

PSCI 597 Contemporary Issues in American Public Policy

Professor Contact Information

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Office Hours

T 12:45-2:45

W 10-1

Course Description

This course considers the various theoretical and empirical explanations for federal public policy making in the United States. In the first part of the course we focus on the important scholarly theories of how public policy is defined, constructed, implemented, and evaluated. In the second part of the course we consider the specific roles of important political actors and institutions in the policy-making process.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will understand and employ significant theoretical and analytical approaches to understanding American public policy.
2. Students will understand the role of political actors and institutions in the policy making process.
3. Students will understand how to initiate an original research project on American political institutions.

Required Textbooks and Materials

1. Anderson, James E. 2005. *Public Policymaking: An Introduction*, Boston: Cengage Learning.
2. Kingdon, John. 2010. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, Update Edition, with an Epilogue on Health Care*. Pearson.
3. Sabatier, Paul (ed). 2007. *Theories of the Policy Process. 2nd Edition* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Students will also be assigned articles to read some weeks. These readings will all be available online through the course site.

Course Requirements

All students are expected to comply with the following requirements.

1. Students are expected to complete all course readings for each section of the course.
2. Students are expected to regularly check the course site for announcements and updates.
3. Students are expected to participate in discussion assignments.
4. Students are expected to complete both midterm exams.
5. Students are expected to complete the research paper and presentation.
6. Students will respect their fellow classmates and the instructor. This includes treating everyone with courtesy and respect in any and all correspondence for the course. For more information on this subject, please see the Student Guidebook.
7. All students will maintain the highest level of personal responsibility and academic honesty. Academic dishonesty affects all individuals at the University and accordingly will not be tolerated. For this class, academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, collusion and/or falsifying academic work. In particular, passing off work as your own that was written by someone else, without proper citation or attribution, on either exams or discussion assignments will be considered an act of plagiarism. This holds true whether material comes from the textbooks, other publications, an internet source, or another student. Any act of plagiarism on a midterm exam will result in a score of 0 for the exam. Any act of plagiarism on a paper will result in a score of 0 on the paper. Any act of academic dishonesty on a Discussion Assignment will result in a score of 0 for the entire semester's Discussion Assignment grade. Instances of academic dishonesty may also be referred to the appropriate offices on campus and may result in significant administrative penalties.
8. Students will comply with any and all eCollege technical requirements in terms of training, computer access, & Internet access.
9. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Gee Library Room 132

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835 Fax (903) 468-8148

StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Technology Requirements

Because this is web-enhanced course, all students must meet the following technology requirements to successfully complete this course.

- Regular access to a quality computer.
- Regular, high-quality Internet access, specifically, a high-speed internet connection, not dial-up or a cellular phone. Students should use the eCollege tutorial to test the quality and speed of their browser and ensure that it is compatible with the system.
- Students will need access to an Internet browser such as Internet Explorer

Access and Navigation

Student will access this course using eCollege, the Learning Management System used by Texas A&M University-Commerce. Students can access their online courses using the myLeo portal or directly from the URL <http://online.tamuc.edu>. In order to login, students will need both their CWID and password to access the myLeo site. If you do not know what your CWID or password is, please contact Technology Services at 903-468-6000 or by e-mail, helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

eCollege Student Technical Support

Technical support for eCollege is provided around the clock (24 hours a day/7 days a week) so if students experience technical issues with the class page itself they should contact the student help desk for assistance. Students can access support through one of three following methods:

1. Chat support: Students can access real-time chat support from within the course page by clicking on "Tech Support" in the tool bar and then click on "Chat Online"
2. Phone: Students can access phone support by calling the toll free phone number for eCollege, 1-866-656-5511.
3. E- mail: Student can request assistance by e-mail eCollege directly at helpdesk@online.tamuc.org. Please note that you might not receive a response for 24 hours if you use the e-mail option.

eCollege also has extensive help files available. These can be accessed by clicking the 'Help' button on the toolbar.

Grading and Evaluation

Student performance will be based upon 3 categories of graded elements: midterm exams, discussion assignments, and a research paper.

Exams:	There are two scheduled midterm exams. These exams will be “take home” exams and due within 5 days of being assigned. Students will submit both a hard copy and electronic copy to the instructor. The first exam is worth 30% of the final grade, the second exam is worth 25% of the final grade.
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Discussion Assignments: Students will participate in weekly discussion assignments using eCollege. More information about these assignments is listed below. Missed discussion assignments cannot be made up, however, the lowest single discussion assignment grade will be dropped. Collectively these assignments are worth 25% of the final grade.

Research Paper Assignment: Students will prepare an original research paper that describes and analyzes an important policy issue in American politics. Students will receive the guidelines for this assignment during the first week of the semester. This task will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Grade Break Down

Exam 1	30%
Exam 2	25%
Discussion Assignments	25%
Research Paper	20%
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Final Grade	100%

Grading Schedule

Final grades will be based on a 100-point scale, using the following conversion.

A: 100-90 B: 89-80 C: 79-70 D: 69-65 F: Below 65

Midterm Exams

The first midterm exam will be available on March 2nd and the second will be available on May 2nd. These exams will be take home exams and due 5 days after being assigned. Students will submit both a hard copy and electronic copy, if possible, to the instructor. These exams will feature multiple essay questions that focus on the material covered up until that point in the semester.

