Political Science 5100/3810
U.S. Public Policy
Fall 2018

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Course Introduction

Public policy is purposeful governmental intervention in the lives of citizens. Prominent examples include taxing, operating public schools, building highways, regulating pollution, providing old age assistance, and conducting war. Political Science 5100/3810 examines U.S. public policy and the implications of various policies for our society. The paramount course objective will be to explain the political and economic logic of policy; why government enacts some policies yet not others, what the enacted policies seek to accomplish, why they often fail. The course emphasizes policy analysis rather than policy advocacy or the descriptive overview of programs. Accordingly, we will evaluate and discuss various policy options, but the purpose of the course is not to identify what kind of policies are best. That is a value question and a matter of personal preference.

The course is organized into two sections. In the first six weeks or so of the course we will develop a theoretical framework for policy analysis. This framework will draw together the complementary perspectives of economic theory and political theory. Economic theory addresses the attainment of abstract economic objectives--efficiency, equality, and providing public goods. It focuses on how policy can maximize the welfare of society. Political theory explains policy outcomes in terms of political power distributions and/or political self interest--reelection for politicians and policy benefits for voters and interest groups. The second section of the course applies this theoretical framework to the analysis of selected policy issues. These issues include the federal budget, fiscal policy, taxation, welfare, health care, drugs, farm policy, public education, environmental regulation, and climate change policy.

The course will emphasize domestic rather than foreign policy, and national rather than state and local issues. Political Science 1100 is the only course prerequisite, but students should anticipate that the integration political and economic theory can be challenging, and that the course will require mastery of basic economic concepts such as “opportunity costs.”

Course Learning Objectives

1. To provide students with a basic conceptual understanding key U.S. public policy issues.
2. To apply theory to explain the political and economic logic of U.S. public policy.
3. To stimulate critical and independent thinking about U.S. public policy.
4. To contribute the General Education of USU students, by giving them critical thinking skills, writing skills, and a better appreciation of human behavior and human organizations.

Canvas

The course syllabus, course reading assignments (other than the text) exam study questions, and other course information will be available on Canvas.
Class Participation

I prefer P.S. 5100/3810 to be a mix of lecture and class discussion, and participation will account for 25% of each student’s course grade. In addition to discussions prompted day-in-day-out by question or comments, we will devote at least 5 class periods during the semester to the discussion of a reading assignment or another topic that I will select, or that the class will select. One discussion will focus on the distribution of wealth and income in the U.S., with another on U.S. education policy.

I will assign a discussion grade, on a 50 point scale, to each student based largely upon participation in these 5 discussions, but partly also upon day-to-day class participation and attendance. When in doubt about what participation grade is appropriate for a student, I will use the student’s average exam grade as a benchmark for establishing a participation grade. Students who attend class at least 95% of the time, appear to be alert, and who make a real effort to participate in these discussions, will always receive participation grades at or above this benchmark.

Readings

One text, Public Policy, 5th ed. by Charles Cochran and Eloise Malone, is required for purchase. It is available in the USU Bookstore. There are also required supplementary readings, taken from sources such as Atlantic. In the course outline, reading assignments from the text appear as chapter numbers, or as specific pages within a chapter. The supplementary readings are listed by title. With the exception of “Finland's Unorthodox Education System,” the supplementary readings can be accessed through Canvas. I will explain how to access “Finland's Unorthodox Education System” when it is time for you to complete the assignment. It is a moving target on line. I reserve the right to add one short, additional reading assignment to those listed in the syllabus if I happen to run across something I consider to be particularly worthwhile during the course of the semester.

Exams

The course has 3 exams, each accounting for 50 points (25% of each course grade). You will need to buy a large (8"x11") “blue” (standard examination) book for each essay exam. The exams consist of both short answer and longer essay questions, and will emphasize conceptual analysis and logic, not the memorization of facts. They will cover material from the preceding 12-13 days of class, as indicated in the course outline.

Exam Dates

Students will not be permitted to take early exams under any circumstances, and make up exams will be given only in extraordinary circumstances. Students who anticipate a conflict between an exam and required participation in a university activity or a serious personal emergency should consult the “Missed Exams Policy” section of the syllabus. Tentative midterm and certain final dates are:

- Midterm Exam #1: Monday, October 1
- Midterm Exam #2: Monday, November 5
- Final Exam: Wednesday, December 12, 12:30-1:20 pm
Exam #1 will cover text chapters 1, 2 (36-37 only), 3, “Old v Young,” and “America is Not a Democracy.”

Exam #2 will cover text chapters 2 (up to 41), 4, 5 (up to 131), 6, “Stop Pretending You Are Not Rich,” “The 9.9% is the New American Aristocracy,” “The Submerged State,” and “Going Dutch.”


Fine tuning of the coverage of the readings on the exams is possible.

