U.S. Institutions and The Policy Process
PUBP 730
George Mason University
Schar School of Policy and Government
Spring 2018

GENERAL INFORMATION

Listing: PUBP 730
Time/Location: Thursdays, 07:20 – 10:00 pm, Founders Hall 477
Instructor: Dr. Jason Dechant
Phone: 703-861-4493
Email: jasondechant@gmail.com
Office Hours: By appointment (Wednesdays, noon-1 pm preferred)

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The objective of this course is to explore the major institutions that shape American public policy at the national level. These institutions include the three branches of the Federal government as envisaged by the framers in the U.S. Constitution. They also include institutions the framers did not foresee, such as political parties and executive agencies. The course will explore the emergence and interactions of these institutions over time and discuss them in current context. It will do so through traditional instruction thus strengthening understanding of the topics and also through exercises in professional development.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Successful completion of this course provides the students with the following:

1. Greater familiarity with the national policy-making process in the United States, including interaction of policy and politics,
2. Increased exposure to different and competing perspectives on governance and the policy process,
3. Enhanced ability to analyze information and engage effectively in strategic discussions about U.S. national policy-making,
4. Stronger written and oral communication skills, and
5. More profound understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of public policy.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS

Class members are responsible for obtaining and reading all of the assigned course materials. Study groups and sharing of reading notes are optional. Some of the assigned reading goes
beyond the assigned texts below and are listed in the Additional Readings section of this syllabus. Those readings are available online or are posted on Blackboard. We will read each of the following required books:


REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Both individual and group work are important skills to be developed and you will be evaluated on each throughout the course. They will allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of theories, strengthen your research skills, and refine your presentation and writing proficiency. Exercises and exams are treated as pedagogical exercises to demonstrate your learning throughout the course. Grades will be assigned and apportioned as follows:

- Seminar Discussant 20%
- Oral Responses (x2, 10% each) 20%
- Class Participation 10%
- Policy Memos (x2, 10% each) 20%
- Policy Paper 30%

Late assignments will be penalized one grade level (for instance, from A+ to A) for each calendar day or part thereof. The discussant and oral response assignments will not be accepted late; students missing one of these assignments will receive an F for it. If you anticipate difficulty completing this assignment, please try to trade your date with another student or contact the instructor.

Seminar Discussant
At the first class meeting, students will be assigned a class period from February 1 through the end of the semester to lead a discussion for ~30-45 minutes of the period. The discussion will be based upon a question provided at least a week in advance. Discussants are encouraged to go beyond the basic question and address any related topics from the reading or current events. The
discussion should begin with an opening statement ~10-15 minutes long. Speaker’s notes should be typed and handed in the evening of the discussion. The notes will be evaluated on substance, not style or format.

**Oral Responses**

Also at the first class meeting, students will sign up for two class periods where they will be responsible for an oral response to the discussant’s opening remarks. Part of the oral responses may be developed in advance (based upon the question provided) but should be a reaction to the discussant’s remarks. Oral respondents will be the first to be called upon after the discussant’s opening and the responses should be ~4-6 minutes long. There are no written requirements for this assignment and responses will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

**Class Participation**

Class participation is expected throughout the semester. Even when students are not assigned discussant or respondent responsibilities, they are expected to actively participate during the seminar. A student who misses three or more classes will receive a zero for the class participation portion of the grade. It is also expected that you notify the instructor if you anticipate missing class, or if an emergency arises.

**Policy Memos**

Also at the first class meeting, students will sign-up for two dates to submit short policy memos (one on each date). The memos are due at the beginning of class and should address the topic of the class period (and assigned readings) as it pertains to a current event. The memos should specify the audience or recipient, address a problem/challenge, and offer some solutions. They are intended to provide an introduction to a policy issue and are not to be in-depth policy analyses. They will be evaluated based upon the critical thinking, effective analysis, and clarity of presentation they reflect. The maximum length of the memos is 1250 words (roughly 3 double-spaced pages).

**Policy Paper**

In the policy paper, students will, subject to instructor approval, choose a policy in which they are interested. They will identify which of the institutions examined in the course (Congress, the White House, the executive branch bureaucracies, etc.) would be involved in enacting and implementing the policy. For each of the institutions involved, student should identify key actors (elements or components of the institutions), their interests, and critical choke and pressure points. Students should then discuss critical interactions between these actors and institutions and lay out an effective strategy for ensuring their policy is adopted and implemented. The purpose of this assignment is not to demonstrate the strengths of the policy but to identify how the players in the process could best ensure the policy is adopted and implemented. There is no page
length minimum, but papers should not exceed 15 pages. Bibliographies and required 1-page executive summary do not count against the page limit. Groups may form of no more than 3 members to work jointly with the expectation that each additional member increases the expected page length by roughly 5 pages (ex. a team of two should generate a paper approaching 20 pages long). If groups are formed, all members will receive the same grade on the paper. Paper topics are due February 15. Final papers are due May 3rd (the last class).

**SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 25</td>
<td>Origins and Perspectives of American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>Taylor et al., chs. 1 and 10</td>
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<td>Additional Readings (BB)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Feb 1</td>
<td>The Presidency</td>
<td>Wilson, ch. 14</td>
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<td>Taylor et al., ch. 8</td>
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<td>Haskell et al., ch. 11</td>
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<td>Additional Readings (BB)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Feb 8</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Taylor et al., ch. 7 and pp 320-324</td>
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<td>Haskell et al., chs. 2-3, 5-6</td>
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<td>Wilson, ch. 13</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Feb 15</td>
<td>Congressional Delegation</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
<td>The Courts</td>
<td>Taylor et al., ch. 9</td>
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<td>Haskell et al., ch. 12</td>
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<td>Wilson, ch. 15</td>
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<td>Additional Readings</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mar 1</td>
<td>The Budget Process</td>
<td>Haskell et al., chs. 7-8</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Mar 8</td>
<td>The Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic Organization, Processes, and Behavior</td>
<td>Wilson, chs. 1-9</td>
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<td>Allison &amp; Zelikow, Intro, chs. 1, 3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mar 22</td>
<td>The Bureaucracy: Politics within Government</td>
<td>Wilson, chs. 10-12, 16-20</td>
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<td>Allison &amp; Zelikow, ch. 5</td>
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<td>Additional Readings (BB)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mar 29</td>
<td>Interest Groups and Lobbyists</td>
<td>Taylor et al., ch. 6</td>
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<td>Haskell et al., ch. 13 and pp. 434-444</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Apr 5</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
<td>Taylor et al., ch. 4</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Apr 12</td>
<td>National Security Decision Making</td>
<td>Haskell et al., pp. 339-353</td>
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<td>Additional Readings (BB)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Apr 19</td>
<td>Public Opinion, Voting, and Elections</td>
<td>Taylor et al., ch. 5</td>
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<td>Haskell et al., ch. 4</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Apr 26</td>
<td>Agenda Setting and the Policy Process</td>
<td>Kingdon, chs. 1-8</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>May 3</td>
<td>The Fourth Estate</td>
<td>Additional Readings (BB)</td>
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**MARCH 15—SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

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ADDITIONAL READINGS

Topic 1: Origins and Perspectives of American Exceptionalism

- Declaration of Independence. Available online at: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript

Topic 2: The Presidency


Topic 3: Congress

- No additional readings

Topic 4: Congressional Delegation


Topic 5: The Courts


Topic 6: The Budget Process

Topic 7: The Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic Organization, Processes, and Behavior

- No additional readings

Topic 8: The Bureaucracy: Politics Within Government


Topic 9: Interest Groups and Lobbyists


Topic 10: Federalism

- U.S. Constitution, Article 1 sections 8, 9, and 10. Available online at: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript
- Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, Federalist Papers 9 and 44. Available online at: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdoox/fedpapers.html

Topic 11: National Security Decision Making

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- Stephen M. Griffin, “The Tragic Pattern of the War Power: Presidential Decisions for War since 1945” paper prepared for the 2012 American Political Science Association annual meeting. [Blackboard]

Topic 12: Public Opinion, Voting, and Elections
- No additional readings

Topic 13: Agenda Setting and the Policy Process
- No additional readings

Topic 14: The Fourth Estate

**GENERAL GUIDELINES AND POLICIES**

*Papers*

Writing research and policy papers is a fundamental part of graduate study. The quality of a paper is determined by a number of factors, including presentation of facts, development of argumentation, clarity of analysis, acknowledgment of sources, and accuracy of format and style. A good guideline for elements and format of a research paper and bibliography, including online sources, is *A Pocket Style Manual*, Seventh Edition (2015), by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. Note that your written assignments in this class will be used to evaluate whether you might need to take a writing class as part of your course of study.

*Grading*

All written and oral assignments will be judged using the GMU system for grading graduate courses as laid out in the university catalog. Grades earned for each assignment will be added numerically, and the weighted average will be used to determine the final grade, which allows for the grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, as well as C, F, and IN. Assignments that are submitted late will lead to a grade reduction, up to being marked as missed entirely. Unacceptably frequent periods of absence (missing more than three classes) will result in grade reduction as well. No extra credit will be given.
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Electronic Communication and Blackboard
The GMU email accounts are the primary and authoritative means of electronic communication; announcements regarding classes will be sent to those accounts only. Students are free to use other accounts, but are solely responsible for any failed communication, missed deadline, etc. Blackboard will also be used to post announcements, presentations, and other items, so be sure to check regularly.

Use of Cell Phones, Computers, and Other Electronic Devices in Class
Students are expected to focus entirely on seminar discussion during class. They are expected to refrain from carrying on other professional or personal activities while the class is meeting. This means on both phones and computers. Devices should be turned to vibrate and only used in case of emergency (personal or professional). Computers are permitted only for use pertaining to the course and may be prohibited at the discretion of the instructor.

Special Needs
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at http://ods.gmu.edu/. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS before classes start.

SPGIA Policy on Plagiarism
The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is short sighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPGIA policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be
compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPGIA policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

**Honor Code**

George Mason University shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The Honor Code is an integral part of university life. In the spirit of the code, a student's word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations.

This course is subject to all policies of the George Mason University Honor Code as laid out in the university catalog. As stated above, the provisions regarding plagiarism are particularly relevant. The best way of avoiding plagiarism charges is rigorous and meticulous documentation and, to the extent possible, retention, of all sources that are used for preparing papers and presentations. While it is not necessary to cite a source for every single statement, it is expected that students reference major sources in a way that allows fellow students and other readers to identify them. This means e.g. when citing an author in the text, the cited work needs to be referenced in full in the bibliography, and the bibliographic citations need to be complete and verifiable.