

SYLLABUS
RPOS469Z/546: Comparative Public Policy
State University of New York at Albany
Fall 2014

Professor: Zsofia Barta

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9.00-10.00 in the Contact Office

Office: Milne 205

Phone: 518-442-5259

Email: zbarta@albany.edu

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.

The first half of the course covers the broad theoretical approaches to why policies differ across time and nations. The second half uses different policy areas to see how well the different theories can explain policy variation.

This course is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. Students should register under the number appropriate to their current standing (graduate or undergraduate). While the assignments below are similar for both, the expectations are not: a higher level of synthesis, analysis, and theoretical engagement is expected from graduate students than from undergraduates in the course. That said, the course should be challenging for all students enrolled.

Undergraduate students who have taken RPOS350 Comparative Public Policy should not take this course.

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;
- be familiar with the main theoretical approaches to why variation is so great across democracies at similar levels of development;

- be able 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, writing and research skills.

Teaching method

This course relies mostly on discussion. Students are expected to hold presentations and participate in class discussions. They are expected to have done the assigned readings *before* coming to class in order to enable them to participate actively in group-work and to ask informed questions and express opinions on current policy issues in the US and elsewhere.

Assessment

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

- attendance and participation in class discussions 10%
- reading response papers 20%
- literature review 20%
- first draft of paper 20%
- final paper 20%
- presentation 10%

Reading response papers

For each week, students should hand in via Blackboard a reading response of no more than 300 words, briefly responding to questions regarding the readings assigned for that week. Questions can be found both on Blackboard and in the syllabus. Reading responses are due each Monday by 12 midnight.

Literature review

By the end of week 8, students are expected to write a literature review of no more than 1000 words to summarize the gist of the major theoretical approaches discussed in the first half of the course.

Paper

Throughout the rest of the course, students will work on a scaffolded writing exercise, the end product of which will be an individual paper (of up to 3000 words) that explains an instance of policy variation between two countries of the student's choice in a policy area of the student's choice.

A paper proposal of maximum one page is due October 16. The proposal should explain which countries and what policy area the student will be examining, describe the policies chosen by each country and propose hypotheses that the student wishes to investigate. Students will briefly present their proposed topics

in class on October 16. They will receive feedback from their fellow students and the professor and are expected to incorporate the feedback in their subsequent paper.

The first draft of the paper is due on November 9. Students will receive a grade as well as detailed feedback on this draft and will have the opportunity to rework their drafts and incorporate the feedback also in their presentations.

The final draft of the paper is due December 8.

The last two weeks will be set aside for presentations, in which students explain to their fellow classmates their research and their findings.

Grade Appeals

In order to appeal a grade on a particular assignment, you should contact me during office hours within 2 weeks of receiving the assignment back and submit a written explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed, not to exceed 2 pages. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left as is, depending on the results of the review. After two weeks, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances like a serious illness.

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.

