

RPOS 303 (call 9733) RPUB 303 (9734)
PUBLIC POLICY THEORY AND PRACTICE
Spring 2011
TTH 02:45:00_PM-04:05:00_PM
LC0023
Prof. Nakamura

320 Milne Hall
rn382@csc.albany.edu; 442-5285

Office Hours
Monday, 320 Milne 3:30 to 5:30
Tuesday and Thursday, Basement Humanities, 1:30 to 2:30

Course Description:

This is a course in the policy process. It is organized along the conventionally accepted sequence that begins with agenda setting and moves through policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. While a simplification of how the world works, this sequence offers a convenient and useful way of dividing issues and problems into manageable bits for analysis and instruction.

There are three distinct perspectives found in the policy process literature. First, is an incrementalist view derived from the literature on decision making under conditions of uncertainty, high information costs and limited power. Second is a view from political science and that stresses the primacy of politics in raising issues for consideration, in shaping preferences, and determining which choices are made. This view seeks to explain why things happen the way they do. Third there is a more linear, rationalistic and prescriptive view drawn from economics and is more concerned with making efficient choices and improving outcomes. All three perspectives will be incorporated into the course because they all influence the way we think about and seek to influence the policy process.

We will begin with the question of where political problems come from or how issues get on the public agenda. A variety of models will be discussed at this point including: incrementalist, garbage can, market and government failure perspectives. In the policy formulation section which is about how policy decisions get made, we will cover topics ranging from the rudiments of policy and risk analysis, available policy tools, and major generic arguments typically found in policy debates. We will conclude with a review of the elements and issues encountered during policy implementation and evaluation.

Required Readings:

Thomas Birkland, *An Introduction To The Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, And Models Of Public Policy Making* second edition, (Paperback) ME Sharpe.

Albert Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, Second edition (Longman Classics edition) 2002.

In addition, there are readings on ERSERVE under this course number.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Exams. 3 in class exams at the times indicated under Weekly Assignments. These exams will cover both the readings and lectures. They are intended to test your knowledge of the materials and not your general intelligence or background. If you don't do the reading and understand the lectures, you won't pass the exams.
2. Paper is equal to one of the exams above. This paper will require you to choose a policy and answer the following questions about it explicitly using and citing the course materials. (1) How did the policy get on the elite agenda? (2) What was the process for deciding on it (passing a law? Making an administrative decision? What?) and (3) how did the process shape the outcome in implementation and evaluation? Papers that merely talk about the policy and do not make use of the course materials will not receive a passing grade. You must choose a topic and be prepared to discuss the topic and likely sources with me during my office hours on the dates indicated.
3. Class participation (includes attendance). This portion will determine ½ a grade in either direction. This is not intended to be simply a lecture class. You are expected to participate in a knowledgeable fashion during class discussions.

Honesty Policy

The usual standards of conduct prohibiting cheating will apply. Papers are expected to cite the source materials and expected to be more than mere cutting and pasting of those materials. You are required to submit the papers in electronic form so that they can be checked for originality.

Daily Schedule

Introduction to the Policy Process

1. Introduction, Thurs., Jan. 20
No Assignment
2. Stages of the Policy Process, Tues, Jan. 25
Read: Harold Lasswell, The Decision Process, e reserve
3. Thurs., Jan. 27
Read: Thomas Birkland, An Introduction To The Policy Process, Chapter 1. The Study and Practice of Public Policy, Chapter 2 The Historical and Structural Context of Public Policy Making

Agenda Setting

4. Getting the Attention of Policymakers, Tues, Feb. 1
Read: Birkland, Chapter 3. Official Actors and Their Roles in Public Policy
Birkland, Chapter 4. Unofficial Actors and Their Roles in Public Policy
Birkland, Chapter 5. Agenda Setting, Power, and Interest Groups
5. Agenda Setting in Incrementalist Models, Thurs., Feb. 3
Read: Lindblom, The Science of Muddling Through, e reserve
6. Agenda Setting in Rational Models: Market Failure, Tues, Feb. 8
Read: Read: Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons, e reserve
7. Agenda Setting in Political Models and Windows of Opportunity, Thurs., Feb. 10
Read: Nakamura, The Textbook Policy Process, e reserve.
8. Agenda Setting Taking Stock, Tues., Feb. 15
9. Thurs., Feb. 17 FIRST HOUR EXAM

Tues, Feb. 22 Spring Break
Thurs., Feb. 24 Spring Break

Policy Formulation

Political Models

10. Policy Streams, Tues, Mar. 1

Start Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy (first half)

11. Policy, Politics, and Power, Thurs., Mar. 3

Finish John Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies (first half)

12. Political Model: Business and Solutions, Tues, Mar. 8

Read: Stigler, Theory of Economic Regulation, e reserve

Rational Models and the Search for Solutions

13. Problem-Driven Solutions: Market Failure and Fixing the Market Solutions, Mar. 10

Read: Weimer and Vining, Market Failure, e reserve

Weimer and Vining, Government Failure, e reserve

Types of Policies

14. Policy Tools and Implements, Thurs., . Tues, Mar. 15

Read: Birkland, Policies and Policy Types

15. Policy Implements Thurs., Mar. 17

Read: Elmore and McDonnell ERESERVE

16. Taking Stock, Tues, Mar. 22

TERM PAPER TOPICS DUE

17. SECOND HOUR EXAM, Thurs., Mar. 24

Policy Adoption

18. How Policies Shape Politics, Tues, Mar. 29

Read: Lowi, selection, erseserve

19. Thurs., Mar. 31 No Class. (Midwest meeting)

SPECIAL OFFICE HOURS

April 5, 6, 7.

20. Rational Models of Policy Choice: Cost Benefit. Tues, April 5

Read: Watkins, Intro to Cost Benefit, e reserve

21. Rational Models for Risk Management, Thurs., April 7
Read: Graham, selections from risk vs. risk, on reserve

Political Rhetoric and Policy Debates

22. Arguments, Tues, April 12
Start Hirschman

23. Thurs., April 14
Finish Hirschman

Tues, April 19 No Class
Thurs., April 21 No Class

24. Tues, April 26 THIRD HOUR EXAM

Policy Implementation and Evaluation

25. Policy Implementation, Thurs., April 28
Read: Nakamura and Smallwood, Environment of Implementation, reserve
Birkland, Chapter 9. Putting It All Together: Models of the Policy Process

26. Tues, May 3 TERM PAPERS DUE. Last Day of Class in both hard copy and electronic. There is a penalty for failure to turn in a hard copy on time.