

Spring 2023

POL 386s U.S. Government and Politics

Professor Ryan Hurl

Meeting Code: LEC 0101

Lecture Times: Tuesday, 12-2pm

Location: Claude T. Bissell Building (140 St. George Street) BL 205

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PLEASE COMMUNICATE WITH ME THROUGH THIS EMAIL ADDRESS!

DO NOT USE QUERCUS TO SEND MESSAGES!

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-3pm or by appointment

Course Description

This course will examine a series of controversies that shape American politics. It will help students to develop their understanding of how American political institutions operate, and it will help students develop their ability to understand how (and whether) social science can illuminate complex and controversial policy questions.

The course will investigate the following policy questions:

- Poverty
- Immigration
- Campaign Finance
- Affirmative Action
- Religious Exemptions from Secular Public Policies

We will examine these questions from a variety of perspectives and using a variety of tools. Students will develop their understanding of how policy issues intersect with fundamental questions of constitutional law and political theory, but they will also consider how empirical investigations shed light on questions of public policy.

Course Requirements

Research Assignment #1 25%

Research Assignment #2 25%

The research assignments will require you to apply the skills that you have learned in class to complete a series of research tasks and questions. The final product will not necessarily take the form of a traditional essay, but will instead be more like a “portfolio” composed of separate but inter-connected works. The overall length of each portfolio will be around 10 pages, though this may include visual aids such as charts and graphs.

More precise details about the assignment will be provided on Quercus in up-coming weeks. Here is a list some of the “tasks” that might be part of the first portfolio (which will address questions related to anti-poverty policy in the United States.)

- Explain the difficulty of conceptualizing and measuring the scope of the American welfare state.
- Explain the difficulty of conceptualizing and measuring the concept of poverty.
- Explain one empirical dispute over the causes of poverty
- Explain why it can often be difficult to assess the effects of anti-poverty policies (with reference to one or perhaps two anti-poverty policies).

For the second assignment, students will be able to choose from a broader range of issues covered in the course.

(LATE PENALTY: 2% for every day late, up to a maximum of 10%)

Final Exam 40% The final exam will consist of both multiple-choice and short- answer questions.

Class Participation 10%

Course Texts

Peter H. Schuck, *One Nation Undecided: Clear Thinking About Five Hard Issues that Divide Us*. N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017 (available at the U of T library website)

Lectures and Readings

Week One January 10th Introduction: The Divided States of America

Schuck, Chapter One

Week Two January 17th The American Welfare State in Comparative Context: The Problem of Poverty, Part One

Schuck, Chapter Two “Poverty” pp 23-63

Week Three January 24th The Problem of Poverty, Part Two: Current Policies, Future Possibilities

Schuck, Chapter Two, “Poverty” pp 64-114

Week Four January 31 American Immigration Policy: Historical and Political Context

Schuck, Chapter Three, “Immigration,” pp 115-138

Week Five February 7th American Immigration Policy Part Two: The Key Empirical Questions

Schuck, Chapter Three, “Immigration,” pp 138-192

Week Six February 14th Campaign Finance Law: Legal Structure and Constitutional Limits

Schuck, Chapter Four, “Campaign Finance,” pp 192-205
FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE

(February 21st = READING WEEK)

Week Seven February 28th Campaign Finance Part Two: Follow the Money

Schuck, Chapter Four, "Campaign Finance," pp 206-272

Week Eight March 7th Affirmative Action Part One: Context and History

Schuck, Chapter 5 "Affirmative Action," pp 273-296

Week Nine March 14th Affirmative Action Part Two: The Question of Effectiveness

Schuck, Chapter 5 "Affirmative Action," pp 296-315

Week Ten March 21st Religious Exemptions from Secular Law: The History of a Constitutional Controversy

Schuck, Chapter 6, "Religious Exemptions from Secular Public Policies." pp 316-337

Week Eleven March 28th Religious Exemptions from Secular Law: Compromise or Culture War?

Schuck, Chapter 6, "Religious Exemptions from Secular Public Policies." Pp 337-364

Week 12 April 4th Conclusion and Review

Schuck, Chapter 7, "Conclusion," pp 364-373