

American Public Policy

University of Pittsburgh | PS 1261
Wednesdays 6:00 – 8:30 PM
4500 Posvar Hall
Spring 2022

Instructor: Jacob Schiller

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10-12 or by appointment

**Office hours for the semester will by default be virtual only. If you would like to meet in person, please email me to arrange this.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

Public policy is the most direct way that government affects the lives of citizens and yet how and why public policy is made remains a mystery to many. Often, candidates for office and upset citizens will complain that the solutions are simple and that government itself is the problem. Why is it that government cannot achieve simple solutions? Is it the structure of government? The actors involved in creating and implementing public policy? Are the solutions undermined by unintended effects? Or are the solutions just not as effective as expected? Many critics will simply say government needs to be run more like a business and that would resolve the problems with public policy. This semester we will engage with these questions to gain a better understanding of the nature of American public policy.

The study of American public policy can be divided into three areas defined by the following questions: (1) Why do we have the policies we have?; (2) How good are the policies we have?; and (3) What are the policies we have? This course will prepare students to be able to engage these questions for any given policy space, provide thoughtful analysis of policy, and consider the prospects of policy solutions.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Identify and explain policy issues
- Compare and contrast methods for policy analysis
- Apply theories and concepts of public policy formation
- Write for different audiences and goals
- Build policy solutions
- Analyze and evaluate policy proposals
- Strategize policy prospects

REQUIRED BOOKS AND RESOURCES

There is one required textbook for the course, which can be found at the Bookstore or online through sites such as Amazon or Chegg. Make sure to buy the 11th edition – older

editions of this book will be outdated. The book is also available on course reserve at the Hillman Library.

Peters, B. Guy. 2019. American Public Policy: Promise and Performance. 11th edition. CQ Press. Print ISBN: 9781506399584. eText ISBN: 9781506399577.

In addition to the textbook, there is a library guide with important resources and tools that may be beneficial to your work. This can be found at <https://pitt.libguides.com/pubpolicy>.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Grade Distribution

A	≥ 93%	B+	≥ 87%	C+	≥ 77%	D	≥ 60%
A-	≥ 90%	B	≥ 83%	C	≥ 73%	F	≤ 60%
		B-	≥ 80%	C-	≥ 70%		

Grade Composition

Participation/In-class Activities	15%
Op-Ed	15%
Policy Memo	30%
Exams (x2)	40%

Unless otherwise specified, all elements are to be submitted at 6 PM on their due date.

Participation/In-class Activities

During the semester, you will complete both individual and groups tasks that deal with public policies, the policy process, or current events. Such activities may include very short writing assignments, (e.g. minute papers, one sentence summaries), or performing a specific task (ranking, categorizing, choosing the best answer, etc). These exercises are designed to gauge your class preparation and understanding of the material. In-class exercises may not be made up if you are absent, but I will drop your lowest score; your final total will be the highest 5 of 6 scores.

The assignments will be graded as follows: 2 points (full credit), 1 (half credit), or 0 (no credit/nothing submitted). If you are in class and hand in something legible that is related to the topic, you will receive at-least half credit.

Discussion questions for each day are listed below. Please review them in advance of class each day and come prepared to engage with these questions. Doing so will be the best way for you to prepare to participate beyond reading the assigned sections.

Additionally, students who are frequently absent, fail to participate in class discussion, or otherwise uninvolved during class sessions may have their participation grade lowered solely at the instructor's discretion.

