The Public Policy Process

Winter 2009-10
Thursday, 7:00-9:30pm
SN2033

INSTRUCTOR:
Dr. Russell Alan Williams (Assistant Professor, Political Science)
Office: SN2031 Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00-2:00pm (Or by appointment)
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DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
This course reviews contemporary theoretical models of public policy-making and tests key hypotheses through empirical examinations of selected Canadian cases in public policy-making. Particular attention will be paid to the policy stages, or “policy cycle”, heuristic as a way to distinguish key claims about the determinants of policy outcomes. The course examines the impact of policy ideas, institutions and actors. Class discussion will focus on the methodological challenges of operationalizing exiting policy theory against students’ empirical examinations of policy areas. This course is intended to provide students with:

- An overview of contemporary academic policy theory
- An opportunity to develop their own expertise or “command” over selected policy areas
- An opportunity to write an academic calibre article - which will be presented at the end of the course
- Insight on the challenges of working and researching in the administration of public policy

COURSE ORGANIZATION:
The course is organized into two major sections. The first half of the course will focus on the traditional academic task of reviewing and examining the existing literature on the public policy process. Students will be required to examine this literature, submit weekly analysis of the literature and discuss the challenges of different approaches to study public policy. The second half of the course will focus on the presentation of students’ research - their individual academic articles and their group project briefing notes.

TEXTBOOKS:
- M. Howlett, A. Perl and M. Ramesh, Studying Public Policy (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Additional articles and chapters specified in the weekly outline

COURSE EVALUATION:
Term Paper - Academic Article 35% (Due one week after end of term conference)
Group Briefing Note 10% (Due at the end of term)
Class Discussion Questions 15%
Analytical Presentation (Section One) 10%
Conference Paper Presentation (Section Two) 10%
Conference Paper Discussion (Section Two) 10%
Class Participation 10%
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

TERM PAPER - ACADEMIC ARTICLE (35%)
Students are to write a major research paper exploring the topic they have selected/been assigned. It is expected that students will apply and test policy theory concepts and hypotheses against their topic. For this semester, students should choose one of the following topics:

• St. John’s - Garbage and Recycling Programs
• Newfoundland - Poverty Reduction Strategy
• Canada - Canada’s Mission in Afghanistan
• Canada - Banking Regulation
• Canada - Gun Control
• Canada - Urban Aboriginal Policy

Although the length of the final essay can vary considerably - students should plan to write a paper of approximately 6,000 words. Papers should be formatted in a style consistent with current articles published in the Canadian Journal of Political Science (I will provide a good example during the term). This means papers will be formatted in a scholarly fashion and include an abstract. The final version of the term paper is due one week after the presentation of a draft version of this paper at the end of term “conference”.

GROUP BRIEFING NOTE (10%)
During the semester students will be provided with a “briefing note scenario” relating to their research topic area. All students working on that topic area will be asked to collaborate in the preparation of a briefing note to provide officials with critical information relating to that policy sector. I will provide you with a additional direction as to what should be included in that briefing note. A written version of this note will be due at the end of the semester, and will be discussed at the end of term conference.

CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (15%)
Throughout the semester “Class Discussion Readings” have been assigned. We will be discussing these articles in our weekly seminars. This is an important component of the course as these readings will provide students with the theoretical “material” they will test in the major research papers.

Students are required to come to class with two prepared analytical questions and their own short answers to those questions in regards to the discussion reading. These questions are intended to promote group discussion. They should be typed, take no more then a page and will be turned in at the end of each class for my review.

In preparing your questions you should try to focus on either:

• Concerns raised by individual articles. You might pose questions about the shortcomings of its argument or analysis. You may look for “internal” problems or faults of the article – what is wrong with it. You could also raise questions about the broader implications of an article. You might explore how the article relates, supports or contradicts other course materials.

• Broader thematic questions raised by the week’s readings: For example you might ask a synthetic question about how each article resolves a certain problem or challenge confronting public policy research. You might simply speculate on the political issues raised by the weeks readings.

Regardless, please keep in mind that the point of these Class Discussion Questions is to ensure that you are properly prepared to discuss the readings.

