

American Public Policy Online
POL 285:07 (CID 4093)
Department of Political Science
Sam Houston State University
Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. Sarmistha Rina Majumdar

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1pm to 2pm or by appointment (Room 481, CHSS Building)

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Course Description

This course will help to understand public policies and their impacts on our lives. It will discuss the need for public policies, how they are formulated, approved, implemented and evaluated. The various stages in the policy making process, the roles played by different individuals, politicians, bureaucrats, and organized interest groups in the making of public policies will be examined in this online class. Also, this class will focus on environmental policies and the politics involved in regulations. Even though environmental issues are bipartisan in nature but politics play a major role in enhancing or undermining the importance of major environmental policies. Thus knowledge of various factors is important in understanding and development of personal opinion about policies. The latter can help us to determine the fate of a public policy either by lending or withdrawing support for it.

Course Objectives

This course will examine the entire public policy making process. It will help students to understand the politics behind public policy making, the processes involved in policy formulation, and the various challenges in the policy making process. Usually the passage of a policy is followed by its implementation and this requires allocation of scarce public resources. Hence, the financial aspects involved in securing funding for policy related programs will also be examined along with the need for their evaluation. Evaluation helps us to make decisions regarding the renewal or elimination of public programs in a politically charged climate.

Required Text

1. Davis, Edwin S. 2008. **Public Policy: The Basics, third edition**. Edsal Publishing. ISBN: 9780972197823.

2. Rosenbaum, Walter A. 2008. **Environmental Politics and Policy**, CQ Press. ISBN: 9780872894402.

Class Requirements

The course will require constant review of information posted online (powerpoint slides along with other pertinent information and announcements) and reading of chapters from the two textbooks. Please *download all the powerpoint slides* for the assigned topics. The slides would provide *supplemental information* and help you to better understand the topics in the textbooks.

Please note that powerpoint slides will only be provided for all the chapters of the textbook, '**Public Policy: the Basics**' by Edwin Davis. For the Environmental Politics and Policy book by Rosenbaum,

power point slides *will not be provided*. Every student should read chapters 1-3 in addition to other assigned chapters in the Rosenbaum book. Please check the tentative class schedule for more information.

Check the schedule for posting dates of powerpoint slides. The slides will be available for a fixed time period. Please download them to study for the exam. *Requests to make the slides available prior to the posting dates will not be entertained.*

Please read newspapers (local, state, and national) and newsarticles posted at various websites (Yahoo, AOL, etc.). Often you will find interesting news/facts on various policy related issues, which would help you to understand the theoretical content of the course.

In this online class, I will communicate with students through announcements posted on BlackBoard (BB) and e-mails. **Please make sure that your e- mailbox is not full and check the BB daily.** It is your duty and responsibility to keep all channels of communication open when taking an online class. If messages get bounced back, you may not receive important information and instructions, which might affect your overall performance in this class. **Also, I reserve the right not to answer to any anonymous e-mails. All e-mails addressed to me must have the author's name.**

Participation in online discussions is required in this class. You will be awarded a total of 20 points for participation in *four* discussions. I will post news articles, questions, and invite responses to experts' comments along with my questions. You will post answers to questions within the given time period. Failure to respond in a timely manner will lead to loss of points. Please feel free to come up with additional questions and /or comments on those topics, which are worthy of posting online. If you come across any interesting articles that can be used in our policy discussions or as reference materials, please send it to me for posting. *Check the posting time period in the tentative schedule of class.*

I will be constantly monitoring the site and keeping track of your participation in discussions for evaluation purposes. Further, your participation in discussions will help you to clarify doubts, obtain additional information, examine issues critically and improve your understanding of policy related issues.

In this course, students will be evaluated on the followings:

Exams

First Online Exam – 20 points (multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blanks and word matching)*

Second Online Exam (Final) – 30 points (multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blanks and word matching)*

Public Policy Term Paper - 20 points

Synopsis - 10 points

Four Discussions (five points each) – 20 points

*Word bank will be posted in Course Documents section of BB prior to each exam.

There will be *two online exams* offered in this class. ***These exams will be timed and questions will be released one at a time.*** Please do not backtrack while taking the exam. A time window will be provided for the exam and you can take it anytime within the given time period. ***Each exam can only***

be taken once. Even if you make several attempts to take the exam, only the first attempt will be recorded and counted. Please check the dates and topics for the exams in the class schedule.

Grading Plan

Final grades will be computed on the following basis:

A = 90 points and above

B = 80 to 89 points

C = 70 to 79 points

D = 60 to 69 points

F = 59 points and below

ASSIGNMENTS

A. Synopsis

To write a synopsis, you need to attend a town hall meeting or any local conference and gather enough information to write about it. The guidelines for writing the synopsis are given below and it should help you in the information collection process. Further research on the selected topic will be required. Sometimes the local newspapers and the library can provide you with valuable information. The purpose of this exercise is to help you understand the various stages in policy making and realize how tedious and time consuming the process is.

