

## Public Policy

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### I

This collection of syllabi from courses in public policy was developed because of two particular personal motivations. First, I was interested in honing and improving my own teaching of public policy at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and, second, as director of my college's public policy program, I was very interested in what our colleagues and their programs were doing. Based on the responses to the call for syllabi for collection, both from contributors and those interested in reading the syllabi, our colleagues share this curiosity and a willingness to share their ideas. To those who have been waiting for this collection, I appreciate your patience and ideas. To those who submitted syllabi, your contributions are greatly appreciated, and I regret that we cannot include more of the very fine work that was submitted for this collection.

When I proposed this collection to Sheilah Mann at the APSA, she was very enthusiastic both about this collection and about longer-term ideas on how to promote the ongoing collection of syllabi and dialogue among teachers of public policy. This project is further enhanced by patience and help of a senior advisory committee assembled for this collection: professors Peter May and Bryan Jones from the University of Washington, and Tom Church and Bob Nakamura from the University at Albany. While obvious physical constraints limit the number of syllabi we can include in this collection, through the World Wide Web, e-mail, and online discussion lists such as PUBPOL-L and PSRT-L, the sharing of syllabi among teachers and students should become even more convenient and routine in the near future.

### II

This collection of syllabi reflects the difficulties inherent in defining "public policy" as a subfield. Indeed, a staple of early chapters of our undergraduate textbooks is a discussion of the difficulty of defining the term "public policy." One is tempted to call public policy a subfield of political science, with an obvious connection to American politics. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to understand how policy is formulated and implemented in a state without a basic grounding in that state's political processes and institutions. But the policy field attracts scholars from a variety of disciplines and uses tools that go beyond what might be termed "traditional" political science. Our research and teaching is informed by, and performed by, economists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, statisticians, "hard" scientists, systems analysts, and students of law and of public administration, to name just a few. With such a rich and disparate range of people and disciplines studying issues in public policy, the types of courses we offer will necessarily vary in their scope, methods, and emphases.

However, within this disparate framework of approaches and themes, it is possible to glean some broad themes from the syllabi submitted for this collection. The first of these themes is that the public policy field tends to be primarily oriented to graduate

education, with relatively fewer courses offered at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate courses tend to be process oriented and contain several weeks of lectures on "The Public Policy of (The Environment, Health Care, Energy, etc.)" These courses tend to closely track the organization of the leading textbooks on the policy process. Most of these texts are organized around what Sabatier calls the "stages heuristic" (Sabatier 1991a; Sabatier 1991b) in which the policy process is depicted as a set of stages starting with problem recognition and ending with policy evaluation and feedback. An example of this organization is Anderson's (1997) concise textbook on the policy process. Other texts include a short chapter or two on the policy process, followed by several chapters on substantive policy areas. (Cochran et al. 1996; Cochran and Malone 1995; Dye 1992; Dye 1998; Rushefsky 1996).

Texts and courses arranged in this way are useful because, as Sabatier and others have argued, the "stages" concept is has considerable heuristic power. Students, particularly those without a background in policy or politics, appreciate this sort of organizing scheme to help them make sense of the policy process. However, these approaches are readily illustrated in the rather large selection of standard undergraduate public policy textbooks. For this collection, I sought syllabi that used new ideas to engage policy ideas with broader concepts in politics and theory. Because most of the syllabi are graduate courses, I have included more of them here, but it is important to note that graduate courses are often readily adaptable as upper division undergraduate courses.

One course that more broadly connects politics with policy is John Hardin's course on "The President, Congress, and Public Policy." In this course, Hardin uses Deborah Stone's (1997) *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decisionmaking* as the framework around which to consider key elements of policy making: the goals of public policy, problem definition, and the choice of "solutions" to these problems. Stone's book has become a classic in policy studies; it is a highly provocative book that stimulates class discussion and curiosity. Hardin has integrated this book with a well-organized plan for engaging students in understanding particular substantive policy areas. Hardin engages the students by having them address a particular policy initiative first, rather than waiting to the end of the semester. By introducing a policy at the beginning, students have a substantive issue that they can probe using Stone's multifaceted exploration of issues like equality, security, and efficiency, among others.

In a similar way, Ted Lascher's course on the "Political Environment of Policy Making" consciously focuses students' attention on the pre-enactment politics of policy making and adoption, while noting that his course does not address issues like implementation, which is also politically charged. Rather, Lacher considers policy entrepreneurship, collective action problems, activation and issue framing, persuasion, negotiation, and the changing forums for policy making, similar to what Baumgartner and Jones (1993) call "venues" of policy making. These elements all help students to better understand the dynamics of policy making up to the alternative selection stage, thereby helping them become more effective participants in the process.