Date	Discussion Questions
Jan. 12 th	<i>What do you think best explains policy choices in the United States?</i>
Jan. 19 th	Why did the United States perform so poorly in the COVID-19 crisis? Is it a structural problem or is it a function of the individuals now involved in government?.
Jan. 26 th	You should have read several models that attempt to explain policy choices. Which is the best? Is it good in all situations, and if not what contingencies are important?
Feb. 2 nd	You are committed to solving a particular policy problem. What is the best way to get that issue on the agenda? What are the barriers to your ambitions?
Feb. 9 th	There has been a problem in getting people to wear masks in the pandemic. What is the best instrument for getting people to comply?
Feb. 16 th	What should be done to improve the federal government budget process? In particular, can we allocate resources more effectively on both the macro and the micro levels?
Feb. 23 rd	What is a good outcome for policy? How can we weight outcomes on the formal goals of a program compared to unintended consequences? What is the appropriate time frame for evaluation?
March 2 nd	MIDTERM EXAM
March 9 th	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
March 16 th	What economic policy steps are needed to accelerate recovery after the pandemic?
March 23 rd	What should be done to make American tax policy fairer?
March 30 th	Why does American healthcare perform so poorly, especially given the amount of money spent by government and by the private sector?
April 6 th	<p>If the problems of climate change are becoming so obvious, why is not more being done to either mitigate the problem, or adapt to it? What is the best strategy for the US to deal with climate change?</p> <p>One of the major policy questions in education is how to balance support of the public schools with charter schools, private schools, home schooling, and other alternatives to the traditional public schools. How can we achieve that balance?</p>
April 13 th	<p>What should be the major considerations in US defense planning in the contemporary period?</p> <p>Defund the Police? Reform the Police? How?</p> <p>Policies that impact fundamental social, cultural and religious views are the most difficult for societies to deal with. What mechanisms can be used to get around the “winner take all” nature of American politics when dealing with policy choices?</p>
April 20 th	N/A
April 27 th	FINAL EXAM

Exams

There will be two exams in the course: a midterm and a final. The midterm exam is scheduled for Wednesday, March 2; The final exam is scheduled for Wednesday, April 27. The exams will be multiple choice. Note that the final exam takes place during our scheduled course meeting during finals week. NO makeup exams will be administered.

Op-Ed (Due March 16th)

The Op-Ed will serve as one of two main writing assignments for the semester. While the policy memo will give you a chance to demonstrate your understanding of policy nuance, strategy, and analysis, the op-ed is designed to show your passion for policy and issues.

You are to select a policy issue and write a 2-page op-ed advocating for action on the issue. The goal of a policy memo is suasion – to convince people to take action. Your target can be the public or a politician, but your audience should be clear from your writing. Successful op-eds will clearly identify the position they are advocating for, the target of their persuasion, and the reason their position should be adopted. The policy memo is where you will want to show off your knowledge of the policy space and strategy so be careful not to get too deep in the weeds.

We will discuss writing an op-ed in class, but I have also added links to resources on Canvas. Successful op-eds should have:

- A strong hook at the beginning that pulls readers in and makes clear why they should care
- A thesis statement that summarizes your argument
- Evidence to support your argument
- A brief rebuttal of potential or prominent counterarguments
- A strong conclusion, often re-iterating the call to action

Policy Memo (Due Dates: February 16th, March 30th, April 20th)

Congrats! You have been hired by a Pennsylvania Senator to write a policy background memo on an important policy issue that is likely to come up before Congress in the next two years.

A policy memo is a document compiled for a certain audience—in this case, a member of Congress. Its purpose is to provide analysis and recommendations concerning a specific situation or problem. One distinguishing characteristic of a policy memo is its organization. Since a policy memo provides your audience with advice about a particular decision, it typically includes a short summary at the beginning of the memo stating the memo's conclusions and recommendations. The remainder of the memo is then dedicated to providing support for these conclusions and recommendations.

As you write your policy memo, remember your audience and stay within the recommended page limit, which is 8-10 pages. Policymakers are busy people with lots of

people clamoring for their time and attention. For your memo to be effective, it needs to be on topic, concise, well organized, and well substantiated. This memo is not the place for emotional pleas, it should be written objectively, factually, and strategically.

A. Topic Selection

Choose a national public policy issue that you deem relevant to the senator or his constituency. If there is an issue that you feel strongly about, you may propose writing about it, but make sure that it would be suitable for the scope of the assignment. If you need help, please consult Jake in January.

Policy issues must be cleared IN WRITING with Jake by February 16th. An outline is due to Canvas by March 30th.

