Course Objectives:
Why do we get the public policies we do? Why do some policy issues come to be defined as ‘problems’ in need of attention by public authorities while they are not similarly understood in other countries and/or at other times? In seeking explanations of public policies, should we look to the interests and resources of strategic actors, the constraints and opportunities of political institutions, the ideas and discourses of powerful actors, embedded cultural norms and interpretive frameworks, the legacies of earlier policies, or something else? How, if at all, do our accounts of ‘normal’ policy making differ from those of revolutionary and transformative policy change? How, if at all, is domestic policy making affected by the cross-jurisdictional diffusion of ideas and the activities of transnational political actors? Do we need to adjust our models of public policy making to take account of globalization and transnational actors?

These questions are at the fore of theories of public policy and they are addressed in this course by examining the major theoretical approaches to explaining public policy making, including policy processes, outcomes, and policy change. The readings assigned in the course assume some background in the sub-field of public policy. While the course focuses on some classic literature, it is mainly oriented to introducing students to some of the most interesting theoretical and methodological developments in recent years (at least from the perspective of the instructor!).

The course is open to both MA and PhD students. For PhD students who are specializing in Public Policy as one of their fields, this course is the core course. While I have occasionally listed a few items for Further Reading, a fuller bibliography of supplementary literature is provided in the Public Policy Core Course Reading List. The latter is available from the instructor and will be a primary source for PhD students who intend to write the Major Field Exam in Public Policy.

Course Requirements:
a) Seminar Participation: 20%
All students are expected to do the required readings before class and to come to class prepared to discuss them. To facilitate seminar discussion, students are expected to post 3 questions for discussion and/or points for further clarification on the readings by 10 pm Sunday on the course Blackboard website. Students should consult one another’s posting prior to the Monday class and be prepared to discuss them as well as the readings. The seminar participation grade will be determined on the basis of the quality and frequency of participation, including the presentation of analytical papers (see below).
b) Written assignments: 3 analytical papers, no more than 10 double spaced pages (12 font), each worth 20%. These analytical papers are based on the weekly readings. Students may, but are not required to, draw on items listed under Further Readings in preparing their papers. Papers should develop an argument that appraises the major themes, concepts and methods of the readings. Papers should draw comparisons across the readings assigned for the week. Later in the term, papers will ideally also draw comparisons across relevant literature read earlier in the course.

Students should email a copy of their paper to the instructor by 10:00 pm Sunday before the Monday class.

c) Final Exam: 20%. The exam will be distributed at the last class on Monday, December 6th. Students will have 4 hours to email their written answers to Professor Skogstad. The exam will consist of one question designed to allow you to demonstrate your ability to integrate the course readings.

Required Readings are available in electronic format.

Weekly Readings

September 13: Introduction to the Course

September 20: Overviews and Models of Public Policy

Further Reading:

September 27: Rational Choice, Bounded Rationality Assumptions of Individual Actors
Further Reading:


October 4: Political Economy and Power Resource Accounts


October 11: Thanksgiving. No class.

October 18: Institutions and Public Policy

Please note that there is a large and growing body of literature on institutions and how and why they change. Because this course is focused on Public Policy, the literature chosen here has been primarily focused not on institutions (and their evolution) as a dependent variable, but rather on institutions as an independent variable that affects public policy. That said, theories of institutional development can be helpful to understand public policy development to the degree that public policies become ‘institutionalized.’


Further Reading:


Recommended on Ostrom: Review Symposium, `Beyond the Tragedy of the Commons: A Discussion of Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for
Collective Action.’ Perspectives on Politics, June 2010, 8(2), 569-93 especially essays by Bermeo (pp. 570-2), Baumgartner (p. 575-7) and Axelrod (p. 581-2).


October 25: Policy Communities and Policy Network Approaches


David Marsh and Martin Smith, ‘Understanding Policy Networks: Towards a Dialectical Approach,’ Political Studies, 2000, 48, 4-21.

Further Reading:


November 1: Ideational and Discursive Approaches


Frank Fischer, Reframing Public Policy, Chapter 4 (‘Public Policy and Discourse Analysis’). Oxford University Press, 2003.

Further Reading:

Frank Fischer, Reframing Public Policy, Chapters 7-9.

Alan M. Jacobs, ‘How Do Ideas Matter? Mental Models and Attention in German Pension Politics’ Comparative Political Studies, 42(5), February 2009, 252-279.

November 8: Explaining Policy Change: Multiple Streams, Advocacy Coalitions and Punctuated Equilibriums


Recommended:

November 15: Paradigms and Transformative Policy Change

Martin Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur: bricolage as an alternative vision of agency in ideational change,’ European Political Science Review, forthcoming.

Recommended:

November 22: Policy Diffusion, Transfer and Convergence


Further Reading:

November 29: Policy-Making in a Global Era

Further Reading

December 6: The Political Economy of the Welfare State


Distribution of Final Exam.