

Political Science 111
Current Problems and Controversies in United States Politics: Shaping Policy
Fall 2009

Time: T/Th; 9:30AM -10:45AM
Location: 1115 2BSB
Professor Michael Fortner
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:00-3:00 PM

Contact Information:
1122 2BSB
(312) 996-5156
mfortner@uic.edu

Course Description

The American polity is multifaceted. The policy process is complex. This course examines how various institutional features of the American political system and organizational actors within that system influence policy development. Through a thorough examination of political parties, interest groups, the judiciary, Congress, elections, the media, the presidency, and the bureaucracy, this course provides students with a clear understanding of the forces that shape public policy in contemporary American politics.

First, this course will explore theoretical and analytical approaches to policy development, which the class will employ to assess the role particular institutions play in the policy-making process. Then the course will focus on specific institutions and investigate all the ways they might or might not influence public policy. Finally, the course will examine case studies of policy development in order to observe how various features of the American polity interact to shape public policy.

Course Organization and Requirements

The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. The lectures will not only cover the themes addressed in assigned readings but will also provide a broad overview of those topics. I will reserve time at the end of each class for questions and brief discussions. Occasionally, entire classes will be discussion-based.

Evaluation

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Midterm exam (20%)
- Final exam (25%)
- Paper (25%)
- Participation/presentations (30%)

Grading

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scoring scheme.

- A 90-100%
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79%
- D 60-69%

F below 60

Exams

The midterm and final exams will feature a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer and essay questions. The midterm exam will cover topics addressed in course readings and class lectures from August 25 until September 24. The final exam is cumulative. It will encompass themes and topics addressed in course readings, class lectures, films and debates. I will hold a review session outside of class before each exam to make sure that you are as prepared as possible. Review sessions will be scheduled at a later date.

Final Paper

A final paper (7-9 pages) is due December 3. By the end of the semester, we will have covered theories of policy development (e.g. Kingdon and Baumgartner and Jones) and explored the role that specific political institutions (e.g. the Congress and the Presidency) and processes (e.g. elections) play in policy development. Your final papers will test the explanatory power of particular theories or the causal significance of specific institutions in a specific policy area: tax reform. These papers will compare the development of the Tax Reform Act of 1986 and the development of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001(a.k.a. the Bush tax cuts). You will not need to do outside research for this paper. You will receive a memo outlining the details of this assignment on November 5.

Participation/presentations

Attendance is mandatory. A sign-in sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class. All students must come to class prepared, having completed all assigned readings prior to class. Students should be ready to respond questions and engage in serious discussion. We will also use our Blackboard site to continue class discussions or start new ones. Feel free to post questions about the readings or your initial thoughts. Our Blackboard site will provide students an opportunity to demonstrate their engagement with course materials and boost their participation grade. Your attendance/discussion grade represents 45% of your participation grade.

On October 8, we will watch “Dan Rather Reports: The Best Congress Money Can Buy” in class. No readings are assigned for that day, but a two-page memo on the film is due Friday, October 9 by 5:00pm. Your grade on this memo represents 15% of your participation grade.

There will also be two debates during the semester. I will create debate teams to argue for or against a particular position. Two weeks before each debate, I will hand out a memo detailing the debate question and offering sources that both teams should consult. Each team should submit a one-page memo to me at beginning of the class. These memos should list the team’s major arguments and key supporting evidence. Each team will receive a grade. These grades will be based on the quality of the presentation, the strength and sophistication of the arguments, and the quality and appropriateness of the evidence. Your team’s grade will also serve as your individual grade. Your grade on these debates (an average of the two) represents 40% of your participation grade.

Late Work

There will be no make-exams offered. If you miss an exam, you receive a zero. I will make exceptions for medical emergencies and deaths in the family, both of which require documentation. If you know in advance that you absolutely have to miss an exam, notify me at least one week in advance and you will be able to take the test before the scheduled test date, but not after.

Your final paper is due December 7 and will be collected in class. Extensions will not be granted for this assignment unless I receive a notification of a medical or family emergency. In the absence of such notification, students will lose one letter grade (e.g. A to B, C to D) for each day that the assignment is late.

Academic Honesty

Students should follow the university's regulations regarding academic integrity as laid out in the Student Handbook. Students are strongly advised to read and familiarize themselves with these regulations. If students violate standards of academic honesty they will receive a failing grade in the class and may face expulsion from the University.

Required Texts

John W. Kingdon. 2002. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: Longman. ISBN: 0321121856

Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0226039390

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein. 2008. *The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0195368711

Richard E. Neustadt. 1991. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press; Revised edition. ISBN: 0029227968

Alan Murray and Jeffrey Birnbaum. 1989. *Showdown at Gucci Gulch*. New York: Vintage. ISBN: 0394758110.

