

Contextual Policy Making

Grinnell-in-Washington Program - Fall 2004

Dr. Joseph A. Ferrara

jaf@georgetown.edu or 703-914-4819

Weeks 1-2: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10am-12pm

Weeks 3-6: Friday, 3-5pm

IEL Suite 201, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Introduction

This course is about the public policy process - how it works, whom its key players are, what major institutions are involved and what roles they play. The course has two major components:

- ***Part 1 – Key Concepts, Participants, and Issues.*** During the first two weeks, we will discuss the key concepts underlying the public policy process and its major participants, primarily through reading the book *Policy Paradox*, by Deborah Stone. Students will be assigned chapters to present in class. We will also read case studies from Congressional Quarterly Researcher. Again, students will be assigned to present the cases in class. The mid-term exam will focus on the Stone book.
- ***Part 2 – Finding Solutions to Policy Problems.*** During the last four weeks of the course, we will focus on defining solutions to policy problems. During this part of the course, we will invite in a few guest speakers to share their perspectives with us. Also, students will work on policy briefs describing a policy problem and proposing various alternative solutions.

Expectations

I expect students to attend all scheduled class meetings. If you can't make it one day, please tell me in advance. Unexcused absences will reflect poorly on your participation grade. And please show up on time, or even a few minutes early. It is disruptive when people enter the room after class has begun. Finally, I expect students to submit written products on the assigned due dates. Late submittals will result in a reduction of one full letter grade.

Course Materials

We will read *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making* by Deborah Stone. This book is a thought-provoking examination of the public policy process, focusing on goals, problems, and solutions. We will also read the Congressional Quarterly Researcher compilation, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (5th edition). This compilation presents numerous case studies of contemporary public policy problems, including Medicare reform, gay marriage, affirmative action, civil liberties and the war on terrorism, and job outsourcing.

Course Requirements

The course requirements, their corresponding due dates, and what percentage of the overall course grade they comprise, are summarized in the table below:

<i>Component</i>	DUE DATE	% of Grade
<i>Leading class discussion</i>	First two weeks	20
<i>General participation</i>	Each week	5
<i>Topic proposal</i>	September 10	5
<i>Mid-term exam</i>	September 17	25
<i>Interim presentation</i>	October 8	10
<i>Policy project</i>	October 29	35

Leading Class Discussions. During the first two weeks, students will be assigned to take the lead on a particular class reading. On your assigned day, you should come to class prepared summarize the main points of the reading, critique any weaknesses in the reading's argument, and invite class discussion by posing useful questions.

General Participation. Even when you are not leading class discussions, you should be prepared to participate in the seminar. This requirement also includes regular class attendance. In addition, students should read a major national newspaper (e.g., *Washington Post* or *New York Times*) to keep up with what's happening and be able to incorporate current events into our class discussions.

Mid-Term Exam. At our September 10 class session, I will distribute the mid-term examination. The exam will be take-home, open-book, and will focus on the Stone book. The completed exam (about 5 pages) will be due in class on September 17.

Policy Project. You will select a policy issue that particularly interests you. The only requirement is that it be specific. For example, you may be interested in education but your policy project cannot just be "Education." Rather, it might be "A Proposal to Enhance Accountability at Charter Schools." You need to select your policy topic no later than September 10. On or before that date, please submit to me a one-page summary of the topic proposal. As you decide on a policy topic, feel free to consult with me as necessary. In all likelihood, there will be actual proposals currently being debated in your area of interest. Your task will be to develop a policy brief that does the following things:

1. Explains the policy objective
2. Identifies and explores the key ideas and values inherent in the policy proposal
3. Identifies the key individuals and institutions involved in the policy debate, and describes their positions
4. Summarizes the politics of the issue
5. Identifies and defends your recommended position on the issue

You will present your work-in-progress at our last class session, October 8. The final written policy brief (6-8 pages) will be due no later than October 29.

Course Schedule

Aug. 31 – Introduction and Overview of the American Political System

Sept. 2 – Policy Goals

- *Stone, introduction, chapters 1-3*

Sept. 3 – Policy Goals

- *Stone, chapters 4-5, and selected CQ case studies*

Sept. 7 – Policy Problems

- *Stone, chapters 6-8, and selected CQ case studies*

Sept. 9 – Policy Problems

- *Stone, chapters 9-10, and selected CQ case studies*

Sept. 10 – Policy Solutions

- *Stone, chapters 11-15, and selected CQ case studies*
- *Mid-term exam distributed*
- *Policy topic proposals submitted*

Sept. 17, Sept. 24, Oct. 1 – Current Policy Issues

- *Guest speakers*
- *Completed mid-term exams due Sept. 17*

Oct. 8 – Conclusions

- *Students present initial policy findings*

Oct. 29 – Submit final policy briefs