

DRAFT

**U.S. Institutions and the Policy Process  
PUBP 730  
George Mason University  
Schar School of Policy and Government  
Fall 2020**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Listing: PUBP 730  
Time/Location: Thursdays, 07:20 – 10:00 pm  
Instructor: Dr. Jason Dechant  
Phone: 703-861-4493  
Email: jasondechant@gmail.com  
Office Hours: By appointment (Wednesdays, noon-1 pm preferred)

**COURSE OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this course is to explore the major institutions that shape American public policy at the national level. These institutions include the three branches of the Federal government as envisaged by the framers in the U.S. Constitution. They also include institutions the framers did not foresee, such as political parties and executive agencies. The course will explore the emergence and interactions of these institutions over time and discuss them in current context. It will do so through traditional instruction thus strengthening understanding of the topics and also through exercises in professional development.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Successful completion of this course provides the students with the following:

1. Greater familiarity with the national policy-making process in the United States, including interaction of policy and politics,
2. Increased exposure to different and competing perspectives on governance and the policy process,
3. Enhanced ability to analyze information and engage effectively in strategic discussions about U.S. national policy-making,
4. Stronger written and oral communication skills, and
5. More profound understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of public policy.

**REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS**

Class members are responsible for obtaining and reading all of the assigned course materials. Study groups and sharing of reading notes are optional. Some of the assigned reading goes beyond the assigned texts below and are listed in the *Additional Readings* section of this syllabus. Those readings are available online or are posted on Blackboard. We will read each of the following required books:

## DRAFT

- John Haskell, Marian Currinder, and Sara A. Grove, Congress in Context, Second Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014).
- Steven L. Taylor, Matthew S. Shugart, Arend Lijphard, and Bernard Grofman, A Different Democracy: American Government in a 31 Country Perspective (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
- William T. Gormley Jr and Steven J. Balla, Bureaucracy and Democracy: Accountability and Performance, Fourth Edition (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2017).
- Doris A. Graber and Johanna Dunaway, Mass Media and American Politics, Tenth Edition (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2018).
- John W. Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Second Edition (New York: Addison-Wesley/Longman, 1995). (Order any year as long as Second Edition.)

## REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Both individual work and active participation through discussion are important skills to be developed and you will be evaluated on each throughout the course. They will allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of theories, strengthen your research skills, and refine your presentation and writing proficiency. Exercises and exams are treated as pedagogical exercises to showcase your learning throughout the course. Grades will be assigned and apportioned as follows:

- Seminar Discussant 20%
- Oral Responses (x2, 10% each) 20%
- Class Participation 10%
- Policy Memos (x2, 10% each) 20%
- Policy Paper 30%

Late assignments will be penalized one grade level (for instance, from A+ to A) for each calendar day or part thereof. The discussant and oral response assignments will not be accepted late; students missing one of these assignments will receive an F for it. If you anticipate difficulty completing these assignments, please try to trade your date with another student or contact the instructor.

### *Seminar Discussant*

At the first class meeting, students will be assigned a class period from September 3 through the end of the semester to lead a discussion for ~30-45 minutes of the period. The discussion will be based upon a question provided at least a week in advance. Discussants are encouraged to go beyond the basic question and address any related topics from the reading or current events. The discussion should begin with an opening statement ~10-15 minutes long which should, *at a minimum*, answer the discussion question. A good statement will not summarize all of the week's readings, but address those topics relevant to answering the question and providing a thoughtful

## DRAFT

response. Speaker's notes should be typed and handed in the evening of the discussion. The notes will aid in the evaluation of the discussant and be evaluated on substance, not style or format.

### *Oral Responses*

Also at the first class meeting, students will sign up for two class periods where they will be responsible for an oral response to the discussant's opening remarks. Part of the oral responses may be developed in advance (based upon the question provided) but at least half of the response should be a reaction to the discussant's (or other respondent's) remarks. A good response engages both the discussant and the other respondent (if second in order) in a way that advances the overall discussion. Oral respondents will be the first to be called upon after the discussant's opening and the responses should be ~4-6 minutes long. There are no written requirements for this assignment.

### *Class Participation*

Class participation is *expected* throughout the semester. Even when students are not assigned discussant or respondent responsibilities, they are expected to actively participate during the seminar. Grades in this category will be assigned based upon degree of class participation. For example, as a general guide: a frequent (multiple times a class) participant will get 90-100, a regular participant (weekly) will get 80-90, a sporadic participant 70-80, and so on. A student who misses three or more classes will receive a zero for the class participation portion of the grade. It is also expected that you notify the instructor if you anticipate missing class, or if an emergency arises.

### *Policy Memos*

Also at the first class meeting, students will sign-up for two dates to submit short policy memos (one on each date). The memos are due at the beginning of class and should address the topic of the class period (and assigned readings) as it pertains to a current event. The memos should specify the audience or recipient, the position the author is writing from (constituent, staffer, special interest group, etc), address a problem/challenge, and offer some solutions. They are intended to provide an introduction to a policy issue and are not to be in-depth policy analysis. They will be evaluated based upon the critical thinking, effective analysis, and clarity of presentation they reflect. The maximum length of the memos is 1250 words (roughly 3 double-spaced pages).

