

**School of Public and International Affairs  
North Carolina State University**

**PA 763: Public Policy Process  
Monday, 3:00-5:45  
Location: Riddick 319  
Fall 2008**

**Dr. Thomas A. Birkland  
SPIA – Caldwell 219**

**Office Hours: Tuesday, 10:00 am to noon, or by appointment**

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### **Course Description**

This course is an overview of the major theoretical frameworks in the study of the public policy process in the United States. A major theme of the course is that the policy process is a very “messy” one—attempts to model the process to create a sense of order from chaos have not progressed to the point where we can say that there is a theory of the policy process. The field is now turning to the creation of “middle range” theories of the process that help us to make sense of the process without overselling these theories as “unified theories” of politics or policy making. However, our dominant theories are about twenty years old, which suggests the time may be ripe to think about new models and new ways of thinking about the policy process.

In particular, my recent work has focused on the relationship between events, ideas, and groups in policy change and “learning,” and this is where I think there is an opportunity for fruitful work. At the same time, one cannot say that all the different veins of policy studies are untapped: there is considerable work to be done in agenda setting, decision making, implementation, and, indeed, in every aspect of the policy process.

This course will be conducted as a research seminar. Because this is a doctoral level course, we will focus on the key theories and the controversies around these theories. This course is intended to prepare students to do research and to teach courses in public policy and the policy process. Public policy is an important aspect of the training of any public administration scholar, and the two fields share some, but not all, the same concerns and interests. In particular, the managerial aspects of public policy are not central to this course, although questions of management are becoming very important in the field.

### **Course Objectives**

1. Understand and be able to apply policy models to policy issues
2. Begin to understand the academic discipline of public policy research, and its main methods and questions.
3. To be better prepared to engage in academic and intellectual research and publishing in any PA or public policy field
4. To give students the opportunity to read, discuss, clarify, critique, and amplify key literature in the public policy field.
5. To serve as a forum of scholars with shared interests and different experiences in understanding public policy as a field of endeavor.
6. To orient students to the vast variety of tools available for doing research on public policy using the vast array of sources, from books to the “grey literature.”
7. To value and encourage enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity. These qualities will also make the course easier for you to navigate and enjoy graduate school.

8. To prepare students to teach public policy courses.

### Required readings

**Important note. There are many books, and I apologize that some of these are expensive.** In particular, the McCool book is \$110 new (!). Anthologies are expensive because of the need to compensate all the rights holders. I am sensitive to the cost of textbooks, but there are some that are just inherently expensive and, compared with the overall cost of being a graduate student, the cost of books is still relatively small. You should be able to get a combination of new and used books for about \$250; buying all new could run to nearly \$400. I prefer new books because I like to write in them and don't like other peoples' writing in my books (!), but you will want to balance convenience, cost, and aesthetics, and I certainly support your choices to seek out used books.

I have ordered all the books at the NCSU Bookstore **except for the McCool and the Howlett and Ramesh books**. I will order them through the NCSU Bookstore if you ask me to do so; however, I *strongly urge* that you order these and any other books from on-line booksellers. I have had good luck with, of course, amazon.com, but half.com has great book deals. (Don't forget to compare shipping charges.). Another good source is [www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com) for used books.

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Birkland, Thomas A. 2005. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*. 2nd ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. (**Recommended, but not required**. The first edition is acceptable. This book is assigned as an overview and reference. If you have another introductory public policy textbook, you may be able to use it in lieu of my book, but please consult me about this. I will put this book and all other books on reserve, so you don't have to buy this or some of the other books.)

Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver. 1993. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Howlett, Michael, and M. Ramesh. 1995. *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Kingdon, John W. 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. 2nd ed. New York: Harper Collins.

McCool, Daniel C. 1995. *Public Policy Theories, Models, and Concepts: An Anthology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Sabatier, Paul A. 2007. *Theories of the policy process*. 2nd ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Schattschneider, E.E. 1975. *The Semisovereign People*. Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press.

Stone, Deborah A. 2002. *Policy paradox: the art of political decision making*. Rev. ed. New York: Norton.

I will also distribute a CD-ROM with all the other readings on the schedule on the first day of class. I will also provide a full reference list for all the readings. For those of you who use Endnote reference management software, I will make an Endnote library of references to all the materials assigned for the course.

## Course Requirements and Grading

- Discussion leadership and seminar participation (20%)
- Book review and presentation (10%)
- Research paper and research presentation (40%)
- Final exam (written, take-home, 24 hours to complete) (30%)

**Response papers and seminar participation.** Each student will write and submit short (500-750 word) papers that *analyze* the weekly readings (500 words is about two double spaced pages, Times Roman 12 point, 1" margins)—these are not to be summaries, and summaries will earn lower marks. In your papers, you will relate the readings to each other and to the overall themes of the course. The papers will be distributed to the class via the Web and via email as a single PDF file. All class email will be directed to your NCSU mail account, although you may add an alternative email account to the class mailing list if you like.

