Course Description

To be effective policy analysts, you must understand the political and institutional environment in which policy is made. This course provides an introduction to the policymaking process in the United States. We will focus principally on policymaking at the national level, with a particular emphasis on the institutions, including Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy, that comprise the national government. We will also cover different models of, or ways to think about, the policy process, as well as actors outside the formal institutional structure who influence it, including interest groups and voters.

Course Expectations

My goals for students in this class are as follows:

1. To further students’ understanding of the American public policy process, the key actors therein, and how these actors’ interactions shape policy outcomes.
2. To develop students’ ability to critique and evaluate the arguments of others.
3. To build students’ writing skills, with an emphasis on clear and logical argumentation and expression.
4. To grow students’ oral communication skills, through both class discussion and oral presentations.
5. To cultivate students’ ability to think critically about ongoing policy debates using the tools of social science.

I expect you to come to class prepared, having completed the reading and any relevant writing assignments and ready to engage actively with the material and your classmates. Class will be largely conducted through discussion of the readings, and everyone’s experience will more pleasant and productive if I am not the only one doing the talking.

Guidelines and Policies

Academic Integrity
Faculty in the Schar School have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty and will strictly enforce Mason’s honor code.
Accommodations for Learning
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

Attendance
I expect you to be present and on time for class, and your attendance will be factored in your participation grade for the term, which counts for 20% of your overall grade. There will be a sign-in sheet for every class; please record your name on it.

Respect in the Classroom
At various points in the semester, we will encounter topics that are controversial and/or about which you have passionate opinions. I encourage everyone to voice their opinions and to disagree with one another; we all learn more when we are exposed to a variety of perspectives on a given issue. At the same time, it is extremely important that we are respectful of one another during our conversations; our classroom needs to be a space where each individual feels comfortable expressing his or her point of view. Conducting ourselves in a respectful manner includes, but is not limited to: avoiding name-calling and pejorative language; making careful distinctions between facts and opinions; and displaying appropriate body language toward one another.

Beyond classroom discussion, I also expect each of you to be respectful of our time together. This includes, but is not limited to: arriving late to class, packing up early, participating in side conversations, using cell phones, and using laptops for anything other than note taking or referring to the readings. Partaking in any of these activities will negatively affect your participation grade.

Electronics
I recognize that you may find it useful to take notes on your laptop, and for some of you, your computer or another electronic device may be the avenue through which you access the readings. I will allow laptops in class, but please be respectful of our time together and use them for course purposes only. In addition, cell phones are not to be used during class. They must be turned off or kept on silent—please note that ‘vibrate’ is NOT the same as silent.

Office Hours
I will hold an office hour each week before our class, from 6 to 7 PM, and I encourage you to come see me if you have questions about the readings, writing assignments, etc. If you are unavailable at that time, please let me know; I am also happy to schedule a phone call or Skype appointment.

E-mail
I am also more than happy to answer questions over e-mail, and am available over e-mail from 9-5 Monday-Friday. I will almost always respond to e-mails within 24 hours. When writing, please include PUAD 540 in the subject line.

Assignment Procedures
All submissions should be posted to the Blackboard Assignments site as a .doc or .pdf with your last name, the assignment, and the appropriate extension as the filename, for example Reynolds.memo1.pdf. Due dates and late policies are described with the assignments at the end of the syllabus.
Questions about Grades

I recognize that when I return your graded assignments, you may have questions about my comments and/or why you were given the grade you received. If you want to speak to me about a grade, please wait 24 hours after I’ve returned your assignment before contacting me. Also, if you feel that your assignment has been graded unfairly, please send me an email containing a one-paragraph summary of your grievance before coming to see me to discuss the issue.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for the course:


Draper, Robert, *When the Tea Party Came to Town* (New York: Basic Books, 2012)

All other required readings for the course are posted on Blackboard. If you feel that your background knowledge of the American political system could use a refresher (i.e., if it has been a while since you took college or high school American government), I would strongly recommend consulting either of the following introductory American politics textbooks (older editions are fine).


Grading

Your grade in this course will be as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short reaction papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy change paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Group Memo</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Group Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Short reaction papers (10% each):** During the first half of the semester, each of you will write two short papers (between 750 and 1000 words; 12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). Directions are provided at the end of the syllabus.

**Policy change paper (15%):** You will also write a 1200-word (12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins) analyzing models of policy change. Directions are provided at the end of the syllabus.

**Final Group Memo (35%):** Together with a group of your peers, you will produce a final memo, as described at the end of the syllabus. I will assign these groups based on the policy area interests you identify on your introduction sheet. On four weeks (marked with an asterisk below), I will give you approximately 20-30 minutes of class time to confer with your group, but I expect you will need to meet outside of class as well.
**Presentation (10%)**: Effective oral communication skills are a necessary complement to solid writing abilities. To help you build these skills, your group will give a 20-minute presentation, described at the end of the syllabus, on April 30.

