

Sam Houston State University
Department of Political Science
Fall 2008

American Public Policy (POL 285.08)
Tuesday and Thursday 11:00-12:20
Academic Building I, Room 310

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Office Hours: TR 10:00-11:00; or by appointment.

Course Overview and Objectives

This three credit hour course will offer broad coverage of public policy through critical and analytical inquiry into policy-making in America. Specific objectives are:

- to help you gain a better conceptual and operational understanding of American public policy by exploring a few major public policy issues;
- to help you learn and appreciate how economics (the framework we use and the real decisions we face/make) affects how well we live and all other policy choices available to us;
- to help you relate and apply the featured policy areas to your own life, both now and in the very near future;
- and to help you develop skills in critical thinking (i.e. thinking logically, utilizing information sources purposefully, and discussing thoughtfully).

Course Format

Most class sessions will consist of lecturing and discussion on the assigned topics. Everyone is expected to prepare appropriately for class in terms of doing the assigned readings on time. That is a necessary condition for participation and a valuable edge when it comes to performing well on exams and quizzes. Additionally, performing well depends on curiosity, a desire to engage others and, last but not least, a commitment to be part of a successful collective endeavor. -- And a gentle reminder, turn off cell phones and place all unrelated reading material (newspapers, magazines, etc.) in your bag. Likewise, I expect (and the University demands) that you treat the people around you with respect (i.e. distracting behavior such as eating, arriving late and/or departing early, reading newspapers, and making offensive remarks will not be permitted).

Course Requirements

Examinations (80%). There will be four exams during the semester. Exams will cover readings and lectures. Exams are a combination of multiple choice, short answer, identification, and essay. Please note: makeup examinations will only be given under extraordinary circumstances and require comprehensive documentation; I will not ask for documentation and if it is not provided promptly your grade will be recorded as a zero.

Quizzes (15%). On four occasions you will be evaluated in class by way of a quiz that covers recent material. Quizzes are generally short answer, true or false, and/or multiple choice; though quizzes may also require students to explain and synthesize material in written form. Your lowest quiz score will not factor in your final grade.

Attendance (5%). Attendance is crucial for effective participation and performance; to this end, if you miss three or fewer class meetings, you will receive full marks for attendance, however for each additional absence you will lose one-fifth of your possible attendance points.

Grading Scale. The standard SHSU grading scale is in effect: 90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, 60-69 D, 59 and lower F. -- Please note: There is no provision for extra credit in this course; it is therefore imperative that you work diligently throughout the entire semester.

Required Texts

Gosling, James J. *Economics, Politics, and American Public Policy*. M.E. Sharpe.

Miller, Matthew. *The Two Percent Solution: Fixing America's Problems in Ways Liberals and Conservatives Can Love*. Perseus Books Group.

O'Rourke, P.J. *Eat the Rich: A Treatise on Economics*. Atlantic Monthly Press.

Peterson, Peter G. *Running on Empty: How the Democratic and Republican Parties Are Bankrupting Our Future and What Americans Can Do About It*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Please Note: On a number of occasions I will provide you with handouts to supplement our study of particular concepts and issues. You are, of course, responsible for these materials in order to prepare and participate effectively in class meetings, as well for examinations and/or quizzes.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experience both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work (exams, quizzes, and attendance) will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you 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 accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe a religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). This request must be made in the first fifteen days of the semester or the first seven days of a summer session in which the absence(s) will occur. The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

Visitors in the Classroom

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Aug. 26 – Course Introduction and Opening Remarks

Aug. 28 – Perspectives on the Role of Government

Readings: Miller, Prologue and pp. 3-68; Gosling, pp. 3-20; Handout

Week 2

Sept. 2 – Introducing the U.S. Economy

Sept. 4 – Economic Concepts

Readings: Gosling, pp. 21-39; O'Rourke, pp. 1-55; Handouts

Week 3

Sept. 9 – Economic Concepts and Monetary Policy

Sept. 11 – **Quiz #1** and Monetary Policy

Readings: Gosling, pp. 40-61; O'Rourke, pp. 56-103; Handouts

Week 4

Sept. 16 – Fiscal Policy

Sept. 18 – Fiscal Policy

Readings: Gosling, pp. 62-109; Handouts

Week 5

Sept. 23 – Fiscal Policy and Exam Review

Sept. 25 – **Exam #1**

Readings: None Assigned

Week 6

Sept. 30 – Trade Policy

Oct. 2 – Trade Policy

Readings: Gosling, pp. 110-133; O'Rourke, pp. 104-246; Handouts

Week 7

Oct. 7 – **Quiz #2** and Price and Wage Controls

Oct. 9 – Price and Wage Controls

Readings: Gosling, pp. 196-220; Miller, pp. 160-171; Handouts

Week 8

Oct. 14 – Exam Review

Oct. 16 – **Exam #2**

Readings: None Assigned

Week 9

Oct. 21 – Social Security

Oct. 23 – Social Security and Retirement Security

Readings: Gosling, pp. 172-195; Peterson, Preface and pp. 3-55; Handouts

Week 10

Oct. 28 – Social Security Reform

Oct. 30 – **Quiz #3** and Social Security Reform

Readings: Peterson, Preface and pp. 56-146; Handouts

Week 11

Nov. 4 – Unfunded Liabilities

Nov. 6 – Unfunded Liabilities

Readings: Peterson, pp. 147-234; Handouts

Week 12

Nov. 11 – Unfunded Liabilities and Exam Review

Nov. 13 – **Exam #3**

Readings: None Assigned

Week 13

Nov. 18 – Healthcare Policy

Nov. 20 – Healthcare Policy

Readings: Miller, pp. 69-113; Handouts

Week 14

Nov. 25 – Education Policy

Nov. 27 – Thanksgiving Holiday (No class meeting)

Readings: Miller, pp. 114-137; Handout

Week 15

Dec. 2 – Education Policy

Dec. 4 – **Quiz #4** and Campaign Finance Reform

Readings: Miller, pp. 138-159 and 172-180; Handouts

Week 16

Dec. 9 – Campaign Finance Reform and Financing the “Two-Percent Solution”

Dec. 11 – Course Wrap-Up and Exam Review

Readings: Miller, pp. 181-262

Thursday, Dec. 18 – **Exam #4** (11-1)

For What It’s Worth –

“You are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in making mental efforts under criticism. A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed with average faculties acquire so as to retain; nor need you regret the hours spent on much that is forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions. But you go to school not for knowledge as much as for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment’s notice a new intellectual posture, for the art of entering quickly into person’s thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the habit of what is possible at a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness. Above all, you go to school for self-knowledge.”

William Cory -- Master at Eaton College, 1861.