This is a graduate course on policymaking in the American federal government. The course embodies my own view of policy research. In general, policy research is bifurcated. Economists typically address what government should so, while political scientists study what it has done and can do politically. But in actual government, policymakers have to consider both—the merits of policy and the politics. I think policy research should do the same. Policy scholars should initially make an argument about how to resolve some important issue on the merits, and then go on to discuss what government is able to do, in light of constraints due to politics, implementation, or administration.

Following this approach, the course first reviews leading theories of policy analysis, or how one makes arguments for policies on the merits. We consider both the economic approach and criticisms of it. We then review leading theories of the policymaking process, including agenda setting, policy advocacy, and bureaucracy. A midterm exam follows.

In the second half of the course, we consider some examples of research that follows this model—books that advance an argument about best policy but also address institutional constraints. Some of this work has been my own. Where possible, I invite authors to visit the class to discuss their research.

Meanwhile, students write papers on topics of their choosing, also seeking to combine policy and political analysis. In the seminar’s last two meetings, students present outlines of their arguments and receive feedback from the class. Finally, there is a written final exam drawing on the whole course.

Readings

The course will use these texts, in about this order. All are on sale at the book store and also on reserve at Bobst. Buy as many as you are able:


In addition, for students with a limited background in federal institutions and policy processes, I recommend buying or renting a recent edition of:


In the course schedule below, required assignments come mostly from the above books. Some articles and selections are also assigned. The required books and the additional items are on reserve at Bobst, and a copy of the additional items may also be purchased for $27 at Unique Copy Center, 252 Greene St., phone 212-420-9198. Some recommended items are also listed; these are not on reserve or for sale, but most can be found at Bobst or on Bobst e-journals.

**Requirements**

There will be a midterm and final examinations, both closed-book and in class, which will each count 20 percent of the grade. Each test will be two-part. Half of each test will be to write six identifications of terms or concepts from the course, chosen out of 12. The other half will be to answer one broad essay question, chosen out of three. Each part will count about half the grade. Both halves of the midterm will cover all material up to that point in the course. On the final exam, the IDs will be drawn from material after the midterm, but the essays will cover the whole course.

There will also be a paper of about 20 pages, due at the end of the course, in which students work out a study design for an actual research project in public policy. The assignment is given below. This paper will count 40 percent of the grade. The remaining 20 percent will be given for participation in class, counting both attendance (40 percent) and speaking (60 percent). Finally grades will be determined by ranking the class on the basis of average, with about the top half receiving As and the bottom half Bs.

**Schedule**

The following are the dates of each session, with the subject and readings for each. Readings must be completed before class to profit from the discussion and contribute to it:

**Sept. 5, Introduction: The Policy Approach**: The development of the policy field. An approach to policy research stressing both policy analysis and political analysis. Contrast to other approaches:

*Required:*

Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, ch. 1.


**Recommended:**


**Sept. 12 The Economic Paradigm 1:** Traditional economic policy analysis. How economists understand the goals of government, and criticisms of this approach.

**Required:**

Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, ch. 2.

Munger, *Analyzing Policy*, chs. 2-4, 8, 12.


**Recommended:**


**Sept. 19, The Economic Paradigm 2:** The economic approach to the optimization of policy, and criticisms of it. Choices of policy instruments.

**Required:**

Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, chs. 5-6.


**Recommended:**


**Sept. 26, The Policy Process:** Institutions as the context of policymaking. The stages model of policymaking, and criticisms of it. The formative role of agenda setting. Implementation and evaluation.

*Required:*

Howlett et al., Studying Public Policy, chs. 3-4, 7-9.

Conlan et al., Pathways of Power, chs. 1, 4, 6-7, 10.

*Recommended*


**Oct. 3, The Politics of Policy:** Lowi’s types of policy and other approaches to understanding the politics aroused by policymaking. The question of how interest groups mobilize:

*Required:*

Stone, Policy Paradox, ch. 10.


*Recommended*


**Oct. 10—Fall Recess—no class.**

**Oct. 17, Policy Advocacy (Mark Kleiman):** How policy entrepreneurs form and sell policy solutions, the highest-level form of policy analysis. Experts as entrepreneurs. The case of airline deregulation.

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Oct. 24, Bureaucracy:** The powerful influence of organization on policymaking. Bureaucracy as a constraint on the options available to policymakers.

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Oct. 31, Midterm examination**

**Nov. 7, Law Enforcement (Mark Kleiman):** How to improve law enforcement with effective deterrence so that both crime and punishment are reduced.

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Nov. 14, Domestic Policy (David Schoenbrod):** Conflicts between Congressional policymaking and the public interest.

*Required:*

Schoenbroad, *DC Confidential*, chaps. 1-2, 4-6, 8.

*Recommended:*


**Nov. 21: Economic Policy (Steven Teles):** How economic interests dominate economic policy

*Required*


*Recommended:*


**Nov. 28, Student Presentations:** members of the class will present summaries of their papers.

**Dec. 5, Student Presentations:** members of the class will present summaries of their papers.
Course evaluations.

Dec. 19, Final examination and papers due, 6:20-8:20 PM, 19 West 4th Street, #212.

Paper Assignment

The purpose of the paper is to give you experience in framing and addressing policy issues using the public policy approach developed in this course. That requires:

1. **Defining a public policy problem**, something important but doable (see further below).
2. **Taking a position** on how best to solve this problem using policy analysis. That means a position taken “on the merits,” without reference to political or institutional constraints.
3. **Critiquing actual policy**. How does government’s actual policy in this area differ from what you would recommend?
4. **Explaining the divergence** using political analysis. Why in this area does government fail fully to “do the right thing” as you understand it? What political or administrative constraints account for the outcome we see?
5. **Narrowing the gap** by either suggesting revisions in the policy process or by revising your idea of best policy so that it is closer to what is politic.

