

The Policy Process
Spring, 2004 George Mason University
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The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the policymaking process in the United States. Primary focus will be on understanding the politics of policymaking for the national government. The course will help students understand how policy issues reach the governmental agenda and how public laws are formulated by our policymaking institutions. The students will be introduced to a number of conceptual frameworks and models that offer various ways of explaining the process. The consequences of the process for the substance of policies will also be explored.

The course will cover several areas. First, general models of the policymaking process will be discussed. Second, the key steps in policymaking will be explored. Focus will be placed on how issues get placed on the public agenda, how policymaking institutions formulate policy responses to problems, how budgetary resources are provided for policies, and how implementation makes a difference in policy goals and outcomes. The roles of ideas, interests, values and institutions will be examined to understand their contribution to policy formation. Finally, models of policy change will be explored, with particular attention to competing theories explaining rapid policy change and policy stability.

The approach used in the course will consist of three parts. First, students will be expected to complete assigned readings presenting various concepts and models of policymaking. Second, lectures and classroom discussion will highlight important issues and controversies. Finally, students will select a policy issue or area to focus on during the semester to assess the relevance of the general concepts to particular case studies, discussing how their case study is addressed through important stages of the policy process. Ultimately, we will attempt together to arrive at some broader conclusions about similarities and differences in the politics of policymaking across a diverse range of issues.

The course grade will be based on following components:

- Class participation and short papers - attendance, active participation and completion of assigned readings is expected. Students will be expected to complete short papers of no more than 2 pages addressing selected readings on selected weeks (20 percent)

--Midterm and final exams - A midterm examination will be scheduled with the specific date to be determined. This will be a take home exam, consisting of several essay questions that students will complete.(50 percent)

--Case study presentations - students will make a presentation, using powerpoint or similar technology, addressing the political and institutional factors shaping policy in a particular substantive area. Each student will also be asked to write an essay on their case study as part of the final exam.(30 percent)

The following books have been assigned:

Daniel C. McCool, Public Policy Theories, Models and Concepts: An Anthology, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1995

Allen Schick, The Federal Budget: Politics, Policy, Process Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2000

John Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies, 2nd ed., New York, Harper Collins College Publishers, 1995.

Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith, eds., Principles and Practice of American Politics Washington, D.C., CQ Press, 2000

Larry N. Gerson, Public Policymaking: Process and Principles, Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 1997

In addition, other readings will be provided.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF MODELS

Week 1

Larry N. Gerson, Public Policymaking: Process and Principles, entire book.

ASSIGNMENT: WRITE A TWO PAGE ESSAY DISCUSSING HOW THE GERSON BOOK HAS HELPED YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND THE POLICY PROCESS. TRY TO REFERENCE A PARTICULAR POLICY EXAMPLE, EITHER ONE OF YOUR OWN CHOOSING OR ONE HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Week 2

Daniel McCool, Public Policy Theories, Models and Concepts - pp. 111-141 - articles by David Easton and George Mitchell
Graham Allison, handout article on Cuban missile crisis.

ASSIGNMENT: APPLY ALLISON'S THREE MODELS TO THE CURRENT DEBATE OVER WAR WITH IRAQ IN A TWO PAGE ESSAY. HOW DOES EACH OF THE THREE MODELS HELP SHED LIGHT ON THE DECISIONMAKING PROCESS? WHAT SHORTCOMINGS IN ALLISON'S APPROACH ARE REVEALED BY THIS EXERCISE?

AGENDA FORMATION

Week 3

John Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, pp. 1-90.

David Rochefort and Roger Cobb, "Problem Definition: An Emerging Perspective" (handout)

Elaine B. Sharp, "Paradoxes of National Antidrug Policymaking" (handout)

Week 4

John Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies, pp 90-230.

David Rochefort and Roger Cobb, The Politics of Problem Definition, pp. 182-204. (handouts)

ASSIGNMENT: WRITE A TWO PAGER APPLYING THE GARBAGE CAN APPROACH AND THE ROCHEFORT/COBB APPROACH TO A KEY POLICY ISSUE OR PROBLEM. HOW DOES EACH MODEL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE EMERGENCE OF THIS ISSUE AND WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THESE MODELS IN UNDERSTANDING YOUR EXAMPLE?

