

## PUBL 601: The Political and Social Context of the Policy Process, Fall 2018

Mondays, 4:30-7  
438 Public Policy

Roy T. Meyers  
Professor of Political Science and Affiliate Professor of Public Policy, UMBC  
318 Public Policy  
Office Hours: W 12-2:15, and by appointment

Please call or email me if that's more convenient for you.

Work: 410-455-2196

Home: 410-381-4755

Cell: 410-409-6220

meyers@umbc.edu

### Course Objectives

The graduate catalog describes this MPP/PhD course as:

designed to introduce students to the processes by which policy is made in the United States. It introduces students to the policy-making system, including the institutional, structural and political contexts, as well as the policy-making environment. The various stages of the policy-making process from problem definition and agenda-setting to implementation are examined and discussed, and important theories and models of policy-making are presented. Significant concepts relating to the political analysis of public policy are discussed, such as the social construction of problems, group demands, political influence and resources, motivations and incentives for political behavior, and political feasibility.

To make this task manageable, we will focus on American domestic policy and national government and politics, though a few readings address state and local government and politics. The reading load is necessarily heavy in terms of page length, but most readings are very accessible. The Blackboard site for the class identifies many optional readings should you want to continue your exploration of the topics for any week. PhD students who are considering writing a dissertation related to topics covered in this course should ask me for advice about additional relevant academic readings.

Understanding the policy-making process is difficult because participants often act strategically, sometimes intelligently and sometimes not, under highly variable conditions. And just as importantly, observers of politics--including all of us in this classroom--often have strong political and policy preferences that substantially affect how they understand the process. Given that what we are studying is extraordinarily dynamic and value-infused, you should not expect this course to set out a few universal laws of the policy-making process. Rather, the course is designed to help you use build a craft expertise--the ability to do practical political analysis for

public policy advocacy, evaluation, and management, in a way that incorporates findings from both social science research and practitioner reports.

Our class sessions will help you build that craft expertise as you discuss the concepts and methods in the readings, which include both narrative cases and quantitative analyses. I will lecture on approaches and findings that are not covered by the readings. In most class sessions we will apply concepts from the readings to current events and to the policy issues you will research individually.

### Assignments and Grading

Students should complete all required reading before class, attend class regularly and participate in class.

Participation will be 20% of your final grade. Participation includes careful listening, speaking in discussions, and asking questions if you are confused. If you bring a laptop to class, I expect that you will avoid being distracted by its various applications, and I also require that you use cellphones only for emergencies. There will be a 10-minute break in each class.

In our class discussions, we will follow the rules of “academic freedom.” I hope that you will express your values as strongly as you would like, and respect the rights of others to do the same. I will express my own views at times, and when you disagree, I encourage you to challenge my position; you should be absolutely confident that I will not penalize you for doing so. The counterpart to this encouraged diversity of opinion will be the academic exercise of analyzing our differences in reference to the concepts and methods covered in the course. My hope is that everyone in the room will end the semester having reconsidered some beliefs in light of our deliberations.

Weekly writing assignments will make up another 40% of the final grade. These are due by email to [meyers@umbc.edu](mailto:meyers@umbc.edu) by 9 a.m. the morning of class. They may be in the body of your email or an attachment in Pages or Word, and should be 2 pages long. Some of these assignments are labeled as “reaction” assignments in the weekly schedule. They are intended to assure that you read carefully, to help me organize the discussion, and to understand any questions you may have. Please do not write “book reports” that merely summarize a reading; instead, provide your analysis. Class discussion will likely bring to your attention ideas that you did not think about while writing your assignment; don’t worry about not having written in such a short essay about everything that could be relevant.

Other weekly writing assignments ask you to conduct practical political analysis on a current policy issue of your choice; these are labeled as “workshop” assignments. You should apply concepts from readings when completing these assignments. These assignments will cumulate into a final paper on the politics of your policy issue. The final paper is worth the remaining 40%

of the final grade, is due on 12/17 in hard copy or by email, and should be about 15 double-spaced pages long, plus references and any graphics.

The paper should be political strategy advice addressed to a client--a person or organization, real or imagined. It must set out a realistic political strategy that is likely to result in successful adoption, implementation, or termination of a policy. This policy should be a national or Maryland state government domestic policy in the United States. If you are employed in the policy area you cover in your paper, your topic should not be your primary focus at work.

Your final paper should draw on ideas and readings covered in the course and from other academic and practical sources besides those included in syllabus. Some class periods will be devoted to helping you learn how to identify useful sources. You may find that several of my web pages will provide a useful head start: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/linkampol.htm> and <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/linkmdstatebud.htm>. Consult also the list of “strategy questions” posted in the Blackboard readings section. You are encouraged to include relevant sections from your workshop essays as long as they are edited to fit the final paper’s narrative.

