

Political Science 303: Public Policy Formation in the United States

Spring 2021

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Class meets online on Tuesdays and Thursday, 2:30-3:20.

Zoom link posted on class Canvas site under Announcements. The Zoom link may change for security reasons.

Online Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:20-5:30, and by appointment. Same link as for class meetings.

Class Description

How does public policy get made in the United States? This course examines the politics of the policymaking process. Students will learn how policy agendas emerge as issues arise and problems are framed. We'll explore how official actors as well as unofficial actors evaluate policy alternatives and promote or deflect policy change. We'll identify how the legislature, the executive, and the bureaucracy organize themselves to handle policy issues. Students will learn about effective written communication for influencing policy. Also, the course will address how policymaking differs across national, state, local, and tribal governments. We'll apply these concepts to current issues in American politics.

Learning Objectives

In this class, students will learn

- why many issues do not receive serious consideration in the policymaking process and what distinguishes the issues that do.
- to identify politically feasible courses of action.
- how different political actors influence each other's policymaking aims.
- to improve their ability to produce clear, concise, and trenchant writing.
- to improve organizational and time management skills.

Readings

Required Texts:

Thomas A. Birkland. 2019. *An Introduction to the Policy Process*, 5th Edition. Routledge.

Catherine F. Smith. 2019. *Writing Public Policy*, 5th Edition. Oxford University Press.

Additional readings will be posted or linked on Canvas for specific weekly modules.

How's this going to work?

Our transition to online classes inevitably requires a degree of learning by doing. In coming weeks, I reserve the option to change elements of the course if I think it will improve learning.

We will have synchronous class meetings from 2:30 to 3:20 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Class time will be split between lecture, Q&A, and small group discussion.

For most weeks, there will be asynchronous video lectures. Videos will be posted on the Friday before class. I expect you to watch the video before our Tuesday class meeting. In my videos, if there are slides, generally I will post them in the module and not display them within the video. That way, you will have flexibility about the kind of screen split that you prefer. Slides are not a substitute for note-taking; they are a scaffolding. This design is intentional. If you're not taking notes, you'd have to be superhuman to keep your focus on the lecture.

****HOWEVER****

High-quality synchronous class-time hinges on student preparation, which includes absorbing the asynchronous lecture content. Via Canvas, I will monitor the extent to which students are viewing recorded class videos. **If I am concerned that spotty viewership is affecting the quality of synchronous class-time, I will eliminate recorded videos and we will switch to meeting for our entire allotted class time.**

Online Privacy

If students have privacy concerns, they may choose a Zoom username that does not include any personal identifying information. If you select this option, please let me know in advance your username, and please stick with the same username throughout the term.

Also, you are welcome to use a Zoom background.

Keep usernames and backgrounds PG- or G-rated, of course. I retain full and final authority over whether a username or background is appropriate for this class.

Grading

You'll have short writing projects in this class. Short doesn't mean easy, though. Aim for work that is brief but golden. Submit work that is clear, concise, and well-edited.

Don't try funny stuff with formatting. Stick with 11- or 12-point font, double-spaced text, and 1-inch margins.

All late assignments will receive a grade penalty, unless I explicitly grant an extension in advance of the due date.

What's Good Writing?

Writing should be clear, concise, and grammatically correct. Avoid indirect, passive, and flowery phrasing.

A short paper is not a suspense novel: no plot twists along the way! The introduction should briefly summarize your key takeaways. Best practice: write or revise the introduction after the rest of the essay is complete.

Don't just present your conclusions. It's equally important to explain the rationale behind your conclusions.

With short papers, often the hardest task is to balance generalities and specifics. You don't want to present an argument that seems vague or disconnected from the particulars. At the same time, you don't want to write a paper that's so far into the details that you lose the big picture.

Answer all questions in the writing prompt. Be careful that you don't put all your energy into the first part and then run out of time for the remainder.

Know what the textbook says, even in weeks where your writing focuses on the case studies. It's possible to make an argument that doesn't cite any particular passages in the textbook. If your argument runs counter to Birkland's arguments, however, you should address why you think he's wrong.

It's fine to write in the first person.

Class Calendar

Week 1 (Class meets 3/30): Introduction

In-person class cancelled on 4/1. I will post a recorded lecture by Wednesday, 3/31, on Week 1 content

Week 2 (Class meets 4/6 and 4/8): Systemic Factors in Policymaking

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 2

Smith, Chapter 1

Elections Policy Case Study

RaJade M. Berry-James, Susan T. Gooden, Richard Gregory Johnson III. 2020. "Civil Rights, Social Equity, and Census 2020." *Public Administration Review* 80(6): 1100-1108.

Week 3 (Class meets 4/13 and 4/15): Context of Policymaking

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 3

Smith, Chapter 2

Climate Change Policy Case Study

Moser, Susanne C. and Berzonsky, Carol L. 2015. "There Must Be More: Communication to Close the Cultural Divide." In *The Adaptive Challenge of Climate Change*, eds. Karen L. O'Brien and Elin Selboe, Cambridge University Press.

Recommended: Smith, Appendix

Week 4 (Class meets 4/20 and 4/22): Agendas

Paper #1 due Monday, 4/19

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 6

Smith, Chapter 3

COVID-19 Policy Case Study

Daniel Béland, Gregory P. Marchildon, Anahely Medrano, and Philip Rocco. 2021. "COVID-19, Federalism, and Health Care Financing in Canada, the United States, and Mexico." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*.

