

Public Policy Formation

POLITICAL SCIENCE 320
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Spring 2006

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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. Further information on the discussion board will be provided at the beginning of the semester. 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 23) 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: 6 quizzes will be given during the course which will count for 15% of your overall course grade. They will usually be posted on a Wednesday. It is your responsibility to continually log into WebCT 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 or www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/.) 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	Monday, Feb. 28/Due March 1 - Noon	30%
Participation	N/A	5%
Quizzes	TBA	15%
Paper	FRIDAY. April 28 by 10am	20%
Final Exam	Tues. May 2/Due May 9 - Noon	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	TOPIC	READINGS
Week 1	January 17	Introduction to Public Policy	Bickers & Williams ch. 1 & 2
Week 2	January 24	The Political Economy Approach to Policy	Dye ch. 1, 2, 3
Week 3	January 31	Democracy, Political Institutions and Public Policy	B&W ch. 3
Week 4	February 7	Societal Problems: Causes and Solutions	B&W ch. 4, 5
Week 5	February 14	Societal Problems: Markets as Solutions	B&W ch. 6, 7
Week 6	February 21	Discussion of Research Problem	
Week 7	February 28	Policy Actors: Public Officials & Elections	Dye ch. 4
		MIDTERM Due by Noon 3/1/06	
Week 8	March 7	Policy Actors: National and State Government	B&W ch. 8 & 10
	March 14	SPRING BREAK	
Week 9	March 21	Policy Actors: Interest Groups	B&W ch. 9 & Dye Ch. 5
Week 10	March 28	Policy Actors: The Media	Dye ch. 6
Week 11	April 4	Public Opinion and Policy: the Sometime Connection	Dye Ch. 7; Sharp Ch. 1
Week 12	April 11	Morality Policy: Criminal Justice; Pornography; Abortion	Sharp Ch. 2, 4, 5
Week 13	April 18	Economic Policy: Taxing and Spending – Welfare and Social Security	Sharp Ch. 3, 6, 7; Cochran, Clarke, et al
Week 14	April 25	Policy Analysis and Implementation	B&W Ch. 11; Theodoulou & Kofins
Week 15	May 2	Policy Implementation and Evaluation (Final Exam Questions Given)	Dye Ch. 8 & 9; B & W Ch. 12

Final	May 9th	Final Exam – Due at Noon	

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". Specify whether you will be focusing on a state, local or a federal issue.
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 political science 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? Use at least 4 academic sources.
4. *Policy History.* What has the city or state 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 by 9am on April 28, 2005. An electronic copy must be presented by the deadline. Late papers will be penalized by a full grade for each day (24 hours) it is 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 proper citations throughout the paper, for example:

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

Include a bibliography with full information about 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.

Student's Name