B. Memo

Write an 8-10 page memo that highlights the following information for the Senator (Due to Canvas by April 20th):

1. *The Issue and Its Significance*
 - a. What is the issue?
 - b. Why is it a significant public policy issue?
 - c. Does it affect a lot of people? Who? How?
2. *Background and Context*
 - a. What are the primary issues at hand?
 - b. What main policy choices need to be made?
 - c. What is the history of this issue?
 - d. What were the two or three most important policy decisions made on this issue or in this arena during the past twenty years?
3. *Politics*
 - a. Who supports each side of the issue and why?
 - b. How much support is there for each alternative? Be sure to identify the positions of the major political parties and relevant interest groups.
4. *Media Coverage and Public Opinion*
 - a. How has recent media coverage framed this issue?
 - b. If available, what are public opinion trends on this issue?
 - c. What considerations must the senator consider before taking a public position?
5. *Other Key Players?*
 - a. Are there other outside organizations or individuals that affect or shape this issue? For example, if you have chosen a legal issue, what about the courts?
 - i. For foreign policy issues, what about international organizations?
 - ii. For trade or agricultural issues, what about the World Trade Organization?
 - b. Are there other Senators or members of Congress that might be allies?
6. *Recommended Action*
 - a. Based on your research and knowledge of the issue, chose a side and make a recommendation to the senator regarding how she should formulate her public position on this issue and why.

- b. What are the benefits, liabilities, and consequences of her taking this position?

Please note: Although policy memos are, in effect, position papers, they are not editorials. You must provide evidence to support your assertions and conclusions. If taken from other sources, this evidence should be properly cited both in-text using the Author-Year format and with a works cited. Information on citation will be posted on Canvas.

General Grading Rubric

Your grade on writing assignments will be based on the following factors.

Criteria	Exemplary	Fair	Poor
Content & Subject Knowledge	Writing displays an impressive level of depth of student's ability to relate course content to examples and applications of a current policy issue. Incorporates comprehensive analysis of details, facts, and concepts in a logical sequence.	Writing displays student's above average ability in relating course content to current policy issues. Details and facts presented provide an adequate presentation of student's current level of subject matter knowledge.	Writing presents concepts, but only meets the minimum requirements in this area, overlooking critical details. Concepts are presented in isolation, and writing does not have a logical sequencing of ideas.
Critical Thinking	Writing follows a strategic approach in presenting examples of problem solving or critical thinking, while logical conclusions are drawn, which are not immediately obvious. Ideas are well supported and both pros and cons of policy options are thoroughly discussed.	Writing displays a command of critical thinking skills in the presentation of material and supporting statements. Concepts are related and writing contains adequate conclusions, with 2 or fewer errors.	Writing has a limited perspective on key concepts throughout assignment. Writing contains confusing statements and facts in assignment. Very limited demonstration of critical thinking skills.
Organization of Ideas & Format	Writing is highly organized – presenting the policy issue in a clear light, giving options to the reader and making a firm recommendation. Student can clearly plan and organize research in a logical sequence. Student exceeds minimum research	Writing meets minimum requirements of presenting a current policy issue, options and a recommendation for the reader. Student demonstrates a good skill level in formatting and organizing material in	Writing has a variety of formatting styles, with some inconsistencies throughout. Does not have a continuous pattern of logical sequencing. Sources used for research lack variety or do not meet the required number.

	requirement using at least seven sources.	assignment, with a few errors.	
Writing Standards	Student demonstrates an excellent command of grammar. Research is presented in a concise writing style. Extensive understanding of word usage. Writing is largely free of grammatical errors. Citations are present and correct.	Student displays good writing and grammar. Ideas are expressed with some clarity; grammatical errors may occasionally interfere with meaning. A few citation errors may be present.	Writing contains significant grammatical/proofreading errors which impede message. Student uses a basic vocabulary in assignment. writing lacks clarity, consistency, and correctness. Significant errors with citations.

COURSE POLICIES

COVID-19 Statement:

In the midst of this pandemic, it is extremely important that you abide by public health regulations and University of Pittsburgh health standards and guidelines. While in class, at a minimum, this means you must wear a face covering and comply with physical distancing requirements; other requirements may be added by the University during the semester. These rules have been developed to protect the health and safety of all community members. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in you not being permitted to attend class in person and could result in a Student Conduct violation. For the most up-to-date information and guidance, please visit coronavirus.pitt.edu and check your Pitt email for updates before each class.

Students with disabilities:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, (412)648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412)383-7355 (TTY). Please do this as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. It is your responsibility to discuss with me any accommodations you wish to use in the course. If DRS determines you are eligible for accommodations, but you do not discuss it with me, I will proceed as normal.

