

American Public Policy: The Invention of the Possible

Political Science 4216
Spring 2017
TTH 11 AM–12:15 PM
128 Olin Engineering

Prof. Philip Rocco
Email: philip.rocco@marquette.edu
Office: 411 Wehr Physics
Office Hours TTH 9–10 AM, 4–5 PM or by appt.

[Politics] is a realm akin to art insofar as, like art, it occupies a creatively mediating position between spirit and life, the idea and reality.

Thomas Mann (1945)

Solutions to problems, scientific and practical alike, both reflect and create social constructs...By proposing new programs, the policy analyst suggests new hypotheses and hence new values that codify social relations.

Aaron Wildavsky (1979)

Course Description

This course is designed to provide upper-level undergraduates with an in-depth exploration of the political foundations of public policy in the United States. Public policy has a double meaning in contemporary American politics. First, policy is a political prize. At all levels of government, politicians, interest groups, experts, and citizens fight about how to define and prioritize policy problems, how to implement policies on the ground, and how to evaluate the success of laws already on the books. Policy is also a terrain on which politics itself plays out. Once enacted, policies channel resources—material, institutional, and symbolic—towards some groups or individuals and away from others. In so doing, policies shift the balance of power in society, remaking the rules by which political games are played.

We will begin the course by examining processes that lead to policy enactment, including agenda setting, problem definition, interest formation, and legislative coalition building. We will then apply these ideas by examining the budgetary process. Next, we will look closely at post-enactment politics, focusing on processes of policy implementation, evaluation, and feedback. In the second half of the semester, we will apply these insights to several contemporary sources of policy debate. To explore the relationship between policy and politics in greater detail, primary source materials will complement political science analyses of statutory or regulatory activity at the federal, state, and local levels.

By the end of the course, students will be able to critically evaluate how and under what conditions real “change agents” can leverage the formal, legal structures of government to produce innovations for (and sometimes against) public welfare. Throughout the semester, students will be expected to apply analytical and empirical tools and data sources to develop an original research paper on an attempt at major policy change in the current session of Congress.

Requirements

Participation (10%): This course requires an extensive amount of reading and preparation prior to class. To facilitate this, weekly reading questions will be posted to D2L. You are expected to attend each class session having read and digested all assigned material, ready to engage in an informed, lively discussion with the instructor and with other students. If you do not speak at all during the semester or are absent for more than 6 class sessions, you will receive a 0 for participation.

Quizzes (20%): You will be given ten short, unannounced quizzes on the readings throughout the semester. These are designed to ensure that you are doing the reading and will draw on weekly reading questions posted on D2L. There will be no makeups for missed quizzes.

Midterm (20%): The midterm will feature a mix of short-answer and multiple-choice questions aimed covering material from the first half of the semester.

Policy Expert Project (50%): Over the course of the semester, you will complete three policy briefs and prepare a short presentation on a major policy issue in the current session of Congress. The project is described in detail at the end of the syllabus.

- Policy Brief #1 – Problem Definition (15%)
- Policy Brief #2 – Interest Groups (10%)
- Policy Brief #3 – Legislative Success (20%)
- Final Presentation (5%)

Policies

Academic Misconduct: Information on Marquette's Academic Misconduct Policy can be found here: <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/> Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, individual violations, helping another student with any form of academic misconduct, failing to report any form of academic misconduct, or intentionally interfering with the educational process in any manner. Academic misconduct of any type is unacceptable and will result in immediate referral to Marquette's Academic Integrity Director. If you are in doubt as to whether an action or behavior is subject to the academic misconduct policy, you should consult an appropriate member of the Academic Integrity Council, faculty or staff.

Disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact the University's Office of Disability Services within the first week of classes. For more information, contact the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Suite 005 or at (414) 288-1645. If you require any accommodations for exams or other assignments, you must notify me (along with all required documentation) at least one week in advance of the assignment due date.

Courtesy: Your participation is essential to this course. As such, you are expected to behave with courtesy towards your classmates and professor. **Phones should be silenced and out of sight.** Laptops are acceptable for taking notes but please stay attentive to the task at hand. Failure to appropriately use technology will result in a lower participation grade.

Late Assignments: I expect all students to complete required assignments when they are due. If you are unable to complete an assignment for a serious or urgent reason you must contact me before the assignment is due. Otherwise, the assignment will be marked down a full letter grade for each day past the deadline.

Grading Scale:

93-100 A
 87-92.9 AB
 82-86.9 B
 77-81.9 BC
 72-76.9 C
 67-71.9 CD
 60-66.9 D
 Below 60 F

Books

Required:

Four books are available for purchase at the Book Marq:

1. Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality: How the Politics of Higher Education Sabotaged the American Dream* (Basic Books, 2014).
2. Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).
3. Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2016).
4. Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics* (Simon and Schuster, 2011).