Missed Exams Policy

Students who miss an exam as the result of required participation in a university activity, a death in the immediate family, hospitalization, or a comparable personal emergency, will be given a make up exam on final exam day. Students who miss an exam for other reasons—such as the weddings of friends, car problems, or alarm clock failures—will fail the exam missed. If a student misses an exam and does not contact me within 24 hours, I will presume there is no justification for a make up exam, and unless there are extraordinary circumstances, this will result in the student failing the missed exam.

Exam Preparation

I will distribute exam study questions on the course web site 7-10 days prior to each exam. Each set of questions will cover both lectures and readings, and each exam will be based exclusively on that group of study questions. Although exam questions will not be taken verbatim from these study questions, they will cover the same material. I strongly recommend that students reserve sufficient time prior to each exam to outline a complete answer for each study question. I may also conduct a review session prior to each exam. At these review sessions, I will summarize the answers to lecture based review questions and respond to other questions about lecture material. I strongly recommend that you complete your study question outlines prior to the review.

Course Grading Policies

In Political Science 5100/3810 no extra credit is awarded, nor do certain students receive special consideration for any reason. In addition, there are no grade quotas, and overall course grade distributions vary from quarter to quarter. Many students find the exam grading standards in this
course to be quite rigorous. Please do not conclude that college instructors establish their grading standards to make students feel inferior, or to intimidate them. We simply want you to prepare you for careers in which you will be required to think logically and to write intelligibly. The “grading standards” that most of you will encounter in your postgraduate careers will be far more rigorous than the grading standards in this course.

Exam Grading Criteria

1. Responsiveness to the assignment: addressing the questions that have been asked.
2. Command of information: demonstrated knowledge of the relevant concepts and facts.
5. Organization: clarity and coherence of the overall essay.
6. Creativity: presenting original thoughts about the question.

I strongly encourage students to meet with me to question the evaluation of an exam, or to seek further explanation of the reasons for a grade, or to get advice about how to improve in the future. I ask, however, you do so as soon as possible after an exam is returned to you, as I can do much more to help you if you come to me sooner rather than later.

Tape Recording and Laptop Computers

The tape recording of lectures is not permitted. Students can use laptop computers in P.S. 3810/5100 only for note taking and only with the instructor’s approval.

Classroom Civility

Regrettably, a small minority of USU students demonstrate insensitivity to other students and to instructors by disrupting classes unnecessarily. Students who behave in this manner will receive one firm warning, and then dismissed from class permanently if they cause any further problem.

Disabled Students

Students with disabilities likely require accommodation by the instructor must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center during the first week of classes. Requests for special consideration must be approved by the instructor.
Course Outline

“Readings” entries in the course outline indicate how readings tie in with lecture material, but students should not feel any obligation to complete the readings in precise accord with the outline. The material in text chapters 1-3 does correspond roughly with what I will cover in lecture in weeks 2-5, but the organization is very different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture Topics</th>
<th>Readings (subject to revision)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I:</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 27-31</td>
<td>Approaches to the Study of Public Policy: Normative and Economic</td>
<td>Chapters 1 and 2 (36-37)</td>
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<td>September 5-7</td>
<td>The “Post-Positive or</td>
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<td>September 10-14</td>
<td>Policy Making Theories, Elite Theory,</td>
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<td>Interest Group Theory, Government Self Interest Theory</td>
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<td>September 17-21</td>
<td>Predictions of Government</td>
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<td>Self Interest Theory: About Voters</td>
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<td>Interest Groups, Congress, Presidents, and Agencies</td>
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<td>September 24-28</td>
<td>U.S. Government in Decline?</td>
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<td>Part II:</td>
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<td>October 1-5</td>
<td>Government vs. Markets</td>
<td>Chapter 2 (up to 41, but not 36-37)</td>
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<td>Market Efficiency and “Failure”: Public Goods, Equality Concerns</td>
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<td>October 8-12</td>
<td>The Federal Budget</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
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<td>Economic Policy</td>
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<td>International Trade</td>
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October 15-17  The 2008-12 Recession (?)

Oct. 22-26  Taxes  Chapter 5 (up to p. 131)

Oct. 29-  Income Equality  Chapter 6
Nov. 2
“Stop Pretending You Are Not Rich”
“The 9.9% is the New American Aristocracy”
“The Submerged State”

Nov. 5-9  Welfare
Social Security  Chapter 5 (131-138)

“The Outsize Hold of the Word ‘Welfare’ on the Public Imagination,” “The Case for Free Money,” “Going Dutch”

November 12-16  Health Care  Chapter 9
Drug Policy
“How American Health Care Killed My Father”

November 19-  Education  Chapter 7, “Finland's Unorthodox Education System”
November 26-30

December 5-9  Environmental Regulation  Chapter 11 (335-360 only)
Climate Change, and/or
and/or Immigration