R. Douglas Arnold. 1992. *The Logic of Congressional Action*. New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN: 0300056591

Recommended:

R. Shep Melnick. 1994. *Between the Lines: Interpreting Welfare Rights*. Brookings Institution Press. ISBN: 081575664X

Course Schedule

American Democracy, Power, and Public Policy Development

Aug 25 **Introduction**
Federalist 10
Federalist 51
(available online: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp)

Aug 27 **Inequality and Policy Development**
Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder. 1971. "The Politics of Agenda-Building: An Alternative Perspective for Modern Democratic Theory," *The Journal of Politics*, 33(4): 892-915 (Available via JSTOR)

Theories of Policy Development

Sept 1 **Garbage Can Model**
Kingdon, Chaps. 1-3

Sept 3 **Garbage Can Model**
Kingdon, Chaps. 7-9

Sept 8 **Punctuated Equilibrium Model**
Baumgartner and Jones, Chaps 1-3

Sept 10 **Punctuated Equilibrium Model**
Baumgartner and Jones, Chaps 4-5

American Institutions and Public Policy Development

Sept 15 **Elections and Public Opinion**
James A. Stimson. 2005. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University. Chaps. 1-2 (*On reserve*)

Sept 17 **Media**
Lawrence R Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Part I (*On reserve*)

Sept 22 **Media**
Lawrence R Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Part III (*On reserve*)

Sept 24 **Interest Groups**

Robert H. Salisbury. 1990. "The Paradox of Interest Groups in Washington: More Groups, Less Clout," in *The New American Political System*, rev. ed., ed. Anthony King, 203-229. (*On reserve*)

Jeffrey M Berry. 1989. "Subgovernments, Issue Networks, and Political Conflict." In *Remaking American Politics*. Edited by Richard A. Harris and Sidney Milkis. (*On reserve*)

Sept 29 **Midterm Exam**

Oct 1 **Congress**
Arnold, Chaps. 1-3.

Oct 6 **Congress**
Arnold, Chaps. 4-5.

Oct 8 **Congress**
"Dan Rather Reports: The Best Congress Money Can Buy"
Film (in-class viewing)

The film memo is due Friday, October 9 by 5:00pm.

Oct 13 **Political Parties**
Mann and Ornstein, Introduction and Chap. 1. Skim Chap. 3

Oct 15 **Political Parties**
Mann and Ornstein, Chaps. 4-5.

Oct 20 **The President**
Neustadt, Chaps. 1-3.

Oct 22 **The President**
Neustadt, Chaps. 4-5.

Oct 27 **The President**
Paul J. Quirk and Bruce Nesmith. 2003. "Divided Government and Policymaking: Negotiating the Laws." In Nelson, Michael (Ed.) *The Presidency and the Political System*. (*On reserve*)

Nov 3 **The Bureaucracy**
Daniel P. Carpenter. 2001. *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928*. Introduction and Chapter 2, Skim Chapter 4 (*On reserve*)

Nov 5

Judiciary

Debate #1: Does the judiciary influence public policy development?

Recommended:

R. Shep Melnick. 1994. *Between the Lines: Interpreting Welfare Rights*.
Brookings Institution Press.

Nov 10

Judiciary

Debate #2: Should the judiciary influence public policy development?

Recommended:

R. Shep Melnick. 1994. *Between the Lines: Interpreting Welfare Rights*.
Brookings Institution Press.

Tax Policy

Nov 12

Tax Reform Act of 1986

Alan Murray and Jeffrey Birnbaum, Introduction, Chaps. 1-3.

Nov 17

Tax Reform Act of 1986

Alan Murray and Jeffrey Birnbaum, Introduction, Chaps. 4-6.

Nov 19

Tax Reform Act of 1986

Alan Murray and Jeffrey Birnbaum, Introduction, Chaps. 7-9.

Nov 24

Tax Reform Act of 1986

Alan Murray and Jeffrey Birnbaum, Introduction, Chaps. 10-11.

Nov 26

No Class

Dec 1

Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 15-32. (Available via JSTOR)

Hacker, Jacob S., and Paul Pierson 2005. "Abandoning the Middle: The Bush Tax Cuts and the Limits of Democratic Control." *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 33-53 (Available via JSTOR)

Recommended:

Lupia, Arthur, Levine, Adam S., Menning, Jesse O. and Sin, Gisela. 2007. "Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters "Simply Ignorant?": A Second Look at Conservatives and Liberals in "Homer Gets a Tax Cut."" *Perspectives on Politics*. 5(4): 773-784 (Available via JSTOR)

Dec 3

Tax Reform

Debate: Does public opinion influence the development of tax reforms?

Final Paper Due

Final Exam