

POLI 212: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY

Fall 2026: T/Th 10:00-11:35

Steele Hall 219

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Office Hours: T/Th 11:30 – 12:30 or by appointment

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Prince Otto von Bismark of Germany is often credited with the quote: “Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made”. Against his advice, this course examines the political processes by which laws are made. We will consider the conditions under which new policy issues are placed on the government’s agenda; how policy responses are formulated and developed by decision-makers; the tactics and strategies used by actors (i.e. politicians, the media, interest groups, and other public and private actors) seeking to influence the policy-making process; the difficulties inherent in implementing policies; and the predominant methods used to evaluate different policies as successful or failing. We will also examine the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical dynamics influencing current policy controversies, such as health care, the environment, immigration, education and social welfare.

There are a number of objectives in this course. First, you will learn a number of theoretical frameworks that seek to illustrate and explain both the inputs and outputs of the policy process and, in so doing, develop a familiarity with the language and concepts used to describe and discuss public policy. Second, you will study some of the practical tools used by policy-makers to make and implement new laws, which should provide you a better understanding of how the government interacts with and influences the public. Third, you will acquire methodological tools for evaluating public policies, so that you might better determine whether and how different policies are able to achieve their target objectives. Finally, you will consider and analyze the ways in which other academic disciplines are relevant to both politics and policy-making, spending the latter half of the course focusing on how knowledge about medicine, environmental science, economics, and social trends influences public policy.

Required Texts:

Adolino, Jessica R. and Charles H. Blake. 2011. *Comparing Public Policies: Issues and Choices in Industrialized Countries* (2nd edition). CQ Press. ISBN-13: 978-1933116785

Kraft, Michael E. and Scott R. Furlong. 2024. *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives* (8th edition). CQ Press. ISBN-13: 978-1071858394

Assessment:

5% - Class Attendance and Participation
20% - Mid-Term
20% - Final
10% - Policy Issue Discussion
15% - Brief 1
15% - Brief 2
5% - Brief 3
10% - Group Presentation on Local Policy Problem

Grading Scale:

The numerical equivalents of the letter grades are:

A = 93%-98%	C = 73%-78%
A- = 90%-93%	C- = 70%-73%
B+ = 88%-90%	D+ = 68%-70%
B = 83%-88%	D = 63%-68%
B- = 80%-83%	D- = 60%-63%
C+ = 78%-80%	F = 60% or below

Learning Goals:

This course serves to fill the Ethics Intensive requirement of the Central Curriculum.

- Demonstrate an understanding of ethical reasoning as it relates to specific course content.
- Critically analyze various ethical positions taken in relation to course content.

Assessments:

You will author three original policy briefs as part of the class.

The first two policy briefs should each identify a separate problem that has not been adequately addressed or resolved by the government. Each brief should contain an executive summary; a section framing the problem; a review of the relevant background information; an analysis of existing policy responses; and a recommendation for a particular course of action. The length of each brief should be 2-3 pages, single-spaced, with normal margins (meaning no more than 1 inch of white space between the text and the edge of the paper)

The third brief will be written under the working conditions in which you may find yourself after graduation. Near the end of the semester, you will arrive to class and the instructor will have a prompt available asking you to research a policy problem and provide a policy recommendation. You will have the class period to research and produce a one-page brief.

The briefs will be graded according to the following rubric: Statement of Problem Area (whether the problem is original, whether the problem can be addressed by policy, whether the problem is

described in detail, the reasoning for why it is a problem) – 15% of brief grade; Background (causes of problem, relevant legal and policy information) – 30% of brief grade; Policy Response/Recommendation (how specific and detailed is the recommendation, a cost-benefit reasoning of some sort, incorporating relevant research) – 30% of brief grade; Overall Quality (grammar, structure, phrasing) – 25% of brief grade.

You will also be assigned to a group, with which you must prepare a class presentation on a local policy controversy and a recommended solution. You will be assigned to groups of 4-5 students. In the first two weeks, you will need to identify a public policy problem in Selinsgrove, Snyder County, or one of the surrounding communities. Your group will need to let the instructor what problem you are going to focus on by the start of week 3. You will then need to find as local and national news and research on the causes and consequences of the problem by the start of week 6. You will need to identify 2-3 individuals (possibly local officials) from this area who are knowledgeable on the topic and interview them about what they see as the causes of the problem and potential solutions. Those interviews need to be completed by the start of week 10. You need to propose a detailed policy solution and find research that supports the efficacy of your solution by the end of week 13. You will present about the problem in the last week of class. That presentation should be around 20 minutes. Your PowerPoint slides and the presentation itself will be graded according to the following criteria: background and explanation of local policy problem – 25% of grade; interviews with local officials – 10%; policy recommendation – 25%; quality of research and data – 15%; overall quality of presentation – 25%.

