

PS109-B: The Politics of Public Policy (Summer 2025)

Discussion Section Syllabus (101)*

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Office Hours Location: Zoom

Office Hours: Wed 9:00am – 10:00am, Thurs 9:00am – 10:00am
Office Hours Sign Up: [Google Sheets Link](#)

“No one really knows how the game is played / The art of the trade /
How the sausage gets made / We just assume that it happens”

— Aaron Burr, *Hamilton*

Objectives

Welcome to *PS109-B: The Politics of Public Policy*! Why is rent in Berkeley [too damn high](#)?¹ Why do people [have to exhibit competency before they drive](#)?² The policies government enacts are the very stakes of electoral politics.³ But how does political conflict translate into public policy? What makes the winners and losers in a given fight? Why do some policies that everyone seems to hate manage to stick around?

I hope to guide you as we answer these questions and other this summer and give you the analytical tools to understand how politics really works: why certain interests prevail while others don't, how institutional rules shape outcomes, and why popular policies sometimes fail while unpopular ones succeed. Rather than focusing on what policies *should* be, we'll examine the political dynamics that determine what policies *actually become law*. You will learn to think strategically about political influence and develop the skills to analyze any policy debate through the lens of competing interests, institutional constraints, and information asymmetries. By the end of the class, my goal is for you to understand not just **what** happens in American politics, but **why** — and how various actors might effectively influence the process.

Because this class is taught asynchronously and online, my primary goal is to use office hours to recreate the benefits of an in-person section. Specifically, I hope to create a space where you can feel connected to your fellow students, collaboratively build your knowledge of how public policy is made, and feel confident applying the theories and concepts from this class to novel examples of contemporary policy.

Activities to do so may include brief recap lectures, small group discussions, short written assignments, and additional learning activities. These activities are designed to recreate the learning environment of in-person sections and encourage you to deeply engage with the week's assigned readings within the greater context of the class alongside your peers. They are a core component of the course, and as such **I highly recommend that you attend once a week.**

*Current version: 1.1 - 2 June, 2025.

¹This is a bit of a [dated reference](#) but a surprisingly relevant one for this class.

²Gary Johnson would go on to win the Libertarian Party's 2016 nomination for President. Unfortunately, he failed to garner enough support to swing the historically-close general election, probably because of this toxic stance.

³For more, see of course the rest of [the quoted song](#).

Additionally, I want office hours to help you build a support system that will help you succeed in this class. This requires a classroom in which *everyone* feels comfortable asking questions and helping each other. To that end, I want to remind you that it is *ok* to not know everything. We are all here to learn - even me! Sustained effort and a [growth mindset](#) are key to succeeding in this course, and I have full confidence in everyone's ability to apply both.

Office hours are also an opportunity for you to ask questions about lectures. I **strongly** encourage you to submit your questions **before office hours have started** so that I have sufficient time to prepare answers. [Submitting additional questions](#) ahead of office hours will help me to focus the time to ensure discussion is helpful for you. I plan to structure office hours to start by answering your pre-submitted questions, then any questions raised in the bCourses discussion forum. If there are requests to recap previously-covered concepts, I will do that as well.

Feedback and Evaluations

I am incredibly excited to be your GSI! I will do my best to answer your questions and be a resource to you for this class. There are no “bad” questions and while in rare cases I may not immediately have an answer, I will be sure to get back to you with an answer. I welcome feedback at any point and it would be helpful to hear from you on what is working and what can be improved.

Contact Information

It is my goal as your GSI to help you with anything even remotely related to the course! I would prefer that you reserve email communication for technical and administrative questions about the course. When you have these questions, please feel free to email me (zachary_hertz@berkeley.edu). I would prefer that you bring substantive questions about course content or other questions to my office hours.

I aim to respond to every email in a timely manner, but I may miss the occasional email. If I do not respond to your email within two business days, please kindly remind me. I generally reply to emails during normal business hours (ie. not after around 6 pm, and generally not on weekends barring either extenuating circumstances or agreed-upon prior notification). If your question is urgent, please mark it as such and I will do my best to respond promptly. Likewise, please label your emails with “PS109B” in the subject line (I have an email filter that bumps these emails to the top of my inbox so I can respond ASAP).