### *Policy Paper*

In the policy paper, students will, subject to instructor approval, choose a policy in which they are interested. They will identify which of the institutions examined in the course (Congress, the White House, the executive branch bureaucracies, etc.) would be involved in enacting and implementing the policy. For each of the institutions involved, student should identify key actors (elements or components of the institutions), their interests, and critical choke and pressure points. Students should then discuss critical interactions between these actors and institutions and lay out an

DRAFT

effective strategy for ensuring their policy is adopted and implemented. The purpose of this assignment is not to demonstrate the strengths of the policy but to identify how the players in the process could best ensure the policy is adopted and implemented. There is no page length minimum, but papers should not exceed 15 pages. Bibliographies and required 1-page executive summary do not count against the page limit. Paper topics are due September 10. Final papers are due December 3 (the last class). Each student is also responsible for introducing and briefly discussing their topic (for ~5 minutes) at a selected session. No formal presentation is required.

**SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE**

Classes	Date	Topic	Reading
1	Aug 27	Origins and Perspectives of American Exceptionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., chs. 1 and 10</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
2	Sept 3	Agenda Setting and the Policy Process	Kingdon, chs. 1-8
3	Sept 10	The Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., ch. 8</li> <li>● Haskell et al., ch. 11</li> <li>● Graber &amp; Dunaway ch. 7</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
4	Sept 17	Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., ch. 7 and pp 320-324</li> <li>● Haskell et al., chs. 2-3, 5-6</li> <li>● Graber &amp; Dunaway pp 257-267</li> </ul>
5	Sept 24	Congressional Delegation	Additional Readings (BB)
6	Oct 1	The Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., ch. 9</li> <li>● Haskell et al., ch. 12</li> <li>● Graber &amp; Dunaway pp 268-281</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
7	Oct 8	The Bureaucracy I: Origins and Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gormley &amp; Balla, ch. 1</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
8	Oct 15	The Bureaucracy II: Theories and Mechanics of Bureaucratic Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gormley &amp; Balla, chs. 2-5 and 7</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
9	Oct 22	The Budget Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Haskell et al., chs. 7-8</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
10	Oct 29	National Security Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Haskell et al., pp. 339-353</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>
11	Nov 5	Voting and Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., ch. 5</li> <li>● Haskell et al., ch. 4</li> <li>● Graber &amp; Dunaway ch. 12</li> </ul>
12	Nov 12	Interest Groups and Lobbyists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Taylor et al., ch. 6</li> <li>● Haskell et al., ch. 13 and pp. 434-444</li> <li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li> </ul>

DRAFT

13	Nov 19	The Fourth Estate	Graber & Dunaway, chs. 1-2, 4, 6, 11, 13-14
NOVEMBER 26--THANKSGIVING--NO CLASS			
14	Dec 3	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Taylor et al., ch. 4</li><li>● Additional Readings (BB)</li></ul>

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

### Topic 1: Origins and Perspectives of American Exceptionalism

- Declaration of Independence. Available online at: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Available online at: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript> and <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>
- James Madison, Federalist Papers, 10 and 51. Available online at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>
- Seymour Martin Lipset, American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword, Chapter 1, “Ideology, Politics, and Deviance” (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997). [Blackboard]

### Topic 2: Agenda Setting and the Policy Process

- No additional readings

### Topic 3: The Presidency

- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Papers, 68 and 69. Available online at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>
- Ezra Klein, “The Unpersuaded: Who Listens to a President?,” *New Yorker*, March 19, 2012. [Blackboard]
- James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chapters 14 “Presidents”. [Blackboard]

### Topic 4: Congress

- No additional readings

### Topic 5: Congressional Delegation

- Lilly J. Goren, The Politics of Military Base Closing: Not in My District (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), chapters 1-2 and 7. [Blackboard]
- A. Lee Fritschler and Catherine E. Rudder, Smoking and Politics: Bureaucracy Centered Policymaking, Sixth Edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007), chapters 4, 6, 7, 10. [Blackboard]
- Colton C. Campbell, “Creating an Angel: Congressional Delegation to Ad Hoc Commissions,” *Congress and the Presidency*, Autumn 1998, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 161-182. [Blackboard]

### Topic 6: The Courts

- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Papers, 78 and 81. Available online at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>
- James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chapters 15 “Courts”. [Blackboard]

## DRAFT

### Topic 7: The Bureaucracy I: Origins and Characteristics of Modern American Democracy

- Joseph Postell, Bureaucracy in America: The Administrative State's Challenge to Constitutional Government (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2017), chapter 1 and Conclusion. [Blackboard]
- James Q. Wilson, Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why they Do It (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chapters 2, 6, 10. [Blackboard]

### Topic 8: The Bureaucracy II: Theories and Mechanics of Bureaucratic Performance

- Cornelius M. Kerwin and Scott R. Furlong, Rulemaking: How Government Agencies Write Laws, Fifth Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2018), chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-68. [Blackboard]