Note: Students providing an Analytical Presentation are not required to submit Class Discussion Questions for that week.
ANALYTICAL PRESENTATION (10%)
Each student is required to do one seminar presentation on the assigned weekly Class Discussion Reading. You will be given the opportunity to choose a week for this presentation on a “first come, first served” basis in class, on the week of January 7.

- These presentations should take approximately TEN minutes.

A good presentation will promote class discussion of the issues raised by the reading. To prepare for presentations, you should have a clear understanding of the issues covered by the reading. You may wish to draw on additional materials from outside of the required reading materials. Students are encouraged to examine these materials in advance.

Please remember that a presentation is similar to an essay. It should have an introduction and it should develop a clear set of analytical concerns. Simply describing the article is not sufficient. Analyzing the reading can take a number of forms, but generally you should try to do one of the following:

- Engage with claims made by individual articles. You might discuss the shortcomings of an article’s argument or analysis. You may look for “internal” problems or faults of an article – what is wrong with it.
- Discuss the broader themes emerging from the weeks’ readings. You might discuss how the articles relate, support or contradict each other or other course materials.

Regardless, please keep in mind that the point of your presentation is to enlighten the rest of us regarding the topics we are discussing that week. Your presentation is intended to promote discussion. Good presentations will give the class something to talk about.

CONFERENCE PAPER PRESENTATION (10%)
Near the end of the term each student will be given the opportunity in a conference setting to present a draft of their research paper to the class. Each student is required to email a draft version of their paper to the entire class one week in advance of the presentation.

You will give a brief presentation (10-15 minutes) outlining your paper. This presentation should focus on summarizing what you have argued and outline how your paper contributes to understanding the public policy process. This is intended as an opportunity to improve your oral communication of your work, but more importantly provides an opportunity to get feedback and advice on your topic from your colleagues before submitting it for grading. It is assumed that everyone in the class will have read your draft paper before your presentation.

Tip: It is sometimes useful to think of your research presentation as answering three questions:

- Why were you interested in examining the topic in the manner that you did?
- How did you go about studying the topic of your paper?
- What did you learn? Or, what lessons can be drawn from your paper?

One student in the class will be selected in advance to act as a discussant of your paper. They will follow your presentation with a five minute discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the draft version of the paper. Your final research paper is due one week after this presentation.

CONFERENCE PAPER DISCUSSION (10%)
Following the presentation of draft research papers, each student will be asked to serve as a discusssant of at least one of the student papers being presented. This is a form of peer review intended to help each member of the class improve their paper prior to the final submission. The responsibility of the discussants is to read the paper carefully and to provide a polite and respectful five minute critique that will help guide the paper’s author in making improvements before the final submission.

This process should be taken seriously. It is a normal aspect of scholarly activity. It is expected that the discussant's comments will help the author identify shortcomings with their draft. Failure to carefully read the paper and provide useful feedback will result in a poor grade on the assignment.

PARTICIPATION (10%)
You are required to attend scheduled classes. In each class, readings, or student papers, will have been assigned specifically for the seminar. This reading is intended to prompt class discussion of themes raised by that week's course unit. It is expected that you will have read this material and come to class prepared to discuss it and the broader issues it raises. Your participation grade will be based on the degree to which you consistently (over the whole term) demonstrate that you have come to class prepared. Simply attending class will not result in a good grade; rather, you must attend and discuss that week’s topics.

Please keep in mind that “discussing” the readings does not require that you be an expert on the topic. Often, the best class discussions are prompted by students asking questions about what they don’t understand about the topic or student presentations.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Students must not engage in academic dishonesty . . .
Cheating includes (but is not limited to) allowing another student to copy from your work, presenting someone else’s work as your own, consulting electronic devices such as mobile phones or MP3 players and/or interacting with others while a test is ongoing. Information about procedures and penalties for academic dishonesty is outlined in the University Calendar and is available from the Department (http://www.mun.ca/posc/undergraduate/planning/plagarism.php).

Students must have an appropriate classroom demeanor . . .
On occasion less serious students disturb others’ learning during class, by talking at inappropriate times, using the Internet and/or using cell phones. Students distracted by any such behaviour should bring this to the attention of the course instructor.

