Course Description

This is a doctoral seminar on selected issues in the U.S. policymaking process. The course is meant to complement the material presented in PUBP 840 (“Governance, Institutions, and Public Policy”) and is a “Field of Study” course for Public Policy PhD students. Its content is also quite relevant to Political Science PhD students, especially those specializing in American Government and Politics.

I am a political scientist and see this course as providing a political scientist’s understanding of the generic policy process, but also giving a more detailed treatment of a number of specific policy areas, at both the federal and state levels. I divide the course into two equal length segments, with each meant to expose students to different levels of governmental policymaking and different research approaches and methodologies.

The first focus of the class is on tracing developments in national social policy. These works are often grand in theoretical and empirical scope. This half of the course is book-heavy and the methodologies employed by our authors tend to be historical and/or qualitative.

Our second area of focus is in examining the policymaking process as it relates to national-state governmental interaction, state-specific factors, and the process of policy diffusion across states. This work tends to be more recently published articles that are more heavily quantitative in their research methodologies.

This mixture of topics and approaches is designed to increase the probability that the course is useful for each student’s dissertation research.

Course Objectives

Students will develop the ability to use scholarly literature in professional research and writing. Practice in rigorous, analytical writing will be required. Students will emerge from the course
with the ability to engage in scholarly research and analysis as they pursue their doctorate. Students will become familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of using different types of methodology in scholarly inquiry about public policy, e.g. qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, rational choice/public choice, normative philosophy, historical analysis, and legal analysis.

**Ordered Books**

I have ordered the following books from the bookstore. You are welcome to find used or library copies. All other readings will be available in electronic form through Blackboard.


**Course Requirements**

This course is a seminar and individual class sessions will be discussion-based. Although I may spend some time during each meeting introducing the material and perhaps clarifying technical aspects of the readings, the primary purpose of our meetings is for student-led critique and discussion of the required readings. A necessary requirement for this type of course is that students attend every class. Absence from more than one class – unless a student has a documented emergency – is considered unacceptable in terms of class participation. With each absence past the first, a student’s participation grade will be penalized, and the student may be be encouraged to drop the class. Work commitments, vacation, and travel are not documented emergencies, and if these conflict with class, you should strongly consider dropping and taking the course when it better fits your schedule. In addition, any absence must be reported to the instructor prior to the beginning of class.¹

**Class Participation**

*Class Participation* is required for the seminar run smoothly. Students should read all of the required readings and think about them before arriving to a class meeting. Participation includes both raising and responding to questions regarding the readings and being attentive to the thoughts

¹This does not mean that you are “allowed” one absence before your grade is penalized. In particular, any absences that are not documented emergencies will hurt your participation grade.
and criticisms of fellow participants. Advanced graduate students need not be coerced into engaging the literature and fellow seminar participants. Discussions, while focused on criticism, will remain constructive and productive throughout. A good rule of thumb is that you should volunteer your thoughts at least two separate times per class session. If I notice that you are not meeting this minimum threshold, I will call on you in class and send you an email nudge to remind you of your participation responsibilities. 20%

**Reaction Papers**

Each student is required to write 4 Reaction Papers over the course of the semester on the weekly readings of any 4 topic weeks of their choosing. These are due by the Monday before class at 5:00pm, and should be submitted via Blackboard. These papers should briefly summarize the week’s readings, analyze arguments and execution, offer critical assessments, and discuss the readings in a larger framework. Students can choose to select to focus on one or more of the readings in that selected week (that is, you need not mention each and every assigned reading in your response). Papers should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced, 12pt font, and include proper citations. There is no set template for your reactions. The most important thing is that you read carefully and try your best to react to the readings in a scholarly way. One good strategy is to discuss how the readings taught you something unexpected about your research area of interest. Another strategy is to discuss how the readings might miss important aspects of a topic and to suggest how alternative readings would be more useful to understand the week’s topics. These two ideas should not limit your creativity in developing reaction papers. A good rule of thumb is that you should spend far more time thinking about a reaction paper than actually physically writing it. Reaction papers must pertain to the current week’s readings only and cannot be submitted for past weeks. 20%

**Seminar Paper**

Choose a research question regarding the adoption and/or implementation of some public policy, broadly speaking, and complete an original research project addressing your chosen question. The final product should take the form of a conference paper/journal article. Your paper should be between 25 and 30 pages in length, contain a review of the relevant literature, and be written in the professional style of the American Political Science Association. You may use whatever methodology you feel is most appropriate for your question and that you feel qualified to implement.

