RPOS/RPAD 140: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY  
FALL 2016

Class Meetings:  
M/W: 2:45pm-4:05 pm (LC 7)

Discussion Sections:  
Fridays: (12:35-1:30pm); (1:40-2:35pm); (2:45-3:40pm). Rooms TBA.

Instructor:  
Dr. Ashley M Fox, PhD, MA  
afox3@albany.edu

Office hours:  
10am Fridays, 300C Milne, Downtown Campus or by Appointment  
Please let me know if you plan to come to office hours if you want to ensure that I am there.

Teaching Assistants:  
Amani Edwards    Andre Kiesel  
aedwards@albany.edu    akiesel@albany.edu  
Meets by appointment    Meets by appointment  
Students w/ last names A-M    Students with last names N-Z

I. Course Summary & Goals for the Course

Ever wonder why…  
• The US was unable to pass gun control legislation that would have expanded background checks on gun purchases in spite of over 90% of the public being in favor?  
• The US is among the few countries internationally that does not guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave?  
• The government had to shut down in 2013 costing the US economy $24 billion due to a partisan stalemate in Congress over health reform?

Then this course is for you! This course introduces students to the process of public policy making in the US and internationally. As a student in this course, you will gain a greater appreciation for the complexity of policymaking, the vast number of actors involved in policy making, and the factors that make policies more or less successful. Through the course, we will ask questions such as: Where do ideas for policies come from in the first place? Why do some ideas get attention while other problems are ignored? What does it take to get a policy formulated, enacted, and successfully implemented? What are the roles of the executive, legislature, courts, interest groups, business, the news media, and other actors in the policy process? Why do some policies, even after extensive research and analysis, seem so irrational and haphazard? How does US public policy compare with other countries?
There are no prerequisites for this course. The course is a requirement for students in Rockefeller College’s Public Policy program, and is also considered a Social Science course under the General Education requirements.

II. Course Objectives

Students coming out of this course should be able to:

- Critically analyze how political processes shape public policy formation
- Evaluate policy proposals based on various criteria
- Begin to think and write like a professional policy analyst

III. Required Texts/Technologies


The books will be available at the campus book store or can be bought (new or used) or rented on the internet (e.g., Amazon.com, etc.). I know these books are expensive, but you MUST find a way to secure a copy as you will have weekly graded Top Hat questions on the readings (see below). If you purchase an older edition of the books, you are responsible for any differences in material covered.

Top Hat classroom response system (www.tophat.com).

$24 Term – 4 month access; $36 12 month access; $72 Lifetime access

At this time, we recommend you purchase the 4 month access since few other courses at UAlbany use Top Hat.

NOTE: This is significantly less expensive than an i-Clicker, which costs upwards of $80 new.

Additional Readings

A course site on Blackboard Learning System (https://blackboard.albany.edu/) will contain supplementary readings and other materials, like written assignments required for the course. Additional reading assignments will be posted on Blackboard. Be sure to check Blackboard regularly for additional readings.

IV. Class Policies

TA’s and Discussion Sections

The TA’s should be your first recourse for questions related to the course. Please contact them first before contacting the instructor (it is nothing personal, but with 80+ students, it is better to let the TAs act as a filter for questions related to the course). Students with last names A-M are assigned to Crystal Charles as their principle TA, and students with last names N-Z to Andre Kiesel. The TAs will rotate weeks that they will lead discussion sections and in this way you will get to know each of them, but this way each TA is principally responsible for a sub-set of students.

Attendance at discussion sections is MANDATORY and attendance will be taken weekly. Discussion
sections are a time to engage in an additional set of activities designed to reinforce concepts covered in class and as a time to answer questions about course material that may be unclear, including appealing Top Hat questions.

- **Group Work versus Individual Work**
  A significant portion of work in this course will involve work in permanent groups that you will be randomly assigned to on the first day of class. A key philosophy of this course is that students learn by doing and you will be asked in your groups to apply concepts from the readings and course materials to real world examples. While group work has its challenges, it also has the advantages of providing you with a source of feedback and interaction. You should always be respectful of your group members, including thinking about the implications of coming unprepared to class for your fellow group members. In order to discourage freeriding, part of your participation grade will also come from a peer evaluation of your group members, making you accountable to your peers. See grade structure below.

