

Masters in Legislative Affairs Program  
George Washington University  
**PSC 229: Politics and Public Policy**  
Fall Semester 2008

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This is an introductory graduate-level course on American domestic politics and federal public policy. We will look at the nature of public policy, how policy comes to the public agenda, and the decision-making processes. We will look historically at the main currents of public policy since World War II and particularly in the last two decades. We will look at the role of Washington think tanks and lobbyists, examine the emerging role of electronic advocacy, and look at policymaking from the perspective of a Member of Congress. We will also speculate on the next fifty years of public policymaking.

You will be asked to do some serious graduate-level writing and analysis, concentrating on one area of public policy concern. You will be asked to make two short presentations in class on your research findings.

**Readings:**

You will read six paperback books and several journal articles for this course.

Dennis W. Johnson, *Congress Online: Bridging the Gap Between Citizens and Their Representatives* (Routledge, 2004)

John B. Judis, *Paradox of American Democracy* (Routledge, 2001)

Paul C. Light, *The President's Agenda: Kennedy to Clinton*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Johns Hopkins, 1999)

John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy* (Longman, 1995)

Deborah A. Stone, *Policy Paradox*, rev. ed. (Norton, 2002)

Carl E. Van Horn, Donald C. Baumer, William T. Gormley, Jr., *Politics and Public Policy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (CQ Press, 2001).

From **electronic reserves** (accessible through our Blackboard site):

David Broder and Haynes Johnson, *The System*, ch.

Dennis W. Johnson, "Introduction," *The Laws That Shaped America* (research manuscript).

Dennis W. Johnson, "Medicare and Medicaid," *The Laws That Shaped America* (research manuscript)

Paul C. Light, "Government's Greatest Priorities in Next Half Century," Brookings Reform Watch, December 2001

Paul C. Light, "Government's Greatest Achievements," ch. 1.

You may want to purchase Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (7th ed), paperback

**How your grade will be determined:**

There will be three assignments in this class. You will have two research papers, the first counting as 30 percent of your final grade, and the second counting as 40 percent. Then you will have a take-home final examination, counting as 30 percent of your final grade. There will be no grade for class participation, no quizzes, and no extra credit assignments.

**Final Examination:**

On **December 3**, you will be given your final examination. This is a take-home final that will require you to use the books and readings assigned to answer one or more examination questions. The examination answer should be no more than 12 pages long, and must be returned to me, via e-mail, by **December 10**. This examination will constitute 30 percent of your final grade.

**Research Assignments:**

You will write two papers, each 15 pages in length, which several aspects of politics and public policy. You will focus on one, and only one, of the following areas of current public policy debate:

- McCain and Obama: politics and public policy on the campaign trail
- Social security privatization
- Medicare reform
- Reduction of greenhouse gases
- Homeland security enhancements
- Immigration reform
- Protecting the sanctity of the American family
- Improving elementary and secondary education
- Military reform

The **first paper**, worth 30 percent of your final grade, and 15 pages, double-spaced, in length, will address the following question: What are the basic policy and political issues surrounding this topic and who are the principal players advocating reform or change? This paper will be due on **Wednesday, October 8**.

The **second paper**, worth 40 percent of your final grade, and 15 pages, double-spaced, in length, will address these questions: who are the principal policy players (both individuals and institutions), and what are the prospects of reform or change? This paper will be due on **Wednesday, November 19**.

More on the research paper assignment is found in the accompanying handout on writing graduate-level policy research papers.

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**Week One: September 3****Introduction to Public Policy**

Course requirements and expectations

What is public policy?

What is the public policy process?

Policy and politics.

**Readings:**

Van Horn et al., *Politics and Public Policy*, chs. 1-5, 6, 7, 9, 10

**Week Two:** September 10

**Public Policy and the Presidential Elections**

**Readings:**

**Obama presidential website, policy pages**

**McCain presidential website, policy pages**

**Assignment Due:** Determine which policy area you will focus on for your two research papers.

**Week Three:** September 17

**Politics and the Art of Decision-making**

**Readings:** Stone, *Policy Paradox*, chs. 1-10

**Week Four:** September 24

**Politics and the Art of Decision-making**

Topic continued

**Readings:** Stone, *Policy Paradox*, chs. 11-15

**Kingdon**, *Agendas, Alternatives and Policy Making*, chs. 1-3

**Week Five:** October 1

**Agenda Setting and Public Policy**

**Readings:**

**Kingdon**, *Agendas, Alternatives and Policy Making*, rest of book

Johnson, *Laws that Shaped America*, "Introduction," and "Medicare and Medicaid," available on electronic reserve

**Week Six:** October 8

**Executive Branch Policymaking from Kennedy to Bush II**

**Readings:**

Light, *The President's Agenda*.

**Assignment Due:** First Research paper. Due promptly at 6:00 p.m.

**Week Seven:** October 15

Presentation of research findings.

**Week Eight:** October 22

**Executive Branch Policymaking from Kennedy to Bush II (continued)**

**Case Study:** 1933 Clinton Health Care Proposal

**Readings:**

Light, *The President's Agenda*.

Broder and Johnson, *The System*, chapter available on electronic reserve.

**Week Nine:** October 29

**Congress and Public Policy**

**Readings:**

Light, "Government's Greatest Achievements," chapter available on electronic reserve.

**Week Ten:** November 5

**Washington: Center of Power**

**Readings:** Judis, *Paradox of American Democracy*

**Week Eleven:** November 12

**Citizen Advocacy, Netroots, and Electronic Advocacy**

**Readings:**

Van Horn et al., *Politics and Public Policy*, ch. 8

Johnson, *Congress Online*.

**Week Twelve:** November 19

Report on research findings

**Assignment Due:** Second Research paper. Due promptly at 6:00 p.m.

**Week Thirteen:** November 26

Day before Thanksgiving; no class will be held

**Week Fourteen:** December 3

**Public Policy for the Rest Next Fifty Years**

Light, "Government's Greatest Priorities in Next Half Century," available on electronic reserve.

**Final Examination:** handed out in class; due promptly at 6:00 p.m. on **December 10**, via e-mail.