given during the course which will count for 15% of your overall course grade (your lowest quiz score will be dropped – only 6 will be used to calculate your grade). They will be posted on Wednesday at Noon. The quiz will be available on WebCampus for 48 hours and once logged on you will have 1 hour to complete the quiz. It is your responsibility to continually log into WebCampus every week to check for quizzes and announcements.

**Research Papers:** Students will write an original paper based on a topic described at the end of this syllabus. The paper should be a systematic exploration of the chosen topic (i.e. not an opinion piece). It should be at least 2500 words. Internet sources are acceptable, but should be kept to a minimum. Students should also familiarize themselves with the university's policy on plagiarism (see page 58 in undergraduate catalog) and understand that I will recommend expulsion if I discover any academic dishonesty.

Papers will be graded on the mastery of the subject/topic, writing style (e.g., clarity) and grammar. If writing is not your strongest ability UNLV has a writing center with well-trained tutors who help students of all skill levels in all disciplines. All services are free for enrolled students. The Writing Center is located at FDH 240 and can be reached at 895-3908.

**Disability Policy:** The UNLV Disability Resource Center (DRC) houses the resources for students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137. Their numbers are: (702-895-0866/Voice; 702-895-0652/TDD). For additional information please visit <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc>.

**Grading Policy:** The value of each course component is as follows:

COMPONENT	DUE DATE	COURSE VALUE
Midterm	Wed., Feb. 28/Due March 1 – 5pm	30%
Participation	N/A	5%
Pop Quizzes	TBA (posted on Wednesday)	15%
Paper	Wednesday, April 25 by 5pm	20%
Final Exam	Wed. May 9/Due May 10 – 5pm	30%

\*the remaining 10% is dedicated to class participation and attendance

**The assignment of letter grades is as follows:**

92 <= A	80-81 = B-	67-69 = D+
90-91 = A-	77-79 = C+	62-66 = D
87-89 = B+	72-76 = C	60-61 = D-
82-86 = B	70-71 = C-	> 59 = F

\* Rounding at .5

**COURSE CALENDAR:**

WEEK	DATE	LECTURE # AND TOPIC	READINGS
Week 1	January 17	1. Introduction to Public Policy	Bickers & Williams ch. 1&2
Week 2	January 24	2. The Political Economy Approach to Policy	Dye ch. 1, 2, 3
Week 3	January 31	3. Democracy, Political Institutions and Public Policy	B&W ch. 3
Week 4	February 7	4. Societal Problems: Causes and Solutions	B&W ch. 4, 5
Week 5	February 14	5. Societal Problems: Markets as Solutions	B&W ch. 6, 7
Week 6	February 21	6. Discussion of Research Problem	
Week 7	February 28	7. Policy Actors: Public Officials & Elections	Dye ch. 4
		<b>MIDTERM Due by Noon 3/1/06</b>	
Week 8	March 7	8. Policy Actors: National and State Government	B&W ch. 8 & 10
		<b>Email instructor your paper topic by 5pm 3/7</b>	
	<b>March 12-18</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
Week 9	March 21	9. Policy Actors: Interest Groups	B&W ch. 9 & Dye Ch. 5
Week 10	March 28	10. Policy Actors: The Media	Dye ch. 6
		<b>Email instructor list of policy experts for interviews</b>	
Week 11	April 4	11. Public Opinion and Policy: the Sometime Connection	Dye Ch. 7; Sharp Ch. 1
Week 12	April 11	12. Morality Policy: Criminal Justice; Pornography; Abortion	Sharp Ch. 2, 4, 5
Week 13	April 18	13. Economic Policy: Taxing and Spending – Welfare and Social Security	Sharp Ch. 3, 6, 7; Cochran, Clarke, et al (pdf file on

			WebCampus)
Week 14	April 25	14. Policy Analysis and Implementation	B&W Ch. 11; Theodoulou & Kofins (pdf file on WebCampus)
Week 15	May 2	15. Policy Implementation and Evaluation	Dye Ch. 8 & 9; B & W Ch. 12
Final	May 9th	<b>Final Exam – Due at 5pm</b>	

## RESEARCH PAPER FOR PUBLIC POLICY COURSE: PROBLEMS AND POLICY SOLUTIONS

The paper should discuss the following six items:

1. *Discussion of Research Topic:* Identify a political/social **problem** (e.g., increased poverty, crime, traffic, inequality, declining education quality, etc.) that interests you. Make sure you frame the issue as a "social problem" and not a specific policy (i.e. the death penalty).
2. *Definition of the Problem:* How does society see this problem (how do they define the problem, the scope of the problem)? Discuss how citizens, the media, and government define the problem. Discuss conflicts between definitions (i.e., scope, causes, etc.) and solutions.
3. *Literature Review:* What has the academic community written on this topic? Write a brief literature review regarding what they have written on this social problem. What does the literature suggest are the causes of the problem? What are the potential solutions? Use at least 5 academic sources (see Tools and Resources for an article on what an academic source is).
4. *Policy History.* What has the government (city, state, federal) done to solve this problem? Be specific - what legislation, bills, ordinances, how much money spent, etc.
5. *Qualitative Research:* Identify the policy experts and political actors that are addressing this issue – what are their names, positions/occupations, what agencies to they belong to. Contact and briefly interview two individuals and summarize what s/he said. If in doubt who is a policy expert/player, contact the professor.
6. *Conclusion:* What caused this problem?; What should be done about it (what policies)? How would one begin to accomplish this (policy implementation)? This can be your own opinion but back it up with evidence from section 4 (literature review) and what the policy experts you identified said.

### REQUIREMENTS OF FINAL PAPER:

Length: at least 2500 words

Papers are due via Webcampus's Assignments Inbox by 5pm on April 25 2005. Late papers will be penalized by a full grade for each day (24 hours) they are late.

Use academic articles and books for literature review (no internet sources)

Internet cites can be used to help provide examples and/or to supplement your research but should be kept to a minimum.

Use The *APSR*(*American Political Science Review*) style of embedded citations and a separate list of references at the end of the paper. Do not use footnotes for simple citations. For example, using your own words describe an idea or argument of an author or set of scholars and then cite the author's or authors' last name or names and year of publication (see below).

The general public may often have conflicting policy preferences; wanting more services along side lower taxes (Wlezien 1995).

Include at the end of the paper a bibliography with full information about all cited material (for example: Wlezien, Christopher. 1995. "The Public as Thermostat: Dynamics of Preferences for Spending." *American Journal of Political Science* 39:981-1000.). This cannot be included in your 2500 word count.

Avoid excessive use of quotes. Summarize material in your own words and cite where the ideas come from.

Use academic style of writing. Try not to use clichés, overgeneralizations, or derogatory comments. Make an argument backed up with facts, don't just rant and rave.

Provide word count. If you don't know how ask a friend or email the paper to me.

The paper must have a title page that includes the title of the paper, the student's name, the course name, quarter/year, and the following statement.

This paper represents my own work. It is not a recycled paper from another course and it is not a paper purchased or obtained from another source. I understand the meaning of plagiarism and no part of this paper has been plagiarized. I have properly documented and cited all of the references and sections. I am familiar with the rules for documenting sources and understand that any violations of the university's code of student conduct will cause me to fail this course and the case turned over to Student Judicial Affairs with the instructor's recommendation that I be expelled from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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Student's Name