

COURSE SYLLABUS
POL 285.01
AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY
CREDIT HOURS: 3
FALL, 2009

CLASS LOCATION: CHSS C070
CLASS MEETING TIMES: 4MWF
INSTRUCTOR: DR. WILLIAM E. CARROLL
OFFICE LOCATION: CHSS 496D
INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION: PHONE: 41469; pol_wec@shsu.edu
OFFICE HOURS: 2-3, MW

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is the natural sequel course to POL 261 (American Government). In the latter course the student learned the foundations of American government (Constitution, political culture), governing institutions (Congress/Texas legislature, President/Governor, bureaucracy, federal and state courts), and how citizens democratically participate in and are represented in government and hold it accountable (elections, media, interest groups, political parties). In POL 285, American Public Policy, the student learns what the government does, namely, it produces public policies (actions, decisions, regulations, laws – “output”).

To come out of the course with a knowledge of American Public Policy means knowing both the substance of concrete policies (economic policy, education policy, environmental policy, and so on) and how these policies are made, by whom, in whose interests, and why – why these policies and not some alternatives. The first part of the course is devoted to this – an understanding of the policy making process: stages of the process, actors in the process, how to analyze and evaluate policies and policy alternatives. The greater part of the course however has us examining real policies – learning, for example, what education policy in the US (and Texas) is – while “debating” sometimes controversial policies and the issues surrounding them – for example, gun control, death penalty, war in Iraq).

Approach/method of instruction: Lecture and discussion. Lectures will be used to introduce, summarize, and amplify the assigned readings, where necessary providing background to each of the policy issues covered. While some lectures will be rather formal, usually my lecture style is more discursive. Questions and class discussion are always encouraged, and students should expect to hear diverse opinions and know they won’t be punished in any way for their own.

Course Prerequisite: POL 261

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Factual knowledge: first, of the policy process (as described above and in the course outline); and then of the content and substance of specific policies (and policy alternatives)
- Critical thinking: on the policy process, how it works (or doesn't); and on existing policies (particularly compared to other democratic countries)
- Analytical skills: learning to evaluate policies and policy alternatives, for effectiveness, equity, etc.

TEXTS

Required:

Davis, Public Policy: The Basics (Edsall Publishing, 2005)

CQ Researcher, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy, ninth edition (CQ Press, 2008)

In addition to newspapers – NOTE: the New York Times and USA Today are both available free at various locations on campus - there are of course numerous sources available online (including CQ Weekly Reports and National Journal)

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance is required, following general university regulations. Repeated absences result in grade penalty (see grading plan below). Makeup exams are available only for verified and excused absences, and are given at the instructor's discretion.

EXAMS

There will be four exams. Their format will be objective questions (Honors: there will be an optional written component). Dates of exams will be announced in class.

GRADING PLAN

Exams: 90%

Attendance and participation: 10%

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. Not excluding further disciplinary action a student found cheating on an exam, plagiarism, collusion, or the abuse of resource materials will result in a grade of 0 on the exam or relevant work.

CLASSROOM RULES OF CONDUCT

Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Cell phones and pagers must be turned off before the class begins; students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process. Making offensive remarks or talking at inappropriate times may result in a directive to leave the class. Students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

COURSE OUTLINE

- I. Public Policy: Politics and Processes – Models of the political process; Definitions of public policy; Actors; Types of public policy; Agenda setting and policy formulation; Policy implementation; Policy evaluation; Budgets

Reading: Davis, chapters 1-10

First Exam

- II. Public Policies: Education; Health Care; Social Policy
 - a. Education: No Child Left Behind; Student Aid

Reading: CQ Researcher, 1 and 2; handouts

b. Health Care: Universal Coverage; Fighting Superbugs

Reading: CQ Researcher, 3 and 4; handouts

c. Social Policy: Domestic Poverty; Gun Violence, et al

Reading: CQ Researcher, 5 and 6; handouts

Second Exam

III. Public Policies: Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Criminal Justice: Environment; Business and the Economy

a. Torture Debate; Hate Speech

Reading: CQ Researcher, 10-11; handouts

b. Oil Jitters; Buying Green; Mass Transit Boom

Reading: CQ Researcher, 7-9; handouts

c. Mortgage Crisis; Aging Infrastructure

Reading: CQ Researcher, 12 and 13; handouts

Third Exam

IV. Homeland Security and Foreign Policy

a. Illegal Immigration; US Policy on Iran; Cost of the Iraq War

Reading: CQ Researcher, 14-16

b. US Foreign Policy: Historical Background; Actors, and Processes

c. War in Iraq/Afghanistan; War on Terrorism

Final Exam

NB: The material the student is responsible for includes the readings identified above; whatever handouts are made available; AND lecture material that in some instances goes beyond the assigned readings (for example, providing background for each policy area).

STUDY TIPS

Students are strongly advised to take class notes, review them – and the handouts – on a regular basis. It also helps to keep up with the assigned reading as we are addressing each topic rather than leave it until the night before the exam. Questions are always encouraged, either in class or out of class. Another tip is to find classmates to study with, compare notes, etc.

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS

Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation toward the end of the semester.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS

Any student desiring to be absent in order to observe a religious holy day(s) is to inform the professor by the third week of the semester. I will make every accommodation possible.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student having a disability is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodations can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

All items in the syllabus are subject to revision at discretion of professor; this would be done only in the interests of mutual convenience – for example, exam dates, shifting of material between exams, details of written assignments.