**Participation (20%)**: This course is a collective endeavor that requires your active engagement. Your participation grade is not determined by a pre-existing formula, but rather by my ability to determine that you are reading, thinking about, and responding to the material throughout the course. I reserve the right to call on students at will if that is necessary, so I encourage you to bring notes or questions based on what you have read to class.

**January 22: Introduction**

Ryan Lizza, “As the World Burns,” *New Yorker* 11 October 2010

**January 29: Models of the Policy Process**


**February 5: Agenda Setting***


**February 12: The Presidency**


Conlan, Posner, and Beam, Chapter 3.


Molly E. Reynolds, “The President and Congress,” in *The Obama Legacy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, forthcoming)
February 19: Congress, Part 1


February 23: Capitol Hill Day

9 AM to 1 PM, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC

Students are expected to attend this session, featuring congressional staff and representatives from interest groups.

February 26: Congress, Part 2*

Robert Draper, *When the Tea Party Came to Town*, entire

March 5: Lobbying and Interest Groups

Conlan, Posner, and Beam, Chapter 2.


March 12: No Class (Spring Break)

March 19: Courts


March 26: Bureaucracy*


April 2: Federalism


April 9: Policy Change Over Time

NOTE: There is NO CLASS this week. Your third short paper, described at the end of the syllabus, will be due this week. I also HIGHLY recommend that you use this block of time to meet with your final project group.

April 16: Public Opinion and Representation

Conlan, Posner, and Beam, Chapter 5.


April 23: The Politics of Information and Expertise*

Conlan and Posner, Chapter 4.

The Uncertain Hour Podcast, “The Peanut Butter Verdict”:

April 30: Final Presentations

May 4: Final paper due at 9 AM via Blackboard.
Short Paper Instructions

Papers #1 and #2:

For two out of the six weeks between January 29 and March 5, you will write a short reaction paper to that week’s readings of between 750 and 1000 words (12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). These are short pieces that give your reactions: lessons, comments on the quality of argumentation or evidence in the reading, questions it caused you to formulate. A good strategy is to pair them with an article from the media or about current events: how does [your article] show [the concept or argument] at work? If you choose to use an article, please include a link to the story in your works cited list.

For the two weeks that you choose to write reaction papers, you MUST turn them in before class begins in the applicable week. In other words, there are no late assignments; if you do not complete a paper before class begins, simply take advantage of a different week to write one.

Paper #3: Policy Change

For this paper, you will listen to an episode of The Uncertain Hour entitled “Everything But the Kitchen Sink”: https://www.marketplace.org/2016/06/08/wealth-poverty/uncertain-hour/s1-04-everything-kitchen-sink. You will also read the following articles:


What happened in with welfare spending in Michigan? Which one of Hacker’s models of policy change best describes what happened? Use examples from the episode and article to support your case. This paper be 1200 words (12 point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins) and is due at 7 PM on Monday, April 9. There is no class that evening. If the paper is late, you will be marked down 5% immediately and 5% for each additional 24 hours it is late.
Final Group Assignment

Virginia’s 10th congressional district (Loudon County) is one of the country’s most competitive. Your group has been contacted by one of the candidates for 2018—either incumbent Republican Barbara Comstock or one of the Democrats running in the June 12 primary—to help develop a piece of his or her policy platform.

The candidate must approve of your plan, and has asked for a report summarizing your strategy. You may choose to format the report as you wish, but some questions you may want to address include:

- Why this particular policy?
- Are you proposing a legislative strategy? If so, why? If you are proposing a non-legislative strategy, why, and why is a member of Congress still well-position to advance it?
- What factors will influence whether your preferred policy receives attention on the agenda if the candidate is elected?
- Who else will support your policy? Who will oppose it?
- What groups should the candidate include in his or her efforts to advance this proposal if elected?
- Why is this particular policy proposal attractive to voters in Virginia’s 10th district?

This list is not exhaustive; there may be other considerations that you want to discuss. Your report should include separate sections of your choosing. Each member of your group should be responsible for at least one, as indicated by listing that person as the “contact person” for the section. Each of you will be graded on your individual section(s), as well as on the quality of the document as a whole. The report should be no longer than 20 pages, double-spaced, plus any attachments (tables, graphs, etc.).

You will also provide an in-person briefing on your report. I will play the role of the campaign manager, and your classmates will act as other staffers who are skeptical of your choice to focus on this particular issue. Because we are all pressed for time, you will have ten minutes to make your case, followed by ten minutes of pointed questions from the “staff” members. You may use electronic resources (PowerPoint, etc.) but because you are on a tight timeline, it will be important to have everything in working order.