Week 5 (Class meets 4/27 and 4/29): Policy Types

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 7

Smith, Chapter 4

COVID-19 Case Study Exercise due Monday, 4/26

Identify at least one example of each of the five policy types in the COVID-19 Economic Relief Bill: distributive, regulatory, redistributive, procedural, and symbolic. To do so, use the resources and links compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures, at the website below. Write an explanation of your choices that is no more than one page long. Be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

<https://www.ncsl.org/ncsl-in-dc/publications-and-resources/covid-19-economic-relief-bill-stimulus.aspx>

Week 6 (Class meets 5/4 and 5/6): Policy Tools

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 9

Smith, Chapter 6

Climate Change Policy Case Study

Chapter 2 in Rabe, Barry et al. 2018. *Can We Price Carbon?* MIT Press.

Week 7 (Class meets 5/11 and 5/13): Legislatures

Readings

Birkland, pages 114 to 132

Climate Change Policy Case Study

Chapter 5 in Mildemberger, Matto. 2020. *Carbon Captured: How Business and Labor Control Climate Politics.* MIT Press.

Paper #2 due Friday, 5/14

Week 8 (Class meets 5/18 and 5/20): Executive Branch

Readings

Birkland, pages 132 to 151 and Chapter 10

Smith, Chapter 10

Elections Policy Case Study

Pages 129-139 and 163-173 in Rhodes, Jesse H. 2017. *Ballot Blocked: The Political Erosion of The Voting Rights Act.* Stanford University Press.

Week 9 (Class meets 5/25 and 5/27): Interest Groups and Advocates

Readings

Birkland, Chapter 5

Smith, Chapter 7

COVID-19 Policy Case Study

Xiuhtecutli, Nezahualcoyotl and Shattuck, Annie. 2021. "Crisis Politics and US Farm Labor: Health Justice and Florida Farmworkers Amid a Pandemic." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(1): 73-98.

Week 10 (Class meets 6/1 and 6/3): Wrapping up

Readings

Smith, Chapter 9 and Conclusion

Elections Policy Case Study

TBD

Finals Week

Testimony due by Wednesday, 6/9

Grading

Paper #1 (due Monday, 4/19): **25% of grade**

COVID-19 Case Study Exercise (due Monday, 4/26): **5% of grade**

Paper #2 (due Friday, 5/14): **30% of grade**

Testimony (due Wednesday, 6/9): **40% of grade**

In this class, you will research and write about a specific, actionable public policy issue. You will explore that issue in your two papers and your testimony.

The issue needs to be in the US, but it need not be a national one. If you wish, you are free to evaluate an issue where policy is made by a state, county, city, tribal, or territorial government.

You will need to select a public policy issue that is not overly broad, so that you'll be able to dive into specifics. For example, elections policy, climate change policy, and COVID-19 policy are all too broad. Voting machine security policy, vehicle emissions policy, and vaccine delivery policy are all okay.

You may re-use portions of text from one of the papers in the subsequent paper or in your testimony. Keep in mind, however, that each assignment is quite different from the others.

Paper #1: Problem definition

Write a problem definition, following Smith's guidance in Chapter 3. Your memo should describe problematic conditions, identify interests in the problem, and specify the issues for policy. For now, skip the task of offering solutions. We'll get to that in Paper #2.

Your memo should be no more than three pages. The page limit does not apply to the bibliography.

COVID-19 Case Study Exercise: see description under Week 5 content

Paper #2: Policy analysis

Write a policy analysis, following Smith's guidance in Chapter 4. Your memo should identify the problem and the interests, specify alternative solutions and relevant criteria for evaluating them, recommend an alternative, and explain your reasoning. In Smith's subsequent chapters, you will find relevant insights on how to write an effective argument; feel free to incorporate those techniques.

Your memo should be no more than three pages. The page limit does not apply to the bibliography.

Testimony

Pick a legislative committee to which you are testifying. It could be a committee in Congress or in a state, city, county, tribal, or territorial legislative body. The key feature is that the committee has jurisdiction to act on the policy recommendation that you present. You may assume there are some media and other observers present, but the legislators are your main audience.

Record testimony of no more than seven minutes. You may include audiovisual aids, but the time limit is firm.

As with all good testimony, you will provide written testimony to accompany your oral testimony. Your written testimony need not be an exact transcript of your oral testimony. Your written testimony should closely mirror your oral testimony, however. Do not include appendices or elaboration.

Include a half-page preface to your written testimony that explains to me which legislative body and which committee you've chosen, and why.

Policies

Religious Accommodation

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/) (<https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>).

Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/) (<https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>).

Academic Integrity

As a student in Political Science 303, you agree to uphold the fundamental standards of honesty, respect, and integrity, and you accept the responsibility to encourage others to adhere to these standards.

Academic misconduct is defined in Student Governance Policy, Chapter 209 Section 7.C: <http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/SGP/SPCH209.html#7>

If you are uncertain about whether a particular action constitutes academic misconduct, please ask me for guidance before an assignment is due. "I didn't know" is never an acceptable excuse for academic misconduct.

Attribution

Whenever you refer to factual information or to an author's argument, you must provide an attribution. This applies when you quote someone or when you summarize another's ideas or findings.

You cannot make minor edits to another's phrasing. You must either quote the author or restate the author's ideas with significantly different phrasing. Please include a parenthetical phrase in the text that includes the author's last name and the date of publication. If you're referring to a quote or to information or ideas from particular page(s), include the page number(s) to which you are referring. Example: (Jones 2010, 22). In addition to providing a parenthetical citation in the text, you should include full bibliographic information in a list of references at the end of the paper. Check with a style manual on how to structure the bibliography.

Plagiarism is a very bad idea. A paper that includes plagiarized materials of any kind will earn a grade of 0.