Office Hours

With a few exceptions, I will hold office hours every Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00 am to 10:00 am. These office hours will be held [on Zoom](#). To sign up for office hours, please use [this link](#). Office hours will be open but I require you to sign up to track participation. Please feel free to sign up for multiple time slots for my office hours if you require more time. Likewise, if you sign up for an office hours slot and can no longer attend, please cancel the appointment in a timely manner (ie. before 10:30 pm the previous night) in order to be considerate to the other students in the course. Repeated no-shows to office hours may result in a reduction of your participation grade.

I know the timing of these office hours is not ideal, but because I am in Denmark on fellowship this is the best time given the time zone difference. I want to make sure you are able to get the support you need to succeed in this course, so if you would like to meet me for personal reasons outside of office hours, please feel free to email me and I will try to make the scheduling fit.

This is not mandatory but please do take the time to sign up for office hours to meet with me specifically, even if you don't have questions! I would love the opportunity to get to know you a little bit, understand your motivations for taking the course, and how I can be of most help to you. I have also found that meeting directly in office hours has been effective for students hoping to increase their grades.

A final note on office hours: students often let a lack of clarity on the purpose of office hours keep them from attending, so I want to clear this up. Some discussion topics you can come to me to talk about during office hours include (but are not limited to):

- You are having trouble with a course concept and need help understanding it
- You want to write a thesis next year and wanted to ask questions about this
- You want to know what graduate school is like
- You want to practice going to office hours in a lower stakes environment

Course Policies

Course policies are outlined in the syllabus. Please refer to the syllabus for all questions related to grading, assignments, and the course schedule.

Grading and expectations

Grading

All assignments will be graded fairly following the rubric and/or guidelines set forth by the professor.

I am more than happy to discuss your assignment grades with you in office hours, but not within the first 24 hours after you receive your graded assignment. If you wish to dispute an assignment grade, you must document and explain in writing each aspect of your assignment that you feel was graded incorrectly or unfairly. Be aware that a re-grade may lower rather than raise your assignment score.

Attendance

Remember, you are **required** to attend office hour sessions at least twice over the duration of this course, and must make your first appearance before the start of week 4 (ie. before Monday, June 16). You can [sign up here](#) for an appointment if you have not already done so. You can attend my office hours, Maggie's, or Professor Broockman's to receive full credit; to ensure GSI work is divided equally we do ask, however, that you do not sign up for one of Maggie's office hours unless you are completely unable to come to my office hours that week. Furthermore, please attend for at least 15 minutes to receive full credit. If no one is there after 50 minutes, I will leave the Zoom room.

Academic Honesty

You are required to submit only original work in this course; this means assignments should be written by you and you alone, and cannot have been submitted for credit in another class without instructor permission.

You must use proper attribution when engaging with ideas and written words from other individuals (i.e. citing your sources when referring to academic materials). If you remain unsure what the bounds of proper attribution are, feel free to reach out to me, the instructor, or find clarification from other campus resources (the Office of Student Conduct, the Student Learning Center, the campus library). Remember, the consequences to academic dishonesty are severe but can be avoided by asking questions and utilizing proper attribution.

Additionally, as a part of the Berkeley campus community you are expected to abide by certain standards of integrity in your academic endeavors. Your work should provide you with the opportunity to be evaluated on your own merits, and represent fully and honestly the strength of your original ideas. We will assume that any assignment you submit under your name meets these criteria of proper attribution, and expect your work to meet the basic tenets of academic honesty.

Policy on Artificial Intelligence

You are strictly forbidden from using generative AI (a catch-all term including but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, and similar LLMs) to produce work submitted under your name in such a way that would constitute plagiarism if the generative AI were any other author. Furthermore, its use on exams is strictly prohibited in this course.

Permissible uses of generative AI are those that act similar to search engines such as Google (ie. to ask about potential sources) and to assess potential spelling/grammar errors. Note, however, that while generative AI is decent at the latter task, the former remains plagued by hallucination and potential errors will be penalized. Furthermore, generative AI **may not** be used to directly compose any part of submitted assignments. To rephrase, you **may not** directly copy and paste — nor recreate verbatim without attribution — the output of a Large Language Model.

In general, I **strongly** encourage students to refrain using generative AI for any purpose throughout this course, even in potentially permissible ways. Remember that this course aims to help you build the skills necessary to critically think and write on a complex topic in American Politics today; while it may be uncomfortable at times, engaging directly in this process without the aid of generative AI will ultimately make you a stronger and more capable person, and this class will reward the effort you put in.

