POSC 315, *Introduction to Public Policy*

Fall 2025

1 Faculty Information

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Office hours: Mondays 7:00–8:00 p.m. on Discord Office Hours Channel; Tuesdays at 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. in person; schedule individual in-person or Zoom appointments at dadams.io/appointments.

2 Why This Course Matters

We live in an era when deep divisions shape not just our politics but our perceptions of reality itself. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (65%) say they "always or often feel exhausted" by politics (Pew Research Center 2023). Self-identified moderates, once the largest group, have dropped to a record low of just 34% (Gallup 2024). Meanwhile, unfavorable views of the opposing party have more than doubled since the 1990s, reaching record highs of "very unfavorable" sentiment (Pew Research Center; Gallup). James Madison warned in Federalist 10 of the "violence of faction," and Montesquieu's vision of checks and balances was meant to prevent any single group from dominating. Yet today, partisan animosity runs so deep that many Americans see political opponents not merely as wrong, but as a threat to the republic itself. Alexis de Tocqueville once marveled at Americans' capacity to build associations and bridge differences—a civic muscle that now appears strained. And yet,

even amid this polarization, the machinery of governance continues to turn: problems still become laws, programs are implemented, and occasionally, genuine solutions emerge from the gridlock.

This course equips you with the analytical tools to see beyond the doom-scrolling and cable news shouting matches. You'll discover that polarization isn't destiny; it's a policy problem that can be understood through frameworks like path dependence and punctuated equilibrium. FDR faced a nation literally coming apart during the Depression, yet managed to fundamentally reshape the relationship between citizens and government through savvy use of policy windows and coalition building. The same processes he mastered—agenda setting, problem definition, policy entrepreneurship—still operate today, just waiting for those who understand them. Through your research project, you'll trace how real policies navigate this polarized landscape, learning to spot the moments when change becomes possible. You'll understand why some issues break through the gridlock while others languish, how policy entrepreneurs exploit crises to push long-dormant solutions, and why implementation often matters more than legislation. This isn't just academic theory; it's a toolkit for citizenship in troubled times. Whether you're headed for public service or simply want to be an informed participant in democracy, this course teaches you to read the hidden grammar of American politics—to see the republic not as hopelessly broken, but as a complex system that citizens who understand it can still influence.

3   Course Communication

All course announcements and communications will be sent via *Canvas* and university email. Students are responsible for regularly checking their *Canvas* notifications and email at least once daily. Please ensure your *Canvas* notifications are set to receive messages from the course.

For questions and support, use the course Discord server for the fastest response. For private matters, email me at dpadams@fullerton.edu. I strive to respond within 24 hours on weekdays.

4   Technical Problems

If you encounter any technical difficulties, contact the instructor immediately to document the problem. Then, contact: student IT help desk, email, phone (657) 278-8888, walk-in student genius center, online chat - log into portal; click "Online IT Help"; click "Live Chat."

For issues with Canvas: Canvas Support Hotline = (657) 278-8888, search the CSUF Canvas Guides with AI Assistant, or report a problem.

For issues with Kritik: Contact support@kritik.io or use the help resources at us.kritik.io/help. Document any Kritik issues immediately with screenshots and notify the instructor.

Alternative plan for submitting work: If you cannot submit an assignment via Canvas or Kritik, email it to me immediately at dpadams@fullerton.edu with documentation of the technical issue.

Response time: I will strive to respond to all student emails, Discord posts, and Canvas messages within 24 hours, except on weekends and holidays. If you have not received a response within 24 hours, please send a follow-up message. If still no response within 48 hours, please text or call (657) 278-4770.

5 Course Information

Prefix, number, title: POSC 315, *Introduction to Public Policy*
Meeting times with modality: Fully online (100% online), asynchronous

- **Course requisite(s):** POSC 100, GE Area 4A
- **Catalog description:** Federal domestic policymaking. Structure, functions, and relationships among American national institutions, including executive, legislative and judicial branches, media, political parties, and pressure groups.
- **Additional description:** This course explores the processes and key players in creating public policy in the United States. We examine the various official and unofficial influences on the policy process and the limitations imposed by institutional and structural factors. Students will gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities surrounding agenda setting, policy making, implementation, and evaluation in the American political system.
- **Workload expectation:** This course requires consistent engagement throughout the semester. The scaffolded paper project (60% of grade) means you'll be working on some aspect of your policy analysis nearly every week. Plan accordingly and avoid procrastination, as each stage builds on previous work. Expect to spend 8–10 hours per week on course materials, assignments, and peer reviews.
- **Course materials and equipment:**
    - **Required text(s):** Birkland, T. A. (2020). *An Introduction to the Policy Process:*

Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making (5th ed.). Routledge. ISBN: 978-0367333286

– **Other materials:** Reliable computer and internet connection, access to Canvas, Discord, and Kritik platforms

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Discuss and explain the key features of the public policy-making process in the United States

2. Recognize and describe the distinct stages of the public policy process

3. Describe the various internal and external actors that influence public policy, their interactions, and their impact on the policy process

4. Articulate the historical and contemporary structures and institutions that facilitate, expand, or constrain the public policy process

5. Differentiate and describe the various theories that attempt to explain the drivers and influences leading to public policy change or maintaining the status quo

6. Apply knowledge of the policy process to analyze specific policy domains impacted by multiple policy actors and diverse elements of the policy process

6   Grading Policies and Standards

a. Grading scale:

The grading scale for this course is outlined in Table 1. Letter grades correspond to the percentage ranges shown. Note that grades are not rounded up.

b. Required Course Assignments:

The breakdown of required course assignments and their respective weightings is provided in Table 2. These assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the course material and your ability to apply it effectively.

Table 1: Grade scale

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A+	97.0–100.0	C+	77.0–79.9
A	93.0–96.9	C	73.0–76.9
A-	90.0–92.9	C-	70.0–72.9
B+	87.0–89.9	D+	67.0–69.9
B	83.0–86.9	D	63.0–66.9
B-	80.0–82.9	D-	60.0–62.9
		F	0.0–59.9

Table 2: Assignment weighting

Assignment	Percentage
Module Quizzes (weekly)	25%
Policy Process Analysis Paper	60%
Topic Selection & Proposal	5%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Literature Review	15%
Draft Analysis	15%
Final Paper	15%
Discussion Participation	10%
Attendance and Participation	5%
Total	100%

Module Quizzes (25% of Final Grade): Each module includes a quiz following the video content to assess understanding of key concepts. Quizzes consist of 10–20 multiple-choice questions and must be completed by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. of each week. Lowest quiz score dropped.

Policy Process Analysis Paper (60% of Final Grade): This scaffolded writing project develops your ability to analyze a specific policy issue through the lens of policy process theories. Each stage builds on the previous work and includes peer review via Kritik (integrated into each assignment's grade):

- **Topic Selection & Proposal (5%):** 1–2 page proposal defining your policy issue and research question
- **Annotated Bibliography (10%):** Compile and evaluate 8–10 scholarly sources with

150–200 word annotations

- **Literature Review (15%):** 4–5 page synthesis of existing research, identifying gaps and theoretical connections
- **Draft Analysis (15%):** 7–9 page application of a theoretical framework to analyze your policy issue
- **Final Paper (15%):** Complete 10–12 page analysis incorporating all feedback received

Note: Each assignment grade includes both your submission quality and peer review participation via Kritik. Missing peer reviews will significantly impact that assignment's grade.

Discussion Participation (10% of Final Grade): Bi-weekly participation in Canvas discussions and Discord conversations demonstrates engagement with course material and peers. Quality matters more than quantity—thoughtful, substantive contributions that advance the conversation earn full credit.

c. Attendance and Participation policy (5% of Final Grade): As an asynchronous online course, "attendance" means regular engagement with course materials, timely submission of assignments, and active participation in discussions and peer reviews. Students should log into Canvas at least 3–4 times per week and complete all module activities by the weekly deadlines. Consistent engagement is essential for success in the scaffolded paper project.

d. Examination dates: No traditional exams in this course. Assessment occurs through weekly module quizzes and the scaffolded writing project with integrated peer review.

e. Make-up and late submission policy:

- **Written assignments:** 5% penalty per day for late submissions unless prior arrangements are made
- **Module quizzes:** Cannot be made up due to weekly release schedule (lowest score dropped to account for emergencies)
- **Kritik peer reviews:** Have firm deadlines and cannot be made up—missing peer reviews results in significant grade reduction for that assignment
- **Final paper:** No late submissions accepted without documented emergency

f. Authentication of student work: All written work will be checked for originality using Turnitin (integrated with Canvas). Students may be asked to discuss their work via Zoom

to verify authorship. The Kritik peer review process helps establish familiarity with each student's writing style throughout the semester.

g. Extra credit: No extra credit offered. Focus your efforts on the assigned work, particularly the scaffolded paper project which comprises the majority of your grade.

h. Retention of student work: Keep copies of all submitted work. I may retain exemplary student work (anonymized) for future teaching purposes with student permission.