PROPOSALS FOR CASE STUDY DUE

POLICY PROCESS MODELS

Week 5

James Wilson, The Politics of Regulation - handout excerpt

David Beam, Timothy Conlan and Paul Posner, "Four Pathways to Power" handout

Daniel McCool, Public Policy Theories, Models and Concepts, pp. 177-200, 220-232 - articles by Lowi and Steinberg

ASSIGNMENT: WRITE A MEMO TO A MEMBER OF CONGRESS TELLING HIM OR HER WHAT THEY MIGHT LEARN ABOUT THE POLITICAL STRATEGIES OR PROSPECTS REGARDING A CURRENT OR PAST POLICY ISSUE OR PROBLEM FROM TWO OF THESE MODELS.

POLICY FORMULATION AND LEGITIMATION

Weeks 6 AND 7

Michale Delli Carpini and Bruce A. Williams, "Let us InfotainYou: Politics in the New Media Environment" (handout)

Donald Kettl, "Clueless in the Capital" handout article

Anthony King, "Running Scared" handout article

Thomas E. Mann, "The U.S. Campaign Finance System under Strain" (handout)

Kernell and Smith reader, Chapter 1-1; 10-4; 12-2; 13-1,13-3 - articles by Mancur Olson, Stimson, et al., Hernson, Schattschneider, and Cigler/Loomis.

Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, Politicians Don't Pander (excerpt handout)

Week 8

Douglas Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action - handout excerpt

Paul J. Quirk, "Structures and Performance: An Evaluation" - paper handout

Sarah Binder, "Can the Parties Govern?" (handout)

Kernell and Smith reader, Chapter 6-2 - article by Mayhew

MIDTERM EXAMINATION - TAKEHOME DUE THE FOLLOWING WEEK

Week 9

Charles O. Jones, "Stop: The Campaigning Presidency and the 2000 Presidential Campaign" (handout)

Kernell and Smith reader, Chapter 7-1;7-2 - articles by Neustadt and Kernell

Charles O. Jones, "Capitalizing on Position in a Perfect Tie" - handout

RESOURCE ACQUISITION AND ALLOCATION

Week 10

Allen Schick, The Federal Budget: Politics, Policy, Process - selected chapters to be assigned

CBO and GAO slides and charts

ASSIGNMENT: ASSUME YOU ARE STAFF TO A SENATOR WHO WANTS TO PROPOSE ADDING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS TO MEDICARE, ELIMINATING THE ESTATE TAX AND ADDING \$3 BILLION IN NEW GRANTS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS. ADVISE HIM OR HER OF THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET RULES AND PROCESSES PERTAINING TO EACH PROPOSAL.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Week 11

Daniel McCool, Public Policy Theories, Models and Concepts, pp. 256-288 - articles by Freeman and Heclo

Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian, "A Conceptual Framework of the Implementation Process" handout excerpt

Peter Schuck, "Benched" (handout)

Kernell and Smith reader, Chapter 8 (all)- articles by Wilson, Moe and Light

Week 12 - THE FEDERAL SYSTEM

John Kincaid, "Governing the American States" - handout

Richard P. Nathan, "Federalism - the Great Composition"
(handout)

Kernell and Smith, pp. 66-71 (excerpt from Madison)

ASSIGNMENT: JAMES MADISON MAKES THE CASE FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT BY POINTING TO THE POTENTIAL DOMINANCE OF FACTIONS IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES AND STATES. DOES THIS ARGUMENT STILL RESONATE AS A CONTEMPORARY RATIONALE FOR A STRONG NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN CHECKING THE STATES AND THEIR LOCALITIES? DRAW ON THE OTHER READINGS FOR YOUR TWO PAGE ESSAY.

WRAPUP AND CONCLUSIONS

Week 13

Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, "Punctuated Equilibria in Politics" from Agendas and Instability in American Politics - handouts of selected chapters

Anthony Downs - "Up and Down With Ecology: The Issue Attention Cycle" - handout

Daniel McCool, Public Policy Theories, Models and Concepts, pp. 142-156 - article by Charles Lindblom

David Beam, "If Policy Analysis Is So Important, Why Are Policy Analysts So Depressed?", handout

CLASS PRESENTATIONS OF CASE STUDIES

FINAL EXAM - TAKEHOME