

PLSC 497, Public Policy and Agenda-Setting
Penn State University
Fall Term, 2005, MW 4:15-5:30
Room 067 Willard Building

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Office hours: M, W, 3:00-4:15 and by appointment

This course will focus on the politics of public policy and agenda-setting. We will discuss the major policy activities of the US federal government with particular attention to how issues have risen and fallen on the national political agenda over time. Students will make extensive use of the resources available at www.policyagendas.org which allows users to trace attention to hundreds of different topics from 1947 to present. Lectures and discussions will also be largely based on these resources. Readings will include general treatments of public policy as well as specialized readings focusing on agenda-setting. Students will do significant writing and each will engage in an original research project using the resources available through the policy agendas project web site.

The class will consist of some lectures and computer-based presentations, but it is designed to allow for significant student questioning and discussion. So come to class ready to discuss things; if things are confusing, come with questions. Be prepared to be called on in class. Avoid that by coming prepared to say things on your own initiative. In any case, there will be a lot of discussion in class, not so many straight lectures.

Assignments and grading:

Short assignments:	3 x 5	=	15 %
Two in-class exams:	2 x 20	=	40 %
Final paper:			30 %
Class participation:			15 %
Total:			100%

(Note: Class participation counts 15 percent. That's a full grade-and-a-half. Class participation means showing up, doing the readings before class, asking relevant questions, and participating in discussions. It is important; don't take it lightly.)

Readings for purchase, available at campus bookstore:

- Kraft, Michael E., and Scott Furlong. 2004. *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

- Bosso, Christopher J. 2005. *Environment, Inc. From Grassroots to Beltway*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Jones, Bryan D., and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2005. *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Note that this book is not available yet but should be in the bookstore by the time we need it in class, later in the semester.)

Note: I am the co-author of one of the required books. This borders on the obnoxious, I know; sorry about that. However, I don't mind criticism and feel free to rip it apart if you don't like it. By the nature of the course, however, you'll see that the book links closely with the web site you are going to become familiar with. I do receive (modest) royalties on the book, and I will refund that to each student registered in the class at the midterm. Unfortunately, this is only fifty cents per student... You'll get your fifty cents if you are still registered at the midterm.

Term paper assignment: During the semester you will learn how to use the data from the agendas project web site. This will provide the background you need to do your own independent research project concerning a great number of possible term paper projects. Most of you will likely choose to analyze the development of a given policy, such as energy, education, health care, or defense over time, from 1947 to present, using the Agendas Project datasets as the main data source for your analysis. (You will need to supplement this with bibliographic material and relevant statistical indicators specific to your case.) Others may choose a different type of topic, such as an analysis of the distribution of federal government spending over time, across all policy areas. In any case, you should work on choosing your topic early, in the first 4 weeks of the semester, and keep in touch with me about your progress and plans. Papers should be at least 15 pages, double spaced, not counting figures and tables, which should be presented in an appendix.

Please note the following announcements concerning University policies.

Academic Dishonesty¹

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist of any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Other violations include, but are not limited to, any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in regard to an examination, such as tampering with a graded exam or claiming another's work to be one's own. Violations shall also consist of obtaining or attempting to obtain, previous to any examinations, copies of the examination papers or the questions to appear thereon, or to obtain any illegal knowledge of these questions. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of a violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to impose appropriate penalties that are consistent with University guidelines.

Disabilities

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

¹ Much of the text above has been directly obtained from the sections of the Princeton University website (<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/rrr/99/pages/O1.htm>) concerning academic integrity (Rights, Rules, Responsibilities introductory text as well as pages 55-69) as well as from the website of the Department of Economics at The Pennsylvania State University.

Weekly assignments and topics

You should do all the readings before the Monday course. I'll keep on schedule during the semester week to week, but some discussions may go over from Monday to Wednesdays. Each week we'll start a new topic, however. For each week, the list below indicates the topic and the reading or other assignments. Everything is required.

Week 1. Aug 31. Distribution of syllabus.

(Note: No class on Monday; only one class meeting this week.)

Baumgartner will be absent on the first day because of the American Political Science Association meetings. Buy your books, start reading, and get familiar with the web site.

Week 2. Sep 5. Introduction to the Policy Agendas Project and the course.

(Note: No class on Monday, again; Labor Day)

Come to class familiar with www.policyagendas.org. Do the tutorial and make some graphs on-line before class (you don't need to bring them to class). Look in particular at the budget data and the hearings dataset. Familiarize yourself with the topics system.

Week 3. Sep 12. Introduction to public policy: Terms, concepts, institutions, the basics.

Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 1, 2

Week 4. Sep 19. The politics of public policy: Theories of who gets what.

Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 3.

(Note: Baumgartner absent on Wed Sep 21, so no class. Take advantage of the extra time and work on your first assignment for next week, and read ahead for the exam. Also, if you haven't chosen a topic for your term paper yet, get on the ball; do that this week!)

Week 5. Sep 24. Analyzing and producing public policy: Choosing the best policy.

Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 4, 5, 6

First assignment due Mon Sep 24. Choose a policy area or process you want to study and produce some preliminary graphs from the policyagendas.org web site relating to it. Make sure your analysis includes both some budgetary figures as well as either congressional, media, or public opinion information. Also email me a copy of your excel spreadsheet that you used to produce your graphs. By this time you should be familiar with the web site, including how to work interactively on line as well as how to download data to make your own graphs in excel.

Week 6. Oct 3. Review and prep for exam on Monday, exam on Wednesday.

Exam # 1. Wed Oct 5. The exam covers everything in the readings so far. Short answers, identifications, short essays.

Week 7. Oct 10. The politics of the environment and the creation of "Environment, Inc."

Bosso, Ch. 1, 2, 3

Week 8. Oct 17. How an interest-group domain works: Specialization, niches, roles.
Bosso, Ch. 4, 5, 6

Week 9. Oct 24. Understanding and analyzing policy areas: The environment, education.
Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 11 (Monday)
Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 10

Second assignment due in class Wed Oct 26. Compare what you can learn about the environment and / or energy as a political issue from the agendas web site with what Bosso and / or Kraft and Furlong write. Either confirm or disconfirm some aspect of their argument using up to five graphs. Don't do more than five. Give up to one page of commentary.

Week 10. Oct 31. More examples of particular policy areas: Economics and the federal budget, health care, social welfare.
Kraft and Furlong, ch. 7, 8, 9

Week 11. Nov 7. Review (Monday) and Exam (Wednesday)

Exam # 2. Wed Nov 9. Covers everything since the first exam. Similar format.

Week 12. Nov 14. A theory of attention, incrementalism, and punctuated equilibrium.
Jones and Baumgartner, Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4

Week 13. Nov 21. Lots of evidence and data to support the theory.
Jones and Baumgartner, Ch. 5, 6, 7

Third assignment due in class Monday Nov 21. Take a policy area of your choice from the Agendas Project. Trace annual changes in spending over time. Graph: 1) spending over time in current dollars; 2) spending over time in constant dollars; and 3) annual percentage change in spending (you'll need to calculate this in excel). Were there periods of stability and punctuation in your series? Discuss your findings in up to one page. Total assignment: 1 page and 3 graphs.

(Note: No class on Wed Nov 23. Happy Thanksgiving!)

Week 14. Nov 28. Problems, solutions, attention, public opinion, and government response.
Jones and Baumgartner Ch. 8, 9, 10, 11

Week 15. Dec 5. Review and conclusions.
(Note: Last class is Wed Dec 7. Term papers due.)