



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College
The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

PBPL 20: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN AMERICAN POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

Summer 2011 Term

Professor Charles Wheelan
206 Rockefeller Hall
Telephone: 646-0650
Email: Charles.Wheelan@Dartmouth.edu

2A: Tues./Thurs., 2:00-3:50 p.m.
X-Hour: Wed., 4:00-4:50 p.m.
Office Hours: Tues./Thurs. 12:30-2:00 p.m.
and by appointment

This course addresses the major policy areas that are shaping the current political and policy debates at the national level. These issues include but are not limited to the federal deficit, health care reform, the public education system, financial bailouts, and partisan politics. Each policy area will feature a public lecture by a policy maker or expert in the area. In most cases, the guest speakers will meet exclusively with the Public Policy 20 students for a lecture and question and answer session. In other cases, the guests will give a campus address that Public Policy 20 students will be required to attend.

The list of speaker invitees for this year includes several sitting U.S. Senators, prospective presidential candidates, and members of the Obama and Bush Administrations. The course this year will leverage the fact that a presidential campaign cycle will soon be underway.

Course assessment will be based upon writing assignments and class participation. Students will prepare briefs on the week's topic, questions for the featured speaker, and critiques of the speaker's themes and responses.

The lead instructor will be Professor Charles Wheelan '88, who is visiting from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. Dartmouth faculty members including Professor Andrew Samwick, Professor Bruce Sacerdote, Professor Deborah Brooks, Professor Dean Lacy, and President Jim Yong Kim have agreed to participate and to lead the course for a specific week. Other faculty members will be invited to participate. The course is intended to be interdisciplinary in content and to encourage collaboration among the contributing faculty across departments.

One course meeting each week will be devoted to preparing for the week's speaker and discussing the content of the previous week. The second class meeting will be reserved for the guest speaker who will be asked to address an assigned topic. Every effort will be made to keep the invited guests on topic, so as to improve the depth and focus of the course.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The class will require eight short memos (roughly 1,000 words) summarizing and critiquing the content of the week's guest lecture. The memo should be modeled in tone and substance on an editorial critique that might appear in a major newspaper or news magazine. The focus of these assignments is threefold: 1) To expose students to the policy issues presented in the course and make them aware of the relevant political context; 2) To train students to think critically about the plans and ideas presented by the guest speakers; 3) To give students repeated opportunities to present their analysis succinctly and persuasively in writing.

Students are also responsible for background reading on each week's policy topic and for preparing questions in advance of class for each guest speaker.

The course grade will be based on the following: an average of a student's best five policy memos (80%); class participation and prepared questions for the guest speaker (10%); quizzes on course reading (10%).

COURSE LOGISTICS

Each week, a specific faculty member will "own" the content. This faculty member will be responsible for preparing students on the relevant policy content in advance of the guest lecture, leading the Q and A with the guest speaker, and grading the weekly student memos.

BOOKS

The following books are required for the course. They are available at Wheelock Books:

Wheelan. *Introduction to Public Policy*, W.W. Norton.

Bittle and Johnson. *Where Does the Money Go? Your Guided Tour to the Federal Budget Crisis*, Collins.

Irwin. *Free Trade Under Fire*, Princeton University Press.

WEEK 1

FACULTY: WHEELAN AND PRESIDENT KIM

GUEST: NONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this week is to introduce the students to basic concepts in public policy that will help them evaluate the policy ideas proposed and discussed in the balance of the course.

Readings:

Wheelan. *Introduction to Public Policy*, Chapters 1-4, 15.

Wheelan. *Naked Economics*, Chapters 3-4.

Bruce Reed, "Bush's War Against Wonks," *Washington Monthly*, March 2004.

WEEK 2

FACULTY: DEAN LACY AND/OR DEBORAH BROOKS

GUEST: NONE

OVERVIEW OF THE AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The purpose of this week is to make students aware of the electoral tenor of the nation in 2012 that will await candidates for office at every level of government, which will in turn allow them to make judgments about the political feasibility of topics discussed in the balance of the course.

