RPOS350: Comparative Public Policy  
State University of New York at Albany  
Spring 2014

Professor: Zsofia Barta  
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11.45am to 12.45pm in the Contact Office  
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Course description

Why do countries differ in their policy choices? Why do some countries provide health care and education through the public sector, while in others the provision is mostly private? Why do some countries borrow extensively while others keep their budgets in balance? Why do some countries pay unemployment benefits indefinitely, while others barely pay such benefits at all? This course answers such questions by exploring the nature of social conflicts surrounding policy-making, the differences in national policy-making institutions, changing ideas about the desirable goals and best types of policies and the influence of the international economic and political environment on national policy-making.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students should have a good understanding of the variation of policy choices across prosperous developed countries in several policy areas. They should be familiar with the main theoretical approaches to why variation is so great across democracies at similar levels of development. They are expected to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and use their knowledge to make informed arguments about cross-national variation in different policy areas. The course is also aimed at developing students' presentation and research skills.

Teaching method

This course relies mostly on lectures and student participation. All students are expected to have done the assigned readings before coming to class in order to enable them to ask informed questions and express opinions on current policy issues in the US and elsewhere. (There will be 10 pop quizzes throughout the course to test how well students prepare for classes.)
In the last three classes of the course, students will hold presentations based on their own research about specific recent policy developments of a policy area and a country of their choice. Further guidance on presentations will be provided in the second half of the course.

**Assessment**

The final grade for the course will be based on the following components:

- pop-quizzes and class participation 20%
- final presentations 20%
- mid-term 30%
- final 30%

**Readings**

There is no single textbook for this class. However, we will read “Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, CQ Press” in its entirety. Therefore, it is recommended that students secure a copy of this book. All other readings will be made available on Blackboard.

**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](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](http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html). All papers will be judged with the knowledge that you have taken the online tutorial.
## Outline by week

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| 1  | The politics of policy-making 1. | 23-Jan Process and general theory | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Introduction, Ch 1 and 2  
• Hall (1986) Governing the Economy – The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France, Ch 1 |
• Keohane and Milner (1996) Internationalization and domestic politics, Cambridge University Press, Ch 1-3  
| 3  | The politics of policy-making 3. | 4-Feb Institutions 6-Feb Ideas | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 3 and 4  
• Hall and Taylor (1996) Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms, Political Studies, 44(4), 936-57.  
• Blyth (2002). Great transformations: economic ideas and institutional change in the twentieth century, Cambridge University Press, Ch 1 and 2 |
| 4  | Macroeconomic policies | 11-Feb In normal times 13-Feb In times of crisis | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 6  
| 6  | Taxation | 25-Feb Level 27-Feb Structure | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 7  
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|      |             | • Barta (2012) Flirting with Disaster, Ch 1  
| 8    |             | 18-Mar: No Class 20-Mar: No Class 25-Mar Primary, secondary, tertiary 27-Mar Vocational education |
|      |             | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 10  
| 9    |             | 11-Mar No Class 13-Mar: No Class - CES conference |
| 10   | Education   | 25-Mar Primary, secondary, tertiary 27-Mar Vocational education |
|      |             | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 10  
| 11   | Health policy | 1-Apr American exceptionalism 3-Apr Europe |
|      |             | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 8  
• Freeman (2000) The politics of health in Europe, Ch 1, 2, 8  
| 12   | Welfare policy | 8-Apr The origins 10-Apr Current challenges |
|      |             | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 9  
| 13   | Immigration policy | 15-Apr: No Class 17-Apr Immigration and integration |
|      |             | • Adolino and Blake (2011) Comparing Public Policies, Ch 5  
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<td>1-May Projects</td>
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