

# GOVT 350: Introduction to Public Policy (02)

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**Office Hours:** Monday 2-4 pm, or by email or appt.

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**Location:** Washington Hall 301

**Day/Time:** MWF 10:00–10:50 am

## 1 Overview & Introductory Remarks

Welcome to GOVT 350! In this class, students will be given an introduction to the policy making process at the federal level of American government, focusing on the impact of public opinion, interest groups, and governing institutions on public policymaking in America. The result should be a deepened understanding of how public policy alternatives and solutions are generated. Such an approach will offer students an opportunity to “sit in the driver’s seat” of public policymaking and think how a policymaker may act in a variety of contexts, under a variety of constraints, with a variety of other policy actors. The ultimate goal of this course is to learn to think systematically about the entire public policymaking process, rather than viewing each actor, outcome, and policy tool as isolated events or phenomena.

With the ultimate goal of the class in mind, let’s take a step back to develop the motivation a bit more to make it more relatable. We are all constantly bombarded by conflicting views of public problems. It can be difficult to sort out which (if any) of the solutions proffered by politicians, pundits, academics, family members, friends, and colleagues will resolve the problem in a way that is consistent with one’s values. Understanding the nature of public problems and how they are (or are not) resolved, then, is essential to informed participation in these policy debates, especially when we are called to make choices at the ballot box. So in sum, this class serves as a first introduction to understanding what public problems are, how policies are formulated to solve them, and what the consequences of those policies may be.

Public policy experts Michael Kraft and Scott Furlong reiterate our goals by noting, “[The first goal] is to help [students] develop a fuller understanding of public policy and the way governments make policy decisions. The second goal is to encourage [students] to look ahead to the implications of policy choices. The third is to foster critical thinking of public policy and possible alternative courses of action.” As such, our objectives for the class are:

- Understand what we mean by “public policy” and how it relates to political science and other social sciences.
- Know what public policy problems are, some theoretical explanations for why they happen, and how we solve them through political processes.
- Compare and critique policy solutions from the perspectives of various policymakers.
- Be able to clearly communicate ideas through writing and class discussion.

The general flow of the class, with a few exceptions, will be more lecture/discussion on Mondays and Wednesdays, with Fridays being reserved as a more “applied” day. As I will try to keep more formal lectures to a minimum throughout the weeks including group work most days, there will be many different expressions of participation and discussion. Each week will be slightly different, but follow this general pattern.

## 2 Text & Materials

### Required:

1. Anderson, James. *Public Policymaking, 8th Edition*. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning. 2015. (Hereafter *Anderson*)

### Recommended:

1. Carnes, Nicholas. 2013. *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Patashnik, Eric, Alan Gerber, and Conor Dowling. 2017. *Unhealthy Politics: The Battle over Evidence-Based Medicine*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
3. Kingdon, John. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy, 2nd Edition*, Longman.

## 3 Evaluation & Assessment

All final grades are rounded to the nearest decimal (e.g., 88.38% = 88.4%). I use the following grading scheme to determine your final grade: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (88-89), B (83-87), B- (80-82), C+ (78-79), C (73-77), C- (70-72), D+ (68-69), D (63-67), D- (60-62), F (0-59).

There are six components to students' final grades: (1) midterm exam (20%), (2) final exam (20%), (3) policy definition paper (10%), (4) policy memo (20%), (5) memo presentation (10%), and (6) participation & discussion (20%).

1. *Exams*: There are many ways to give/take exams, and in an effort to balance the wide variance in students' preferences, the class includes two commonly used formats: objective *and* subjective. The midterm will be an "objective" style exam, including a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions. Students will be given a full regular class period to take the exam. Anything up to the day of the exam is fair game to show up, whether in class discussion, in the assigned reading (*whether or not we discussed it*), or things I specifically highlight.

The final will be a more "subjective" style exam in a long-answer format. Students will be given a single question/prompt, and asked to address the question fully during the exam period. There are no length requirements for the final exam; students are encouraged to take as much or as little space required to *fully* address the question. Students will be given the full amount of time (3 hours) during our scheduled final exam period to take the exam. Blue books will be provided by the instructor for the students.