All other required readings will be made available on D2L.

Recommended:

- *Chicago Manual of Style Guidelines (Quick Study®)* (ISBN: 978-1423218609)
- You are advised to read publications with daily coverage of national politics, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or *Vox*. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* affords excellent coverage of local and state politics.

Schedule of Class Meetings

1. Analyzing Power and Public Policy

- Jan. 17 No readings
- Jan. 19 John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (University of Illinois Press, 1982), 3-17.
- Marcia Angell, "The Truth About the Drug Companies," *The New York Review of Books*, July 15, 2004.

2. Framing Problems and Setting the Agenda

- Jan. 24 William Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (Yale University Press, 1986), 106-113.
- Jal Mehta, "Escaping the Shadow: 'A Nation at Risk' and Its Far-Reaching Influence." *American Educator* 39, no. 2 (2015): 20-44.
- Jan. 26 Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 59-82.
- *Short tutorial on using Congress.gov. Bring laptops to class.

3. Studying Interest Group Influence

- Jan. 31 Olga Pierce, "Medicare Drug Planners, Now Lobbyists, With Billions at Stake," *ProPublica*, October 20, 2009.
- Richard L. Hall and Frank W. Wayman. "Buying time: Moneyed interests and the mobilization of bias in congressional committees." *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 03 (1990): 797-820.
- Feb. 2 Nolan McCarty et al., *Political Bubbles* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 71-89.
- *Short tutorial on using opensecrets.org. Bring laptops to class.

4. The Logic(s) of Legislative Action: Interests, Parties, and Institutions

- Feb. 7 R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 1-16, 210-223.
- *Short tutorial on writing policy briefs
- Feb. 9 Frances E. Lee "Presidents and Party Teams: The Politics of Debt Limits

and Executive Oversight, 2001-2013." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2013): 775-791.

Sarah Binder, "Polarized We Govern?", Brookings Institution Paper (May, 2014)."

Feb. 14 Anne-Laure Beaussier, "The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: the victory of unorthodox lawmaking," *Journal of health politics, policy and law* 37, no. 5 (2012): 741-778.

***Policy Brief #1 Due**

5. Budgets, Politics, and Honest Numbers

Feb. 16 Eric Patashnik, "Budgeting More, Deciding Less," in Martin Levin et al., eds., *Seeking the Center: Politics and Policymaking at the New Century* (Georgetown University Press, 2000), 35-53

Feb. 21 Roy T. Meyers, "The Implosion of the Federal Budget Process: Triggers, Commissions, Cliffs, Sequesters, Debt Ceilings, and Shutdown." *Public Budgeting & Finance* 34, no. 4 (2014): 1-23.

Feb. 23 Robert Saldin, "Gaming the Congressional Budget Office," *National Affairs* 1 (Fall, 2014), 81-93.

Sarah Kliff, "The CBO Has Some Bad News for Obamacare repealers," *Vox.com*, December 28, 2016.

6. Structures, Bureaucrats, and Implementation Wars

Feb. 28 Terry Moe, "The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure," in *Can the Government Govern?*, eds. John Chubb and Paul Peterson (Brookings Institution Press, 1989), pp. 267-285.

March 2 Marissa Martino Golden, "Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect: Bureaucratic Responses to Presidential Control During the Reagan Administration," *J-PART* 2 (1, 1992): 29-62.

***Policy Brief #2 Due**

March 7 Daniel Béland, Philip Rocco, and Alex Waddan, *Obamacare Wars: Federalism, State Politics, and the Affordable Care Act* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016), Introduction and Chapter 3.

March 9 **Midterm exam**

March 14-16 ****No class – Spring Break****

7. The Logic of Post-Reform Politics

- March 21 Andrea Campbell, "Policy Feedbacks and the Impact of Policy Designs on Public Opinion," *Journal of Health Policy, Politics, and Law* 36 (6, 2011): 961-973.
- Jon Oberlander, "The End of Obamacare," *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 5, 2017.
- March 23 Daniel Vock, "States, Not Just Feds, Struggle to Keep Gas Revenue Flowing," *Governing*, May 18, 2015
- Philip Rocco, "Informal Caregiving and the Politics of Policy Drift," *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* (in press).

