

GOV 358: Introduction to Public Policy (UN: 37329)

Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30 – 2:00 PM

CPE 2.204

Fall 2024

Instructor: Chris Cassella

Office: Mezes 3.220

Drop-In Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Email: chris.cassella@austin.utexas.edu

This course will examine the politics and history of public policymaking in the United States. We will look at the foundational theories of policymaking, unpack how institutions impact the policy process, and dive into contemporary policy problems. We will also study the ways policymakers respond to the many inputs of the policy process including interest groups, the public, and other related policies. Throughout the semester, we will grapple with the Big Questions. What is public policy? What is a policy problem? What are the benefits to getting *it* (a solution) right? What are the consequences of getting *it* wrong?

Course Objectives

- 1) Survey the approaches used by political scientists to understand the policy process.
- 2) Understand how current events are, and are not, policy problems.
- 3) Survey the use, history, success, and failure, of the major tools used by the United States government to address policy problems.
- 4) Develop analytical skills in policy analysis through a policy memo.

Required Books

Jake Grumbach, 2022. *Laboratories Against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Beth Macy, 2018. *Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America*

Michael Lewis, 2010. *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine*

Other Readings

Other readings are available either through the link provided in the syllabus, the UT Library system, or through Google Scholar.

Assignments

Your grade for this course will be composed of the following assignments:

- 10% Course Participation
- 15% Concept Check Assignments
- 20% Short Response Paper
- 25% Mid-Term Exam
- 30% Final Research Paper

Grading Policy

The breakdown for semester grades are as follows:

A = 92.5 – 100

A- = 89.5 – 92.4

B+ = 86.5 – 89.4

B = 82.5 – 86.4

B- = 79.5 – 82.4

C+ = 76.5 – 79.4

C = 72.5 – 76.4

C- = 69.5 – 72.4

D+ = 66.7 – 69.4

D = 62.5 – 66.65

D- = 59.5 – 62.4

F = < 59.4

Course Participation

The size of this class allows us to move away from lectures every day towards discussing the readings and course concepts. To do this, you will need to come to class every session prepared. “Prepared,” means arriving on time to class, completing the reading(s) for that day, and being ready to engage with your fellow students.

Concept Check Assignments

There will be six concept check assignments that you will complete on Canvas. These assignments are not meant to be difficult; they will be short answers (5-7 sentences **maximum**). The goal of these assignments is to make sure you are on the right track and understanding the course material, as well as signal to me if there is anything we need to revisit as a class. **Your five best scores will count towards your grade.** These assignments will be due the **Friday of a class week at 11:59 PM.**

Short Response Paper

You will have to complete two short response papers. The prompts for these papers are listed on the syllabus. They will be no longer than two pages double spaced. There are three papers listed on the syllabus, but only **your top two scores will count towards your grade.** These papers will be due at **5:00 PM on the assigned day.**

Midterm Exam

The midterm will take place **in class on October 22nd**. It will be composed of a mix of multiple choice and free response questions from all lectures and readings leading up to that week.

Policy Memo

There are two essential components of good policymaking. First, is having accurate data about your policy area. Second, is the ability to communicate your research to others. For this course, you will write an original policy memo on a topic that interests you. We will write the paper in parts beginning after the midterm exam. **The final draft of this paper will be due on December 13th at 11:59 PM.** Your grade for this paper will be comprised of a series of smaller assignments throughout the term. We will go through each of these assignments in more detail leading up to the due date.

15%: Topic Proposal (Due 9/27 at 5:00 PM)

20%: Literature Review (Due 11/1 at 5:00 PM)

10%: Graphical Figure (Due 11/15 at 5:00 PM)

20%: Rough Draft (Due 12/5 at 5:00 PM)

35%: Final Draft (Due 12/13 at 11:59 PM)

University Policies

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD): If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the SSD. Additional information can be found here:

<https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

Academic Dishonesty: You should all be familiar with the UT Honor Code (or statement of ethics) and an explanation or examples of what constitutes plagiarism. See the University Honor Code if you have any doubts about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>.

Artificial Intelligence: The creation of artificial intelligence tools for widespread use is an exciting innovation. These tools have both appropriate and inappropriate uses in classwork. The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class shall be permitted on a limited basis. You will be informed as to the assignments for which AI may be utilized. You are also welcome to seek my prior approval to use AI writing tools on any assignment. In either instance, AI writing tools should be used with caution and proper citation, as the use of AI should be properly attributed. Using AI writing tools without my permission or authorization, or failing to properly cite AI even where permitted, shall constitute a violation of UT Austin's Institutional Rules on academic integrity.

Title IX Reporting: Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms.

When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

- 1) Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.

- 2) Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
- 3) Investigate and discipline violations of the university's relevant policies.
- 4) Links to an external site.

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. We are Responsible Employees and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with us, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit titleix.utexas.edu (links to an external site) or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

Sharing of Course Materials: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials may facilitate cheating. The University is aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in initiation of the student conduct process and include charge(s) for academic misconduct, potentially resulting in sanctions, including a grade impact."