Try to attend a town hall meeting in your community or any other meetings that are likely to deal with local problems and issues. Check the website of your community and you will see the dates of meetings and the topics that are likely to be discussed. At the meeting, observe the process of political engagement and listen to the discussions to solve a particular problem in the community. If a solution to the problem is not adopted at the meeting, follow up with the local officials and derive information from them on the future course of action. If several solutions are discussed at the meeting but none of them have been voted upon, then you be the judge and decide which is the best solution for that place and validate your choice.

Just to keep you informed, a political engagement project is being planned on SHSU campus this semester. You can attend the various workshops in this project and report on it by following the given guidelines. The date, time and venue are yet to be finalized and I will keep you all informed.

Guidelines:

1. Write a brief introductory summary introducing the topic and the problem. **The descriptive part should not exceed two paragraphs.**
2. In the body of the synopsis, discuss the impact(s) of the issue on people's lives and whether it is worthwhile to invest scarce resources in addressing that particular problem. For example, if the road through the town/city is extremely congested during office hours and there are major accidents at intersections due to traffic violations, then should the local government invest in expensive monitoring cameras at traffic lights to prevent such violations and accidents.
3. Do your own research on that topic. Check if there already exists a policy at the state and federal level on that issue and whether they are being followed in the implementation of a proposed plan in dealing with the issue at the local level. Comment on the likely changes in the

community that is, how it would affect the target population and what would be the likely outcomes in the local community. Do neighboring communities have similar problems? If not, why not? If so, how are they dealing with it and what are the consequences of their policy related actions?

4. Conclude the synopsis by expressing your personal opinion on the issue that is, your criticisms and/or praise for the efforts being made to address the problem through a policy initiative. Suggest your recommendations for further improvements in the proposed plan or policy objectives or what policy opinion/advice can you offer as an individual to your local elected and/or public officials in handling that particular problem or the issue?
5. You may add other pertinent points relevant to the issue of your choice.

The synopsis should not exceed 2 pages in length and must be typed and double spaced. Use Microsoft Word for typing purposes and 1 inches margin. It should be typed in Times Roman font, size 12. No title page is required. Print the title at the top of the paper.

Check your work for grammatical errors and typos prior to submission.

- (1) Post your synopsis in the **Environmental Policy Forum** of the Discussion Board of BB.
- (2) Also, submit it into the Synopsis folder in the Assignment section of the BB to facilitate its grading.

Please note all assignments will be checked for plagiarism using the Turnitin software.*

B. Term Paper Assignment

You have to submit a term paper on an *environmental problem* and a related policy that is of interest to you. Please keep in mind that in selection of an environmental problem and a related policy, the topics used in writing synopses cannot be reused. Since there are endless environmental problems and policies, the selection of a topic should not be a problem. **Even though choice of the topic rests with you, please check with me and have it approved prior to writing your term paper. I want each student to write his or her term paper on a topic that has not been selected by another student.** *So, please make your selection at your earliest convenience. I will maintain a record and make sure that there is no repetition of topics.*

Do some research on your choice of an **environmental issue/policy**. Use both journal and news articles in investigation of the problem and the existing policy to address it. Make optimum use of resources available at the university's library – use *Lexis Nexis* to obtain current information from newspaper articles. Also, use *Google Scholar* to obtain journal articles. Many journals are available online at our SHSU library. Once you have information on journals and other news articles, please do not forget to cite them in the *body of your term paper* and the *reference section*.

The following guidelines need to be followed in writing the Term Paper. Please elaborate on each item. Feel free to add additional items in your discussion of the environmental policy.

- (a) Discuss the environmental problem that has helped to set the agenda for an environmental policy. Introduce the essential elements of this environmental policy.
- (b) Discuss the roles played by various people in passage of the policy and the media if any.

- (c) Which agency or department is responsible for implementation of the policy? Discuss its functions or explain the implementation process (describe the program used to attain the objectives of the policy).
- (d) Identify the decision making process used in policy formulation. Example, was it rational comprehensive model, incremental, mixed scanning, etc.?
- (e) Identify the presence of either an Iron Triangle or an Issue network in the policy formulation and/or implementation process. If none, explain why?
- (f) Discuss the problems or obstacles (if any) encountered in implementation of the policy.
- (g) What measures have been taken to address the problem(s)?
- (h) Has the policy benefited the public? If not, explain why? If yes, in what ways?
- (i) Discuss your personal opinion of this policy.
- (j) Provide your own recommendations or make suggestions to improve this policy.
- (k) Add your comments on pertinent issues related to your selected topic and worthy of discussion. For example, if you are writing on global warming, you can discuss the steps being taken to address the problem within US and compare it with measures in European countries. Even you can discuss how China and India are contributing to the problem and what they are doing to address it.
- (l) I would like to see a diagram in your paper where you can outline the five stages in the policy making process. You may use boxes and arrows to connect the boxes.
- (m) Please save your save as a Pdf file. Upload it and then send it electronically using the Assignments feature of the BB.