Michael Howlett's course is important because it adopts the policy process or policy cycle model and places it into a broader context. There are several strengths in this syllabus that make it worthy of closer review. First, Howlett integrates this course with his text (with M. Ramesh), *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy*

Subsystems (1995). In their text, Howlett and Ramesh seek to provide a richer model of the policy cycle than provided in earlier policy texts. They do so by not only specifying and defining the stages in each model; they also indicate the important variables and relationships between and among stages of the cycle, while acknowledging that any model of the policy process is likely to be an simplification. The virtue of their discussion, argue the authors, is that they knit together the stages by "specifying the relevant policy actors, examining the actors and institutions that which are involved in public policy-making" (Howlett and Ramesh 1995, 12).

The syllabus closely follows this goal, with a considerable amount of effort spent on explaining theories of policy making. This syllabus is both familiar in its treatment of actors, institutions, and the policy process, but is also different in the way it integrates these pieces of the policy-making puzzle to develop what is hoped to be a more holistic view of policymaking.

James Thurber's course, "Political Power and American Public Policy," approaches the study of power from the perspective of political power. Many teachers in policy studies rely on classics on political power (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Gaventa 1980; McFarland 1987; Mills 1956; Schattschneider 1960/1975; Stone 1989) to illustrate the inequities in group influence and power in policy making. Theories of power help to illustrate the shortcomings of the "pure-pluralist" depiction of politics and policy making as a group competition with relatively equal opportunities to enter the fray and neutral referees to maintain "order." Thurber is explicit about the importance of political power, and starts the course by defining "politics" and "political power" before moving into a discussion of "what is public policy?" By focusing on power, Thurber can illustrate important features of policy subsystems. Since power is also an important part of all elements of the policy cycle or process, Thurber is able to illustrate how politics and power are an important element in each stage, even while discussing substantive policy issues. Thurber's list of readings is particularly strong, and should serve as a useful resource for teachers assembling courses in public policy and for students preparing reading lists for graduate exams.

Three policy analysis syllabi have been selected because of their similarities and differences in their approaches. Both Sally Kenney's and David Robertson's courses recognize the importance of interpretivism as well as empiricism in policy analysis. Their approach is attractive, because it may be more fruitful to engage students at the qualitative level, because this can teach important lessons in analysis, argumentation and evidence without requiring a resort to more complex economic or statistical analysis. Given novice students' (and political partisans') tendency to cite statistics as fact without much critical examination of the source of statistics or the method by which they are derived, qualitative analysis may lead to more thoughtful discussion about quantitative data and the assumptions made by evaluators. Along these lines, both Kenney and Robertson assign Richard Rose's (1993) Lesson-Drawing in Public Policy as an example of how decision makers "learn" about policy successes and failures, regardless of whether the right lessons are or are not learned. The determination of learning from success or failure is as much a qualitative as quantitative endeavor (Ingram and Mann 1980; May 1992), and the interpretivist approach can help students draw out their own assumptions about what makes policy "successful" or "unsuccessful."

These two policy analysis courses differ in two important ways. First, Kenney's course includes an entire unit—about one month—on the policy process itself.

Robertson's course, on the other hand, is a seminar course that assumes some knowledge of the policy process and covers the process in one class session before moving to a treatment of the behavioral, economic, and interpretivist interpretations of public policy. Second, Robertson's class covers the economic approach rather more extensively than does Kenney. Robertson assigns several chapters of Weimer and Vining's (1992) classic policy evaluation text to illustrate the economic approach, and devotes a session to cost benefit analysis. Kenney remains more interpretivist, and also assigns a classic in the field—in this case, Stone's (1988) *Policy Paradox and Political Reason*—to illustrate the interpretive and rhetorical tools that analysts use to evaluate policy.

A particular strength of Robertson's very thorough syllabus is the detailed description of each course meeting, discussion question and assignment. While this makes for a longer syllabus, students seem to respond to these more detailed statements of course policy, practice, and expectations. In the same vein, Kenney makes very clear the assignments and exams, and includes a helpful list of the key academic journals in the discipline to help students to complete their own projects.

Michael Rich's course in "Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation" is a more traditional economic and statistical approach to policy analysis and evaluation. This upper division course assumes some familiarity with statistics; with this foundation a diligent student will be rewarded with a very useful set of analytic tools that would serve as an outstanding foundation for graduate and professional work. Students and teachers of policy analysis will greatly appreciate Rich's exhaustive bibliography of required and recommended reading. This syllabus, while designed for an undergraduate course, will be quite useful as a foundation for graduate courses as well. Along the same lines, Nancy Naples's syllabus for her course on "U.S. Social Welfare Policy" provides excellent guidance for teachers of courses on any social movement or issue. Her list of recommended texts is concise but covers extensive ground in the history of social welfare and its connection to women and children, poverty, health, and race.

