

Political Science 4320: Public Policy
Fall 2008

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Office Hours:
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Public policy is "an intentional course of action undertaken by a government official or institution for resolving an issue of public concern." **Policy analysis** examines how policies are proposed, adopted, implemented, and evaluated. This course describes central features of the American policy-making process by overview several domestic policy issues. We will identify the major institutional and political actors shaping U.S. domestic public policies, discuss criteria for evaluating the performance of the policy process, and assess the quality of American life as it is shaped by governmental decisions.

Policy analysis is "the use of reason and evidence to select the best alternative to solve an issue of public concern." Policy analysis may first look like "current events," "campaign speeches," "high school debate," "journalism," or even "history" but it is not. Policy analysis requires an understanding of (1) the nature of the policy-making process, (2) a variety of "analytical tools," and (3) substantive public problems and policies.

This course seeks to balance the theoretical (so your knowledge can grow and prepare you for future discussion, education, and public decisions) and the immediately practical (so you can better understand the difficulties in making sound public policy). Since many political observers have questioned whether we have sufficient knowledge to revitalize the economy, to increase the effectiveness of public expenditures, and to anticipate the future problems that public policy must deal with, this course focuses on an important subject.

The major objectives of PS 4320 are:

1. to overview major U.S. public policies;
2. to examine in greater depth a few specific policies;
3. to examine several models and chief characteristics of the policy process;
4. to consider criteria for evaluating the performance of U.S. public policy;
5. to identify the major institutional and political actors shaping U.S. public policy; and
6. to improve students' analytical and writing skills.

Note: Like all other 3000-4000-level political science classes, the prerequisite for this class is PS 1000 and junior/senior standing. I assume all students have successfully completed PS 3000, Introduction to Political Research.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Anderson, James E. (2006) PUBLIC POLICYMAKING, Sixth edition, Houghton Mifflin.

O'Hanlon, Michael E. (2008) OPPORTUNITY '08: Independent Ideas for America's Next President. Washington, DC Brookings.

A NOTE ABOUT CLASS PROCEDURE

I advocate active learning. I know people learn best when they are motivated, interested in the material, and actively interact with other people interested in the same subject. Reading, thinking, discussing, and writing are the principal activities of learning. If you are in the habit of passively going about your college education, you might want to take advantage of this course to become a more active, involved student. You don't need to be a debater or a policy wonk, but you do need to engage the material and communicate such engagement in one of several ways.

While all assignments will be graded on an individual, not small group, basis, we will occasionally work in small groups to facilitate discussion and to encourage students to help one another.

All students are expected to follow current public affairs by reading quality news sources such as the WASHINGTON POST, WALL STREET JOURNAL, NATIONAL JOURNAL, CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY WEEKLY REPORT, and the NEW YORK TIMES and receiving quality electronic media such as C-SPAN, CNN, and the zillion information sources available on the internet. For your convenience I have established a homepage (www.web.missouri.edu/~webberd) with links to major government, news and public policy organizations. Every morning I start out my day by visiting www.JohnCombest.com for a quick overview of Missouri political and policy news.

While I am an avid user of information technology I have become increasingly concerned about the diluting effect of the internet on academic activity. Information technology should be used to supplement, not replace, conventional teaching and learning activities. Use e-mail to ask about substantive issues related to course material not as a wimpish way to seek approval for missing class or turning in assignments late. Additionally, be concerned about the source and quality of information available on the internet. Just because it exists in cyberspace does not mean that a fact is accurate or an argument is sound.

Do not e-mail (or fax) me your paper, your excuse for missing class, or your request for your grade.

A NOTE ABOUT WRITING

This is not an official WI class, although it has requires a lot of writing. Writing is probably the most critical activity of learning. Reading is important but it is too passive to motivate most people to think hard thoughts. Writing causes a person to re-think, re-consider,

and reconcile information, arguments, and evidence which he or she has read. I believe in writing. A day without writing is like a day without running.

This course requires academic and professional writing, i.e. writing that is clear and crisp and is used to develop a well-organized and thoughtful argument. Bad writing can easily dilute good ideas. Split infinitives don't bother me (the Oxford Dictionary finally agreed with me in December 1998) but incomplete and awkward sentences do. The form of documentation and citation is less important than the quality of the idea and evidence. While one can get ideas from newspapers and random websites these are not "acceptable sources" for academic papers. We will discuss a variety of writing styles and their appropriate use in public policy activity.

Writing Assignments this semester are:

1. Policy Challenges Facing the U.S.
2. Review of a policy journal article or other credible policy analysis document.
3. Policy Proposal
4. Reaction to Classmates' Policy Proposals.
5. Policy Memo
6. Semester journal

I have a political science TA this semester who will help me in grading papers and with whom you can confer. You should use the Campus Writing Center. If you have never spoken about your writing with an MU writing tutor you have not received the maximum return on your tuition. Spend some time with the Campus Writing Program website (cwp.missouri.edu).

