Theories of the Policy Process  
POLS 660  
Spring, 2012  
M 2-5 PM  
C 347 Clark Bldg.

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Office Hours: 1-2 MW, or by appointment

Course Description

This course deals with theories of public policy within U.S. politics. We begin by examining the historical and structural contexts of policymaking. Next, we identify and discuss concepts and frameworks used in examining differing phases of the policy cycle from problem identification to the implementation and evaluation of public programs. I am primarily concerned with policy literature that accounts for the how and why of policy decisions rather than literature that offers prescriptions for the resolution of policy problems.

This seminar will follow a discussion format. It is expected that everyone will come to class prepared to discuss the readings from a critical perspective. Thus, you should remember not only the basic theme of the piece but the quality of evidence and how well it is presented. For each session, students will be expected to carry out a critical discussion of the required readings for the initial 45-60 minutes, focusing on key themes, problems, etc. My role will be that of the dispassionate observer; i.e., asking questions and breaking in if things get too off course or misinterpreted.

We then turn to the suggested readings. Here individual students take the lead in discussing assigned articles/chapters. This should last approximately 15 minutes and consist of basic themes, examples and an evaluation of the piece. Discussion leaders should also provide a one page synopsis and critical evaluation of the article to be distributed to others. Under no circumstances shall anyone be caught reading the assignment out loud - we want to stay awake and interested. Feel free to raise questions and to make comments.

Course Requirements

Course requirements include two exams plus a term paper. Each will constitute a third of your grade. The midterm will be taken in class while the final will be a take-home exam. The take-home final will be handed out in class on April 30 and should be returned to me at or before 3 PM on May 7 (answers should be typed, double spaced and roughly 4-7 pages in length). The paper may deal with any facet of public policy such as agenda setting, formulation, implementation or change. Alternatively, a paper can be based on the application of any framework (e.g., multiple streams, ACF, implementation, etc.) to the analysis of a substantive area of policy such as transportation, agriculture, energy, etc.). It should be 15-25 pages in length, double spaced, amply documented with source materials and well organized (there must be an introduction, an analytical section and conclusions). It is expected that the paper will deal with conceptual aspects of policy whether you are comparing alternative approaches to policy design or testing an agenda building approach through the analysis of data or cases. Credit will be deducted for poor organization, grammatical sloppiness or lateness.
The paper is due on April 16. On the previous week (April 9), I will be meeting with each student to review a detailed outline or rough draft of your paper that you will have given to me at least two days beforehand. The idea is to offer preliminary feedback before the paper is turned in. You will receive a tentative grade plus comments on April 23rd. If you choose to rewrite the paper based on the comments received and provide a revision plus the original draft by Monday, May 7, I will consider adjusting the grade. Note: this applies only to paper grades below an A-.

Texts


Topics

1/16 Introduction: Historical and Political Contexts of Public Policy

Required Readings

Birkland, Ch. 1-3; Sabatier, Chapter 1

Suggested Readings


1/23 Defining Policy Problems and Issues

Required Readings

Birkland, pp. 187-95; Kingdon, Ch. 5

Suggested Readings


1/30  Policy Communities/Subgovernments/Networks

Required Readings

Birkland, Ch. 5; Sabatier, Ch.5


Suggested Readings


2/6 Agenda-Building and Containment

Required Readings

Birkland, Ch. 6

Suggested Readings


2/13 Political Institutions and Policy Formulation

Required Readings

Birkland, Ch. 4; Kingdon (all); Sabatier, Chapter 3

Suggested Readings


Sarah Pralle, “Agenda-setting and Climate Change,” *Environmental Politics* V18 (September, 2009).


2/20 Policies and Policy Types

**Required Readings**

Birkland, Chapter 7

**Suggested Readings**


2/27 Institutionalism and Policy

**Required Readings**

Sabatier, Chapter 2

**Suggested Readings**


3/5 Midterm Exam

3/12 Spring break – no class

3/19 Policy Change

Required Readings

Sabatier, Chapter 6&7; Baumgartner and Jones (all)

Suggested Readings:


3/26  Policy Design and Implementation

Required Readings

Birkland, Chapter 8 & 9; Sabatier, Chapter 5

Suggested Readings:


4/2  The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs

Required Readings

Kingdon, pp. 179-83


Suggested Readings


4/9 Term Paper Work & Consultation

4/16* Comparing Policy Decisions: Diffusion of Innovation

Required Readings

Sabatier, Chapter 8

Suggested Readings


*Term paper is due

**4/23 Using and Evaluating Policy Research**

**Required Readings**

Birkland, Ch. 7

**Suggested Readings**


Beryl Radin, Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Comes of Age. Georgetown University Press, 2000, Ch. 3.


**4/30 Presentation of student papers**

**Final exams will be distributed**