Often, the tension in the design of fundamental graduate courses on public policy is between two audiences: students enrolled in academic programs versus those in professional programs. As the syllabi in this collection show, however, there is no necessary contradiction between professional training and academic rigor.

This is aptly demonstrated by the Kennedy's School's syllabus for "Mobilization for Political Action," taught by Professors Brian Mandell, Anna Greenberg, Thomas Patterson and David Hart. This syllabus stands out from the policy process syllabi in this collection because it explicitly recognizes the role of strategy and politics in training future decision makers. Indeed, the instructors argue that "any arena in which you mobilize constituents, acquire allies, and confront resistance is a political arena." While the focus of this course is on practical training, however, the course is also rigorous. Students of the policy process will recognize standards from John Kingdon (1995) Graham Allison (1969), E.E.Schattschneider (1960/1975), Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1993), and even Saul Alinsky (1971). Much of the literature on planning campaigns, action planning or coalition building may be unfamiliar to some students and teachers of policy, as these are not staple topics in public policy courses. But perhaps they should be, particularly for professional students who seek both broader knowledge and practical tools in their courses.

Both Bryan Jones's and David Meyer's courses are straightforward graduate courses on the policy process. Meyer's syllabus contains classic readings from well-known policy scholars, but also includes texts and readings not often seen in courses on policy, such as Gerald Rosenberg's (1991) provocative study of the influence of the judiciary in promoting policy change. Jones's syllabus is important because it goes beyond describing policy processes and institutions and assesses broader problems, such as "Collective Action, Institutions and Institutional Design" and questions of problem definition, evaluation and feedback, and political economy. Like several of the syllabi in this collection, there are considerable recommended readings, and this syllabus should serve as a valuable resource for students, teachers and researchers who would like an update of the current state of the literature. A more advanced graduate course on policy is offered by Duncan MacRae at the University of North Carolina. His doctoral-level course, "Ethics and Formal Analytic Techniques," is taken by students of politics, policy, and sociology, among other disciplines. As with other courses in the collection, the syllabus is remarkably detailed, and does well to consider both the interpretivist and quantitative literature.

The remaining courses are substantive policy area courses that were selected for their comprehensiveness, timeliness and enduring importance, and usefulness as teaching tools. Professor Matheny's course on "The Politics of Regulation" could be profitably used by teachers of courses on regulation or as a source of ideas for a course unit on the role and function of regulation in a broader course on policy or the executive branch. Professor Thomas Church's course on "Law and Policy" is included because of the important connections between law and public policy (see, for example, Barclay and Birkland 1998; Wasby 1997) and because many students of policy are also interested in pursuing legal studies. Indeed, many institutions offer combined degrees in law and policy, and students in both fields should find this course useful.

Professor Samuel Myers's syllabus for "Racial Inequality and Public Policy" is particularly noteworthy because of all the public policy domains that are influenced by problems of racial inequality, such as health care, housing, employment and education. Like many of the syllabi included here, Myers's reading list is extensive and will serve as a valuable reading list for teachers in any course in which issues of race and discrimination are important.

Another very thorough syllabus is Professor Lawrence Mead's "The Politics of Poverty and Welfare." Professor Mead is particularly careful to make his own perspective on welfare explicit—noting, for example, his belief in workfare and in the centrality of the question of welfare and urban civility. His syllabus is designed, however, to help students reach their own conclusions about welfare policy and the social factors leading to poverty.

Helen Ingram's graduate course in "Environmental Politics and Policy" seminar reflects current thinking in many courses in environmental policy. What distinguishes her syllabus is the breadth of sources assigned for required reading, including the current standards in environmental studies, such as Vig and Kraft's (1996) *Environmental Policy in the 1990s*. The syllabus also gives good ideas for course units for teachers in courses on natural resource policy and economics, planning, and science and technology policy. As befits a course taught in a department of Social Ecology, the course attracts a broad range of students from across several disciplines.

Professor Sally Kenney's syllabus is notable for the care with which she outlines the subject matter and course procedures. Her approach to teaching and the subject matter are clear and explicit. While Kenney states that, "as a feminist teacher, I am committed to a mode of learning that is shared and collective," she makes clear that the work in the course, within this shared and supportive environment, will be challenging and rigorous. This course would be an excellent addition to any public policy curriculum, because, as Kenney argues, "public policy is gendered," and it takes considerable time and effort to understand the manner in which it is gendered.

### III

I hope that teachers, researchers and students find this collection useful. Working with the advisory group, I have sought to select syllabi that are not only exemplary syllabi in public policy but are also excellent syllabi qua syllabi. I hope that these syllabi provide examples of what is being read in our discipline, but, beyond this, I hope that these are also good examples of how social science courses can be structured, with stimulating projects explained clearly and explicitly. I have learned a lot from this collection about structuring my courses, and hope others will as well.

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