Introduction and Objective:

The objective of this course is to explore the major institutions that shape American public policy at the national level. This includes an examination not only of the major governmental institutions themselves – for example, the U.S. Congress, the presidency, and the federal bureaucracy – but also of some of the non-governmental institutions that play a major role in creating or carrying out public policy – for example, lobbyists and special interest groups, the press, think tanks, and other nongovernmental organizations.

Because the Schar School aims to prepare its students for professional positions in public policy, class members should view this course not only as an opportunity to learn how various institutions operate and interact to create public policies but as an exercise in professional development.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students should have acquired:

1. A familiarity with the national policy making process.
2. A clear understanding of the policy making institutions of American government and of other institutions influencing American public policy.
3. An appreciation of the interplay between politics and policy.
4. An improved ability to write concisely and effectively in short and longer formats.
5. An improved ability to analyze information and to engage effectively in policy discussions.
6. Practice in critical thinking about the underlying assumptions, motivations, strategies, and strategic calculations of policy makers.
7. An exposure to different and competing perspectives on public policy.
Course Materials:

The reading for this course is, in general, not difficult, but it is fairly extensive. Class members are responsible for reading all assigned course materials. Study groups and sharing of reading notes are encouraged. Used, shared, or borrowed books are fully acceptable. Note that used copies of most of the assigned books are available through online retailers such as Amazon or AbeBooks at very substantial discount to cover price.

We will read the bulk of each of the following books:


In addition to these nine books, we will be reading a number of Harvard Kennedy School case studies and one Institute for the Study of Diplomacy case study. These need to be purchased directly from the Kennedy School, [https://case.hks.harvard.edu/](https://case.hks.harvard.edu/), and from the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, [https://casestudies.isd.georgetown.edu/collections/frontpage](https://casestudies.isd.georgetown.edu/collections/frontpage). They can be downloaded online.


Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 279.0: “Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 280.0: “The CIA to 1961”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 492.0: “Prohibition A: Enactment.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 493.0: “Prohibition B: Repeal.”
Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 823.0: “Siege Mentality: ABC, the White House and the Iran Hostage Crisis.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1006.0: “Against All Odds: The Campaign in Congress for Japanese American Redress.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1344.0: “The Reagan Revolution.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1349.0: “Taking on Big Tobacco: David Kessler and the Food and Drug Administration.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1429.0: “Going against the Grain: A ‘Conservative’ Think Tank in Massachusetts.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1583.0: “Breaking the ‘Circle of Poison’: Senator Patrick Leahy and Pesticide Export Controls.”

Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1777.0: “DC Agenda: A Nonprofit ‘Intermediary’ Arrives at a Crossroads.”


Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1975.0, “Social Media and the Planned Parenthood/Susan G. Komen for the Cure Controversy.”

Grading and Requirements:

This course is a seminar. We will wrestle collectively with the issues we are addressing. This requires that all seminar participants come to class fully prepared, having done the assigned readings, completed the required written assignments, and having thought about the issues and arguments. It also requires that seminar members contribute their thoughts and ideas to the collective discussion, engaging openly, thoughtfully, and respectfully in the intellectual give-and-take that forms the core of a seminar experience.

During much of our classroom time each week we will be engaged in “case-method” instruction. This instructional approach presents the class with a set of historical facts (the “case”) and asks the class to analyze this material to identify key insights and lessons. By its very nature, case-method learning is a participatory, group undertaking. Preparation and engagement are essential.

Because seminars are collective activities and because this course is built around our weekly meetings, attendance represents a sine qua non. Professional lives may on occasion prevent class attendance. Professional behavior, though, requires that students inform the instructor by email in advance when their other responsibilities will prevent class attendance. Student grades will be lowered for unexcused absence.

If you anticipate missing more than two meetings of this class, you should think seriously about postponing taking it to another semester.
Grading for the seminar will be based on:

- Contribution to seminar discussion (50%)
- Two short policy memoranda (10% each; total 20%)
- Final group project (30%)

Class participation grades will reflect the contribution that each seminar member has made to the seminar's collective understanding of the topic. This necessarily means that the quality of thought embedded in the contribution, the frequency of involvement, and the responsiveness of the contribution to issues or questions on the table or to the previous contributions of other seminar members will all be taken into account. For many of us the habit of speaking up in a public, group setting does not come naturally or easily. It is, however, an important professional skill to develop. Students who would like some help becoming active participants in the discussion should feel free to speak with the instructor.

For the policy memos, the class will be randomly divided into 4 cohorts – A, B, C, and D. The dates that memos will be due will depend on cohort assignment. Memos are due at the start of class. The memos are based on assigned class readings. They will not require additional research. Rather, they are designed to emphasize critical thinking, effective analysis, and clear presentation. The specific assignment for each week’s memo is posted on the course’s Blackboard site. Maximum permitted length for policy memos is 1000 words (roughly 3 double-spaced pages). While class members are encouraged to work together in study groups to master course materials and prepare for class discussions, policy memos are individual work. Students are not to give or receive help in the preparation of papers.

