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PO 141: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY

Summer Semester I (19 May-25 June 2015)

Class time: Tuesdays, Thursdays 1:00 PM-4:30 PM, SOC B-61

Office hours: Wednesdays 12 PM-3 PM, or by appointment

This course will provide you with the intellectual foundations necessary to understand the policymaking process, both in the United States and in other democratic political systems. This introductory course is designed to serve as a basic toolkit for understanding why and how effective public policies are made: How and why does political change happen? What factors constrain change? Why are some policies able to achieve their desired outcomes, and others are not? Who and what are the key players in the policymaking process? What kind of rules and norms govern these players' actions? This course is meant to be broad-based and to whet your appetite for studying public policy in greater depth later on in your academic career; the topics we cover are by no means exhaustive and should provide you with an effective *framework* for analyzing public policies and thinking about how policies are (and should be) designed. We will draw from all fields of social science—economics and game theory, statistics, political theory, psychology and sociology—to analyze inherently political questions. I also hope this class will instill valuable skills for success in upper-level social science courses and possibly for a career in politics or public service: You will learn to methodologically assess and *critically analyze* important social scientific puzzles. In short, you will learn to think like a social scientist. This course is meant to challenge you, but it's also meant to excite you about the policymaking process—a process that these days seems to command anything but excitement. If you're having trouble with any aspect of the course, in any way, don't hesitate to come talk to me during office hours or by email. I will stick to a 24-hour response time with emails, so if you don't hear from me within 24 hours, it's because I somehow missed the email. Write again.

COURSE MATERIALS:

We will be working from the following textbook:

Charles Wheelan
***Introduction to Public Policy*, 1st edition**
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011

You are responsible for purchasing (or renting) the textbook. (I will post the readings on

Blackboard through Tuesday 26 May; please let me know if you have not been able to acquire the textbook by then.) Any and all supplementary course readings will be made available on the Blackboard course site, and are indicated by the [BB] designation on the schedule. There will be approximately 50-75 pages of reading *per class session*. It is extremely important that you keep up with the reading; this is a small class, so if we're not all on the same page, our time together will be far less enjoyable.

GRADING:

Your grade for this course will be based on the following criteria:

- **In-Class Participation, Attendance and Quizzes (25%):** This course is small enough to foster the kind of in-depth discussions that are not only intellectually and academically beneficial, but are certainly much more engaging than listening to me lecture at you for 7 hours a week. Active participation is crucial for doing well in this course. I understand viscerally that certain students may be shyer than others, and I encourage you to come talk to me if you feel you're unable to speak your mind or ask necessary questions in class.

As mentioned above, keeping up with the reading is essential for doing well in this class. At the very beginning of every class session, I will roll a dice to determine if there will be a short quiz on that day's assigned reading (a roll of 1-3 means there will be a quiz; 4-6 means no quiz). The quizzes will be simple and are not designed to trip you up; if you've done the reading, you'll be fine.

Please do not miss class; this is a condensed semester and even one absence can be critical in terms of keeping up with the workload. If you do have to miss a class for whatever reason, please let me know as soon as possible. Your participation grade *will* include your attendance record.

- **Take-Home Midterm Exam (25%):** There will be one take-home midterm exam on the course material through 4 June. I will distribute the midterm exam at the end of class on Thursday 4 June and it will be due *via email* by the beginning of the next class session, Tuesday 9 June. The exam will be essay-based and will ask you to analyze facets of a particular public policy; *each student will be assigned a different policy*, selected from a hat at the end of class on 4 June. I will provide more details as the exam approaches.
- **Policy Design (25%):** You will choose a real-world policy problem—anything you want, related to the country and political system of your choice—and propose a policy designed to solve the problem and effect the solution you propose. The paper should address the political and systemic constraints that we discuss in class, and will involve original research on the country of your choice. For instance, should you choose to write about a problem afflicting the United States, you should assume the policy you propose would be implemented tomorrow—in other words, you will need to account for the *current* political climate, *current* leaders, and the structural organization of the US government (decentralized federal state as opposed to, say, the centralized, president-dominated French system). The policy proposal should be no less than five

full pages, double-spaced, with 12-point font and one-inch margins. It should be structured like a report (a clearly delineated goal; diagnosis of the problem; identification of the appropriate political institution; evaluation of alternative solutions and justification for the proposal you settle upon; and a plan for implementation/execution of the chosen policy). I will provide more details as the semester progresses.

- **In-Class Final Exam (25%):** The final exam will be short-answer and essay format; no multiple choice. The exam will be cumulative and is meant to assess your basic understanding of the material discussed throughout the course, not to trip you up. There won't be any "gotcha" questions; if something is important enough to be on the exam, we'll have mentioned it in class. You'll have approximately two hours to complete the exam. I will post some sample exam questions on Blackboard a week beforehand.

Finally, you should familiarize yourself with Boston University College of Arts and Science's plagiarism policy: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>. I'm sure I don't need to say this, but don't plagiarize, and don't cheat; it's not worth it, and I assure you I'll be able to tell. I will grant extensions on assignments depending on the circumstances; absent any sort of personal discussion/agreement, you'll be docked 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from an A to an A-, or an A- to a B+) for every day that an assignment is late.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, 19 May 2015:

Introduction to Public Policy

- No assigned reading

Thursday, 21 May 2015:

Analyzing Units: Individual vs. Group Behavior

- Wheelan, chapters 3-4 (pp. 69-138) [BB]

Tuesday, 26 May 2015:

Defining Outcomes: What is Social Welfare?

- Wheelan, chapter 5 (pp.139-174) [BB]

Thursday, 28 May 2015:

Making Policy, Part 1-A: The Political Process

- Wheelan, chapter 6 (pp. 177-213)

Tuesday, 2 June 2015:

Making Policy, Part 1-B: The Market System

- Wheelan, chapter 7 (pp. 214-249)

Thursday, 4 June 2015:

Making Policy, Part 1-C: The Role of Government

- Wheelan, chapter 8 (pp. 250-287)

Tuesday, 9 June 2015:

Midterm Exam Due

Analytical Tools: Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating Data

- Wheelan, chapters 9-10 (pp. 291-363)

Thursday, 11 June 2015:

Analytical Tools: Regression Analysis

- Wheelan, chapter 11 (pp. 364-404)

Tuesday, 16 June 2015:

Analytical Tools: Cost-Benefit Analysis and Evaluating Programs

- Wheelan, chapter 12 (pp. 405-475)

Thursday, 18 June 2015:

Making Policy, Part 2-A: The Role of Institutions

- Wheelan, chapter 14 (pp. 479-510)

Tuesday, 23 June 2015:

Making Policy, Part 2-B: Policy Design

- Wheelan, chapter 15 (pp. 511-547)

Thursday, 25 June 2015:

Policy Design Due

Final Exam