### Topic 9: The Budget Process

- Allen Schick, The Federal Budget: Politics, Policy, Process, Third Edition (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007), Chapters 5-6. [Blackboard]

### Topic 10: National Security Decision Making

- William W. Newmann, Managing National Security Policy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Chapters 1-3. [Blackboard]
- Stephen M. Griffin, "The Tragic Pattern of the War Power: Presidential Decisions for War since 1945" paper prepared for the 2012 American Political Science Association annual meeting. [Blackboard]
- Paul D. Miller, "Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, September 2013, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 592-606. [Blackboard]
- Charles A. Stevenson, SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006). Chapters 1-2, 13-17. [Blackboard]

### Topic 11: Voting and Elections

- No additional readings

### Topic 12: Interest Groups and Lobbyists

- Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech, "Money, Priorities, and Stalemate: How Lobbying Affects Public Policy," *Election Law Journal* 13:194-209 (2014). [Blackboard]
- Mark Rozell, Clyde Wilcox, and Michael Frans, Interest Groups in American Campaigns, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 5, pp. 137-64. [Blackboard]
- Bertram Levine, The Art of Lobbying (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009), chapter 2, pp. 10-46. [Blackboard]
- Tom Hamburger, "Boardroom Tries to Reach into Lunchroom," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2014, pp. A1, A4. [Blackboard]

## DRAFT

- Moises Naim, The End of Power (New York: Basic Books, 2013), chapter 5, pp. 76-106. [Blackboard]

### Topic 13: The Fourth Estate

- No additional readings

### Topic 14: Federalism

- U.S. Constitution, Article 1 sections 8, 9, and 10. Available online at: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>
- Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, Federalist Papers 9 and 44. Available online at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>
- James Pfiffner, “Federalism and the Devolution of Social Policy in the United States.” (Published as “Foderalismus und die Dezentralisierung der Sozialpolitik in den Vereinentem Staaten,” in Reinhard C. Meier-Walser and Gerhard Hirscher, eds., *Krise Und Reform Des Foderlismus* (Munchen, Germany: Olzog, 1999), pages 148-182. Available online at: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~pubp502/pfiffner-readings-federal.htm>
- Greg Goelzhauser and Shanna Rose, “The State of American Federalism 2016–2017: Policy Reversals and Partisan Perspectives on Intergovernmental Relations,” *Publius* 47:285–313 (2017). [Blackboard]
- Carol S. Weissert; Benjamin Pollack; and Richard P. Nathan, “Intergovernmental Negotiation in Medicaid: Arkansas and the Premium Assistance Waiver,” *Publius* 47:445–466 (2017). [Blackboard]

## GENERAL GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

### *Papers*

Writing research and policy papers is a fundamental part of graduate study. The quality of a paper is determined by a number of factors, including presentation of facts, development of argumentation, clarity of analysis, acknowledgment of sources, and accuracy of format and style. A good guideline for elements and format of a research paper and bibliography, including online sources, is *A Pocket Style Manual*, Seventh Edition (2015), by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. Note that your written assignments in this class will be used to evaluate whether you might need to take a writing class as part of your course of study.

### *Grading*

All written and oral assignments will be judged using the GMU system for grading graduate courses as laid out in the university catalog. Grades earned for each assignment will be added numerically, and the weighted average will be used to determine the final grade, which allows for the grades of A+ (98-100), A (92-97), A- (90-91), B+ (88-89), B (82-87), B- (80-81), as well as C (70-79), D (60-69) F (59 and below), and IN. Assignments that are submitted late will lead to a grade reduction, up to being marked as missed entirely. Unacceptably frequent periods of absence

## DRAFT

(missing more than three classes) will result in grade reduction as well. No extra credit will be given.

A grade of A or A- reflects exceptional performance across course assignments and requirements. A grade of B+ indicates command of the course material and very good performance on all aspects of the course. A grade of B denotes good performance in meeting requirements of the course. A grade of B- is given for marginal work that does not fully meet graduate level requirements. The grade of C indicates work that consistently fails to meet graduate level standards. A grade of F is assigned upon failure to perform adequately in the course (assignments, discussions, etc.).

### *Electronic Communication and Blackboard*

The GMU email accounts are the primary and authoritative means of electronic communication; announcements regarding classes will be sent to those accounts only. Students are free to use other accounts, but are solely responsible for any failed communication, missed deadline, etc. Blackboard will also be used to post announcements, presentations, and other items, so be sure to check regularly.

### *Use of Cell Phones, Computers, and Other Electronic Devices in Class*

Students are expected to focus entirely on seminar discussion during class. They are expected to refrain from carrying on other professional or personal activities while the class is meeting. This means on both phones and computers. Devices should be turned to vibrate and only used in case of emergency (personal or professional). Computers are permitted only for use pertaining to the course and may be prohibited at the discretion of the instructor.

### *Special Needs*

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at <http://ods.gmu.edu/>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS before classes start.

### *Policy on Plagiarism*

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

The faculty of the School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F." This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student's transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

## DRAFT

To help enforce the policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The School's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.