My expectations for your writing style are the same in both the weekly assignments and the final paper. Papers should use clear and concise language. Employ jargon only when necessary, and explain its meaning. Pages should be numbered. The final paper should be well-organized and use sub-headings. Since the Graduate School prefers APA citation style, you should use that format. You are obligated to act ethically in conducting your work, and in particular, to not commit plagiarism. For my guidance on this, see: <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~meyers/plag.htm>.

## Readings

There are two required texts:

John W. Kingdon, 2011. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, updated second edition. Boston: Longman.

Deborah Stone, 2012. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, third edition. N.Y.: W.W. Norton.

All other readings are available on the course Blackboard page, as are displays I use in class and links and citations to many related optional readings.

Each week we will discuss current events, and you will often find that the substantive topics for the week are reflected in the news.

In case you have very little knowledge of the basics of American government and would like a reference source, you may find it worthwhile to buy a standard textbook; there are many options

with different perspectives. Richard Valelly's *American Politics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2013) lives up to its title while providing useful summaries of major topics. You might also look at the practical activism-oriented book *America, The Owner's Manual: Making Government Work for You* (CQ Press, 2010), by former Senator Bob Graham.

### Class Schedule

9/3 Political belief systems--no class on Labor Day, but submit your entry to the discussion board by this date, and read other students' entries after that

#### Pew Political Typology Quiz

Assignment: Complete the Pew survey that categorizes respondents into ideological categories and political affiliations. For the discussion board, answer the following questions: 1. To what extent do you think the survey accurately captures your political beliefs and connections? In what ways is it accurate, and where does it make errors of commission and/or omission? Note: you are free not to reveal how you were categorized. 2. What do think this categorization of Americans implies about the process of policy-making in the United States?

9/10 Stone's conception of politics in policy making; theory of responsible government through elections; partisan polarization and government dysfunction

Stone, introduction and chapter 1--the market and the polis

Christopher Achen and Larry M. Bartels, 2016. "The Elusive Mandate: Elections and the Mirage of Popular Control," from *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsible Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 21-51.

Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven W. Webster, 2018. "Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans," *Advances in Political Psychology*, 39: Suppl. 1, 119-135.

Michael Barber and Nolan McCarty, 2013. "Causes and Consequences of Polarization," in Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin, eds., *Negotiating Agreement in Politics*, American Political Science Association.

Assignment: What evidence do you see in the last three readings that helps you evaluate the accuracy of Stone's "Polis" model?

9/17 Constitutionalism; norms; presidentialism; Trump

Stone, chapter 16--powers

Norman J. Ornstein and Thomas E. Mann, and, 2016. "The Republicans waged a 3-decade war on government. They got Trump," *Vox*, July 18.

James Pfiffner, 2018. "Trump's lies corrode democracy," *Brookings*, April 13.

Your selections from Obama Administration, 2017, "Cabinet Exit Memos: Our Record of Progress and the Work Ahead," January 5, and Trump Administration, current, [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)

Reaction: Pick a policy of the Trump Administration that has changed significantly from the position of the Obama Administration. What do you hypothesize are the main reasons why policy has changed? In your opinion, in comparison to the arguments of Ornstein, Mann, and Pfiffner, are there other explanations for the policy change?

9/24 Policy values; workshop issues

Stone, chapters 2-5--equity, efficiency, welfare, liberty; chapter 12--incentives

Tyler Cowen, 2018. "Immigration Policy Is Hard," *Bloomberg Opinion*, June 26.

Workshop: Choose a policy area on which you will focus your political analysis over the semester. Prepare a brief policy problem definition and identify your preferred policy response. Be explicit about the policy values that your proposal are intended to promote, drawing from Stone or from other sources. If you are new to the graduate program, see "problem definition hints" on the course Blackboard page.

10/1 Interests and pluralism; how policy affects political mobilization

Stone, chapter 10--interests

Andrea Louise Campbell, 2012. "Policy Makes Mass Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15: 333-351.

Workshop: Identify several organizations who would take a position on your preferred policy--including at least one that would likely support your position and one that would likely oppose it. Relate these identifications to at least one concept in the assigned readings.

10/8 Oligarchy and public policy; political movements

Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics*, 12: September, 564-581.

Nicholas Confessore, Sarah Cohen, and Karen Yourish, 2015. "The Families Funding the 2016 Presidential Election," *The New York Times*. October 10.

Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, 2012. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, chapter 3

Alasdair Roberts, 2012. "Why the Occupy Movement Failed," *Public Administration Review*, 72: September, 754-762.

Assignment: Roberts asserts that advocates for change must "work through existing political institutions." To what extent do you disagree? Support your argument by referencing a specific policy conflict.

10/15 Models of policy change: incrementalism, multiple streams, punctuated equilibrium, path dependence, drift, policy history

Stone, chapter 11--decisions

Kingdon, chapters 1-4 and appendix

Suzanne Mettler, 2016. "The Polycscape and the Challenges of Contemporary Politics to Policy Maintenance," *Perspectives on Politics*, 14: June, 369-390.

