Professor: Zsofia Barta
Class schedule: Wednesdays 11:30-15:20, HS208
Office hours: Wednesdays 10:00-11:00 or by appointment
Office: Milne 205
Phone: 518-442-5259
Email: zbarta@albany.edu

Course description

This course introduces students to theories explaining cross-national variation in policy choices. It approaches policy-making from a political economic point of view and explores the relative importance of differences in socio-economic structures, institutions and ideational factors in accounting for differing policy patterns. The first third of the course lays the theoretical foundations. It first discusses the state as the provider of public policies, the way in which societal forces are reflected in policy outcomes and the influence of the international economic and political context on domestic policy choices. Then it explores the three main approaches to explaining cross-national variation in public policies – interest-focused, institutionalist and ideational theories – and reflects on the different methodological approaches suited to each. The rest of the course uses these theoretical tools in investigating policy choices in substantive policy areas – such as trade policy, public finances, welfare, health and education policies – in different countries.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students should have a good working knowledge of the main theoretical approaches to comparative public policy analysis. They are expected to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of the models discussed and use their knowledge to make informed arguments about cross-national variation in choices in several substantive policy areas. The course is also aimed at developing students’ presentation, writing and research skills.

Teaching method

This course relies on both lectures and student participation. In the first, theoretical part of the course, lectures will be combined with class discussion, whereas the seminars dealing with substantive policy areas will be centered on student presentations and discussion. All students are expected to have done the
assigned readings before coming to class, in order to enable them to participate in the debate about the merits and drawbacks of different theoretical and methodological approaches to policy-making. As a complement to classes, each student will be engaged in an independent research project, resulting in a 4000-word paper that explains a specific policy decision in a country (or countries) and a policy area of the student’s choice. Students will receive general guidance on how to hold a good presentation, how to write in a logical and concise manner and how to conduct independent research. They will also be provided with personalized advice on their individual research projects.

Assessment

The final grade for the course will depend on participation in class discussion (20%), presentation(s) (20%) and the research paper (60%). Each student will be required to hold at least one presentation and act as a moderator for the class discussion that follows. Topics and dates for the presentations will be allocated in the third class (9/28). The research paper is due in (or before) the penultimate class of the course (11/30). A 10 percent penalty is applied to late submissions for each day after the deadline. Students need to get their chosen topic approved by the professor by class 8 (10/19).

Readings


Accommodations

“Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations. (For further information, please visit http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html).” If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please also inform the instructor as soon as possible. In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from religious observance. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor’s attention as soon as possible. “Students should not expect that, if they do poorly on an exam or other assignment, to claim, at that time, the need of an accommodation. This statement is to preclude that problem, and allow people with a need for accommodations to be treated fairly and appropriately (Harwood 2003).”

Plagiarism

Please make sure to know and follow the rules. If you are involved in plagiarism the penalty will be failure in the course and you will be reported to judicial
affairs. Every Student is expected to go through the following tutorial http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html. All papers will be judged with the knowledge that you have taken the online tutorial.
# Weekly outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Practicalities</th>
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</table>
| 1.   | 8/32  | NO CLASS (annual APSA meeting)                                                                 | • Fukuyama F. (2004). State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century (Ch1)  
• Rogowski, R. (1987) Political Cleavages and Changing Exposure to Trade. The American Political Science Review Vol. 81, No. 4 | * |
• Keohane, R. O. and H. V. Milner (1996). Internationalization and domestic politics, Cambridge University Press. (Ch1 and 10)  
| 5.   | 9/28  | The three schools of explanations for policy variation: 1. Interests | • Blyth, M. (2002). Great transformations: economic ideas and institutional change in the twentieth century, Cambridge University Press. (Ch.1, 2 and 8)  
• Deadline for research proposal (300-500 words: question, hypothesis, method) |
<p>| 8.   | 10/19 | The three schools of explanations for policy variation: 3. Ideas | * |
| 9.   | 10/26 | Trade policy | * |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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* Hallerberg, M., R. Strauch and J. von Hagen (2009). Fiscal Governance in Europe. Cambridge University Press (Ch 1, 2, 8.)  
* Barta, Z. (2016) Flirting with Disaster (Ch.1) | Mini-workshop on research projects |
| 13.11/23 | NO CLASS (Thanksgiving break) | | |
| 15.12/9 | Conclusion – Interests, Institutions and Ideas Revisited | * Hall, P.A. (1986). Governing the Economy – The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France (Ch. 1, 9, and 10.)  