8. Public Policy and Widening Income Inequality

- March 28 Hacker and Pierson, Chap. 1-2, 4, 6.
- March 30 Hacker and Pierson, Chap. 8-10

9. The Political Economy of Mass Incarceration

- April 4 In-class movie: *Prison State* (2014)
- April 6 Gottschalk, Chap. 1-3
- April 11 Gottschalk, Chap. 10-11
- April 13 **No class**

10. The Politicization of Pain and Relief

- April 18 Wailoo, Chap. 1, 3
- April 20 Wailoo, Chap. 4-5

11. A Hollowed Out American Dream? Drift and Higher Education Policy

- April 25 Mettler, Introduction, Chap. 2-4
- April 27 Mettler, Chap. 5-6
- May 2 Student Presentations
- May 4 Student Presentations

***Policy Brief #3 Due**

Policy Expert Project

Legislation is a central vehicle for policy change in the United States. The purpose of this project is for you to analyze the politics of a major policy issue in the current session of Congress (115th). At the start of the semester, students will choose from a list of possible issues; over the course of the semester, students will write three policy briefs assessing different dimensions of their issue. At the end of the semester, students will be responsible for making a 3-5 minute oral presentation that summarizes their findings from the three briefs. This assignment is designed to allow you to apply your knowledge of key concepts in the study of public policy, develop expertise about a major policy issue, and to gain familiarity with valuable data sources for analyzing American politics.

- ***Policy Brief #1: The Politics of Problem Definition* (1500-1600 words) – Due Feb. 14 – worth 15% of course grade**

In this brief, you will discuss the background and history of the policy proposal and the approach that supporters and opponents of the issue take to framing the problem the proposal is meant to solve. To do so, you will use information from Congress.gov, including the text of the legislation in question and relevant sections of the *Congressional Record* [*CQ Weekly*, available at Raynor Library, may be used as a supplementary resource if necessary.] More details on how to use these resources will be provided in class.

Specifically, your brief should address the following questions:

1. What is the content of the policy proposal in question? What does it propose to do? What effects might it have?
2. Who supports the policy proposal in Congress? Who opposes it?
3. What kind of language and arguments do proponents and opponents of the proposal use to discuss it?
4. How might the language and arguments of proponents and opponents affect the following: (a) the sense among members of Congress that urgent action is required and (b) the possibility of building a viable coalition within Congress?

- ***Policy Brief #2: Mobilization of Interest Groups* (1000-1200 words) – Due March 2 – worth 10% of course grade**

In this brief, you will analyze the interest-group environment for your issue. In particular, you will use data on campaign contributions from opensecrets.org, as well as other appropriate sources, to answer the following questions:

1. What industries account for the largest and second largest contributions to the member sponsoring the legislation? Do organizations in these industries have positions on this legislation? If so what are they?
2. What pattern, if any, exists in the industries contributing to the legislation's cosponsors?

3. What pattern, if any, exists in the industries contributing to members of the committee the legislation was referred to?
 4. Given your answers to questions 1-3, to what extent do you think interest groups are likely to have an influence on the nature and content of the legislation you are analyzing? What is this effect likely to be? Keep in mind that even interest groups opposed to legislation in principle may want to shape its content.
- ***Policy Brief #3: The Politics of Legislative Success* (2000-2500 words) – Due May 2 – worth 20% of course grade**

In this brief, you will provide a more comprehensive analysis of how your legislation has fared thus far is likely to fare in the future. Using Congress.gov, *CQ Weekly*, and other appropriate resources discussed in class, your brief will answer the following questions:

1. How far has your legislation made it in the legislative process (committee, floor vote, passage in one chamber, passage in both chambers, signed by the president)?
2. To what extent have any of the following factors played a role in shaping this outcome? Describe and support this influence with clear examples.
 - a. Importance / lack of importance in Public Opinion
 - b. Coverage / lack of coverage in news media
 - c. Support / lack of support from the President
 - d. Support / lack of support from Interest Groups
 - e. Support / lack of support within majority party
 - f. Focusing events/crises
 - g. Evaluations of the proposal / policy analysis

- ***Short Presentation* – Due May 2-4 – worth 5% of course grade**

Presentations will occur during the last two class sessions. You will prepare a 3-minute oral presentation that briefly characterizes the issue you examined, and your main findings on the issue framing, interest-group mobilization, and the factors that influenced policy change.

Style Rules for Policy Briefs

Policy briefs must adhere to the following style rules. These are not optional:

- **Title:** All policy briefs should begin with an original title that conveys the main point of the brief.
- **Introduction:** Following the title, a short introductory section should characterize the main findings.
- **Organization:** Briefs should be organized into subsections with clear headings that characterize the topic of paragraphs within them.

- Citation style: Parenthetical author-date citations (Rocco 2016) with page numbers for direct quotations (Rocco 2016, 15). References table must follow the Chicago Manual of Style (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/contents.html>).¹ Policy briefs lacking appropriate citations will be receive significant grade deductions. Evidence of plagiarism will be dealt with under the Academic Integrity Policy on the syllabus.
- Font and Spacing: Times New Roman, 12 point. Double spaced.
- Margins: 1” on all four sides
- Page numbering: Upper right-hand corner
- Stapling: Upper left-hand corner
- Cover sheet: Should include title of brief, name, course number, date, and word count.

¹ A quick guide to citing *government documents* in Chicago style is here: <https://library.bowdoin.edu/help/chicago-gov.pdf>.