As a general rule of thumb: if you are unsure if the use of generative AI is appropriate or not, do not use it. To demonstrate to me that you've read this syllabus and understood it (including this section) please email me with PS109B in the subject line, telling me about something that recently made you smile; doing this will earn you a participation boost.

On collegiality

Please be respectful and kind towards your peers and towards me. Creating a safe and inclusive classroom is important to me, and is important to create an environment conducive to everyone's learning. Any discriminatory language or behavior **will not** be tolerated. If you have concerns about things that were said in office hours, please feel free to reach out to speak with me. I will not disclose any information you share.

Other Resources

Technology Access Issues

If you encounter an issue accessing technology at any point in the semester (or, indeed, throughout your time at Berkeley) consider the following resources:

- Student Technology Equity Program: free long-term loans of laptops, headphones, and other hardware devices
- Cost of Attendance Adjustment: loan (sometimes grant) of \$3000 to purchase a computer every 3 years through the financial aid office
- Student Helpdesk: free drop-in tech support (wi-fi issues, broken laptop, etc.) located in Doe Library, Eshleman Hall, and Fannie Lou Hamer Resource Center, and via email (sts-help@berkeley.edu) and phone (510-642-HELP)
- Free Software: Visit software.berkeley.edu and click “What am I eligible for?” to find over a dozen free software downloads.

Diversity and Classroom Climate

Diversity is a defining feature of the University of California and we embrace it as a source of strength. Our differences — of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, abilities, experience, and more — enhance our ability to achieve the University’s core missions of public service, teaching, and research. We welcome faculty, staff, and students from all backgrounds and want everyone at UC Berkeley to feel respected and valued.

We are all responsible for creating a learning environment that is welcoming, inclusive, equitable, and respectful. If you feel that these expectations are not being met, you can consult me or Sean Gailmard. The expectation in this class is that we all live up to this responsibility, even during vigorous debate or disagreement. The resources listed below may help individual students feel a sense of belonging.

As UC employees, all course instructors, GSIs, and tutors are “Responsible Employees” and are required to report incidents of sexual violence, sexual harassment or other conduct prohibited by university policy to the Title IX officer. We cannot keep reports of sexual harassment or sexual violence confidential, but the Title IX officer will consider requests for confidentiality. There are confidential resources available to you through UCB’s PATH to Care Center, which serves survivors of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment and Violence

Visit the PATH to Care website: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/dean/confidential-care-advocate> or call the PATH to Care 24/7 Care Line: 510-643-2005.

Students with Disabilities

If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, or if you have emergency medical information you wish to share, please inform me immediately, either in private after class or during office hours. For more information, visit the website of the Disabled Students’ Program at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu/> or contact DSP by phone at (510) 642-0518 (voice), (510) 642-6376 (TTY), or email dsp@berkeley.edu.

Student Learning Center

Located in the Cesar Chavez Student Center, Lower Sproul Plaza. Visit <http://slc.berkeley.edu/general/> for more information. The Student Learning Center provides a variety of services to assist students with coursework and assignments, including study groups, writing consultations, and workshops.

Counseling and Psychological Services

The Tang Center, 2222 Bancroft Way, offers counseling and psychological services for students facing various challenges, such as adjusting to school, deciding on a major, dealing with personal crises, and more. Visit <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/caps> for more information.

Undocumented Students Program (USP)

Located at 119 Cesar Chavez Center, USP provides holistic, multicultural, and solution-focused services to undocumented students. Visit <https://undocu.berkeley.edu/> for more information.

Basic Needs Center

The Basic Needs Center, located at the lower level of MLK Student Union (BNorth), Suite 72, provides support with essential resources like food, housing, healthcare, and more. Visit <https://basicneeds.berkeley.edu/home> for more information.

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

EOP at Cal supports first-generation and low-income college students with guidance and resources necessary to succeed. Visit <http://eop.berkeley.edu> for more details.

Gender Equity Resource Center (GenEq)

Located at 202 Cesar Chavez Student Center, GenEq fosters an inclusive experience for all students and provides resources related to gender and sexuality. Visit <https://cejce.berkeley.edu/geneq> for more information.

Multicultural Education Program (MEP)

MEP works towards institutional change and a positive campus climate for diversity. Visit <https://mep.berkeley.edu/> for more details.

Ombudsperson for Students

Located at 102 Sproul Hall, the Ombudsperson provides a confidential service for students involved in University-related problems. Visit <http://sa.berkeley.edu/ombuds> for more information.

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