Course Objectives

This course serves as the core course for PhD students who are specializing in Public Policy as one of their fields. It provides an overview of developments in public policy theory and the various methods used by public policy scholars. The course readings combine seminal works and more recent contributions to theories and empirical analyses of public policy. They are representative of the different theoretical and empirical work regarding the causal factors that explain policy-making dynamics and outputs across time and place.

The course concentrates on addressing a number of questions that have preoccupied students of public policy, including: What micro-theories of individual behaviour best explain collective decision-making by political actors? What causal factors and processes – structural, institutional, ideational, and psychological – explain variations in public policies across policy sectors and jurisdictions? What causal mechanisms and processes explain policy stability and policy change? And how have policy processes been reshaped by the dynamics of globalization and policymaking beyond the state? The course draws on literature that is largely, but not exclusively, derived from studies of public policies in industrialized democracies.

The course is also open to MA students. They must consult the instructors to ensure they have the background for the demands of the course. Students are expected to have sufficient background in research design and methods to address, in seminar discussions and assignments, the merits of the methods employed in the course readings (which may include large-n quantitative studies, small-n case studies, formal theory, process tracing, and experiments).

Students with NO background in public policy should review an introductory text. We recommend one of the following:


Required Readings

Most of the required readings are journal articles that are available for down-loading on the University of Toronto’s E-library system. They can also usually be accessed through a simple Google search of the article title. Required readings that are not available online (i.e. are book chapters or unpublished papers) have also been made available on Quercus. Please note, given how much we use this text, you may want to purchase:


A highly recommended text available through the UofT library system is the following:

Course Requirements

Grades for this course will be based on the following requirements:

1. Seminar Participation: Cumulative throughout term: 20%
2. Critical reading responses and presentations: (4 x 20% each) 80%

1. Seminar Participation: 20%

Weekly attendance is mandatory. If it is impossible for you to attend a class, please email the instructors as much in advance as possible to explain why. All students are expected to have done the required readings before class and attend class prepared to discuss them. To facilitate seminar discussion, all students are expected to post 3 questions for discussion and/or points for further clarification on the readings by 4 pm Wednesday on the course Quercus website. Questions are expected to address the theoretical or methodological features of the article. Students should consult one another’s posting prior to the Thursday 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. Frequency of participation will be determined by the regularity of intervention in class discussions. Quality of participation will be determined by demonstrated grasp of course readings, attentiveness to class discussion, and thoughtful comments and questions.

To assist you in preparing readings for seminar, the following steps are recommended:

**Step One:** Do you understand the basic terms and concepts used by the author?
- list the concepts with which you had difficulty
- try to write an explanation or definition for a few of these

**Step Two:** What is the central point or argument that the author is trying to make?
- what is most important about what the author has said?
- what are the interesting questions or hypotheses being addressed?
- try to write out in two sentences at most what you think are the main points/most important points/most interesting questions or hypotheses of the reading
Step Three: How has the author organized their argument? What are the steps or major themes?
   - write down what you see to be the steps in the argument
   - ask yourself what would be the logical way to discuss the various sub-topics

Step Four: What evidence and methodology has the author used to support the argument?

Step Five: How does the reading relate to other material examined in the course?
   - play the devil's advocate and query whether the reading provides anything new
   - ask or state how the new material substantiates or contradicts point(s) raised in earlier readings or seminars

Step Six: How do you evaluate the presentation by the author?
   - now is the time for you to say what you think: is the author credible? What parts of the argument are persuasive and what parts are less so? Prepare to justify your conclusions.

This sequence of steps is designed to ensure you understand the author's concepts and his or her argument before you evaluate the author's claims. Keeping written notes as you proceed through the sequence of steps gives you the basis for active participation in the seminar.

2. Critical Reading Responses/Presentations: Four (20% each)

Students will prepare three analytical papers of not more than eight double spaced pages (12 point font) on the readings for three separate weeks. Papers should develop an argument that appraises the major themes, concepts and methods of the readings, and situate the readings in the broader public policy sub-field. Papers should draw comparisons across the readings assigned for the week, highlighting their shared/different epistemological and ontological claims, and conclude with two or three questions for class discussion. Students may, but do not have to, include readings from “Additional MFE Readings” in their analytical paper.