Response papers are due on Monday at 9:00 am for that week's readings. Papers received later than this time will earn no credit, but should still be submitted to aid in class discussion.

Papers should be submitted in Microsoft Word 2003 format or earlier (.doc). Please do not send me these papers or any other document in the new Office 2007 .docx format, or in PDF format; I use Word to comment on your papers before I return them.

**Book review:** In consultation with the professor, you will select a recent book on public policy book, read it, do a written review, and orally report on it to class. For benefit of your classmates, you are expected to share your review and other pertinent review information. I will post your review on the class website for the class to download and discuss. The book should be one written in the last three to five years.

Your five-page written review should (1) Describe the contents and major arguments of the book; (2) critically review the author's arguments in the context of your required readings; and (3) analyze the contributions of the book to policy theory and application. Please select your book by September 22, so that we can plan for your presentation on a day where the book may best fit the schedule of topics.

For models of good book reviews, consult the key journals in public policy, public administration, and political science, many of which publish book reviews.

**Research paper:** In consultation with the professor, you will research a policy issue, model, or theory and prepare a formal research paper. Your paper should contain (1) a research question, or set of questions; (2) literature review; (3) research methodology; (4) findings and (5) conclusions. Length of text: 20-25 pages. Citation style is Chicago parenthetical (the same style used in the *American Political Science Review*).

This paper may be approached in any of the following ways, or in another way in consultation with the instructor.

1. A paper suitable for presentation at a national or regional conference in PA, public policy, political science, or a related discipline.
2. The first draft of a grant proposal to submit to NSF or another funder
3. The first draft of a dissertation proposal.
4. Any other scholarly product you may wish to develop, in consultation with and with the approval of the instructor.

In any case, the paper *must directly engage* academic literature as outlined in this syllabus. By this I mean that whatever paper you write must be based in and serve to advance some aspect

of mainstream policy theory. No descriptive “case studies” are acceptable, because the course goals are to focus on theory development. Of course, empirical studies help with theory building, but a purely descriptive assignment cannot, by definition, deeply engage policy theory. You may apply theory to a particular case

Whatever the form of the paper, you should also consider what you think you would like to tackle in your dissertation. You should, by this stage in your graduate career, be devoting considerable time to thinking about your dissertation. The time you spend now will be rewarded later!

The abstract for this paper is due on September 29 before seminar. The paper is due on December 12.

**Final Exam.** There will be a final 24-hour take home exam. Please think of this as preparation and practice for your comprehensive exams! I will offer at least two and probably four choices of questions.

I will set a date for pickup and submission of the exam later in the semester, to coordinate this best with your other classes’ schedules. Tentatively I am thinking that this will be December 15.

**Incompletes.** I will give incompletes under only the most extraordinary circumstances. It is usually much better for your graduate career to take a lower mark than it is to take an incomplete—in other words, don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good. However, if you wish to seek an incomplete, please schedule a time to meet with me.

**Attendance and late assignments:** I expect everyone to be present for every class. Notify me by phone or email if you know you are going to miss a class. More than one missed class, or any unexcused absence, will result in a letter grade reduction in your final course grade.

I have noticed a trend of what I will call “casual absenteeism” in graduate courses, related both to personal (vacation!) schedules and to professional obligations. Please do not register for this course if you will be unable to fulfill your obligations. In particular, because this is a full-time PhD program, I expect students to organize their work schedules around their scholarly obligations, not vice versa. Job-related reasons for missing seminar or assignments will generally not be accepted.

Late assignments will be penalized by a letter grade reduction for each day late, but assignments three or more days late will earn no credit.

**Students with disabilities:** Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. Students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653.

[http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm\\_action/dss/](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/)

**Academic integrity:** The University’s Code of Student Conduct [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student\\_services/student\\_discipline/POL11.35.1.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_discipline/POL11.35.1.php) specifically addresses academic integrity in part 7. Students should familiarize themselves with this policy and those policies described at [http://www.ncsu.edu/stud\\_affairs/osc/AIpage/acaintegrity.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_affairs/osc/AIpage/acaintegrity.html). In any case, any instance of plagiarism will result in a failing mark for the assignment if the assignment is worth less than 30% of the course grade, and will result in failing the course if the assignment is worth 30% or more of the course grade. Plagiarism is a subset of the broader list of cheating offenses listed at [http://www.ncsu.edu/stud\\_affairs/osc/AIpage/cheatingpolicy.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_affairs/osc/AIpage/cheatingpolicy.html). Other forms of misconduct outlined here will be similarly addressed. This list of resources and authorities is neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and any violation of academic integrity as traditionally understood in the American scholarly context will be referred for University action.