Students must have a functioning Memorial email account . . .
Memorial University’s policy is that students are to use e-mail from an account with the official university domain name (@mun.ca). This is the sole address to be used for official university e-mail communication. The policy further states that “failure to appropriately check e-mail will not exempt them from responsibilities associated with the email correspondence.” This course requires that your MUN email address is working and that you regularly check your messages. Class readings and advice will be emailed to you on a regular bases.

In addition, if students wish to contact the instructor via email, they must make it clear who they are and what course they are referring to. Questions that require “in-depth” lengthy answers may not receive a quick response. Complex questions about research papers or problems understanding course materials are usually better addressed in person during office hours.

Students must complete assignments on time . . .
In the event that a class is cancelled on the day of a scheduled exam - the exam will be administered in the next available class. Students unable to write exams on the days which they are administered may qualify—through the provision of valid medical documentation (i.e. a doctor’s note) for the day in question—for a deferred and dissimilar testing opportunity.

The penalty for late essays is 5% per day. E-mail or other technological problems do not constitute a valid excuse.

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES:**

**Persons with Disabilities:** The Glenn Roy Blundon Centre ([www.mun.ca/blundon](http://www.mun.ca/blundon)) serves students whose disabilities involve conditions affecting mobility, vision, hearing, learning, chronic illness, or mental health; support is also provided to students with documented temporary illnesses and injuries.

**Use of Recording Devices in Classrooms:** Students may not make a visual and/or audio recording, openly or surreptitiously, of any lecture material delivered in a course without the written permission of the course instructor.

**Writing Centre:** The Writing Centre ([www.mun.ca/writingcentre](http://www.mun.ca/writingcentre)) is a free facility for all Memorial University students who want help with their writing. The Centre provides individualized tutorials to students from all schools and faculties on a by appointment bases.

**Political Science Website:** Information about upcoming courses, sample course syllabi, course instructors, work internships, international exchanges, degree requirements and more is available on the Political Science website ([www.mun.ca/posc/welcome/](http://www.mun.ca/posc/welcome/)).
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING:

- **Background Reading:** Reading intended to provide contextual background information for weekly discussions.
- **Class Discussion Reading:** Reading assigned for weekly discussion
- **Applications and Methods Reading:** Reading assigned for weekly discussion which illustrates attempts to empirically apply policy theory.
- **Additional Reading:** Classic readings that might be of use in preparing research papers.

January 7 - Policy Science? Introduction and Course Organization

**Background Reading:**


**Additional Reading - Classic Questions:**


**Additional Reading - Classic Approaches:**

SECTION I – APPROACHES TO PUBLIC POLICY

January 14 - The “Policy Subsystem” and the Study of Politics: Domains, Communities and Networks

**Background Reading:**

**Class Discussion Reading:**

**Applications and Methods Reading:**

**Additional Reading - The Role of Institutions:**

**Applications and Methods Reading:**

**Additional Reading - the Role of Institutions:**
January 28 - The Role of Ideas

Class Discussion Reading:

Applications and Methods Reading:

Additional Reading:
- Blyth, Mark M. ““Any More Bright Ideas?” The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy.” Comparative Politics, 29(1997): 229-250.

February 4 - Actors, Entrepreneurs and Advocates

Class Discussion Reading:

Applications and Methods Reading:

Additional Reading - the Role of Actors:

February 11 - Stages in the Policy Process: Agenda Setting

Background Reading:

Class Discussion Reading:

Applications and Methods Reading:

Additional Reading:

February 18 - Class Cancelled


Background Reading:

Class Discussion Reading:
March 4 - Stages in the Policy Process: Decision-Making

**Background Reading:**

**Class Discussion Reading:**

**Applications and Methods Reading:**

**Additional Reading:**
March 11 - Stages in the Policy Process: Implementation

**Background Reading:**

**Class Discussion Reading:**

**Applications and Methods Reading:**

**Additional Reading:**

March 18 - Stages in the Policy Process: Evaluation - Feedback, Termination (?) and Learning(?)

**Background Reading:**

**Class Discussion Reading:**

**Applications and Methods Reading:**

**Additional Reading:**


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**No Assigned Class - Understanding Policy Change and Stability**

**Background Reading:**


**Class Discussion Reading:**


**Applications and Methods:**


**Additional Reading:**


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**SECTION II – STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE**

**March 25 - Draft Term Papers Due**

**April 1 - 3 - Student Research Presentations (Time and Location TBD)**