Please plan on presenting your response paper in 10-15 minutes, and on leading the class discussion the day you present. Students should email a copy of their paper (in Word format, not PDF) to the instructors by 5:00 pm Tuesday before the Thursday class. Pending enrollment numbers, students may also be asked to lead additional discussions on weeks for which no written response paper is due.

In a fourth and final synthesis paper students will respond to a prompt from the instructors and reflect on all of the course required readings and seminar discussions. Papers should be not more than eight double spaced pages (12 point font) and are due by 5pm Tuesday, the final week of class.

Late Assignments

Assignments are due on the days assigned. The only exception is an adequately documented emergency and/or medical illness. Please contact the instructors as soon as the problem arises to inform them of the problem and present your written documentation when you return. Please keep copies of rough and draft work, as well as of the written work you submit until the marked assignments have been returned. All graded assignments are to be kept by students until the grades have been posted on ACORN.
Academic Integrity

Please be aware of the importance of academic integrity and the seriousness of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism. The more obvious instances of plagiarism include copying material from another source (book, journal, website, another student, and so on) without acknowledging the source, presenting an argument as your own – whether or not it is a direct quotation – rather than fully acknowledging the true originator of the idea, having another person help you to write your essay, and buying an essay. All of these are instances of academic dishonesty, which the university takes very seriously and they will result in academic penalty. Those penalties can range from failing the assignment, failing the course, having a notation on your academic transcript, and/or suspension from the university.


Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools in Assignments

The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, may be considered an academic offense in this course.

Office Hours and Email Policy

Students are invited to meet with the instructors in-person or remotely by appointment about any matter relating to the course. The instructors are also available by email – but please reserve email communication for scheduling appointments, rather than for discussing the substance of your course assignments.

Accessibility Needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom, or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/.

Notice of Video Recording and Sharing

Course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other sources depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright, including the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c C-42. Do not download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. For questions about recording and use of videos in which you appear please contact your instructor.
Course Modification Statement

The instructors reserve the right to modify assigned readings during the term—with reasonable notice and with an explanation.

Schedule of Seminar Topics and Readings

Week 1: September 7 – The Study of Public Policy
- Professors Craft and Renckens will lead this seminar


Additional MFE Readings:


**Week 2: September 14 - The Micro- or Behavioural Foundations of Public Policy**

- *Professor Craft will lead this seminar*


Craig Parsons. 2007. *How to Map Arguments in Political Science.* OUP. Chapter 2 (pp. 52-56) and Chapter 5, Psychological Explanations (pages 133-147).


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 3: September 21 – Institutional Accounts of Public Policy**

- *Professor Craft will lead this seminar*


**Additional MFE Readings:**


**Week 4: September 28 – Interest-based Accounts of Public Policy**

-  **Professor Renckens will lead this seminar**


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Additional MFE Readings:


**Week 5: October 5 – Structural Accounts of Public Policy**

- Professor Renckens will lead this seminar


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 6: October 12 – Ideational Accounts of Public Policy**

-  *Professor Craft will lead this seminar*


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 7: October 19 – Policy Networks, Subsystems, and Advocacy Coalition Framework**

- *Professor Renckens will lead this seminar*


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 8: October 26 – Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Multiple Streams Approach**

- *Professors Craft and Renckens will lead this seminar*


**Additional MFE Readings:**


**Week 9: November 2 – Policy Transfer, Policy Diffusion, and Convergence**

- *Professors Renckens will lead this seminar*


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**November 9: Fall Reading Week – No Class**

**Week 10: November 16 – Design and Instrument Approaches**

-  *Professor Craft will lead this seminar*


Peter Hupe and Michael Hill. 2016. And the rest is implementation. Comparing approaches to what happens in policy processes beyond great expectations. Public Policy and Administration 31(2): 103–121.

*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 11: November 23: Public, Private and Transnational Policymaking Interactions**

- *Professor Renckens will lead this seminar*


*Additional MFE Readings:*


**Week 12: November 30 - Course Wrap up and Review: Synthesis and Emergent Frontiers**