Discussion Assignments

Post Requirements

This component of the course will consist of 15 weekly discussions to be completed on the course eCollege site. Topics for the discussion assignments will be posted on Sunday each week at 9 AM (except for the first week). Each discussion thread will close at 11:30 PM on Saturday that week. Regardless of the reason, there will be no make-up opportunities for discussion assignments and students will not receive any credit for posts made after the deadline.

Students will make two types of posts:

(1) Students will make initial posts in which they respond directly to the question(s) framed in the prompt for the week. This post should be at least 300 words long and include a thoughtful analytic response to the prompt. Students should include a word count in parentheses at the end of their posts. Please note that some weeks there may be more than one prompt which will require students to submit two separate initial posts and two sets of response posts.

(2) Students will make response posts to what other students post, specifically; students will post a response post to at least 3 classmates' initial posts. These posts should be between 100-200 words and refer to the original poster by name.

Post Time Frame

In order to ensure that students can complete the assignments in a timely manner, the prompt will include a time line for posts with each topic. In general, this time frame will require an original response by Wednesday evenings so that classmates have an opportunity to respond before the deadline and still ensure that the assignment is an actual discussion/interaction.

Formatting

All posts should be well written and well organized. Avoid using slang, abbreviations, shorthand and "text speak"/emojis. Use proper punctuation, capitalization, and unusual fonts. Posts should be proofread/edited to remove spelling and writing mistakes.

Grading Criteria

Students will be graded upon two criteria. First, students are expected to make the minimum number of posts described above with the minimum number of words. Second, students are expected to respond to the posts of other students in their discussion group. Students should engage in conversation with their group members in a thoughtful discussion about the topic as well as their individual responses to the topic.

Students will receive a grade of 1, 2, or 3, with 3 being the highest, on each discussion assignment. (Students who do not participate will receive a 0) Grades will be based both upon the quality of the content of a student's posts, as well as the student's engagement with other students by responding to posts in the student's group. Posts that do not fully answer the questions or do not respond to posts will not receive full credit.

All content submitted for discussion assignments must be a student's original submission. Any material taken from another source, including the textbook, should include a proper citation. Material which is copied or pasted from any source will be considered plagiarism as discussed above in the Course Policies and Procedures section.

When the discussion assignment average is computed at the end of the semester, the student's lowest individual assignment score will be dropped. If a student completes all 15 assignments, the lowest score will be dropped. For students who do not complete all of the assignments, one score of 0 for a missing assignment will be dropped. The discussion assignment average will be a ratio of the number of points earned on each assignment divided by 42 (3 points X 14 assignments)

Additional Course & Instructor Policies

Make-up exams: If a student misses an exam, that student will receive a grade of 0 for the exam. Make-up exams will only be granted at the discretion of the instructor. Any request for a make-up exam must be in writing and include documentation explaining why the absence was legitimate. Such a request must be received within 3 calendar days of the missed exam date, unless the student is physically unable to submit such a request. Legitimate reasons may include illness severe enough to require professional treatment, death in the immediate family, participation in University activities, and legal obligations. *Please note, these reasons do not guarantee that a make-up exam will be given.*

Student Conduct & Discipline

The University has rules and regulations for the orderly and efficient conduct of business. It is the responsibility of each student to be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations that govern student conduct and activities. General information on student conduct and discipline is contained in the student handbook.

Students will maintain the highest level of personal responsibility and academic honesty which is discussed in Texas A&M University-Commerce Procedures A13.12 Academic Honesty. "Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another and passing them off as one's own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material."

Academic dishonesty affects all individuals at the University and accordingly will not be tolerated. For this class, academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, collusion and/or falsifying academic work. Any and all instances of academic dishonesty will be referred to the appropriate offices on campus and may result in significant penalties.

Telephone and Email Use

The University prefers electronic mail as the primary means of communication between faculty, staff and students. Please use the e-mail address & telephone number provided on this syllabus for any and all correspondence. Questions about specific grades should be made in person during office hours.

Course Topics and Calendar

Below is a general list of the reading topics for the semester. A detailed reading schedule will be made available on the class eCollege page.

Week	Dates	Topic
1	Jan 13 - Jan 18	Methodologies
2	Jan 19 - 25	Introduction to the study of public policy
3	Jan 26 - Feb 1	Agenda Setting I
4	Feb 2 - Feb 8	Agenda Setting II
5	Feb 9 - Feb 15	Problem Definition, Rational Choice
6	Feb 16 - Feb 22	Social Construction
7	Feb 23 - Mar 1	Implementation
8	Mar 2 - Mar 8	Diffusion, Evaluation, and Learning
9	Mar 16 - Mar 22	Future Theoretical Considerations
10	Mar 23 - Mar 29	Interest Groups and Public Policy
11	Mar 30 - Apr 5	Public Opinion and Public Policy
12	Apr 6 - Apr 12	Legislatures and Public Policy
13	Apr 13 - Apr 19	Bureaucracy and Public Policy
14	Apr 20 - Apr 26	Courts and Public Policy
15	Apr 28 - May 3	Research Paper Presentations and Critiques

******* Please note that the instructor reserves the right to change any part of this syllabus as needed over the course of the semester. Any and all changes will be announced in class.**