7 Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity. Any student found to have engaged in academic dishonesty will be subject to the sanctions described in the Academic Dishonesty Policy (UPS 300.021). Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and submitting previously graded work without prior authorization. Students are expected to be familiar with the university's policy on academic dishonesty and to adhere to this policy in all aspects of this course. Any student who has questions about the policy should ask the professor for clarification.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity and will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, copying and pasting text from sources without proper citation, paraphrasing text from sources without proper citation, and submitting work that is not your own. Students are expected to properly cite all sources used in their work and to submit original work. Failure to do so may result in a failing grade for the assignment and further disciplinary action.

Written Work

All written work must be submitted in a professional format, including proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Written work must also be properly cited using APA 7th edition format. Students are expected to follow the guidelines for written work provided by the professor and to seek clarification if they have questions about the requirements.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

Definition of Generative AI

For this course, generative AI refers to systems capable of producing human-like text, images, data analysis, or other content. Examples include:

- Large Language Models (e.g., GPT-4, GPT-5, Claude, Gemini, TitanGPT)
- Text-to-image or multimodal generators (e.g., DALL-E, Midjourney)
- AI writing assistants and summarizers
- Automated coding, data, or content generators

AI Use Policy for the Policy Process Analysis Paper

AI is permitted and encouraged as a learning tool, under the following guidelines:

Allowed uses for the paper project:

- Brainstorming research questions and identifying potential sources
- Getting feedback on draft sections before submission
- Checking grammar, clarity, and APA formatting
- Generating questions to deepen your analysis
- Identifying potential gaps or weaknesses in your argument

Prohibited uses:

- Having AI write any portion of your submitted work
- Using AI to paraphrase or rewrite sections of your paper
- Submitting AI-generated text as your own analysis
- Using AI to synthesize sources or create your literature review

All analysis, synthesis, and argumentation must be your own original work.

Rationale for AI Policy

This policy is designed to ensure AI use strengthens—not substitutes—your academic work:

1. Promotes critical engagement with public policy theory by using AI as a feedback partner

2. Enhances literature review and writing by highlighting missing connections or blind spots

3. Builds professional literacy with tools already common in public service organizations

4. Develops ethical judgment by practicing responsible use of emerging technologies

5. Prepares you for professional environments where AI tools are increasingly prevalent

Ethics and Responsible Use

Students are expected to engage with AI responsibly:

- **Authorship**: All substantive writing must be your own. AI may provide critique, but not draft or rewrite.
- **Citation**: When AI meaningfully informs your work, cite it (e.g., "ChatGPT (GPT-5), personal communication, [date]").
- **Bias Awareness**: AI outputs reflect biases. Evaluate them critically for fairness and accuracy.
- **Sustainability**: Be mindful of AI's environmental footprint and use tools thoughtfully.

Repercussions for Misuse

- Misuse includes submitting AI-generated work as your own, failing to cite AI contributions, or relying on AI instead of demonstrating your own analysis.
- Consequences may include revision requirements, grade penalties, or formal academic integrity proceedings.
- Turnitin's AI detection tools will be used to identify potential misuse.

8   Technical Competencies

Students need:

- Proficiency with Canvas, including submitting assignments, participating in discussions, and accessing course materials
- Ability to use Discord for class discussions and office hours
- Experience with Kritik platform for peer review assignments (training provided in Week 1)
- Skills in word processing, online research, and proper APA citation formatting
- Ability to stream video content for module lectures and documentaries
- Access to CSUF Writing Center for paper development support (optional but strongly recommended)

- Time management skills for multi-stage writing project with firm peer review deadlines

9   Student Resources Website

It is the student's responsibility to read and understand the required and important student information for course syllabi. Included is information about:

- University learning goals
- General Education learning objectives
- Netiquette/appropriate online behavior
- Students' rights to accommodations
- Campus student support resources
- Academic integrity
- Emergency preparedness
- Library services (including research consultations)
- Student IT services and competencies
- Software privacy and accessibility
- Accessibility statement
- Diversity statement
- Land acknowledgement
- Final exam schedule
- Semester calendar

10   Course Policies

Netiquette: Maintain professional and respectful communication in all course interactions. Review CSUF's netiquette guidelines on the student resources website. This applies to Canvas discussions, Discord conversations, and Kritik peer reviews.

Module Schedule: New modules release each Monday at 12:01 a.m. All module activities (videos, readings, quizzes, discussions) are due by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Stay current with modules to succeed in the scaffolded paper project.

Kritik Peer Review Process:

- Each paper stage requires reviewing 3 peer submissions via Kritik
- Reviews must include substantive feedback (minimum 150 words per review)

- Use provided rubrics to evaluate specific criteria
- Complete reviews within one week of submission deadline
- Your peer review quality affects your assignment grade
- Rate the helpfulness of feedback you receive to improve the process

Writing Support: The CSUF Writing Center offers free consultations for all stages of the writing process. Schedule appointments at fullerton.edu/writingcenter. I strongly encourage using this resource, especially for the literature review and analysis stages.