Attendance:

Students are responsible for attending class every day and understanding the material for that day. Yes, it *will* be on the exam. Please do not attend class if you are not willing to pay attention, or at least to pretend to pay attention (I can, in fact, see you scrolling through TikTok). If you prefer not to engage the material, please feel free to skip the class as much as you like. Doing so will make your work very poor, and therefore much easier for me to assess.

Academic Integrity:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the assignment, exam or paper will be imposed. (For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html.)

If you have **ANY** questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, **ASK. Ignorance is no excuse.** You can also consult the University's library guide for more information (<https://pitt.libguides.com/academicintegrity/>) or the English Department's (<https://www.english.pitt.edu/undergraduate/plagiarism>).

Late work:

Late work will receive a 10% penalty for each 24-hour period after the due submission time that it is late. I try to strike a balance between being flexible and maintaining certain expectations of you. I have provided in this syllabus a complete schedule of all of the requirements necessary to succeed in this class. It is your responsibility to manage your time and resources in a way that enables you to meet those requirements.

That said, I do recognize the need for flexibility. You should review the schedule of assignments at the beginning of the semester and request extensions as early as possible. Extensions will be granted based on what I feel is reasonable, given both the reasoning for the request and the timing – if you ask for an extension a month before a due date you will have a much greater chance of it being granted than if you ask a day before. Additionally, requests should be made individually, not collectively, unless everyone asking for an extension is willing to put their name on the request.

Incompletes:

It is my policy not to give incompletes. I do so only in rare circumstances, such as a documented illness. (Note: Getting tired of school at the end of the term is not rare, and therefore is not a valid excuse for an incomplete.) Asking for an incomplete except in the direst of circumstances beyond your control only eats away at the precious moments we both have on earth.

Communication:

I hold high expectations of my students and will push you to perform your best. If there are any issues, academic or personal, that may affect your ability to succeed in my class, I strongly encourage you to schedule a time to discuss them with me. I will work with you to address whatever issues I can, and, at the very least, will be able to be mindful of them throughout the course. Any conversations will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

Email:

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

Canvas:

Be sure to check the **Canvas** site at canvas.pitt.edu *periodically for* postings and announcements. In the event that I find it necessary for me to change an assignment or the date of a scheduled exam, I will post the information on the Canvas site. Students will be responsible for all requirements and assignments posted on this site and failure to see the communications is not an acceptable excuse.

Course changes:

Circumstances may arise that require me to change details of the course and I reserve the right to make changes as I deem them necessary. In the event that such a change needs to be made I will revise the syllabus and distribute an updated syllabus and a summary of the change via email, Canvas, and in person.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	For Today, Read...	For Today, Submit...
January 12 th	<i>Introduction; What is Public Policy?</i>	Syllabus; Ch. 1 (18 pp.)	
January 19 th	<i>What is Public Policy?; Explaining Policy Choices</i>	Ch. 2 (20 pp.)	
January 26 th	<i>Explaining Policy Choices; The Realities of the Beltway</i>	Ch. 3 (14 pp.); Clemmett , Fehrman	
February 2 nd	<i>Agenda Setting and Public Policy</i>	Ch. 4 (24 pp.)	
February 9 th	<i>Legitimizing Policy Choices; Organizations and Implementations</i>	Ch. 5 (18 pp.) & Ch. 6 (24 pp.)	
February 16 th	<i>Budgeting</i>	Chapter 7 (36 pp.)	Policy Memo Subject Approval
February 23 rd	<i>Evaluation and Policy Change; Policy Analysis</i>	Ch. 8 (18 pp.) & Ch. 17 (26 pp.)	
March 2 nd	MIDTERM EXAM		
March 9 th	NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK		
March 16 th	<i>Economic Policy</i>	Ch. 9 (32 pp.)	Op-Ed
March 23 rd	<i>Tax Policy</i>	Ch. 10 (24 pp.)	
March 30 th	<i>Health Care and Income Maintenance</i>	Ch. 11 (34 pp.) & Ch. 12 (32 pp.)	Policy Memo Outline
April 6 th	<i>Education, Energy, and the Environment</i>	Ch. 13 (28 pp.) & Ch. 14 (30 pp.)	
April 13 th	<i>Defense and Social Values</i>	Ch. 15 (30) & Ch. 16 (18 pp.)	
April 20 th	<i>Presentations/Review</i>		Policy Memo
April 27 th	FINAL EXAM		