COURSE OUTLINE

Rockefeller Center
Public Policy 40: Economics of Public Policymaking
Summer 2018

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Office hours: Wednesdays 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. or by appointment

OBJECTIVES
The course will use the basic tools of economics to analyze current public policy issues in the United States. Given the time constraints of the course, we will focus on the most significant issues facing the country. The goal is to understand both the substance and politics of each issue. We will examine the effects of recent policy changes and analyze the likely effects of prospective reforms, particularly those that are currently being debated or implemented.

In general, the Tuesday class will provide background on the policy issue at hand. The Thursday class will consist of student presentations and discussion. Given the broad scope of the course, students should expect a heavy reading load.

CANVAS
There is a Canvas site for the course where announcements, readings, grades and other material related to the course will be posted.

READING
The required texts are available at Wheelock Books. All other readings will be posted on the Canvas site. You are responsible for doing all readings before the class for which they are assigned. Please note that for copyright reasons, you will only be able to access readings posted on Canvas from a computer recognized as part of the Dartmouth community.

COMPUTERS
Please do not use computers or other electronic devices in class. In years past, the distraction has outweighed the benefits of electronic note-taking. If you feel this creates undue hardship, please see me and we can work out a solution. (Evidence now suggests taking handwritten notes leads to better long-term retention.)

Required Texts:


ASSIGNMENTS

➢ Quizzes: There will be regular quizzes on the assigned readings. The quizzes may or may not be announced in advance. The quizzes will be drawn from the reading but will also ask you to analyze policy questions based on material covered in the course to date.

➢ Group Presentation: Each student will participate in one group presentation. The purpose of the presentation is to brief the rest of the class on a specific policy change related to the week’s topic (e.g. 1996 Welfare Reform).

➢ Midterm Exam (7/31): The exam will cover topics and readings through Week 6 of the class.

➢ Policy Memo (due 8/7): You will be asked to propose a policy change to be implemented at the state, local, or federal level. Your proposal must require some kind of institutional change, which typically means approval by some government body (e.g. a state legislature, a federal agency, Congress, etc.). The policy memo must identify a social challenge, propose a policy change (or package of changes) to ameliorate that social challenge, and defend your plan using tools from the course. This memo may be rewritten; the final grade will be an average of the first and second drafts.

➢ Final Exam (8/25): The final exam will cover topics from the second half of the course.

GRADING
The grade for the seminar is made up of the following: quizzes (15%); group presentation (15%); midterm (25%); policy paper (25%); non-cumulative final exam (20%). If you choose to rewrite the policy project, your grade will be an average of the first and second drafts.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1
Thursday, June 21st
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
INTRODUCTION

Reading:
“Here’s Looking at You, Kidney,” Act 2, This American Life, February 19, 2016.

WEEK 2
Tuesday, June 26th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY AND WHY IS IT SO HARD?

Reading:
Wheelan. Introduction to Public Policy, Chapters 1-2.

Thursday, June 28th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR; MARKETS AND GOVERNMENT

Reading:
Introduction to Public Policy, Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8.

WEEK 3
Tuesday, July 3rd

WELFARE ECONOMICS AND THE POLICY PROCESS

Reading:
Wheelan. Introduction to Public Policy, Chapter 5 and 6.

Thursday, July 5th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
POLICY DESIGN AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Reading:
Wheelan. Introduction to Public Policy, Chapters 14 and 15.
“Poor Behavior,” The Economist, December 6, 2014.

WEEK 4
Tuesday, July 10th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
PRODUCTIVITY, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND EDUCATION
Reading:

Thursday, July 12th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
INCOME INEQUALITY AND EDUCATION: WHAT TO DO?

Reading:
“Back to School,” This American Life, September 14, 2012.

WEEK 5
Tuesday, July 17th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
FISCAL CHALLENGES
SPECIAL GUEST: FORMER NH SENATOR JUDD GREGG

Reading:
Thursday, July 19th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Reading:

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
No Child Left Behind
Race to the Top
New York City Value Added Indicators

WEEK 6
Tuesday, July 24th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

HEALTH CARE

Reading:

Thursday, July 26th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

HEALTH CARE CONTINUED

Reading:
WEEK 7

Tuesday, July 31st
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
MIDTERM EXAM

Thursday, August 2nd
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Reading:
Wheelan, Introduction to Public Policy, Chapter 12.

WEEK 8

Tuesday, August 7th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Reading:

➢ POLICY MEMO DUE

Thursday, August 9th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT CONTINUED
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Reading:

Student Presentations: The Paris Climate Agreement; British Columbia Carbon Tax

WEEK 9
Tuesday, August 14th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
TAX POLICY

Reading:

Group Presentation: Tax Reform of 1986

Thursday, August 16th
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
TAX REFORM

Reading:
Slemrod and Bakija. Taxing Ourselves, Chapters 8-9.
WEEK 10
Tuesday, August 21st
10:10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
WRAP-UP AND STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Reading:

PRESENTATIONS:
Portugal Drug Decriminalization
NYC Smoking Ban
Colorado and Washington Marijuana Legalization
1996 Welfare Reform

Wednesday, August 22nd

➢ 5:00 P.M. POLICY MEMO REWRITE DUE (HARD COPY WITH ORIGINAL)

FINAL EXAM: Saturday, August 25th, 11:30 a.m.