Academic Support: If you're struggling with course content or the paper project, please reach out early. Options include:

- Office hours (Tuesday mornings and evenings on Discord)
- Individual appointments via dadams.io/appointments
- Discord #qustions or #315-public-policy channel for peer support
- Canvas discussion forums for content questions

11 General Education Requirements

GE requirement(s) that this course meets: General Education Explorations in Social Sciences subarea 4U.

How the GE writing requirement will be met and assessed: The scaffolded Policy Process Analysis Paper with integrated peer reviews meets the writing requirement of UPS 411.201. Writing assignments involve organization and expression of complex data and ideas with careful evaluation and feedback at each stage. Writing competence determines 60% of the final grade through the multi-stage paper project.

GE grading standard: A grade of "D" (1.0) or higher is required to meet this General Education requirement. A grade of "D-" (0.7) or below will not satisfy this General Education requirement.

GE Student Learning Goals: Students completing courses in this subarea shall:

1. Examine problems, issues, and themes in the social sciences in greater depth; in a variety of cultural, historical, and geographical contexts; and from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives

2. Analyze and critically evaluate the application of social science concepts and theories to particular historical, contemporary, and future problems or themes, such as economic and environmental sustainability, globalization, poverty, and social justice

3. Analyze and critically evaluate constructs of cultural differentiation, including ethnicity, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, and their effects on the individual and society

4. Apply theories and concepts from the social sciences to address historical, contemporary, and future problems confronting communities at different geographical scales, from local to global

12   Calendar of Topics / Schedule of Classes

Week 1, 8/25–8/31
Topic(s): Introduction to the Policy Process
Reading(s): Syllabus; Birkland Ch. 1; American Regime Values (Canvas)
Assignment(s) Due: Introductions on Discord; Kritik platform setup and initial assignment; Module quiz

Week 2, 9/1–9/7
Topic(s): Elements of the Policy-Making System; Policy Process Theories
Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 2; Theory readings on Canvas
Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Discussion post

Week 3, 9/8–9/14
Topic(s): Historical Context & Structure of US Policy Making
Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 3
Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Discussion post

Week 4, 9/15–9/21
Topic(s): Official Policy Actors
Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 4
Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Topic Selection & Proposal (submit to Kritik by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 5, 9/22–9/28
Topic(s): Unofficial Policy Actors I
Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 5
Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Complete peer reviews of proposals on Kritik (by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 6, 9/29–10/5

Topic(s): Unofficial Policy Actors II; Social Movements

Reading(s): Letter from Birmingham Jail (Canvas)

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Discussion post

Week 7, 10/6–10/12

Topic(s): Documentary 1 & Discussion

Reading(s): Documentary viewing guide (Canvas)

Assignment(s) Due: Documentary reflection; **Annotated Bibliography (submit to Kritik by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 8, 10/13–10/19

Topic(s): Agenda Setting, Power, and Problem Definition

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 6

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Complete peer reviews of bibliographies on Kritik (by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 9, 10/20–10/26

Topic(s): Policy Typologies and Frameworks

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 7

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Discussion post

Week 10, 10/27–11/2

Topic(s): Policy Decision Making and Analysis

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 8; Analysis readings (Canvas)

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Literature Review (submit to Kritik by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 11, 11/3–11/9

Topic(s): Policy Design and Tools

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 9

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Complete peer reviews of literature reviews on Kritik (by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 12, 11/10–11/16

Topic(s): Policy Implementation

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 10 (first half)

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Discussion post

Week 13, 11/17–11/23

Topic(s): Policy Failure and Learning

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 10 (second half)

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; **Draft Analysis Paper (submit to Kritik by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Thanksgiving Break, 11/24–11/30

No new content—use this time to complete peer reviews and begin final paper revisions

Week 14, 12/1–12/7

Topic(s): Documentary 2 & Discussion

Reading(s): Documentary viewing guide (Canvas)

Assignment(s) Due: Documentary reflection; **Complete peer reviews of draft papers on Kritik (by 11:59 PM Sunday)**

Week 15, 12/8–12/14

Topic(s): Policy Evaluation and Science

Reading(s): Birkland Ch. 11

Assignment(s) Due: Module quiz; Final paper preparation

Week 16, 12/15–12/19

Topic(s): Course Wrap-up and Synthesis

Reading(s): None

Assignment(s) Due: **Final Policy Process Analysis Paper due Thursday 12/18 at 11:59 PM (submit to Canvas)**