

Political Science 3810  
U.S. Public Policy  
Spring 2021

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Professor” on the next syllabus page

### 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 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 framework to policy issues. These issues include the federal budget, fiscal policy, taxation, welfare, health care, public education, immigration, and climate change policy. We may be able to reserve a day or two for other policy topics suggested by class members.

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.

## Spring Semester 2021 Special Circumstances

I will try to make your virtual Political Science 1100 learning experience as effective and as painless as possible, but I will not be able to replicate fully the vitality or immediacy of a face to face class. By in large, conducting the class over Zoom went well last semester, but there were glitches, and undoubtedly there will be issues with technology again this semester. Please try to keep in mind that I am a Political Scientist, not an IT consultant, and I lack the expertise to help you with wifi failures or other technology problems on your computer.

I have altered some of the course content and many of the course requirements, policies, and grading procedures to accommodate the Zoom delivery process. Normally, these attributes of a course are set in stone once the semester is underway, but not this semester. Instead, I reserve the right to adjust the course content, requirements, policies, or grading procedures as the course progresses. Any changes that I do make will not add to your course workload or the overall difficulty of the course. I ask for your patience as we all adjust to this new environment.

### Contacting the Professor

Last semester I found that the best way to make myself available to students with questions or other concerns was to stay on Zoom for 10-15 minutes at the end of each class period. So I will do that again this semester. Otherwise, I strongly prefer to talk to students personally though Zoom--rather than using email. But I will not try to conduct traditional office hours through Zoom. This proved to be a waste of time last semester. Instead, I will meet students over Zoom through individual appointments. As a general rule, I will be available for Zoom appointments any time between 1:30 and 6:00 pm, TTF, and also between 4:30-6:00 pm MW. To set up an appointment, simply send me an email specifying me when you would like to meet. I will then confirm the meeting time, and send you Zoom link at that time. (You can also set up an appointment by calling me in my office, as normally, I work in my office.) Resort to email to ask questions or raise concerns if you absolutely must in an emergency, but never use email for questions that require complex answers. Questions about lecture material are always best asked during lectures.

### Class Participation

I prefer P.S. 3810 to be a mix of lecture and class discussion, and participation will account for 25% of each student's course grade. With 75 minute class periods this semester, I will use the first 50 minutes or so of each period for lecture/powerpoint presentation, give us a 5 minute break, and then return for 20 minutes or so of structured discussion. We will experiment with several different discussion formats. Some days I will ask a specific question about that day's lecture topic. Other days I will require you to come up with a question or comment for me about the lecture. Sometimes we will tackle an issue unrelated to then day's lecture. Our first discussion will focus on your hopes and fears for the Biden Presidency.

At the end of the semester, using a 50 point scale, I will assign a participation grade to each student. Because it is impossible for a student to gain anything from class participation if they are not present, attendance will be will be the first consideration in determining this grade. 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*, 5<sup>th</sup> 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. “Why Are Finland’s Schools Successful?” is a moving target on line, as new articles regularly appear, and I may substitute a new article for an older one. 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). The exams consist of both short answer and longer essay questions, and will emphasize conceptual analysis and logic, not the memorization of facts. Students are welcome to use their lecture notes during these exams, but you will not be able to access course powerpoints. The exams will cover material from the preceding 8 days of class, as indicated in the course outline.

## Exam Dates

The first two exams will be conducted during the regular class period.

Midterm Exam #1	Wednesday, February 24
Midterm Exam #2	Monday, March 29,
Final Exam:	Wednesday, May 5, 3:30-4:45 pm

With unanimous class agreement, we can move the final to an earlier day and time. Fine tuning of the correspondence between readings and exams is possible.

Exam #1 will cover text chapters 1, 2 (36-37 only), 3, “Blame the Economists for the Mess We Are In,” and “Old v Young,”

Exam #2 will cover text chapters 2 (up to 41), 4, 5 (up to 131), 6, “Stop Pretending You Are Not Rich,” and “The Submerged State” “The Outsize Hold of the Word ‘Welfare’ on the Public Imagination,” “The Case for Free Money,” ‘Economic Incentives Don’t Always Do What We Want Them To’

Exam #3 will cover text chapters 5 (131-138), 7, 9, 11 (335-360), and “How American Health Care Killed My Father,” and “Why Are Finland’s Schools Successful?”

## Missed Exams Policy

Students will not be permitted to take early exams under any circumstances, and make up exams will be given only if there is a conflict with required participation in a university activity or a very serious personal emergency.

## Exam Preparation

I will post exam study questions on Canvas 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, and I encourage you to work in study groups.

## Course Grading Policies

In Political Science 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. I 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.
3. Analysis: putting concepts and facts in logical cause-and-effect relationships.
4. Specificity: presenting concepts and facts exactly.
5. Organization: clarity and coherence of the overall essay.
6. Creativity: presenting original thoughts about the question.

I encourage students to meet with me over Zoom 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.

## 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.

Week	Lecture Topics	Readings (subject to revision)
Part I: Policy Theory		
January 20, 25-27	Approaches to the Study of Public Policy: Normative and Economic	Chapters 1 and 2 (36-37)
February 1-3	The “Post-Positive or “Constructivist” Approach to Policy	“Blame the Economists for the Mess We Are In”
February 8-10	Policy Making Theories, Elite Theory, Interest Group Theory, Government Self Interest Theory	
February 15, 22-24	Predictions of Government Self Interest Theory: About Voters Interest Groups, Congress, Presidents, and Agencies	Chapter 3 “Old v Young”
Part II: Policy Issues		
March 1-3	Government vs. Markets Public Goods, Equality Concerns The Federal Budget	Chapter 2 (up to 41, but not 36-37) One additional assignment likely
March 8-10	National Economic Policy International Trade	Chapter 4
March 15-17	Taxes	Chapter 5 (up to p. 131) “The Submerged State”
March 22-24	Income Equality Welfare	Chapter 6, “Stop Pretending You Are not Rich,” “The Outsize Hold of the Word ‘Welfare’ on the Public Imagination,” “The Case for Free Money,”

We may not get to the material listed for March 22-24 until after the March 29 exam.

March 29-31	Social Security	Chapter 5 (131-138)
April 5-7	Health Care	Chapter 9, "How American Health Care Killed My Father"
April 12-14	Education	Chapter 7, "Why Are Finland's Schools Successful?"
April 19-21	Climate Change, but perhaps just for one day, to make time for some other policy issue of interest to the class	Chapter 11 (342-48 only)
April 26	Immigration, or perhaps some other policy issue of interest to the class	