Political Science 311: Contemporary Issues in American Public Policy

Summer 2010
M-F 1:30-3:00 p.m.
HSS 51

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Course Goals

1. Develop an understanding of the actors and process involved in formulating public policy.
2. Develop an understanding of the functions and tools of policy analysis.
3. Develop an understanding of alternative perspectives on public policy issues.

Course Requirements

Exam #1  25%  Problem Def. Paper  15%
Exam #2  25%  Class Participation    5%
Exam #3  30%

Required Text


Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office of Disability Services at 865-974-6087 in Hoskins Library to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Daily Topics

I. PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

1. Introduction (6/3,4)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #1.
   Outline:
   Defining public policy
   Reasons for government involvement
   Policy goals
2. Institutions and actors (6/7,8)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #2.
   Outline:
   - Multiple constitutional actors
   - Federalism
   - Multiple non-constitutional actors
   - Implications for policy capacity

3. Theories of the Public Policy Process (6/9,10)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #3.
   Outline:
   - Elite theory
   - Group theory
   - Institutional theory
   - Rational choice theory
   - Political systems theory
   - Policy process model

Exam #1 (6/11)

II. POLICY ANALYSIS

4. Introduction to policy analysis (6/14)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #4.
   Outline:
   - Defining policy analysis
   - Policy analysis process
   - Purposes of policy analysis

5. Activities in policy analysis (6/15,16)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #5.
   Outline:
   - Nature of public problems
   - Problem analysis
   - Constructing alternatives
   - Evaluating and assessing alternatives

6. Tools of policy analysis (6/17,18)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #6.
   Outline:
   - Forecasts
   - Cost-benefit analysis
   - Political feasibility analysis
   - Implementation analysis
   - Program evaluation
III. ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES

7. Economic and budgetary policy (6/22)
   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #7.

   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #8.

   Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #9.

10. Education policy (6/30, 7/1)
    Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #10.

Problem Definition Paper Due (7/2)

11. Environmental and energy policy (7/2,6)
    Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #11.

12. Conclusion (7/6)

Final Exam (7/7)