Course Description: This course is designed to promote a better understanding of the policy making process in the United States, particularly at the national level. It will examine the major actors and institutions involved in the national policy making process and the policy instruments available to them. It will also trace the principal stages in the formation of public policy, from agenda setting to implementation. Finally, the course will take a focused look at the political dynamics of federal policy in specific areas, including social security and education policy.

Course Structure: The course will be conducted in a seminar format. The quality of class discussions will be critical to the seminar's success. This requires active and informed participation by everyone in the class. All students will be expected to have read and thoughtfully considered each week's reading assignments. In addition, there will be an opportunity for a small group project and oral research presentations.

Course Requirements: Course requirements include a take home midterm exam and four additional writing assignments. The midterm will consist of a 5-7 page analysis and comparison between course readings and observations acquired during a mandatory field trip to Capitol Hill on Friday Oct. 27. If you need to request time off from work you should do so now.

Each seminar participant will prepare an 5-7 page policy memorandum which analyzes the substance and politics of a major policy issue. Students will exchange and critique each other's papers in small groups prior to final submission of the paper for a course grade.

There will also be a group project examining the politics of social security reform. Assigned groups will meet over the course of two classes to prepare plans for a presentation in class.

Finally, each student will prepare a brief analysis of a given week’s readings and/or a brief response to questions posed on blackboard, for possible presentation in class, as well as a short briefing memo for the first class. Active oral participation is also required in several different course segments.

Course evaluation: The final grade for this course will be based on general class participation (10%); Analyses of readings (10%), Midterm exam (30%); Group project on social security reform (10%); and the Policy memo/paper and critique (30% + 10%).
Grades will be calculated on an A-F scale as follows: 97-100 A+, 93-96 A, 90-92 A-, 87-89 B+, 83-86 B, 80-82 B-. 77-79 C+, 73-76 C, 70-72 C-, 67-69 D+, 63-66 D, 60-62 D-, <60 F.

**Required Readings:** The following books are available for purchase at the campus bookstore. They will be supplemented by several articles and handouts which are available through JSTOR or the course blackboard site.

- John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives & Public Policy*
- Paul Manna, *Collision Course*, (CQ, 2011)

**Learning Goals and Objectives:** This course is designed to enable students to:

1. gain an understanding of the principal actors, institutions, and procedures involved in making domestic public policy;

2. develop a sophisticated understanding of the Constitutional system of separation of powers and federalism and how these systems shape policy making and policy implementation in the United States;

3. acquire knowledge of the policy process across a range of significant issues, including education, social security, urban, and fiscal policy;

4. improve the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate public policy proposals and make sound inferences about the potential for effective implementation;

5. understand differences in the political dynamics between different types of public policy issues and the opportunities and challenges presented at different stages of the policy process; and

6. understand the challenges and opportunities for effective policy making in periods of crisis and rapid shifts in public opinion.

**Class Schedule:**

(Aug 30) **Introduction to Public Policy**

No Class session due to APSA Conference; replaced by Introductory Assignment: Brief Memo on the role of government & public policy.

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *American Amnesia: How the War on Government Made Us Forget What Made America Prosper*, chapter 3.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Available on course blackboard page.
Policy Actors and Institutions in Historical and Comparative Context

Thomas McCraw, “The Public and Private Spheres in Historical and Comparative Perspective,” pp. 478-490.¹
John Kingdon, Agendas, chaps 2 and 3

Recommended:

Graham Wilson, Only in America? (entire).

STAGES OF THE POLICY PROCESS:

Agenda Setting and Policy Formulation

Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy, chaps 1, 4-8.

Recommended:


Policy Adoption and Legitimation: Alternative Frameworks

James Q. Wilson, The Politics of Regulation, chap 10.¹
Conlan, Posner, Beam, Pathways of Power, chap. 1.¹

Policy Adoption and Politics of Organization: Pluralist and Partisan Policy


Recommended:

Christopher Bosso, Pesticides and Politics (Pittsburgh, 1989)

Policy Adoption & the Politics of Ideas: Expert and Symbolic Policy Making

Conlan and Posner, Pathways of Power, chaps 4-5, 10

Recommended:

(Oct 11) **Implementation: An Education Case Study**

Manna, Collision Course, chaps 1-7.

Recommended:


(Oct 18) **Policy Reform and Resilience: The Case of Medicaid**

Thompson, *Medicaid Politics*, chaps 1-5.

Social Security Groups formed

(Oct 25) **Health Care and Social Security Reform, part 1**

Thompson, *Medicaid Politics*, chaps 6, 7.


Committee for Responsible Federal Budget Soc Sec. Simulation

*Midterm Exam Distributed*

(Oct 27) **Capitol Hill Day (Friday)**

(Nov 1) No class due to Capitol Hill day.

*Midterm Exams Due*

(Nov 8) **Social Security Reform**


*Group Presentations on Social Security Reform*

(Nov 16) Capitol Hill Day Compensation—No Class Meeting

(Nov 22) **Thanksgiving Recess**

*Draft Policy Memos Due and Exchanged*

(Nov 29) **Research Colloquium**

(Dec 6) Course Wrap Up and Evaluations

*Final Policy Memos Due*

**Plagiarism**: You are expected to adhere to the honor code of George Mason University. This
includes the university’s policy on plagiarism. Using the words or ideas of anyone other than yourself, and pretending those words are your own, constitutes serious academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated. Any words or ideas presented in your paper which are not your own must be properly quoted and/or cited in your paper. To guard against plagiarism and to treat students equitably, written work may be checked against existing published materials or digital databases available through various plagiarism detection services. Accordingly electronic forms of submitted materials may be requested.

HONOR CODE POLICY

The Honor Code policy endorsed by the members of the Department of Public and International Affairs relative to the types of academic work indicated below is set out in the appropriate paragraphs:

1. Quizzes, tests and examinations. No help may be given or received by students when taking quizzes, tests, or examinations, whatever the type or wherever taken, unless the instructor specifically permits deviation from this standard.

2. Course Requirements: All work submitted to fulfill course requirements is to be solely the product of the individual(s) whose name(s) appears on it. Except with permission of the instructor, no recourse is to be had to projects, papers, lab reports or any other written work previously prepared by another student, and except with permission of the instructor no paper or work of any type submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement of any course in the Department of Public and International Affairs. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations which sell or lease research help or written papers. With respect to all written work as appropriate, proper footnotes and attribution are required.