

NATIONAL POLICY MAKING  
POSC 201, WINTER 2012  
Weitz 132  
MW 9:50-11:00, F 9:40-10:40

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Office Hours: Th 10:00-12:00  
by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to National Policymaking. The purpose of this course is twofold. First, because the policy process is complex, we will work to increase understanding of the wide array of political factors that determine the feasibility and/or desirability of a particular course of action in response to a perceived problem. Second, because the policy process depends upon knowledge and information, we will evaluate the status of various kinds of knowledge claims, including sources of credibility.

We will begin with the politics of the policy formation process. We then turn to the role of citizens in political and policy processes. As we go along we will occasionally take time to consider, discuss and incorporate fundamental (but elusive) political concepts such as liberty, representation, power, and democracy. The course will have an overall orientation toward democratic ideals and practices. Some history will be included, as history provides a dialogue between past and present that helps us to gain clarity about who we are, what we can do, and what we ought to do. We will, of course, discuss current events as they relate to course materials and as they unfold during the term.

TEXTS

The course will use readings excerpted from both classic and contemporary political texts. These will be posted on our class site at the library. In addition to these readings, we will use the following textbooks:

*Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*, updated 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. by John Kingdon  
*Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, Deborah Stone

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Current events:** We will frequently discuss current events as they relate to the topics we are studying. Therefore, you will be expected to read a major newspaper on a regular basis and to be familiar with the prominent political stories. Watching television news and/or Comedy Central, following a blog, or listening to the radio is not adequate.

**Participation:** The expectation of lively interaction is built in to each class period. You are expected to come to class ready to express your thoughts and questions about the readings as well as relevant current events. Because engaging in thoughtful conversation about important issues in public life is an important skill in policy and politics, it is included as a small part of your grade. We will keep track of participation using an honor system. There will be a log in class every day. When you contribute to class discussion, write your name down in the log at the end of class. You can count only one participation for each class period. Participation grades will be based on the standard that 15 contributions fulfills the expectations of an A in participation. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed so you can return to class prepared.

**Reading:** Careful, thoughtful reading followed by critical thinking is the fundamental activity of this class. The types of readings assigned will vary widely, from narratives that read like a story to dense and abstract writings on aspects of public life. Some of these readings will be challenging but none exceed the expectations of course work for this course. I will give you guidance on how to approach difficult readings. In the context of this course, all of the readings are best viewed as political acts that originate in a public purpose and aim to achieve some goal or address some problem. The general reading task in the course is threefold:

- I. First, determine what problem or problems the author is concerned about.
- II. Second, read for the argument the author is making.
- III. Third, assess the observations and evidence the author brings to bear in the writing, and/or the soundness of the reasoning.

After these three tasks are accomplished, at least in part, you are ready to evaluate the text. I will give you guidance on how to approach the various readings. Questions about the readings are most welcome, especially when they are specific. I expect excellent comprehension, retention and substantial reflection to be evident in course discussions, questions raised, and in your writing. The reflection papers (discussed below) are intended to support thorough, thoughtful reading.

Your reading assignments are due on the date they are listed on the course schedule, and the class sessions will be structured based on the assumption that you come to class ready to ask questions and share observations, frustrations, insights or concerns about the reading assignment.

## Writing Assignments

Writing assignments in the course consist of the following:

- 1) Six short (2-3 page) reading reflection papers - The purpose of these assignments is to provide a means for exploring the readings beyond what is typically done by reading alone. This is informal writing focused on expressing ideas, asking questions, and drawing connections. To the extent a reading relates to some previous experience, it is often helpful to include that. The point of the assignment is to think about the reading, so everything should be related to the reading. You select the readings you wish to write your reflection paper on. They are due the day the readings are due in class. It will be most beneficial to the flow of the course if you do not write two reflection papers in one week, although this is only a guideline. If you write about one reflection paper a week you will easily get them done before the research paper is due. You should have all your reflection papers turned in by February 24<sup>th</sup> (week 8).
  
- 2) One short analytical paper - The purpose of this assignments is to develop the ability to form an analytical argument regarding public affairs and express it clearly to others. This papers will be short (4-5 pages). This will be due in late January.
  
- 3) Research project:
  - a) research paper (about 10 pages) - You will use the analytical frameworks we learn in class to study a policy that is of interest to you. The purpose of this assignment is to gain facility in understanding the effects of the political context on policy formation. The papers will be grouped into general topical areas or themes. Although the papers in each group will relate to each other, your research paper will be independent work. This is due Wednesday, February 29.
  - b) group library session with Danya Leebaw - Once the research groups are established, each group will be responsible for setting up a meeting with Danya Leebaw, the reference librarian for political science. She will give you individualized guidance on research tools appropriate to your topic. Aim to have this completed by February 10<sup>th</sup>. If scheduling complications require you to meet with her the following week that is acceptable but not optimum.
  - c) a panel presentation based on your research paper - The groups formed for the research papers will make a short, informal panel presentation to the class. These will occur March 5 and 7.
  - d) two short (1-2 page) discussant papers - These papers will be short discussions of other student papers in preparation for the question and answer session as part of the panel presentations. Your discussant paper should include one or two questions for the panelist.

There will be no exams in this course.

Papers are due as paper copies in class on the date specified. I encourage you to print your papers double-sided. Late papers will be graded down two points for each day they are late.

I encourage you to talk with me about your assignments. I am happy to answer any questions you have about either the course materials or your progress in the course. You can visit me during my office hours or make an appointment.

#### GRADES

	points	%
Class Conference		
Research Paper	120	27
Library session with Danya Leebaw	25	5
Panel Presentation	45	10
2 Discussant Papers (15 points x 2)	30	7
1 Short analytical paper	50	11
6 Reflection papers (25 points x 6)	150	33
Class participation	30	7
Total	450	100

#### CLASSROOM POLICIES

Class policies are intended to foster a stimulating and fruitful intellectual community for everyone. Our time in class is valuable and the topics we address are important; therefore, I will enforce the following rules/expectations:

1. It is the nature of topics in politics to entail conflicting opinions. Even those who take the time to arrive at deeply thoughtful conclusions often disagree. Class discussion will encourage free expression for everyone and hold to a standard of respect for all class members.
2. Any student with a disability who needs to arrange accommodations should talk to me at the beginning of the semester. I will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.
3. In order to nurture the classroom as a learning community for everyone, side conversations, electronics and other diversions will not be tolerated. Laptop

computers are a convenience but also a tempting distraction. During class discussion and at other times I may ask that the screens be folded down.

#### ACADEMIC HONESTY

An act of academic dishonesty is a serious offense in a college community. By seeking credit for work which is not his or her own, a student takes unfair advantage of fellow students, who accept their limitations, and of teachers, who trust that the work received is the student's. Dishonesty in academic work, particularly in the form of plagiarism, also defeats the process of self-discovery which is the heart of a liberal education. People establish their integrity and personality only as they learn to distinguish what is significantly their own from what belongs to another, only as they learn to value their own work, including its limitations, in relation to the work of others. As a scholar, finally, one should be generous in acknowledging the work of other scholars, for their work makes possible one's own.

At Carleton College, an act of academic dishonesty is therefore regarded as conflicting with the work and purpose of the entire College and not merely as a private matter between the student and an instructor; all cases involving such dishonesty are referred to the Academic Standing committee for appropriate action. This action can vary from a grade of Unsatisfactory in the given piece of work to a recommendation of permanent dismissal from the College in cases of repeated or serious offenses.

You can find information about academic dishonesty at:  
<http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/>