Workshop: Find a article that describes some history relevant to your workshop policy, and based on this article describe two important historical events that are relevant to today's policy situation. To the extent your policy is related to those reviewed by Mettler, do you agree or disagree with her status classification in Table 1?

10/22 Framing and motivated reasoning

Stone, chapter 7--symbols

Chris Haynes, Jennifer Merolla, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, 2016. "Media Framing and Effects on Public Opinion," and "Framing Deportations," *Framing Immigrants*. N.Y.: Russell Sage Foundation, 16-40, 111-146.

Workshop: Suggest how your preferred policy position might be best framed. You may want to search through polling data and other sites listed on Blackboard.

10/29 Coupling of policy problems and solutions; political interpretations of policy indicators and policy evaluations

Kingdon, chapters 5-6

Stone, chapters 8 and 9--numbers, causes

Workshop: Identify an important policy indicator or evaluation relevant to your workshop issue. Develop a handout on one sheet of paper (you may use both sides) that succinctly supports your position. Include a data visualization that quickly communicates your message while framing it to your advantage.

11/5 Building policy advocacy coalitions

Calvin Naito and Esther Scott, 1990. "Against All Odds: The Campaign in Congress for Japanese American Redress."

Michael Pertschuk, 2010. *The DeMarco Factor*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 29-87.

Hiroko Tabuchi, 2018. "How the Koch Brothers Are Killing Public Transit Projects Around the Country," *The New York Times*, June 19.

Workshop: Relying on concepts from the readings, describe how a coalition to support your policy position might realistically be developed.

11/12 Major policy changes: policy cycles and the public mood; the policy window; policy termination

Kingdon, remainder

RAND Corporation, 2018, "Overview: Gun Policy in America."

Kanisha Bond, Erica Chenoweth, and Jeremy Pressman, 2018. "Did you attend the March for Our Lives? Here's what it looked like nationwide," *The Washington Post*, April 13.

Reaction: Using the multiple streams model, analyze whether you think gun control is politically feasible, using this definition: capable of being adopted over the next five years, and then sustained as policy for years after that.

#### 11/19 Legislative decision-making; champions

John Jacobs, 1995. "Park Barrel," from *A Rage for Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 351-379.

Barbara Sinclair, 2007. "Medicare/Prescription Drug Legislation. . .," from *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S Congress*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 161-185.

Rick Valelly, 2016. "Making a Rainbow Military: Parliamentary Skill and the Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'," in Jeffrey A. Jenkins and Eric M. Patashnik, eds., *Congress and Policy Making in the 21st Century*. N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 75-105.

Identify an influential member of a legislative committee with jurisdiction over your issue, and describe that legislator's likely receptivity to your proposal.

#### 11/26 Federalism: cross-state variation

Barry G. Rabe, 2008. "States on Steroids: The Intergovernmental Odyssey of American Climate Policy," *Review of Policy Research*, 25:2, 105-128.

Sanya Carley, Sean Nicholson-Crotty, Chris J. Miller, 2017. "Adoption, Reinvention, and Amendment of Renewable Portfolio Standards in the American States," *Journal of Public Policy*, 37: 4, 431-458.

Jason M. Grumbach, 2018. "From Backwaters to Major Policy Makers: Policy Polarization in the States, 1970-2014," *Perspectives on Politics*, 16: June, 416-435.

Workshop: Discuss the extent to which you believe it is desirable that for your policy issue, policies should vary across geographic subdivisions of the United States, and be determined primarily by politicians in those subdivisions. Connect your discussion to a concept from one of the readings.



12/3 Policy making through executive orders, regulations, and waivers

Stone, chapter 13, rules

Cass R. Sunstein, 2013. "The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs: Myths and Realities," *Harvard Law Review*, 126: May, 1838-1878.

Frank J. Thompson, 2012. "Demonstration Waivers and the Politics of Reinvention." from *Medicaid Politics: Federalism, Policy Durability, and Health Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 134-166.

Assignment: Identify and describe a regulation (in place, in preparation, or being reconsidered) that is directly relevant to your issue.

12/10 Judicial politics of policy; political prospects of legal advocacy for promoting policy goals

Stone, chapter 15, rights

Thomas M. Keck, 2009. "Beyond Backlash: Assessing the Impact of Judicial Decisions on LGBT Rights," *Law and Society Review*, 43:1, 151-185.

Christopher McGrory Klyza and David J. Sousa, 2013. "From 'Who Has Standing' to 'Who Is Left Standing?': The Courts and Environmental Policymaking in the Era of Gridlock," from *American Environmental Policy: Beyond Gridlock*, updated and expanded edition. Cambridge: MIT Press, 141-177.

Workshop: Identify any legal issues related to your policy issue that might affect whether you would choose to focus on the courts as a political arena or instead avoid them.