Wk	Topic	Tuesday	Thursday	Assignment
1	Introduction		Aug-27 Introduction to the course • No readings	• No assignment
2	Who makes policies? 1. The state	Sep-01 • Fukuyama F. (2004). State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century (Ch1)	Sep-03 • Migdal, J. (2001). State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another (Ch1) Cambridge University Press	• Reading response paper 1: What does the state do?
3	Who makes policies? 2. Society	Sep-08 • Gourevitch, P. (1986). Politics in hard times: comparative responses to international economic crises, Cornell University Press (Chs 1, 2, 6)	Sep-10 • Gourevitch, P. (1986). Politics in hard times: comparative responses to international economic crises, Cornell University Press (Chs 1, 2, 6)	• Reading response paper 2: How does society (groups within society) impact policy making according to Gourevitch?
4	Who makes policies? 3. The international VS the domestic	Sep-15 • Keohane, R. and Milner H. (1994). Internationalization and Domestic Politics, Cambridge University Press (Chs 1,2,3,4)	Sep-17 • Keohane, R. and Milner H. (1994). Internationalization and Domestic Politics, Cambridge University Press (Chs 1,2,3,4)	• Reading response paper 3: How does the international environment affect domestic policy making?
5	The three schools of explanations for policy variation: 1. Interests	Sep-22 • Rogowski, R. (1987) Political Cleavages and Changing Exposure to Trade. The American Political Science Review Vol. 81, No. 4	Sep-24 • Frieden, J. (1991). Debt, Development and Democracy, Princeton University Press (Introduction, Chs. 1, 7, 8)	• Reading response paper 4: What sort of conflicts and commonalities of interest influence policy making? How?
6	The three schools of explanations for policy variation: 2. Institutions	Sep-29 • Thelen, K. and Steinmo, S. (1992) Historical institutionalism in comparative politics	Oct-01 • Lijphart, A. (1999). Patterns of Democracy. New Haven and London, Yale University Press. (Ch 1-3. and 17)	• Reading response paper 5: How and why do institutions matter for policy making?
7	The three schools of explanations for policy variation: 3. Ideas	Oct-06 • Blyth (2002). Great transformations: economic ideas and institutional change in the twentieth century, Cambridge University Press, Ch 2	Oct-08 • Blyth, M. (2003). Structures Do Not Come With an Instruction Sheet: Interests, Ideas and Progress in Political Science, Perspectives on Politics 1(4)	• Reading response paper 6: How and why do ideas matter for policy making?
8	Midterm revision	Oct-13 • Recommended: Hall, P. A. (1997). The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations. Comparative Politics. Rationality, Culture and Structure. M. I. Lichbach and A. S. Zuckerman. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press	Oct-15 • Paper proposal discussion: explain to the class what countries and policy area you chose, what is interesting about differences in policy choice in these two countries and how you propose to explain the differences.	• Literature Review due (Oct 16.) • Paper proposal due (Oct 16.)
9	Education policy	Oct-20 • Ansell, B.W. (2008). Traders, Teachers, and Tyrants: Democracy, Globalization, and Public Investment in Education. International Organization 62(2)	Oct-22 • Ansell, B.W. (2008). University Challenges: Explaining Institutional Change in Higher Education, World Politics 60(2)	• Reading response paper 7: How do interests influence education policies?
10	Trade policy	Oct-27 • Ehrlich, S. D. (2007) Access	Oct-29 • Hiscox, M. J. (1999). The Magic	• Reading response paper 8: Do institutions matter for trade

10	Trade policy	Oct-27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ehrlich, S. D. (2007) Access to Protection: Domestic Institutions and Trade Policy in Democracies, International Organization, 61(3) 	Oct-29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiscox, M. J. (1999). The Magic Bullet? The RTAA, Institutional Reform, and Trade Liberalization, International Organization 53(4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading response paper 8: Do institutions matter for trade policy?
11	Debt	Nov-03 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hallerberg, M., Strauch, R. and von Hagen (2009.) Fiscal Governance in Europe, Cambridge University Press (Chs. 1 and 2) 	Nov-05 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barta, Z (2015). Flirting with Disaster (Ch 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading response paper 9: What role do interests and institutions play in debt accumulation?
12	Welfare policies	Nov-10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Van Kersbergen, K. and Vis, B. (2014) Comparative Welfare State Politics, Cambridge University Press (Chs. 3 and 4) 	Nov-12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Van Kersbergen, K. and Vis, B. (2014) Comparative Welfare State Politics, Cambridge University Press (Chs. 3 and 4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First draft of paper due on Monday, November 9.
13	Health policy	Nov-17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quadagno, J. (2011). One Nation, Uninsured: Why the U.S. Has No National Health Insurance, Oxford University Press 	Nov-19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quadagno, J. (2011). One Nation, Uninsured: Why the U.S. Has No National Health Insurance, Oxford University Press 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading response paper 10: Why does the US have no national health insurance?
14	Presentations	Nov-24 Presentations	Nov-26 No class	
15	Presentations	Dec-01 Presentations	Dec-03 Presentations	
16	Conclusion	Dec-08		