Each student should consult with me twice before the first due date to ensure the feasibility of their project. These consultations should take place either in person or over the phone (and not over email, if at all possible). I would like you all to inform me with your general idea by 9/19; then again with a “progress report” by 10/24. This is not a formal requirement, but I will take into account any failure to consult when grading the final paper submission, especially if there are issues that would have been easily identified and avoided by a consultation.

Everyone will submit drafts of their papers to their assigned peer reviewer (details below) by 5:00 PM on 11/21, and final drafts of seminar papers are due on Tuesday, December 12th at 5:00 PM. 30%

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2["Proper" citations can come in many forms. APSA citation style is a good one to learn: https://www.csuchico.edu/lref/pols/APSA.pdf. Many of the readings have been written by more than one author. When referring to such a reading, please refer to the authors and use plural pronouns, rather than attributing the work to one of the authors alone.](#)
Seminar Paper Review

On November 21, you will turn in a complete rough draft of your seminar paper. At that point, you will give a draft to me and I will distribute it to an assigned peer reviewer from class (You will also receive someone else’s draft and be their peer reviewer). You should provide written feedback for the author of the draft you receive. These comments should take the form of a review that you might do for a journal article and should be at least 1 full single-spaced page (and no more than 3 pages).

Your responsibility is to provide constructive feedback that will help the authors improve their papers. Point out strengths, note weaknesses, raise challenges, and make suggestions for alternatives. Provide solutions to the weaknesses of the paper, but do not produce generic, unhelpful, praise or scorn.

I will provide examples of reviews that I have done and received to help guide a discussion about professional development and being a peer reviewer. Seminar paper reviews are due (to me and to the author whose paper you review) by 5:00 PM on Friday, December 1. 10%

Response Memo

Students will turn in a response to their peer reviewer’s comments along with their final paper on December 12. Your response memo should detail how you responded to each specific comment either in terms of how you changed the paper or why you believe a change/response is not appropriate. Again, these comments should take the form of a reviewer response memo that you might do for a journal article and should be 2-4 full single-spaced pages. I expect to see substantial changes to the seminar paper and the incorporation of suggestions, where appropriate. The point is that the final paper should be different from the rough draft.

I will provide examples of response memos that I have done to help guide discussion about professional development and responding to reviewer comments. 10%

Paper Presentation

During the final two weeks of the semester, each student will present her/his paper to the class. Each presentation should be 10-15 minutes, followed by 15 minutes for Q&A. I may invite other graduate students or faculty to attend these presentations. I expect these presentations to be taken seriously and be of professional quality. Think about this activity as a conference presentation/mini practice job talk. It is standard in the discipline to prepare presentation slides for such an activity and there are many good resources for this online. 10%

Grading

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<td>Class participation</td>
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Class Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Updates to this schedule may be posted to Blackboard or communicated in class, as appropriate. This schedule is meant to give you a sense of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day.

SECTION I: MAKING NATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY

Week 01, 08/29: Who Governs? Power and Policy


Week 02, 09/05: 19th Century Social Policy


Week 03, 09/12: New Deal and Great Society Programs


Week 04, 09/19: Policy Feedback 1


**Week 05, 09/26: Policy Feedback 2 and Retrenchment**


**Week 06, 10/03: Taxes and Social Policy**


**Week 07, 10/10: No Class**

**SECTION II: FEDERALISM, STATE POLITICS, AND POLICY DIFFUSION**

**Week 08, 10/17: State Politics and Federalism**


**Week 09, 10/24: Public Opinion and Policy Responsiveness**


**Week 10, 10/31: Diffusion 1**

Week 11, 11/07: Diffusion 2


Week 12, 11/14: Health Policy


Week 13, 11/21: Immigration and Morality Policy

Week 14, 11/28: Research Paper Presentations

Week 15, 12/05: Research Paper Presentations

Additional Concerns

Syllabus

This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on the course website. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct

Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

• Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance for other students.

• Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.

• Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).

• If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a class.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). http://ods.gmu.edu/

Academic Integrity

All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Scheduled adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

• Last Day to Add: 9/5
• Last Day to Drop: 9/29

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Other Useful Campus Resources

Writing Center
• A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

University Libraries
• http://library.gmu.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
• 703.993.2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

University Policies

The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.