Readings:

- Pare Jansen Engle and Byron Shafer, "Where Are We in History? 2010 in the Longest Run," *The Forum: Midterm Elections of 2010*, Vol. 8, Issue 4 (2010).
- James E. Campbell, "The Midterm Election of 2010: A Triple Wave Election," *The Forum: Midterm Elections of 2010*.
- Jeffrey M. Stonecash, "The 2010 elections: Party Pursuits, Voter Perceptions, and the Chancy Game of Politics," *The Forum: Midterm Elections of 2010*.
- "Not Only Politicians Fudge the Issues," *The Economist*, April 22, 2010.

WEEK 3

FACULTY: ANDREW SAMWICK

GUEST: JUDD GREGG

U.S. FISCAL CHALLENGES

The guest will be asked to address the current state of federal finances and how the nation ought to address those challenges. The talk may also address fiscal challenges at the state and local levels.

Readings:

- Alan J. Auerbach and William G. Gale. "The Federal Budget Outlook, Chapter 11," Tax Policy Center, September 15, 2010.
- Donald B. Marron. "Cutting Tax Preferences Is Key to Tax Reform and Deficit Reduction," Testimony before the Senate Committee on the Budget, February 2, 2011.
- "Moment of Truth," Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, December 2010.
- Christina D. Romer. "Fiscal Policy in the Obama White House: Reasoning, Results, and Challenges Going Forward," Speech at Reed College, November 17, 2010.
- Bittle and Johnson. *Where Does the Money Go? Your Guided Tour to the Federal Budget Crisis* (Collins)
- "I.O.U.S.A: The Movie," a documentary produced by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation.

WEEK 4

FACULTY: TBD

GUEST: JEFF IMMELT

ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The guest will be asked to identify the key domestic and international challenges related to energy and the environment, critique the relevant current federal policy, and propose specific policy changes.

Readings:

- Tol, Richard S. J. 2009. "The Economic Effects of Climate Change," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23(2): 29n51.
- Metcalf, Gilbert E. 2009. "Market-Based Policy Options to Control U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23(2): 5n27.
- Oates, ed. *The RFF Reader in Environmental and Resource Policy*, Chapters 3-6, 9, 10, 36-39.
- "A Special Report on the Carbon Economy," *The Economist*, December 5, 2009.
- Paul Krugman. "Green Economics: How We Can Afford to Tackle Climate Change," *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2010.
- David Owen. "Green Manhattan," *The New Yorker*, October 18, 2004.
- Jon Gertner. "The Rise and Fall of the G.D.P.," *New York Times Magazine*, May 10, 2010.

WEEK 5

FACULTY: TBD

GUEST: SENATOR SHERROD BROWN

TRADE AND GLOBALIZATION

The guest will be asked to address the opportunities and challenges related to an increasingly interdependent global economy and how U.S. policymakers ought to react to this evolving economic landscape.

Readings:

- Kenneth F. Sheve and Matthew Slaughter. "A New Deal for Globalization," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.
- Douglas Irwin. *Free Trade Under Fire*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4. *Naked Economics*, Chapter 11.
- David Leonhardt. "The China Puzzle," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, May 17, 2009.
- Nicholas D. Kristof. "Where Sweatshops Are a Dream," *New York Times*, January 15, 2009.

WEEK 6

IMMIGRATION POLICY AND REFORM

The guest will be asked to critique current American immigration policy, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and propose reforms.

Readings:

Immigration's Economic Impact, Report by the President's Council of Economic Advisers, June 20, 2007.

Immigration and America's Future, Report of the Independent Task Force on Immigration and America's Future, September 2006.

Adam Nagourney. "For G.O.P., First Stop on '08 Trail Is Hotbed of Immigration Politics," *New York Times*, March 20, 2007.