2. *Policy Definition Paper*: As a precursor to your final paper (the policy memo discussed next), you will submit a paper outlining the definition of your selected policy. ***This will be due in-class Friday, 2/22.*** As the main memo paper will be offering a policy solution to a policymaker, there must be a specific problem or issue within a specific realm of public policy that your memo addresses. Thus, in this paper, students will submit a short paper doing two things: **first**, introduce the policy problem of your choice, and **second**, define that issue in substantive terms. Functionally, this will require doing some background research on the policy area (e.g., health policy, economic policy, etc.) as well as the specific problem within that policy area, using both academic *and* government

sources. This will allow for a proper situating of the specific problem you are targeting in the broader scope of your project (e.g., if the area is health policy, the problem could be a move toward evidence-based treatments in all VA healthcare plans). Then, with the background research underway, the second part of this paper will require a more “formal” definition of the problem that will be the focus of the paper. This will include a definition of the policy problem based in the academic literature as well as discussing how the government has viewed and attempted to address the problem in the past. This will offer the ability for you to place your ultimate solution (detailed in the final memo paper) in the broader public policy sphere.

Stepping back, this definition paper will serve as the foundation for your final policy memo. If you take this assignment seriously, it will make your final policy memo a much smoother task to accomplish. We will discuss this more the closer we get. But you would do well to be thinking about your policy problem and possible solution from Day 1. **A few essentials:** 3-5 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman/standard font, black ink, 1 inch margins, and a properly formatted reference list *with* in-text citations. You can select any reference style you wish (Chicago, APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.); just be correct and consistent.

3. *Policy Memo:* Your final written assignment for this class will be to build on your definition paper to write a policy memo. Based on the policy problem and area you previously selected, you will write a full-scale policy memo to an appropriate hypothetical policymaker (e.g., legislator, high-level bureaucrat, etc.) offering a policy solution to address the problem. For example, if your selected problem is the propping up of the corn industry by the federal government for ethanol production, a potential solution could be pursuit of public-private partnerships to bring in potentially more efficient, or at least greater expertise, from the private sector in bioenergy production. **A few essentials:** around 8-12 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman/standard font, black ink, 1 inch margins, and a properly formatted reference list *with* in-text citations. You can select any reference style you wish (Chicago, APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.); just be correct and consistent.

***Your policy memo is due Friday, 4/26, by 11:59 pm.*** Late submissions will be penalized **one letter grade per day late**. If you have a family or medical emergency that prevents you from turning your work in on time, *please contact me as soon as possible*. Notifying me before the deadline rather than after is always better.

4. *Memo Presentations:* In the final few classes of the semester, students will offer a short presentation on their final policy memos. Specifically, each student will have about 5-7 minutes to present his or her final policy memo to the class in the form of a “quick pitch” to a policymaker. This mirrors the “real world” of policymaking, where policymakers are often quite busy. Thus, the need to distill complex policy information in a quick format is quite valuable. Hopefully this skill will also transfer to other disciplines as well. Students may use visual aids if they wish (e.g., powerpoint or beamer), but are not required to do so. I will grade based on clarity and precision of the presentation, as well as remaining within the short time limit.

**Note:** Assigned presentation days will be alphabetical (see “Week 15: Student Presentation Week” below for specific assignments).

5. *Participation & Discussion*: There will be heavy discussion and participation components to the class every day we meet, and *especially on Fridays*. I will expect everyone to have completed all required reading *prior* to class, and come ready to discuss, answer questions, and engage as appropriate. Participation will be graded on a weekly basis. I will average out your participation for the week based on quality (e.g., were you actively driving your groups discussion and/or pushing the class in a given direction as you participated?) and quantity (e.g., were you frequently present and engaging?).

## 4 The William & Mary Honor Code

The College of William & Mary has had an honor code since at least 1779. Academic integrity is at the heart of the university, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led honor system is responsible for resolving any suspected violations of the Honor Code, and I will report all suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the honor system. The Student Handbook ([www.wm.edu/studenthandbook](http://www.wm.edu/studenthandbook)) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To read the Honor Code, see [www.wm.edu/honor](http://www.wm.edu/honor).

### 4.1 The W&M Pledge

As a member of the William and Mary community, I pledge on my honor not to lie, cheat, or steal, either in my academic or personal life. I understand that such acts violate the Honor Code and undermine the community of trust, of which we are all stewards.

### 4.2 Academic Honesty

The College defines academic dishonesty in several ways, such as plagiarism, which is the form of “deliberate” or “reckless” representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without appropriate attribution to the original author in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise, is a serious breach of academic integrity demanded by the Honor Code and one of the most common forms of academic misconduct processed by the honor system. Plagiarism can take many forms and there may be a number of reasons why it occurs. For example:

- Quote and cite any words that are not your own. If you paraphrase the words of another, you must still give proper attribution. If you look it up, write it down.
- Authorized vs. Unauthorized Collaboration. All academic work in this course, including homework, quizzes, and exams, is to be your own work, unless otherwise specifically provided. It is your responsibility if you have any doubt to confirm whether or not collaboration is permitted. Whenever possible, be clear and concise. Ambiguous statements often lead to confusion.

