

PLSC 497, Spring 2006

Notes for February 6, 2006

Exam on Wednesday:

- 10 percent of your final grade. Study!
- Format:
 - identifications (2 sentence answers; 1 sentence to identify the item; 1 sentence to explain its political or public policy relevance)
 - Short answers (1 paragraph to answer the question)
 - There may be a series of short answers on the same topic. So you have to answer each part of the question separately and I'll grade them each as a separate question. (This cuts down on vague and unresponsive answers.)
- No trick questions. You'll do well if you know the material
- Focus on the book, not the lectures.

Ideas for study topics:

What is public policy?

Rationales for government involvement:

- Public goods, private goods, and stuff in between
- Market failures
- Social demands
- Hurricane Katrina. Is a purely private sector response being discussed? Why not?

Peculiarities, special features of the US public policy making system:

- Separation of powers
- Federalism
- Executive Branch agencies, independent commissions, independent regulatory agencies, etc.
- MANY venues of public policy
- Implications and goals of this; why we have "local control" for example and implications (good and bad) of this system.

Federal, State, and Local public policies. Note that many policies are typically housed at different levels of government. Some are shared between more than one level. Think of how it works in various policy areas: Exclusive (at what level of government) or shared (between which levels, and on what basis)?

- Defense
- Foreign policy
- Environment
- Health
- Social security

- Transportation
- Higher education
- K-12 education
- Police protection and crime control
- Etc.

Subgovernments, issue-networks, iron-triangles, government by the vested interests only

- The “mobilization of bias” – what does that mean?
- Examples of areas of public policy where most people don’t know much or care much about what is going on. We used Dairy price supports as an example, but think of others.
- Examples of areas where many people do, in fact, have an opinion and how these differ. War in Iraq as an example. Abortion. Gun control. There are many issues where the public can play an effective role.
- Examples of issues that are in between: there may be no “public” role, but on the other hand there may be a very diverse set of people who are knowledgeable about it, and significant disagreements and conflicts among this group. These are issue-networks.
- Where would you put student financial aid policy on this continuum? Who is involved? To whom does Government respond? Does this change over time? Is it just a difference between Democrats and Republicans?

Theories of the policy process

- Elite theory
- Group theory, pluralism

Policy Process Model, the “Policy Cycle”

- Agenda-setting
- Policy formation
- Legitimation, decision-making, enactment
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Policy Change, feedback, inputs into the next “cycle”
- Does it really work like this? No. Why do you have to learn it? These different processes occur, just all at the same time or sometimes out of order.

Multiple agendas:

- Public or systemic agenda (what is on people’s minds)
- Institutional agenda: what govt institutions are doing (in general)
- Media agenda, congressional agenda, presidential, court, gubernatorial, mayoral, etc. Each institution can have its own agenda
- These various agendas may or may not correspond. They may or may not follow or lead the public agenda. Should they? What about the agendas of specialized policy communities of experts, such as those knowledgeable about student financial aid programs? Should they be attuned to different agendas, or should they work independently?

Problem definition, framing, etc.

- Examples of rival frames of the same issue. Are these “sincere” or are they purely cynical and strategic? Why do they matter?

Policy Instruments:

- Regulation of private sector or individual behavior (examples?)
- Direct government provision of services (examples?)
- Taxing and spending
- User fees, self-financing, excise taxes
- General funds, redistribution through income tax
- Market mechanisms
- Education and propaganda, “bully pulpit” of the President

Policy Analysis

- Values that support larger government in general
- Values that support smaller government in general
- Values that affect a given policy problem (examples)
- Scientific / objective / researchable facts that affect a given policy problem
 - Extent of the problem
 - Feasibility of the various solutions
 - How these are often relatively narrow compared to the scope of the entire problem
- If you had all the data you could possibly need about the extent of an issue such as poverty, and the cost and likely effectiveness of various possible government programs to alleviate it, would that determine how the government would / should respond? Most debates in public policy combine CONFLICTING VALUES with AMBIGUITY ABOUT FACTUAL CONDITIONS.