Course Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction and Goal Setting

August 27th

First class day, read the syllabus.

August 29th What is public policy?

PART I: Conflicts and Goal Setting

Week 2: Institutional Conflict and Policy Design

September 3rd The Bureaucracy

Rachel Potter, 2017. *Journal of Politics*. "Slow Rolling, Fast Tracking, and the Pace of Bureaucratic Decisions in Rulemaking."

Ian Millhiser, Vox, "The Supreme Court just lit a match and tossed it into dozens of federal agencies." <https://www.vox.com/scotus/357554/supreme-court-sec-jarkesy-roberts-sotomayor-chaos>

September 5th Policy Design

Soss, Joe. 1999. *American Political Science Review*. "Lessons of welfare: Policy design, political learning, and political action."

Week 3: Representation and Policy Positions

September 10th Representation

Pew Research Center, 2023. "Americans' Dismal View on the Nation's Politics."

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-dismal-views-of-the-nations-politics/>

September 12th Partisanship

Jake Grumbach, *Laboratories Against Democracy*. Chapters 1-3.

Week 4: Federalism and Policy Diffusion

September 17th Federalism and Policy Diffusion

Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden. 2006. *American Journal of Political Science*. "Bottom-up federalism: The diffusion of antismoking policies from us cities to states."

NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 19th

SHORT RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE 9/20: What are some of the different factors that can drive conflict among policy makers? What is a policy area where this conflict is especially prevalent?

PART II: Framing the Policy Problem

Week 5: Polarization in Policymaking

September 24th Polarization and Policy

Jake Grumbach, *Laboratories Against Democracy*. Chapters 4-6.

September 26th Polarization, Policy, and Conflicts with Individual Rights

Jake Grumbach, *Laboratories Against Democracy*. Chapters 7-9.

DUE 9/27: TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE

Week 6: Introducing Framing

October 8th Causal Stories and Target Populations

Deborah A. Stone. 1989. *Political Science Quarterly*. Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas.

October 10th Deservingness and Conflicting Policy Solutions

Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram. 1993. *American Political Science Review*. "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy."

Week 7: Friction and Externalities

October 15th Friction

Bryan D. Jones, Hershel F. Thomas III, and Michelle Wolfe. 2014. "Policy bubbles." *Policy Studies Journal* 42(1).

October 17th Policy Externalities

Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss. 2004. "The consequences of public policy for democratic citizenship: bridging policy studies and mass politics." *Perspectives on Politics* (2)1.

SHORT RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE 10/18: What are some common "frames" that policymakers use when describing a problem? What is an example of a frame having a serious impact on the way a policy is received by the public, or how it was (was not) implemented?

Week 8: Midterm Week

MIDTERM EXAM October 22nd

NO CLASS October 24th

READ Beth Macy, *Dopesick*. Part One (Chapters 1-4, continue into Part 2 if you can!)

PART III: Policy Topics

Week 8: Civic Engagement and the Public

October 29th Civic Engagement

Suzanne Mettler. 2001. "Bringing the state back in civic engagement: policy feedback effects of the GI Bill for World War II veterans." *American Political Science Review* 92(2)

Andrea Campbell. 2002. "Self-interest, social security, and the distinctive participation patterns of senior citizens." *American Political Science Review* 96(3)

October 31st Health Policy (Intro)

Dopesick, Part Two (Chapters 5-8)

DUE 11/1: GRAPHICAL FIGURE

Week 9: Elections

ELECTION DAY

November 5th Elections and Public Policy

Vox, "High voter turnout doesn't cancel out voter suppression."

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/9/19/23356904/voter-suppression-midterm-elections>

November 7th Elections and Consequences for Policy
NO READING

Week 10: Drivers of Unequal Policy Outputs

November 12th Unpacking the Broken System
Beth Macy, *Dopesick*, Part Three (Chapters 9-12)

November 14th Federalism and Welfare Reform
Lawrence M. Mead. 2004. "State political culture and welfare reform." *Policy Studies Journal* 32(2)

DUE 11/15: LITERATURE REVIEW

Week 11: Inequality and Economic Policy

November 19th Economic Policy
Michael Lewis, *The Big Short* (Chapters 1-3)

November 21st Housing Policy
Michael Lewis, *The Big Short* (Chapters 4-6)

SHORT PAPER 3 DUE 11/22: How equal is the United States? Pick an example(s) of policies we discussed in class and discuss some metrics for evaluating equality to defend your answer.

Week 14

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 26th THANKSGIVING BREAK

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 28th THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15

December 3rd Government Responses to Crises
Michael Lewis, *The Big Short* (Chapters 9-10)

December 5th Social Welfare Policy and Course Wrap-Up

DUE 12/5: ROUGH DRAFT

Final Paper Due December 13th 11:59 PM