This semester, OPPORTUNITY '08: INDEPENDENT IDEAS FOR AMERICA'S NEXT PRESIDENT, rather than a conventional textbook, will be our starting point for background information about specific public policies. I've identified three clusters that will be our major policy foci:

Economics: chapters 7, 15, 16, 17, 23

Health: chapters 19, 20, 21, 22

Social: chapters 12, 13, 14, 23

Additionally, there are three chapters that describe the current policy environment (or milieu) in which U.S. domestic policy will be made. These are:

Current Policy Environment: Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 10.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. THE COURSE AND THE TEACHING METHOD

- "Teaching Biology, Policy Analysis, and Politics in a Biotechnology Policy Course," by David J. Webber, *POLITICS AND LIFE SCIENCES*, February 1993.

Skim these two samples of previous class projects:
-“Red States, Blue States” project of 2005 class (under “Class Links” on my website).

“[Representation in American Legislatures](#)” 2001 Class Project (a link on my website under Course Information).

Skim:

OPPORTUNITY '08: INDEPENDENT IDEAS FOR AMERICA'S NEXT PRESIDENT, esp. the chapters (3, 5, 6, and 10 and others) describing the “Current Policy Environment.”

II. AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING and POLICY ANALYSIS

Discuss my “14 Key Concepts”

Anderson, chapter 1 and 2.

Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” SCIENCE, 1969
(available at <http://mason.gmu.edu/~rjonas/Tragedy01.htm> on my website)

III. WORDS AND WRITING

Steven Pinker chapter 1 “Words and Worlds” in THE STUFF OF THOUGHT: LANGUAGE AS A WINDOW INTO HUMAN NATURE. Viking, 2007 (on Blackboard as a course document).

(optional) a Pinker lecture is on YouTube: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=hBpetDxIEMU>

Smith, Kevin (2005) “Data Don't Matter” Academic research and School Choice” PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICS. June 2005: 1-15. (a Blackboard course Document)

IV. POLICY ANALYSIS

-Anderson, Chapter 7, “Policy Impact, and Change”
-Webber's Five Tools of Policy Analysis (on my website)

V. AMERICAN FEDERALISM (applied to Education Policy)

-Nathan, Richard “Updating Theories of Federalism” –a paper presented at 2006 American Political Science Convention (a PDF uploaded as a “course document” on Blackboard).

VI. POLICY FORMULATION (applied to Clean Air act and Environmental Policy)

-Anderson, Chapter 3

VI. POLICY ADOPTION (applied to Health Policy)

- Anderson, Chapter 4
- Be familiar with health chapters (19, 20, 21, 22) of OPPORTUNITY '08

VIII. BUDGETING (applied to Economic Policy)

- Anderson, Chapter 5
- Be familiar with economics chapters (7, 15 16, 17, 23) of OPPORTUNITY '08

IX. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION (applied to education and clean air act).

- Anderson, Chapter 6

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student must (A) complete six writing assignments, (B) take two exams, and (C) contribute meaningfully to class discussion and decisions.

- A. Writing Assignments (together they constitute 550 points). Submit TWO copies of each assignment at the beginning of class the day each is due, and post each assignment to Blackboard after class but before midnight of the day that it is due.
 1. Policy Challenges Facing the U.S. (up to 100 points)
 2. Literature review of a policy journal article or other credible policy analysis document. (100 points)
 3. Policy Proposal (50 points)
 4. Reaction to Classmates' Policy Proposals (50 points)
 5. Policy Memo (150 points)
 6. Semester journal (100 points)

1. First Writing Assignment (100 points)

After becoming familiar with the policy clusters and the current policy environment chapters (see page 3 of the syllabus above) in OPPORTUNITY '08 write a 1000 word essay describing, explaining, and evaluating critical aspects of either economic, health, or social policies issues. In your essay, (1) use and document a relevant credible reference other than those used in OPPORTUNITY '08 and (2) specifically mention any attention the Democratic and Republican 2008 party platforms give these issues.

Document your essay and include a three-sentence annotated bibliography for sources other than OPPORTUNITY '08.

The essay is due **Friday, September 12**. Please submit two copies, double spaced, without a title page. Post your essay to Blackboard by 11:59 that evening.

2. Academic Policy Literature Review essay (100 points)

Write a 4-5 page review and synthesis of several articles or analyzes in an academic journal, or other credible source, describing, explaining, and evaluating one of the three policy issues discussed in OPPORTUNITY 08 (see page 3 of this syllabus).

Suitable academic policy journals are POLICY STUDIES JOURNAL, REVIEW OF POLICY RESEARCH, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW, PUBLIUS, and STATE POLICY AND POLITICS QUARTERLY. These are all available in Ellis OR on as an electronic journal.

Thinks tanks, research organizations, and government agencies are also potentially acceptable information sources, but be careful. The prudent person would show me the article before she/he writes the assignment.

Document your essay and include a three-sentence annotated bibliography for sources other than OPPORTUNTIY '08.

The essay is due **Friday, Oct 17**. Please submit two copies, double spaced, without a title page. Post your essay to Blackboard by 11:59 that evening.

