Political Science 272: Introduction to Public Policy

Jeremy Kedziora
jtkedziora@wisc.edu
(608)239-8796

M-W 4:00 p.m.-5:15 p.m. Grainger 2120
Office hours: 5:15-5:45 MW, Friday 11:30-12:30 virtually, or by appointment

Course Overview

Public policy is defined in many ways. I think of public policy as the government's statement of what it intends to do to address problems that cannot, or should not, be solved in a purely private way. In this problem solving sense public policy is made at the international, national, state, regional, county, city, and even more local levels. Some public policies address large problems (e.g., international policies to address climate change). Other public policies focus on highly localized solutions to problems (e.g. local mask wearing ordinances during COVID-19). Policy initiatives operating at very different levels of scale share a common impetus: Governmental or quasi-governmental entities have concluded that a problem exists, and that it requires the allocation of public resources to mitigate, or prevent, the resulting harms.

Learning about public policy—what it is, the legal frameworks within which it is made, the tools available to policymakers, the policymaking process, and how to evaluate public policies—will strengthen your writing, analytical, research, and advocacy skills, and will inform your participation in our society.

Finally, why is this class in the political science department and how does it differ from other political topics? Political debates define problems, goals, and agendas, all of which are the fundamental currency of actual policy making. At the same time, extant policy defines the political agenda and shapes the political environment. Therefore, policy emerges from and shapes politics. Beyond that, to achieve any goal through policy, evidence about the effects of different policy tools is indispensable. Evidence must come from sources that your audience will trust. Good evidence ought to be convincing to reasonable opponents of one's policy goals. Good arguments clarify your logic, even to those who may oppose your goals.

Required Texts

There are three texts for this course. I suggest ordering e-versions of the books to maximize cost savings and convenience. Both Egan and Birkland are available on Amazon or in the apple ebook store.

- Dan Egan, *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*

- Thomas A. Birkland, *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making.* Any Edition (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe).

- Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making.* Any Edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.).

Learning Objectives

- understand the provisions of the United States Constitution most related to the development and execution of public policy in the United States: Delegation of powers; separation of powers; federalism; and the allocation of powers within the states.

- understand the difference between federalism and the allocation of authorities in the State of Wisconsin between state, county, and municipal governments.

- learn to define and frame problems as an essential first step in the development of public policy.

- learn to develop, analyze, and advocate policy alternatives.

- learn how to write a policy memo.

- learn about executive, administrative, legislative, judicial, and other governmental authorities and their respective roles in making public policy.

- understand the role of politics in policy development.

- learn various approaches to policy analysis.

- learn about various tools and functions available to public policy-makers.

- learn various approaches to evaluate the success of public policy initiatives.

- learn about the role of norms and values in public policy formulation.

Course Requirements and Basis for Assessment

Credit hours will be earned by attending two classes of 1.25 hours each, reading and preparing written work outside of class for 6 to 9 hours per week, submitting three policy memos, and taking a final exam.

Engaging with the weekly material is required. If you are going to miss class, please notify me by email in advance, if possible. Written assignments must be submitted on time. Grades will be reduced by 2 points per 24-hour period for which the assignment is late (this is approximately one full grade).

Participation (15 X 1% = 15%). Participation posts to Canvas are due by midnight every Tuesday (except week 2, where they are due by Thursday).

- Weeks 2 and 3: Ask a question: post a question from the readings of least 100 words AND respond to at least one other post

- Week 4: Gather evidence: Find a policy-relevant peer-review research paper and post at least 100 words about it on Canvas

- Week 5: Ask a question about how our local government works (for example, about the relative authority of the Dane County Executive vs. County Board of Supervisors)

- Week 6: Engage in policymaking: Write to a public official or agency. Post at least 100 words about it and a link to the opportunity on Canvas (e.g. Comment on a proposed federal agency policy, Comment on a proposed state agency policy, Recommend a course of action to one of your elected representatives)

- Week 7: Engage others in policymaking: Write at least 100 words about why it is important to engage in a particular policy process and link to the opportunity on Canvass OR Write no more 240 characters (plus a link to the opportunity) on why people should engage that is shared by at least 5 other people–post a link or screenshot to Canvas

- Weeks 8-14: Choose one of the above options. Early posts set the agenda!