- **Alternative class arrangements**
  Contact the instructor at the start of the course if you require alternative assessment arrangements, e.g. extra time to finish assignments. If you are new to the university, you may wish to visit the UAlbany Disability Resource Center webpage: [http://www.albany.edu/disability/index.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/disability/index.shtml). “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 ([http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html](http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html)).”

- **Academic Integrity & Plagiarism Policy**
  The university’s policy on academic integrity is available at: [http://www.albany.edu/reading/academic_integrity.php](http://www.albany.edu/reading/academic_integrity.php). Using someone else’s argument without citing their work, quoting an article, book, web site or other source without giving the source, and claiming as your work a paper written by someone else are all examples of plagiarism. Plagiarism is considered to be a serious matter, even if it was not intentional.

  More importantly, bear in mind that in the policy world, citing evidence that comes from credible sources only increases the persuasiveness of your argument. Throughout the semester we will be discussing different types of sources of policy information. How to correctly use and cite sources is an important part of the learning process and an important part of policy analysis. If you have questions as you are working on an assignment on how to use a source, you should ask for clarification from your TA.

  Plagiarism can result in any of the following, depending on the seriousness of the case: requirement to rewrite the affected assignment, lowering the assignment or the course grade by a full grade or more, failing the assignment or the course, or withholding permission to withdraw from the course.

  If you are not sure if something violates standards – ask. If you are not sure whether to cite or not to cite – cite. Every Student is expected to go through the following tutorial [http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html](http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html). All papers will be judged with the knowledge that you have taken the online tutorial. Any paper suspected of plagiarism will be submitted to SafeAssign to detect plagiarized language (Note: description of plagiarism policy adapted from standard language used in Victor Asal’s syllabi).

- **Meet with the instructor or TA if you have any questions, problems, or concerns.**
Reach out to instructor and/or TAs before/after class or through email to set up a time to meet to discuss any concerns. Although we do not have offices on the uptown campus, we will make ourselves available to you through scheduled appointments.

- **If you believe your grade is wrong for whatever reason, talk to the instructor**
  Visit the instructor during office hours to talk about the problem. You must take the assignment home, read the comments, and contact us. However, do so within two weeks of receiving the grade. Appeals about assignments that are more than two weeks old will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances. Making an appeal is no guarantee that your grade will be raised: it may go up, down or stay the same depending on the results of the review.

- **Mitigating circumstances**
  From time to time, unforeseen circumstances mean that students will have to miss classes or assignments. In such circumstances, please let the instructor know the situation as soon as it is practical, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

  *Important note:* Any absence not excused by the Dean's office will be considered an unexcused absence. If you have to miss a class, provide the Dean with the documentation (e.g., doctor's note) immediately following the day(s) you missed. If the Dean's office approves the documentation, they will send a letter excusing your absence to the instructor. I believe Jeanette Altarriba (jaltarriba@albany.edu) is your first point of contact in such circumstances.

V. **How to succeed in this class**

- **Be on time**
  Class will often begin with graded or ungraded participation Top Hat question. It is imperative that you arrive on time in order to get credit for any questions that are assessed at the beginning of class. There will be no way to make up questions that you miss due to unexcused tardiness.

- **Be prepared**
  Read all the required readings for each class before you come to class. YOU AND YOUR GROUP WILL BE REQUIRED TO ANSWER WEEKLY TOP HAT QUESTIONS ON THE READINGS, WHICH WILL APPEAR AT RANDOM TIMES THROUGHOUT THE CLASS. Bear in mind that you being unprepared may cause your group grade to suffer.

- **Be respectful of other people's opinions and be prepared to back up your opinions with factual evidence and reasoned argument.**
  One of the goals of this class is to train you to think and reason like a policy wonk. This means no UNSUBSTANTIATED opinions. Instead, you will be trained to look for evidence to build a substantive case in favor of your preferred position on a topic. Where underlying values and ideology do come into play, you will be trained to think critically about those assumptions and make these an explicit rather than implicit part of your argument.