Finally, you will sign up to present about a current policy issue to the entire class. You will need to come with a video that presents one or both sides of that issue, a prepared 3-5 minutes presentation of your own views on the issues, and discussion questions for the class. Sign up for a topic and a date at class-signups.clarkn.workers.dev/policy-signup (first come, first serve on both topics and dates).

General Business:

Please note that class attendance is mandatory. You may miss two classes without providing an excuse. The class participation grade will be reduced by 7 points for every additional class missed, unless due to one of the following two exceptions. If you miss class due to a medical reason and provide documentation from a medical practitioner, your absence will be excused without any penalty. Any absences that result from religious observances shall also be excused without any penalty. Anything covered in class lectures or assigned readings may be part of the examinations. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out anything covered in class from another student. Please contact me immediately if you will need to miss class at any time during this semester.

All assigned readings are required. The *Adolino and Blake* text and the *Kraft and Furlong* text are available for purchase at the SU bookstore. Other selected readings will be available for download on Canvas. The lectures will, at times, overlap with the readings, but will often include content not in the readings. ***The two examinations may cover anything from both the lectures and the readings. ***

Any student with a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities should contact me as soon as possible so that we can make accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. Students with disabilities are advised to also contact Disability Services at 570-372-4340.

Make sure that you include proper citations in any written or oral work. Plagiarism will result in a failure for that assignment, referral to the administration and other potential consequences.

Please consult Sharon Stoerger's online resource for more information on plagiarism:

<http://www.web-miner.com/plagiarism> Please also consult the Susquehanna University Code of Student Conduct at <http://www.susqu.edu/studentlife/16594.asp> If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me or the Writing Center located in Fisher Hall, Room 202, phone number 570-372-4342.

AI technologies may be used in this course, but their application is confined to specific predefined scenarios. As we progress through the curriculum, I will provide explicit guidance on when and how AI technologies may be appropriately utilized to complement your learning experience. Students should note that using AI technologies outside these sanctioned instances is not allowed, and violations will be addressed according to the academic integrity policy. This AI policy is specific to this course, and students should not assume that it applies universally to other classes. Please see Susquehanna University's AI policy for more information.

I reserve the right to move around different topics and assignments on the syllabus in consultation with the class. Please do not hesitate to ask questions, introduce discussion points, articulate your opinions and comment on the reading materials.

Schedule of Classes:

Week 1: Introduction to Public Policy

Week of August 31

Day 1: Defining Public Policy

Day 2: Market Failures and Context of Public Policy

Readings: *Kraft and Furlong* Chapter 1

Week 2: The Policy Process

Week of September 7

Day 1: Agenda-Setting, Policy Formulation, and Decision-Making

Day 2: Implementation and Evaluation

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapter 1

Week 3: Policy Evaluation

Week of September 14

Day 1: Conducting Policy Analysis I

Day 2: Conducting Policy Analysis II

Readings: *Kraft and Furlong* Chapters 5-6

Week 4: Alumni Panel

Week of September 21

Day 1: **Alumni Panel on Zoom**

Day 2: **No Class - Policy Brief 1 due by 11:59 PM on September 24**

Readings: No readings assigned this week

Week 5: Explaining Policy Outcomes

Week of September 28

Day 1: Theories of Public Policies

Day 2: Contextual Dynamics

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapters 2-3

Week 6: Policymaking Institutions

Week of October 5

Day 1: Government Institutions and Policy Actors

Day 2: Local Policy

Readings: *Kraft and Furlong* Chapter 2

Week 7: Mid-Term Review

Week of October 12

Day 1: **Guest Speaker: Malcolm Derk**

Day 2: Mid-Term Review

Week 8: Mid-Term

Week of October 19

Day 1: **Fall Break**

Day 2: **Mid-Term**

Week 9: Fiscal and Tax Policy

Week of October 26

Day 1: Fiscal and Tax Policy

Day 2: **No Class**

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapters 6-7

Week 10: Health Care and Education Policy

Week of November 2

Day 1: Healthcare Policy

Day 2: Education Policy

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapters 8 and 10

Week 11: Education Policy

Week of November 9

Day 1: **Guest Speaker: Erik Andreson**

Day 2: **No Class - Policy Brief 2 due by 11:59 PM on November 12**

Readings: No readings assigned this week

Week 12: Immigration Policy

Week of November 16

Day 1: Immigration Policy: United States

Day 2: Immigration Policy: Europe

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapter 5

Week 13: Thanksgiving

Week of November 23

Day 1: **No Class**

Day 2: **Thanksgiving Break**

Week 14: Environment Policy

Week of November 30

Day 1: **Impromptu Policy Brief**

Day 2: Environment Policy

Readings: *Adolino and Blake* Chapter 11

Week 15: Policy Presentations

Week of December 7

Day 1: Policy Presentations I

Day 2: Policy Presentations II

Final Exam: