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Office Hours:
Monday 1:30-2:45 pm
Weds, 1:30-2:45 pm
and by appointment

Course Objectives and Description: "What is the proper role of government in modern society?" Who decides and how? "How can we make government programs work better?" "Is deficit spending a problem?" “Can we fix Social Security?" “How can we improve education?"

These are just a few of many commonly asked questions about government policies and policy making. In this course, we will explore a number of such issues, from a variety of perspectives. In particular, we will examine the functions of government in a modern economy and look at why public policy makers make the types of decisions they do. What kinds of competing interests do they confront, and how do institutions and existing policies constrain their choices.

Learning Goals and Objectives: Broadly, this course is intended to provide an in-depth look at the policy making process, from agenda-setting and policy formulation to enactment, implementation, and policy revision. It also examines the roles of the major policy making institutions, with a focus on Congress and the Executive Branch. Finally, it provides a detailed look at the substance of public policy in several domestic policy areas: social security, education, environmental policy, and the federal budget. More specifically, the course is designed to enable you to:

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

2. develop a more 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, environmental, 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; and

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.
Skills and Course Requirements: This course is designed to give you a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the policy making process through a combination of readings, lectures, group activities, and research projects. Taken together, these assignments and activities are designed to strengthen your substantive knowledge of the policy process, your research, writing and analytical skills, and your ability to work effectively in collaborative teams.

Please note that this course has a prerequisite of Govt 103, Introduction to American Government, or its equivalent (AP American Government or American Government at NVCC). You must pass this course prior to enrolling in Govt 364. The specific requirements of Govt 364 include one or two group projects, a midterm, a final exam, and a 4-5 page policy memorandum. These elements will comprise 20%, 25%, 25%, and 30% of the course grade, respectively. The policy memorandum will consist of your analysis of the substantive and political merits of a pending issue of public policy, along with a specific policy recommendation. The group projects will focus on strategies for reducing the federal budget deficit and approaches to reforming Social Security; each group member will receive a common grade. Finally, class participation may be factored into the final grade in borderline cases. Make-up exams and late papers will be considered only in documented emergencies. 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.

Students are also expected to follow current policy issues and events. A familiarity with policy related developments in Congress and the Executive Branch will facilitate your ability to understand the material. I recommend that you read The New York Times or The Washington Post with frequency. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail news updates from the New York Times or The Washington Post for free on their websites. Additionally, you may want to examine news-magazines and websites for more in-depth coverage of particular issues.

Attendance and Laptop/e-device policy: Your attendance will be required for the group projects, and I strongly encourage you to attend and participate actively in class at all times. Your level of learning and performance in the course will greatly benefit from active attendance. That said, when you are in attendance, I would like your full attention. “Multi-tasking” is rude and counterproductive. Laptops, phones, and tablets should be OFF unless actively taking notes.

Last Day to Add (Full-Semester Course) Jan 29, 2018
Last Day to Drop (Full-Semester Course) Feb 23, 2018

Required Readings:

Conlan, Posner, and Beam, Pathways of Power, (Georgetown Univ. Press, 2014).
David Leonhardt, Here’s the Deal (a Kindle single from Amazon, $1.99)
Century Fund, Social Security: The Basics¹
Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, Social Security Reform simulation at http://crfb.org/socialsecurityreformer/

¹ Available via course Blackboard page.

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, “Stabilize the Debt” simulation (at http://crfb.org/stabilizethedebt)

**Class Schedule:**

(Jan 22) Introduction to Public Policy: What is it and why is it important?

(Jan 24-31) Who Needs Public Policy Anyway?

   (Kraft, chap. 1)

   Hacker and Pierson, *American Amnesia*, chap. 3.¹

(Feb 5-21) Institutions, Actors, and Stages of the Policy Process

   (Kraft, chaps. 2-3, 5)

   (Conlan and Posner, chaps. 1-6)

(Feb 26-Mar 19) Social Security: The Substance and Politics of Policy Reform

   (Century Fund, *Social Security Basics*)

   (Kraft, Chap 9)

   (CRFB simulation)

(Mar 7) MIDTERM EXAM

(Mar 19) SOCIAL SECURITY GROUP PRESENTATIONS

(Mar 21-Apr 2) Tax and Budget Policy

   (Kraft, chap 6, 7; Leonhardt, *Here’s the Deal*, entire

   Conlan and Posner, *Pathways*, chaps 7-8

   CBO *Budget Options*, CRFB Stabilize the Debt)

(Apr 4) BUDGET GROUP PRESENTATIONS

(Apr 9-18) Environmental Regulation

   (Kraft, chap 11)

(Apr 23-30) Higher Education Policy

   (Kraft, Chap. 10)


   (Boston Consulting Group, “Five Trends in Higher Education”)¹

(Apr 30) FINAL POLICY MEMOS DUE

(May 2) Course Wrap Up, Course evaluations
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

**University Honor Code**
To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this honor code: *Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.*

**SPGIA HONOR CODE POLICY**
The Honor Code policy endorsed by the members of the School of Policy, Government, 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.