Public Affairs (PA) 200: Contemporary Public Policy Issues  Spring 2020

FINAL Syllabus --- April 14th, 2020

Meeting times and place:

Lectures 2:30-3:20 pm. M, W, 6203 SSSB
Discussion sections:
Lec 301 (Discussion) Van Hise 159 Fridays 9:55-10:45am
Lec 302 (Discussion) Soc Sci 4308 Fridays 12:05-12:55pm

Canvas Course URL: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/191411

Instructor: Timothy M. Smeeding
https://lafollette.wisc.edu/faculty-staff/faculty/timothy-smeeding

TA: Morgan Galecki

Preferred Contact information: smeeding@wisc.edu  mgalecki@wisc.edu

Office Hours: Professor Smeeding Tuesday 2-3:30 pm, 3464 SSSB or
TA Galecki by appointment

Course description:

The goal of this class is to offer a general primer on large-scale social, economic and other policies directed by federal and state governments, with specific examples in pressing policy areas. Students will gain a broad overall knowledge of how the majority of state and federal funding is both raised and spent, and the associated policy issues and outcomes. The class takes existing policies and the policy process as a given, explains a subset of policies in detail, and puts a focus on a set of specific contemporary public policy questions of concern to students, policymakers and society. A student of this class will gain a broad overall knowledge of how the majority of state and federal funding is spent and the policy outcomes associated with that spending, including its impacts on society. In particular this semester we will also focus on how “administrative burden” affects the delivery of policies and programs. Where appropriate, the class will include speakers from the policy world, or expert researchers on individual topics.

Course Learning Outcomes:

This class will accomplish the following learning goals:

1) Students will demonstrate understanding of how the US federal budget is spent and US domestic policies.
2) Students will gain knowledge and demonstrate application of methodological
tools utilized in the public policy arena (e.g., ‘policy memo’ writing).

3) Students will demonstrate understanding and application of knowledge regarding given policies, being able to apply basic policy concepts to practical cases drawn from the real-world.

4) Students will be able to engage in knowledgeable discussions about policy with researchers, policymakers and policy experts.

5) Students will be able to assess and interpret empirical analyses of policies, and understand the effect of policy changes.

6) Students will understand how policies are implemented and the way that implementation affects outcomes and effectiveness of policy.

7) Students will be able to persuasively advocate for a proposed policy change in an op-ed and in a testimony, as two examples of policy writing.

8) Students will have a chance to present policy options for addressing key public policy issue.

Course Prerequisite: none

Required text:


Paperback version is available on Amazon, and elsewhere – *please buy it ASAP*


Required readings:

The readings for the class are up to date analyses of current policy issues. All required readings will be posted on the class Canvas page: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/191411 (available second week of class). All assignments except for the in class exam will be administered via Canvas.

Grading structure:

Short memos (30%):

--Op-Ed Write an op-ed of 2 pages (750-800 words) supporting a particular solution to an assigned policy problem, due Tuesday February 25th by 4pm, in WORD on Canvas (15%)

--Testimony Complete a short (4-5 pages) congressional testimony arguing for or against a specific piece of legislation of your choice, due on or before Tuesday, April 21st by 4pm, in WORD on Canvas. (15%)

In both, you will consider the pros and cons of your approach. Both documents should directly engage with readings from the course as well as studies published in academic journals and policy reports produced by government agencies and reputable think tanks.
First exam (25%) Monday, March 9th: Students will complete a first written in-class exam, answering specific questions that demonstrate an ability to analyze specific policy problems within a limited time and word space.

Second exam (25%) take home –Distributed Friday, May 1st, due Wednesday May 5th Students will complete a second written, take home exam, answering specific questions that demonstrate an ability to analyze specific policy problems within a limited time and word space.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Students are encouraged to both come to class (attendance taken) and participate in it (see below).