3. **Policy Proposal** (worth up to 50 points).

Write a 2-3 page memo describing an economic, health, or social policy, briefly suggesting a solution, and presenting several credible sources of information useful for further understanding and solving this problem.

The essay is due **Friday, November 7**. Please submit two copies, double spaced, without a title page. Post your essay to Blackboard by 11:59 that evening.

4. **Reaction to Classmates' Policy Proposals** (Worth up to 50 points).

Write a 3-4 page reaction to your classmates' policy proposals in one of the three cluster areas.

The essay is due **Monday, November 17**. Please submit two copies, double spaced, without a title page. Post your essay to Blackboard by 11:59 that evening.

5. Policy memo (up to 150 points) Write a 1,500 word policy memo for a specific federal or state policy-maker describing a policy problem and proposing a solution. This policy memo must:

1. Be written from the perspective of a staffer to a policy-maker for whom you work;
2. Use credible sources;
3. Include both political and policy considerations;
4. Consider other points of view (so your boss doesn't look bad);

5. Be accompanied by an annotated bibliography explaining why you selected the sources you did; and
6. Include a one-page summary for a busy policy-maker. .

The essay is due **Monday, December 1**. Please submit two copies, double spaced, without a title page. Post your essay to Blackboard by 11:59 that evening.

6. Semester current events journal (100 points).

Keep a semester journal of about one page (200 words) per week of current policy events, policy-related campaign news and events, other news coverage, and your personal thoughts about public policy and this class. Some of the current event items must be posted to Blackboard throughout the semester.

This journal is due December 10, the last day of class.

B. Exams (together they are 250 points).

1. First exam, 100 points—Monday, September 29.
2. Second exam, 150 points— Tuesday, December 16, 10:30.

C. Class contribution—up to 50 points

Students may earn up to 50 points contributing to class discussion and decisions, including posting ideas, questions, news items to Blackboard. Students with more than six absences will automatically receive a zero for class contribution.

Under new federal regulations MU is required to establish an "FN" grade--Failure for Nonattendance. A student missing more than 15 classes (one-third of the course) will be given a FN. Repeated tardiness or early departure counts as an absence.

There are either NO or SIX excused absences, depending on your point of view. Don't use up your absences and then have a medical emergency.

There are 850 possible points. Keep track of your grades and calculate the "percent of points earned." Final Grades will be assigned according to the following scale (with possible slight downward modification depending on the class distribution):

- Over 97 percent is an A+
- 94-96 is an A.
- 90-93 is an A-;
- 87-89 is B+;
- 84-86 percent is a B
- 80-83 is a B- and so on.

Late papers are penalized and missed exams are seldom deemed to be worthy of a makeup. If a paper or exam is not completed it will be awarded a "0" and the final grade will be computed according to the scale above. It is very unlikely (Probability approaches zero) that an "incomplete" would be given in this course.

A Note about the Use of Technology

I encourage the responsible and effective use of technology in education. I am an avid e-mailer. I use the internet everyday. However, I am increasingly concerned about the negative aspects of electronic communications. Therefore, the following guidelines have become necessary:

1. Use e-mail and Blackboard often but not as substitutes for class discussion and direct conversation.

2. Do not let the haphazard information available on the internet displace the refined, copyedited, and revised information contained in more traditional outlets. When used in an educational setting, websites are supplements to traditional information sources. Information technology should aid us in thinking hard, not replace our thinking. As a general rule, newspaper articles uncovered in Google searchers are not CREDIBLE sources for academic papers.

After more than five years of frustration, I have finally figured out how to explain the differences about information sources, the limitations of some internet sources, and the pitfalls of “writing academic papers in the internet age.”

3. Only post to Blackboard comments you would say in class. Computer technology is a harsh technology. Be careful that a quick response is not harsher than you mean it to be. Flaming is unacceptable.

4. Do not submit an assigned paper by fax or e-mail. I will not post grades to Blackboard or discuss them via e-mail.

5. Do not leave phone messages because you are afraid to come and face the music. Late night phone messages or e-mails informing me you are sick do not mean you have permission to miss the test or turn your paper in late. I do not play phone tag. If you do not catch me in my office, please e-mail me and I will respond.

Important Dates

September 12, First Essay due

September 29, First Exam
October 17, Policy Literature Review due
November 7, Policy Proposal Essay due
November 17, Policy Proposal Reaction Essay due
December 1, Policy Memo due
December 10, Semester Journal
December 16, Tuesday, 10:30—Second exam.

University Regulations

Visit the Provost web site at <http://provost.missouri.edu/faculty/syllabus.html> to read three MU statements on:

1. Academic Dishonesty
2. ADA Accommodation
3. Intellectual Pluralism

Rather than repeat the university's language, I will state that one of my teaching goals is to create a rich learning environment where everyone participates honestly and fully. Therefore, academic dishonesty is punished, ADA accommodations are made, and all academic discussion and points of view related to this course are encouraged and welcomed.