For the final group project, the class will be randomly divided into groups. Each group will be randomly assigned a different policy goal (e.g., balance the federal budget, build the wall, adopt single-payer health care). It may or may not be the case that individual class members personally support the policy goal they have been assigned. That is life – and more to the point, that is part of the challenge of this assignment. Using insights from the course, each group will develop a strategy to achieve its assigned goal, given the constraints and opportunities created by U.S. institutions and the U.S. policy process.

All papers need to be submitted BOTH in paper form and electronically. Electronic copies should be submitted through the course’s Blackboard site. Late papers will be penalized.

Course grading is NOT on a curve. Class members are not competing with each other for marks.

Observance of Religious Holidays:

Students who anticipate being absent from class or experiencing difficulty in handing in an assignment on schedule due to observance of a religious holiday should contact the instructor at the start of the term to make appropriate arrangements. Alternative scheduling for assignments is possible, but will be approved only if the request is made in a professionally appropriate, professionally timely fashion.

NB:  Hijra (11 September)
      Yom Kippur (18 September)
      Sukkot – third day (25 September)
Simchat Torah (2 October)
Navratri – last day (16 October)
Mawlid an Nabi (20 November)
Ascension of the ‘Abdu'l Baha (27 November)
Hannukah – third day (4 December)

**Academic Accommodation for a Disability:**

The following is Schar School policy with regard to accommodation for a disability:

“If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.”

**Schar School Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:**

The Schar School does not tolerate plagiarism or academic dishonesty.

*Inter alia,* plagiarism and academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the course and in dismissal from the University. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa, dismissal results in visa revocation.

Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Codes; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it. For additional information consult [http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook](http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook)

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

Seminar members are expected to focus entirely on seminar discussion during weekly class meetings. They are expected to refrain from carrying on other professional or personal activities while the class is meeting. Seminar members engaged in other professional or personal activities during class time will be asked to leave the classroom until they are finished with such activities and to return only when they are prepared to participate in the seminar.

Use of cell phones in class is not permitted. Seminar members who for professional or other reason need to carry a cell phone with them must turn these devices off or set them to “vibrate.”

The use of computers or other electronic devices while class is in session is limited to seminar-related purposes. At his discretion, the instructor may require that all computers and similar electronic devices be turned off. Seminar members should be prepared to engage in seminar discussions and to deliver seminar presentations without the use of computers or electronic devices.

Seminar members with disabilities that necessitate the use of computers or other electronic devices should inform the instructor and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS). All accommodations must be arranged through ODS.
Course Schedule:

28 August:  **The Madisonian System**

Readings:

*Declaration of Independence.* Available online at:  
[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)

*Constitution and Bill of Rights.* Available online at:  
[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html) and at  


4 September:  **Congress: Pathways to Legislative Success**

Readings:

Timothy J. Conlan, Paul L. Posner, and David R. Beam, *Pathways of Power*  
(Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014), chapters 1-6, 10.  (Pages 3-127,  
190-201.) Skim chapters 7-9.

235-56.)


11 September:  **Congress: Politics and Policy**

Readings:

Ross K. Baker, *Is Bipartisanship Dead?* Pages to be announced.


First paper due for Cohort A.
18 September:  **Interest Groups and Lobbyists: Social Policy Legislation**

Readings:


Case:  “Prohibition A: Enactment” and “Prohibition B: Repeal,” Harvard Kennedy School Case Numbers 492.0 and 493.0.

First paper due for Cohort B.

25 September:  **Interest Groups and Lobbyists: Special Interest Legislation**

Readings:

Bertram Levine, *The Art of Lobbying*. Pages to be announced.


First policy paper due for Cohort C.

2 October:  **The Presidency: Success**

Readings:


First paper due for Cohort D.

9 October:  **No Class per Mason Schedule**
16 October: **The Presidency: Failure**

Readings:

Michael Wolff, *Fire and Fury.* Pages to be announced.

Case: Materials to be announced.

23 October: **The Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic Organization, Processes, and Behavior**

Readings:


Case: “Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs” and “The CIA to 1961,” Harvard Kennedy School Case Numbers 279.0 and 280.0.

30 October: **The Bureaucracy: Politics within the Government**

Readings:


Second paper due for Cohort A

6 November: **The Old Media**

Readings:


Case: “Siege Mentality: ABC, the White House, and the Iran Hostage Crisis,” Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 823.0.
Second paper due for Cohort B

13 November:  The New Media

Readings:


Additional readings to be announced.


Second paper due for Cohort C

20 November:  “Associations” and Non-Governmental Organizations

Readings:

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (any edition), volume 2, part II, chapters 5-7 (“On the Use Which the Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life;” “On the Connection between Associations and Newspapers;” and “Relationships between Civil and Political Associations.”) Available online at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/816/816-h/816-h.htm


Second paper due for Cohort D

27 November:  Think Tanks.

Readings:


Case:  “Going against the Grain:  A ‘Conservative’ Think Tank in Massachusetts,” Harvard Kennedy School Case Number 1429.

4 December:  Getting Your Policy Adopted and Implemented

Group projects due.