( Team Policy Presentations (10%) Student teams of three will present policy options for dealing with a given policy problem and discuss their pros and cons in discussion sections, March 27th-April 17th (SUSPENDED for COVID)

Course Requirements:

Students will need to fulfill the following requirements:

1. **Complete all reading assignments.** Come to class with questions/comments to ask of the instructor and fellow students. Class sessions will briefly summarize the reading but will mainly provide the larger systemic context, integrate the materials and explore the implications of the readings.

2. **Participate in class discussion.** This means actively engaging in discussions of the reading and the cases. For all classes student participation will be a major component. To participate, you will need to be in class, so please let me know in advance if you cannot attend. In a few cases, I will assign a number of class discussion questions that we will engage in during class. When you read your readings, keep the questions in mind, and keep notes. Come to class prepared to discuss these questions. **Attendance lists will be distributed and signed for both lectures and discussion sections**

3. **Complete grading requirements on time.**

Rules, Rights, & Responsibilities:

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For
more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: “The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.” http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php

Diversity & Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” https://diversity.wisc.edu/

Assigned Reading List

Below you will find the reading list. All the readings and the PowerPoints from previous classes are kept up to date on Canvas so that one can read ahead and stay current as we move through the class. URLs are provided but if broken, Google can find articles for you

1. January 22nd  Welcome and Introduction


Herd and Moynihan, Administrative Burden. Introduction, pp 1-10

For those with no economics at all— one short article:


For all of you – an even shorter one and a retort against economists!


Discussion sections: Friday January 24th: hello and current policy issues

What others (PEW, Brookings) think are the top public policy issues of the day: skim and compare to summary of class preferences from PAF 200 Student Info & Interest Forms


2 January 27th, Values, Markets and Public Policy


3. **January 29th Measuring Administrative Burden and Contentious issues:**

   **Political Rights (Voting) and Abortion/Birth Control**

   Herd and Moynihan. *Administrative Burden*. Chapters 1-2-3

   Thaler, R. (2018). Nudge, not sludge. *Science*, 361, 4311, at [https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6401/431](https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6401/431)


   **Discussion sections: Friday January 31st**: Values exercise & Admin. Burden

4. **February 3rd and February 5th Where the Money Goes: Breaking Down the Federal and State/Local Budgets**

   **Part 1: 4a. February 3rd Federal Government**


Bernstein, Jared. 2019. “A very good economic idea may be about to replace a very bad one”, Washington Post, January 10th; https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/01/10/very-good-economic-idea-may-be-about-replace-very-bad-one/?utm_term=.66ef0ff11f76


Part 2: 4b. February 5th CBO plus State/ Local Budgeting


and


Discussion sections: Friday, February 7th:

CFRB. 2020,. The Debt Fixer” - reduce the debt and balance the federal budget exercise at http://www.crfb.org/debtfixer/?group=lafollettepa20019

5. February 10th: Demography and Public Policy
   Guest lecturer, Marcy Carlson. Professor and Director CDE

Furstenberg, Frank. 2014. “Fifty Years of Family Change: From Consensus to Complexity” ANNALS, Volume 654, July 2014, pp 12-30 (PDF)

Berger, Lawrence and Marcia Carlson. 2019.” Family Policy and Complex Contemporary Families: A Decade in Review and Implications for the Next Decade of Research and Policy Practice”, October 2019 (PDF)


6. **February 12th: The Minimum Wage and the “Living Wage”**


**Discussion sections: Friday, February 14th**

Discuss the week’s topics and visit from Olivia Ernst from the campus Writing Center talking about policy writing as it applies to this class and your testimony

7. **February 17th: Welcome to the LFS Undergraduate Certificate and the Internship Extravaganza**

This class will include an explanation of the new LFS Undergraduate Certificate in Policy, a special panel of internship experts, LaFollette staff and others


8. **February 19th and 26th: Reducing Poverty, Income Support and Encouraging Work**