The term paper must be well organized. Ideas should flow clearly and smoothly from one paragraph to another. Please use headings and subtitles if necessary to avoid abrupt transition of ideas from one paragraph to another.

The paper must be typed using Microsoft Word software. It should be at least 6 double-spaced pages (excluding table of contents, reference list, title page and appendices, if any). Do not forget to include the reference list with *at least seven citations* at the end of the paper. Use the **Chicago Style format** in writing the term paper. If you need assistance with it, check with the Writing Center staff on campus or go to any library and seek the help of a reference librarian in locating the style format book for instructions.

The typed pages should have 1" margins, the **font should be Times Roman** and the **font size should be 12 point**.

Check your paper for typos and grammatical errors. If necessary, please have your paper reviewed by the staff at the SHSU Writing Center before submitting it to me. Reviewing service is free for all students. **Please note that I will check all papers for plagiarism* using the Turnitin software.**

Please submit the term paper on the due date or prior to the due date. Only electronic submission using the BB will be allowed. I will send you instructions on how to submit the synopsis and the term paper electronically. **Late submission of synopsis and term paper would lead to deduction of points.**

***A Note on Plagiarism**

Please do not copy and/or paste directly from websites, journal articles, wikipedia or books. Use proper citation procedures to cite articles, authors and other materials. If you need help, please seek

the assistance of the Writing Center. A plagiarized term paper will receive 0 points and the case will be forwarded to the Dean of Students for further investigation.

Tentative Class Schedule for Fall 2009

American Public Policy Online

Please Note: *The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus, including dates for submission of required assignments and exams. These changes will appear in Blackboard announcements. It is the student's responsibility to become aware of such changes.*

Date	Slide Number/Activity/Assignment Due Date	Read Chapter
8/25	Slide #1	Introduction to Public Policy
8/31	Slide #2	Chapter 1 (Davis)
9/07	Slides #3	Chapter 2 (Davis)
9/14	Discussion #1 Slide #4	Check Course Documents (posted article) and Discussion Board (for questions) and post answers, comments, and/or questions by 9/23/09. Chapter 3 (Davis) Chapter 2, p30 – 33 (Rosenbaum)
9/21	Slides # 5 Read the assigned chapters from Rosenbaum Book	Chapter 4 (Davis) Chapter 2, (Rosenbaum) Chapter 3 (Rosenbaum)
9/28	Discussion #2 Slide # 6	Check Course Documents (posted article) and Discussion Board (for questions) and post answers, comments, and/or questions by 10/08/09. Chapter 5 (Davis)
10/05	Online Exam #1 (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Davis book and chapters 2 and 3 of Rosenbaum book) Slide #7	Time window 9am to 7pm (For easy access, try to use Fire Fox as your web browser.) Chapter 6 (Davis)
10/12	Slide # 8	Chapter 7 (Davis)
10/19	Slide # 9	Chapter 8 (Davis)
10/26	Discussion #3	Check Course Documents (posted article) and Discussion Board (for questions) and post answers, comments, and/or questions by

		11/05/09.
10/30	Slide #10	Chapter 9 (Davis)
11/2	Slide #11	Chapter 10 (Davis)
11/09	Discussion #4	Check Course Documents (posted article) and Discussion Board (for questions) and post answers, comments, and/or questions by 11/20/09.
11/16	Synopsis Due	Submit electronically using the Assignments feature of BB (use the synopsis folder)
11/23	Slide # 12 Read assigned chapters	Slide notes on Environmentalism Chapters 4 and 5 (Rosenbaum)
11/30	Submit Term Paper (penalty for late submission)	Send electronically using the Assignment feature of BB (from the Term Paper folder)
12/07	Online Exam #2 (chapters 6,7, 8, 9 and 10 of Davis book and chapters 4 and 5 of Rosenbaum book)	Time window: 9am to 7pm (Try to use Fire Fox as your web browser.)

*** Please note that you have to *submit assignments (synopsis and term paper)* on the due dates. If you have completed an assignment prior to the due date, you may send it an earlier date. *Failure to submit work on the due date will lead to deduction of points that might affect your overall grade.***