The policy issue you tackle may be anything provided that it is (1) large enough to be important, (2) not so large or amorphous as to be undoable in the time available, (3) with enough written on it to make it researchable, and (4) not one of the topics addressed in class.

The issue must be a real issue posing a real choice. Do not begin with a policy that you already favor and ask how to get it adopted. That is, don’t begin with a problem where the merits are clear to you and the only obstacles are political. Rather, begin with a problem you care about where you haven’t yet formed a view of how to solve it, or where at least you recognize that there is debate. Then follow the steps above.

I should confer with each student on his or her topic before you get very far into your work. Here are some possibilities:

- What explains the recent financial crisis? How did it come about, and is the recent financial regulation legislation enough to prevent the problem in future?
- What is the best means of extending health insurance coverage to Americans who do not have it now? Does Obamacare solve this problem or not?
- What is the best means of reducing the growth in health care costs to the general rate of growth in the economy—rather than much higher, as it usually has been? Did Obamacare take significant steps in this direction?
- Should the section 8 voucher program to subsidize low-income housing be expanded—or abolished?
- What is the best way to expand families’ choice about the public schools their children attend? One option is to expand voucher programs funded with public money.
- What is the best means of stopping illegal immigration into the United States?
- What should be done to improve the collection of child support in the United States?
- In what form, if any, would you continue affirmative action as a federal policy governing employment?
- What is the best way to reduce carbon emissions in the U.S. so as to combat global warming? Assess the “cap and trade” legislation recently considered in Congress.
- What approach would you recommend for combating drug addiction? Tougher criminal sanctions, expanded treatment programs, legalization?
- How would you reform the Medicare problem to prevent it going bankrupt? Consider recent proposals to convert the program to “premium support.”
- How would you reform Social Security to prevent it going bankrupt?

Your answer to your question should:

1. Carefully define your topic. Make sure that the policy issue is clearly and sharply posed.

2. Offer a preliminary study of it, as suggested above, using whatever policy and research materials you are able to cover in the time available. Cover both policy and political analysis. Any arguable position is allowable; it need not be “liberal” or “conservative.”

3. Outline a preliminary argument along the lines suggested above.

4. Set out the additional readings and analysis you would do if you had more time, for example if this were a Ph.D. dissertation.

Please observe the following rules:

**Deadline:** Papers are due no later than the final exam on Dec. 20. Papers handed in late will be accepted but penalized
--5 points if handed in within a week of the original deadline, but before grades go in.
--10 points if handed in later than this, but before grades go in.

Be aware that delays due to commuting or computer or printer problems are to be expected and are the student's responsibility.

Extensions without penalty will be given for serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time, such as illness or family emergency. Students encountering such difficulties should confer with me out of class and as early as possible. For illness, bring a note from a parent or doctor.

Extensions beyond when grades go in require an Incomplete. This also requires that there be serious, unexpected, and documented demands on your time. Confer with me in good time.

*Incompletes are not automatic.* Students who fail to turn in a paper, or turn in a paper after grades are submitted, must have arranged an Incomplete in advance. Otherwise they will simply fail the course. So, if you are in difficulty, *don’t disappear. Talk to me.*
Submission: Papers may either be handed to me on or before the deadline, or they may be left in my box at the Politics Department prior to the deadline.

Papers may not be faxed to the Department or submitted by e-mail.

Keep a copy of your paper, in hard copy or on disk, in case it should become lost.

Format: Papers should observe the following guidelines. Papers infringing the rules will be accepted but incur a penalty of 4 points off per infraction, but not more than 8 points total:
--Cover page: must include name, local address, all possible phone numbers. Please place your name in the upper left-hand corner, to make it easier to locate your paper in a stack.
--Your topic or question must be written out on the cover page. This is to make sure you focus on it. Students often forget this.
--Length: 15-25 pages, exclusive of cover page and bibliography. In figuring length, footnotes or endnotes will be counted, and half the length of any figures, tables, etc., will be added to the text.
--Must be typed or written on a computer.
--Spacing: double-spaced, with 22-4 lines to the page.
--Margins: 1-1.5" on the left and top of pages, .75-1" on the right and bottom.
--Type size: close to the size used for this assignment.
--Pages must be numbered, starting with the first page of text.
--No citations to unauthorized material (see “Sources” below).
--Binders—avoid. Papers should be stapled at upper left-hand corner.

Originality: Students may discuss the assignments with other students but must write their papers individually, without collaboration with others. Students may seek help with their writing in general, but the writing they hand in should be their own, not edited by others.

Plagiarism: Do not use ideas or language drawn from readings without giving the source. Also, do not use an author's actual language as if it were your own; always enclose borrowed language within quotation marks to make clear someone else is talking. It is plagiarism not to cite a source and also to use an author’s words without quotation marks so that they seem to be your own—even if you do cite the source. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will draw heavy penalties.

At the same time, do not be self-consciously "academic." Don't feel you have to have a citation on every sentence. There is no need to document facts that are commonly known to your audience. Multiple citations to the same source that occur close together can often be combined in a single note.

Sources: Everything you cite should be regularly published books or articles. This is to assure that it has undergone some degree of review for accuracy. Academic papers are acceptable provided they come from regular faculty members or were presented at academic conferences. You may not cite material that appears on the internet unless it was also regularly published. Two exceptions: you may cite statistics or reports from government web sites, and you may cite articles from the web sites of reputable news organizations. Where possible, cite web materials in terms of the published version and not a web address. When in doubt, ask me in advance.

Citations: See handout on documentation, on Classes. Either author/date or conventional footnotes may be used.