- **Submit all assignments before the deadline**
  Assignments should be submitted on the day of the deadline. You may receive a 0 for late assignments or reductions of up to a letter grade, unless there are mitigating circumstances (see above). Please let the TAs and/or instructor know in advance if you foresee having a problem meeting a deadline and we may consider some flexibility depending on the circumstance, but only if we are asked in advance of the deadline (no post hoc justifications for circumstances that do not have a supporting letter from the Dean's office).
• **Silence your cell phone before the beginning of the class**
  Laptops or other devices are allowed for use in class provided they are being put toward academic purposes (e.g., fact checking to contribute to a group exercise; going on blackboard; note taking). We reserve the right to ask you to put away any devices if they become a distraction.

**VI. Assignments & Grading Philosophy**

The course is graded A-E. Formal requirements of the course are:

1. Weekly Individual and Group Top Hat Questions on readings 15%
2. Policy Worksheets (2) 15%
3. Mid-term Exam 20%
4. Policy Memo 15%
5. Final Exam 20%
6. Weekly news quizzes in Discussion Section 5%
7. In-Class Performance (based on attendance and group eval) 10%

**Total:** 100%

**Weekly Top Hat Questions on Readings (15% total; 10% individual, 5% group)**

Each class will contain 2-4 graded Top Hat questions, which will be based directly on material from the assigned readings for the week. The goal of these questions is to encourage you to do the readings and also to help you to be better consumers of information- to make sure you are getting the main points from the readings. The questions will not be detailed “gotcha” questions but rather are designed to reinforce major concepts and ideas presented in the readings. We will provide tips in the course about how to read more efficiently and effectively.

Questions will first be answered individually and logged using the Top Hat technology. You will record your answers and then answer the questions as a group. Your individual responses will be worth 10% and group responses worth 5%. The grades for each question will be posted on Blackboard by Friday, but you will also know the same day how you did since we will be using Top Hat and going over the responses in class in real time.

There will be no opportunities to make up Top Hat questions that you have missed. However, the lowest four grades will be dropped including zeros for quizzes that you miss due to an unexcused absence. Bear in mind that if you miss 4 quizzes entirely, ALL of your quiz grades will count.

**Appeals process for quiz questions.** Much of the material we will cover is quite nuanced and many of the quiz questions will ask for the “best” answer. While there will always be an answer that the instructors deem to be the “best” or “correct” answer, sometimes students may feel strongly that the question was worded unclearly or deceptive in some way and that in fact another answer is the “better” answer. In these cases, teams can nominate questions to be struck from the quiz grades.

Below we detail the process:

1. Teams must appeal in favor a specific answer, and must give reasons why that answer is as good or better than the ‘correct’ answer. Typically, the best appeal is when a team shows a part of the book which misled them, or point to an issue with the question's structure. [NOTE: The instructor has complete discretion in whether or not to accept an appeal and this will depend entirely on the cogency of your argument].
2. If a team successfully appeals, than all members of that team who also selected the appeal answer also get credit. Team members who got it wrong by picking another answer get nothing. Other teams in the class also get nothing, and every team needs to appeal themselves. This is to prevent free-riding off others and to encourage individual team thinking effort.

3. Individuals cannot appeal anything; only groups may appeal. This is so that individuals have an incentive to argue their points to their groups. If they want their individual answer to be available to appeal, they have to convince their group that it is a good answer (that even if it is wrong, it can be appealed successfully).

4. The written appeal should be submitted to the instructor by email.

Policy Worksheets (15%)
At the beginning of the semester you will choose a policy issue you are interested in. This will be the issue you will have to address in your policy memo. Before your Policy Memo is due in the second half of the semester, you will hand in two (2) policy worksheets (worth 5% and 10% respectively)- the first on a clearly written statement of the problem you are trying to address, the second on policy alternatives to address the problem and presenting a policy recommendation, based on evaluative criteria. These are designed to help you understand the context of your topic, its structure and how can this issue be seen from a policy analyst perspective. They are meant to help you develop an argument incrementally.

For the first policy worksheet, you will receive peer-to-peer feedback from your groups. We will provide everyone with a grading rubric and you will anonymously assign points and constructive feedback to your fellow group members. This will allow you to revise your first Worksheet to make it stronger when you turn it in with your second Worksheet. Since you will be receiving peer feedback, this worksheet will be graded purely on a pass/fail basis. You will get 5 points for turning it in. The second policy worksheet will be graded on a 0-10 scale.