WEEK 7

FACULTY: PRESIDENT KIM

GUEST: TBD

HEALTH CARE

The guest will be asked to diagnose the current challenges related to the American health care system, explain the underlying issues, and propose specific reforms.

Readings:

Katherine Baicker and Amitabh Chandra. "Myths and Misconceptions about U.S. Health Insurance," *Health Affairs*, Vol. 27, no. 6 (2008): w533 – w543.

Amitabh Chandra, Jonathan Gruber, and Robin McKnight. "The Importance of the Individual Mandate – Evidence from Massachusetts," *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 12, 2011.

Atul Gawande. "The Cost Conundrum," *The New Yorker*, June 1 2009.

Atul Gawande, Donald Berwick, Elliott Fisher and Mark McClellan. "10 Steps to Better Health Care," *New York Times*, August 13, 2009.

David Goldhill. "What Washington Doesn't Get about Health Care: Here's How to Fix It," *The Atlantic*, September 2009.

Reed Abelson and Gardiner Harris. "Critics Question Study Cited in Health Debate," *New York Times*, June 2, 2010.

S&P Health Care Reform Synopsis, May 13, 2010. (A summary of the Obama health care reforms.)

David Leonhardt. "Making Health Care Better," *New York Times Magazine*, November 3, 2009.

WEEK 8

EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL

The guest will be asked to discuss the importance of human capital in a modern economy, critique the state of U.S. education policies (from pre-kindergarten to university), and make specific proposals for upgrading the skills of the American workforce.

Readings:

- Bettinger, E. P. 2005. The Effect of Charter schools on Charter students and Public Schools,” *Economics of Education Review* 24 (2): 133-47.
- Hoxby, C. M., S. Murarka, and L. E. Building. “Charter Schools in New York City: Who Enrolls and How They Affect Their Students' Achievement,” *NBER Working Paper*, April 2009.
- Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz. *The Race Between Education and Technology*, Harvard University Press, 2010, Chapters TBD.
- Gordon, Kane, and Staiger. “Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job,” The Hamilton Project, Discussion Paper 2006-01, April 2006.
- Steven Brill. “The Teachers’ Unions’ Last Stand: How Obama’s Race to the Top Could Revolutionize Public Education,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2010.
- James Heckman. “Catch ‘em Young,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 2006.
- Trip Gabriel. “Many Charter Schools, Varied Grades,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2010.

WEEK 9

AMERICA’S PLACE IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

The guest will be asked to address the key foreign policy challenges for the United States and to make specific proposals for how they ought to be addressed.

Readings:

- Andrew J. Bacevich. *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008.
- Peter W. Rodman and Henry Kissinger. *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (Knopf 2009).
- “United Nations: Fighting for Survival,” *The Economist*, November 20, 2004.

WEEK 10

FACULTY: SACERDOTE AND/OR WHEELAN

GUEST: ROBERT REICH

THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY: POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

The speaker will be asked to speak to the current distribution of income in the United States, assess the long-term implications of these trends, and propose relevant policy changes.

Readings:

Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz. *The Race Between Education and Technology*, Harvard University Press, 2010, Chapters TBD.

Robert Reich. *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future*, 2010.

Sawhill and Haskins. "5 Myths about Our Land of Opportunity," *Washington Post*, November 1, 2009.

Roger Lowenstein. "The Inequality Conundrum," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, June 10, 2007.

WEEK 11

FACULTY: ANDREW SAMWICK

GUEST: HANK PAULSON

REGULATION AND GLOBAL FINANCE

The speaker will be asked how American regulators can create an environment that fosters innovation in finance while protecting the system from the kinds of reckless risk that led to the 2008 crisis.

Readings:

Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission. *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States*, February 4, 2011.

Gary Gorton, "Questions and Answers about the Financial Crisis." Testimony prepared for the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission. February 20, 2010.