- Every week: Attend lectures or let me know ahead of time if you must miss.

Policy memoranda (3 X 25% = 75%). You will write three policy memos to public officials following the memo template exactly. Example memos are on Canvas.

- Memo #1 topic announced September 29, due at midnight October 15.

- Memo #2 topic announced October 22, due by at midnight November 12.

- Memo #3 topic announced November 20, due at midnight December 10.

Exam (10%). The exam is scheduled for Dec 20, 2021 from 7:45 AM - 9:45 AM.

- It will cover the entire course. Please do not take this class if you cannot be present for the final exam.

- The exam evaluates if you did the reading thoughtfully, paid close attention in lectures, and asked when you did not understand a term or concept (raise your hand or email me anytime).

Reading/Topic Schedule

You are expected to do all assigned readings for each week before Monday's class. I will call on students during class. Each week, we will read some original research and portions of a textbook for a broader context.

- Week 1 (8 September): Course Overview

- Week 2 (13 September, 15 September): The Constitution and Federalism

    - Context: The Constitution
    - Context: The Election That Could Break America

- Week 3 (20 September, 22 September): The Policy Process

    - Research: Egan, Part 1
    - Listen: More Perfect, "One Nation, Under Money" (Note: this episode includes a brief mention of sexual assault in the context of the Violence Against Women Act at minute 51. It is not graphic.)

- Week 4 (27 September, 29 September): Institutions

    - Research: Egan, Part 2
    - Listen: The Federalist Society "A Preview of County of Maui, Hawaii v. Hawaii Wildlife Fund"
    - Context: Birkland, Chapter 1-2

- Week 5 (4 October, 6 October): Policy Actors and Evidence

    - Research: Egan, Part 3
    - Context: Birkland Part II, Chapters 4-7

- Week 6 (11 October, 13 October): Policy Tools

    - Listen: Moonshots-Thomas Kalil
    - Listen: Informing Policy-Jenni W. Owen
    - Listen: SSN: Paying for Pollution-Leigh Raymond
    - Context: Bardach Appendix B (PDF online)

Memo 1 due at midnight on October 15

- Week 7 (18 October, 20 October): Policy Tools

    - Context: Birkland Part III, Chapters 8-9

- Week 8 (25 October, 27 October): Theories of the Policy Process

    - Research: There are too many lawyers in politics. Here's what to do about it.-Lee Drutman
    - Listen: SSN: Lawyers, Lawyers, and More Lawyers-Adam Bonica
    - Context: Birkland Part IV, Chapter 10

- Week 9 (1 November, 3 November): Politics and Rationality

- Listen: NPR: Obama Office Alters More Federal Rules Than Bush
  - Context: Stone, Introduction and Chapter 1

- Week 10 (8 November, 10 November): Policy Goals and Tradeoffs

  - Listen: SSN: Death by a Thousand Cuts
  - Context: Stone, Part II

  Memo 2 due at midnight November 12

- Week 11 (15 November, 17 November): Framing Problems

  - Context: Stone, Part III

- Week 12 (22 November, 24 November): Solutions

  - Context: Stone, Part IV

- Week 13 (29 November, 1 December): Policy Feedback

  - Research: Mettler, Suzanne. 2002. Bringing the state back in to civic engagement: Policy feedback effects of the GI Bill for World War II veterans. American Political Science Review 96(2): 351-365.
  - Research: How Mass Imprisonment Burdens the United States with a Distrustful Underclass-Vesla M. Weaver
  - Listen: SSN: 147: In Government We Distrust-Suzanne Mettler

- Week 14 (6 November, 8 December): Laws that Govern Lawmaking

  - Research: "Rethinking Representation" - Jane Mansbridge
  - Listen: Citizens' Initiative SSN 117: The Citizen Expert-John Gastil
  - Context: What is the Local Voices Network?

  Memo 3 due at midnight December 10

- Week 15 (13 December, 15 December): "Best" Practices, final review

  - Wrap up, final exam review

Policy on Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty is broadly defined as submitting work that is not your own without attribution. This is not acceptable in any academic course. I use software tools to detect plagiarism. If you submit written work containing plagiarized material, you will receive a failing grade for the course and be reported to the University.