The weeks that worksheets are due, we will spend time in lecture or discussion section talking about them in groups. Please be prepared to contribute. Worksheets are required. The worksheets will help build your first written assignment due in the second half of the semester (Policy Memo). Worksheets will be posted on the Blackboard site along with examples and we will go over expectations for the assignment in the class before it is due.

Policy Memo (15%)
Policy memos are an important way of conveying complex information about different public policies to various audiences in a brief and convincing manner. The goal should be to boil down a lot of information into succinct, digestible summary. They should be factual, but that does not mean they need to be impartial. A good policy memo persuades through the presentation of facts and evidence.

**MY OWN VIEWS ON AN ISSUE WILL NOT COLOR MY GRADING OF YOUR MEMO.** You will be graded based on how persuasively you provide information in support of your preferred policy alternative. I strongly encourage you to consider taking a position on that is the opposite of what you actually believe, as this can help you to distance yourself from the subject matter and force you to rely more on fact than personal belief. For better or worse, there may come a time when you have to defend (or at least present) ideas that may be counter to what you actually believe is the best course of action.

Potential audiences for your policy memos may be policymakers, the public at large, key stakeholder groups constituents. For instance, you may imagine that you are an aid to one of the candidates running for the
Democratic or Republican nomination and you have been asked to brief him/her on a policy topic. Or perhaps you are an aid to a local state representative. Alternatively, you may be a researcher for a think tank and your role is to educate the public about a policy issue that is going up for vote. Examples of well-written policy memos will be posted on Blackboard and specific requirements will be discussed in class and circulated.

**Midterm Exam (20%)**
The exam is scheduled for **October 15**. Keep in mind that the date is subject to change so please follow the instructor’s announcements. The midterm will consist primarily of close-ended and short answer questions.

**Final Take-Home Case Study Exam (20%)**
The instructions for the final will be distributed one week in advance and posted on Blackboard.

**Weekly News Quizzes in Discussion Section (5%)**
This course strives to make the class materials relevant to your daily lives by relating key concepts to current events. However, for students to get the most out of this, you need to keep up to date on current events and policy issues facing the U.S. As such, we are instituting weekly news quizzes in discussion sections. Quizzes will be comprised of 4-5 multiple choice questions about top headlines in the news that week and registered in Discussion Sections using your Top Hats. The first week of discussion section, we will provide you with a variety of suggestions for news sources where you can get information quickly on top headlines.

**In-Class Performance (based on attendance and group eval) (10%, 5% overall attendance; 5% group eval)**
Towards the end of the semester, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your group members according to their overall contribution to your group. Your group member’s assessment of you will be worth 5% of your grade. Peer evaluation is done to motivate you to participate meaningfully in your group work and not be a distraction. We encourage you to talk to the TAs and/or instructor if significant issues arise in your groups, but please note that groups are permanent throughout the semester and you will need to find a way to work together.

An additional 5% of grade will be based on your attendance record. Good/poor attendance at lecture and/or discussion section will be taken into consideration in your final grade. Both the lecture and the discussion section require you to be an active participant. Although my philosophy is that as autonomous adults it is up to you to regulate your own attendance in class, due to the use of group work and research that shows that nudges are necessary to incentivize desired behavior, we WILL be taking attendance at the beginning of each class. We will take attendance using the Top Hat technology with a grace period of about 5 minutes into the class. I usually spend the first 5 minutes of class making announcements and recapping important take-aways and current events that are important not to miss, so you should still plan to be on time to class.

Each lecture will incorporate 1-2 multiple choice Participation Clicker Questions that you will log using the Top Hat. Top Hat questions based on the readings for the week will be graded. Other Top Hat questions will not, but will still be counted towards your participation grade. To get a full participation grade you need to answer 80% of the Participation Clicker Questions. This means that if you are unable to attend the lecture or you forget your Top Hat you have space to compensate. You are responsible for registering it online at Top Hat and using it.

**Top Hat (i-Clicker like technology)**
In the past we have used i-Clickers as a participation tool for the course to register graded reading questions and poll course participants on various public policy topics. This semester we are trying a new tool with much greater functionality than i-Clickers: Top Hat (www.tophat.com).
Through the Top Hat classroom response system you will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets, laptops, or through text message.

We recommend that you visit the Top Hat Overview (https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide) within the Top Hat Success Center, which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as providing a brief overview to get you up and running on the system.