**8a: February 19th: What is Poverty and Encouraging Work**

West Wing. 2001. *A New Formula for Poverty* at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9EehZlw-zk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9EehZlw-zk) and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8S4JttVlzQ24th](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8S4JttVlzQ24th) (short 5 minutes or so of video)


Discussion sections: Friday, February 21st -- poverty vignettes and clips

Assignment due: Tuesday February 25th: Op Ed due 4pm


Herd and Moynihan, Administrative Burden. Chapters 6 (SNAP) and 8 (EITC)


**Discussion sections: Friday, February 28th:** poverty/inequality discussion and sign up for presentations

9. **March 2nd and March 4th** Inequality and Mobility

9a. **March 2nd Inequality**


Reeves, Richard and Katherine Guyot. 2018. *There are many definitions of “middle class” — here’s ours* Brookings September 4, at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/09/04/there-are-many-definitions-of-middle-class-heres-ours/


**OPTIONAL:** Both below are interactive and you have to go to the NYT to fill in data if you want to do so


9b. March 4th Mobility


Discussion sections: Friday, March 4th getting ready for the hour exam

ASSIGNMENT March 9th In-class mid-term exam

10. March 11th Social Security


Herd and Moynihan, Administrative Burden. Chapter 9, Social Security


Discussion sections: Friday, March 13th The CBO social security balancing exercise

Spring Break: March 16th to March 20th

Online lecturing begins on March 23rd through rest of semester


11a. March 23rd Introduction to Health, Health Care and the US System


Daszak, Peter. 2020. “We Knew it was Coming; Welcome to the Age of Pandemics” NY Times, Feb. 27, at https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/opinion/coronavirus-pandemics.html


11b. March 25th Administrative Burdens, COVID-19, Opioids and Final Health Care Policy Considerations

Herd and Moynihan. 2018. Administrative Burden, chapters 4, ACA; 5, Medicare; 6, Medicaid


Discussion sections: Friday, March 27th class discussion and feedback

12. March 30th: Criminal Justice Policy


13 April 1st Science and Privacy vs Security Policy

"Privacy Issues Related to Medical Records and Consumer Genetic Testing Companies"

Guest lecturer; Professor Lauren Schmitz, LFS


Discussion sections: Friday, April 3rd class discussion and feedback

14 April 6th and 8th Human Capital and Education Policy: ECE, K-12 and Higher Education

14.a. April 6th Overview, ECE and K-12


14b. April 8th Higher education, educational mobility and inequality


Discussion sections: Friday, April 10th class discussion and feedback


“How Doing Policy Analysis: A Short Cookbook” PAF 200, S 2020 , April 3rd


More generally—read a bit about “Public Policy Reporting: The Role of the Press”


16 April 15th Regulatory Policy: Gun Control


**Discussion sections:** Friday, April 17th class discussion and feedback

17 April 20th and 22nd, Climate, Environment and Energy Policy

17a April 20th—the climate problem


Sanders, Nicholas. 2019. Clearing the Air on the Costs of Pollution, ECONOFACT, October 18th, at https://econofact.org/clearing-the-air-on-the-costs-of-pollution


**Assignment due: Tuesday, April 21st**  
**Testimony due 4pm**

17b. April 22nd  
Climate and Energy Policy


Nunn, Ryan, Jimmy O’Donnell, Jay Shambaugh, Lawrence H. Goulder, Charles D. Kolstad, and Xianling Long. 2019. *Ten facts about the economics of climate change and climate policy*. Brookings, as above—section on Carbon tax only


Discussion sections: Friday, April 24th – discussion & prep. for second hour exam

18. April 27th and April 29th Immigration policy and wrap up

18.a April 27th: Immigration basics


18.b April 29th Immigration policy, and Wrap up


Herd and Moynihan, Administrative Burden, Chapter 10, Evidence


ASSIGNMENT: Second hour exam take-home: distributed May 1, returned by May 5th

END