## 5 Student Accessibility Services

William & Mary accommodates students with disabilities in accordance with federal laws and university policy. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact

of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at [sas@wm.edu](mailto:sas@wm.edu) to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see [www.wm.edu/sas](http://www.wm.edu/sas).

## 6 Outline of Topics & Calendar

*\*Below is a tentative outline of the semester. I reserved the right to make changes to dates, topics, readings, etc. as needed. If changes are made, students will be notified ASAP.*

- Week 1: Introduction to the Class and Public Policy as a Field
    - Wednesday, 1/16 - Overview of the class and syllabus
    - Friday, 1/18 - Public Policy as a Field
  
  - Week 2: Historical and Politics Foundations
    - Monday, 1/21 - **NO CLASS - MLK Holiday**
    - Wednesday, 1/23 - Foundations of US Government
    - Friday, 1/25 - Competition and Collective Action
  
  - Week 3: The Study of Public Policy
    - Monday, 1/28 - The (Traditional) Policy Process (Anderson, ch. 1: pp. 1–19)
    - Wednesday, 1/30 - Theories & Approaches (Anderson, ch. 1: pp. 19–32)
    - Friday, 2/1 - Group work, TBD
  
  - Week 4: Politics & Policymakers
    - Monday, 2/4 - Policymaking Environment (Anderson, ch. 2: pp. 37–49)
    - Wednesday, 2/6 - Deeper Dive into Actors (Anderson, ch. 2: pp. 50–78)
    - Friday, 2/8 - Group work, TBD
  
  - Week 5: Policy Formation
    - Monday, 2/11 - Defining Problems and Issue Politics (Anderson, ch. 3: pp. 87–95)
    - Wednesday, 2/13 - Setting the Agenda (Anderson, ch. 3: pp. 95–108)
    - Friday, 2/15 - Group work, TBD
  
  - Week 6: Policy Adoption & Budgeting
    - Monday, 2/18 - Policy Adoption (Anderson, ch. 4)
    - Wednesday, 2/20 - Budgeting and Public Policy (Anderson, ch. 5)
    - Friday, 2/22 - Group work, TBD
- \* **Policy Definition Papers Due in Class**

- Week 7: Exam Week
  - Monday, 2/25 - Midterm Exam Review (Q & A Format)
  - Wednesday, 2/27 - **Midterm Exam**
  - Friday, 3/1 - **NO CLASS - Memo Writing Day**
- Week 8: **NO CLASS - Spring Break, March 2–10**
- Week 9: Policy Implementation & Administrative Politics
  - Monday, 3/11 - Challenges of Policy Implementation (Anderson, ch. 6: pp. 225–243)
  - Wednesday, 3/13 - Administrative Politics & Control (Anderson, ch. 6: pp. 243–282)
  - Friday, 3/15 - Group work, TBD
- Week 10: Federalism
  - **Monday, 3/18 - Class visit by former Members of Congress: Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky and Anne Marie Buerkle**
  - Wednesday, 3/20 - Federalism
  - Friday, 3/22 - Group work, TBD
- Week 11: Impact & Evaluation
  - Monday, 3/25 - Policy & Program Evaluation (Anderson, ch. 7)
  - Wednesday, 3/27 - Policy & Program Evaluation, cont'd (re-read Anderson, ch. 7)
  - Friday, 3/29 - Group work, TBD
- Week 12: Public Policy & Public Opinion
  - Monday, 4/1 - What is the role of the public?
  - Wednesday, 4/3 - Models of opinion formation and policy preferences
  - Friday, 4/5 - Group work, TBD
- Week 13: Topical Case Studies in Public Policy
  - Monday, 4/8 - International Urban Planning Policy: “Nairobi: Fighting Blackouts in a Growing Urban Center” Case Study
  - Wednesday, 4/10 - Education Policy: “Little Rock School District” Case Study
  - Friday, 4/12 - Transportation Policy: “Bicycling and Coast City” Case Study
- Week 14: Wrap Up Week
  - Monday, 4/15 - Workshop on Memo Writing
  - Wednesday, 4/17 - Final Exam Review (Q & A Format), and any final notes
  - Friday, 4/19 - **NO CLASS - Memo Writing Day**

- Week 15: Student Presentation Week
  - Monday, 4/22 - Student Memo Presentations (Anderson – Funkhouser)
  - Wednesday, 4/24 - Student Memo Presentations (Gilliam – Ostapenko)
  - Friday, 4/26 - Student Memo Presentations (Ready – Young)
    - \* *All Memos Due to Blackboard by 11:59 pm Today*
  
- Week 16: **Final Exam date/time: Friday, May 3, 2–5 pm**