An email invitation will be sent to you by email, but if don’t receive this email, you can register by simply visiting our course website: https://app.tophat.com/e/949840
Note: our Course Join Code is: 949840

Top Hat will require a paid subscription, and a full breakdown of all subscription options available can be found here: www.tophat.com/pricing.

Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time, due to the fact that they require specific user information to troubleshoot these issues, please contact their Support Team directly by way of email (support@tophat.com), the in app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491.

**Teaching/Grading Philosophy**

In this course, you are not students. You are junior policy analysts. My goal for this course is to have you start thinking (and writing) like a policy analyst (with an understanding that you are still students and have time to grow). This means moving away from asserting unsubstantiated personal thoughts/opinions on subjects, to building a case for an issue/policy alternative that is based on factual evidence and solid reasoning. The policy worksheets/memo, final exam and open-ended portions of the midterm are designed to get you thinking in this way.

There are also some basic concepts and vocabulary that I want you to gain from this course. These are assessed through close-ended questions in your weekly quizzes and midterm. Myself and the TAs have less discretion over how to assign grades for these types of questions and they may require some rote memorization on your part.

I have purposefully designed the assignments for this class such that small, cumulative assignments actually count more than the “big” assignments- midterm and final. This can be a double-edged sword- it means that the midterm and final will not solely determine your grade, but it also means you need to keep up with smaller assignments, INCLUDING COMING TO CLASS REGULARLY TO ANSWER TOP HAT QUESTIONS to receive a good grade.
## VII. Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 29, 31st, Sept. 2nd</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course and overview of public policy and politics</td>
<td>Anderson, ch. 1 &amp; 2 (Blackboard)</td>
<td>Class: None due</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: None due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 7, 9th NO CLASS MONDAY- LABOR DAY</td>
<td>Public policy: definitions, contexts, players, policy cycle</td>
<td>Cochran et al. ch. 2 (Blackboard)</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News quiz</td>
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<td>Sept 12, 14, 16th</td>
<td>Cycle Stage 1: Agenda Setting and Problem Definition</td>
<td>Anderson, ch.3, p. 87-114 Lawrence, 2004 (Blackboard)</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: <strong>Policy Worksheet 1 (due Friday); News quiz</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 19, 21, 23rd</td>
<td>Cycle Stage 2: Policy Formulation/Design &amp; Introduction to Policy Analysis</td>
<td>Anderson, ch.3, p. 114-132 Selected Reading from Kraft &amp; Furlong; (pp.125-144; 165-168 &quot;Constructing Alternatives&quot;; 243-245-&quot;tax policy&quot;) (Blackboard)</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Sept 26, 28, 30th</td>
<td>Cycle Stage 3: Policy Adoption/ Legitimation and the Political Process</td>
<td>Anderson, chapter 4 Steinmo &amp; Watts, 1995 (Blackboard)</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: <strong>Policy Worksheet 2 (due Friday) News Quiz</strong></td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Oct 17th</td>
<td>Midterm Review</td>
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<td>Oct 19th</td>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Oct 28th</td>
<td>Discussion section- midterm debrief/midterm course evaluation</td>
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<td>Oct 31, Nov 2, 4th</td>
<td>Welfare, social security and economic policy</td>
<td>Cochran et al, ch. 4, 7</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Nov 7, 9, 11th NOV 8th IS ELECTION DAY, DON’T FORGET TO VOTE!</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Cochran et al., ch. 6</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Pol November 14, 16, 18th</td>
<td>Environmental and energy policy</td>
<td>Cochran, et al, ch 5</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Nov 21st NO CLASS WED/FRI-THANKSGIVING</td>
<td>Education policy</td>
<td>Cochran, et al, ch. 9</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Nov 28, 30, Dec 2nd</td>
<td>Health care policy</td>
<td>Cochran, et al, ch 8</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Dec 5, 7, 9th</td>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>Cochran, et al, ch 12</td>
<td>Class: Top Hat questions</td>
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<td>Discussion Section: News Quiz</td>
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<td>Mon Dec 12th</td>
<td>Course wrap-up, Student evaluations and clarifications on Final</td>
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<td>Wed Dec 14th</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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**For all weeks:**
Prepare for weekly quizzes
See additional readings on Blackboard