

# PBPL 5/GOVT 25: Introduction to Public Policy

Dartmouth College  
Summer 2023

Instructor: Michael D. Wales  
Class Room: Carson Hall L02  
Office: Rockefeller Center 202

E-mail: michael.wales@dartmouth.edu  
Class Period: 12 and 12X  
Office Hours: M 2-4

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There is nothing so powerful as truth – and often nothing so strange.

–Daniel Webster, "Argument on the murder of Captain White"

There are no solutions, only trade-offs; and you try to get the best trade-off you can get, that's all you can hope for.

–Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*

## Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the theory, process, and practice of making and implementing public policy in the United States. While public policy is a common topic of conversation and academic study, it is often difficult to define and even more challenging to understand. Even as public policy has become its own field of inquiry, it remains amorphous, interdisciplinary, and multifaceted, with many branches and approaches to its study. This class will survey the field, with an emphasis on the policy process and explanations of policy change.

## Required Materials

Birkland, Thomas A. 2020. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*. 5th ed. New York: Routledge. ISBN-10: 1138495611

Bittle, Scott and Jean Johnson. 2008. *Where Does the Money Go? Your Guided Tour to the Federal Budget Crisis*. New York: Collins. ISBN-10: 0061241873

Kamarck, Elaine C. 2015. *How Change Happens - or Doesn't: The Politics of US Public Policy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. ISBN-10: 1588269396

Students should also join the Poll Everywhere group and download the app on their preferred device they plan to bring to class.

## Course Objectives

The primary goal of this class is to encourage students to think critically about who makes public policy, why they make the decisions they do, and how it affects the public. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- explain the basic processes of making public policy at all levels of government in the US;
- identify some of the most common tools used by policymakers;
- understand how politics and public finance facilitate and constrain policies; and
- apply skills necessary to communicate and participate in the policy process.

## Course Details

### Class Structure

This will be an in-person class in a traditional lecture format, and I intend to have plenty of discussion as well. While some may wish to consider public policy to be independent of politics, the two are inextricably linked, and therefore people can be deeply passionate about their preferences. In order to create an environment conducive to discussion, it will be important for you to show me and your colleagues respect, and I will treat students with respect as well. This means both trying to avoid making hurtful statements, but also giving your classmates the benefit of the doubt and not seeking out offense. Avoiding discussions on difficult topics may alleviate discomfort in the short term, but often only deepens divides in the long term.

Students are expected to attend class (including scheduled X-Hours) and participate to the extent the class size allows, unless they have a valid reason to be absent.

### Assessments

There will be four different types of graded assignments and assessments in this class.

- **40%** of your grade will be determined by two exams (20% each). The midterm is scheduled for July 26 and the second exam will be on August 27 during the final exam period and will only cover material after the midterm.
- **40%** of your grade will be determined by a policy memo project on a relevant public policy of your choice. The project will include the memo itself as well as assignments preparing for it and a short presentation summarizing the memo. The memo will be 25% of the final grade, with the other components providing the remaining 15% of the total. Further instructions will be provided later.
- **10%** of your grade will be determined by a handful of homework assignments allowing you to apply what you are learning and develop research and critical thinking skills.
- **10%** of your grade will be determined by participation. Participation includes:
  - Attendance: Unless you have an excused absence for a previously scheduled event or illness, you are expected to attend. If you must miss class, please let me know in advance. Students who must miss will have alternative means to earn full credit.
  - Participation in class surveys: this is a mid-sized class, and to alleviate issues related to involvement and discussion, we will utilize iClicker for polls and other forms of participation.
  - Active engagement: do the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss and ask questions.

I will accept late work for most assignments with a 10% penalty for each day the assignment is late. If circumstances require you to miss an exam, alert me as soon as possible to arrange alternative accommodations. Documentation may be required to avoid late penalties for exams.

Please note that I currently do not plan to offer extra credit opportunities in the class. Should I add an extra credit opportunity in the future, it will be applicable to all students, not select individuals.

## Grading Policies

The Department of Government establishes median grade standards that will be followed in this class. Except under extraordinary circumstances, median grades in GOVT courses will not exceed A- in seminars, and B+ in all other courses. The grade value for each letter grade in this class is available on Canvas. Scores will be rounded to two decimal places per Dartmouth guidelines.

## Course Policies

For University policies and support resources, please click the Support & Policies link in the course menu on Canvas.

## Use of Canvas

While this class is taught in-person, it will utilize Canvas extensively. Most students no doubt have had both positive and negative experiences with Canvas, and we will aim to have mostly positive experiences in this class.

## Class Etiquette

Your instructor and fellow students wish to foster a safe learning environment. All opinions and experiences, no matter how different or controversial they may be perceived, must be respected in the tolerant spirit of academic discourse. You are encouraged to comment, question, or critique an idea but you are not to attack an individual. Our differences will add richness to this learning experience. Working as a community of learners, we can build a courteous and respectful course setting.

## Academic Honor Principle

The faculty, administration, and students of Dartmouth College acknowledge the responsibility to maintain and perpetuate the principle of academic honor, and recognize that any instance of academic dishonesty is considered a violation of the [Academic Honor Principle](#).

Those students who are permitted to record are not permitted to redistribute audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded.

## Religious Observances

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible—before the end of the second week of the term at the latest—to discuss appropriate course adjustments.

## Intellectual Property

All course materials, including, but not limited to, the syllabus, course assignments, study guides, learning guides, online lecture videos and content, and lab book (i.e. course pack) are property of the instructor and College and may not be shared online or distributed in any manner to others. Students are prohibited from posting course materials or notes online and from selling notes to or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the express written permission of the professor teaching this course. Doing so will constitute both an academic integrity violation and a copyright violation. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to civil penalties and criminal liability. This also includes a prohibition on recording in class without permission.

## Student Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; [Apply for Services webpage](#); [student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu](mailto:student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu); 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center](#) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

## Course Schedule

The schedule of weekly readings and assignments is tentative and subject to change. Assigned readings besides the required books should be posted on Canvas. Some of the readings come from academic journals and can be quite dense and technical. In most cases students should focus on the big picture ideas put forward rather than methodology and jargon.

### Week 1, 06/19 - 06/23: Introduction

- Introduction
  - Prather, Larry J. and Dan Delich. 2019. "In flood resilience debate, there are no solutions - only tradeoffs." *The Hill*, February 2. <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/428193-in-flood-resilience-debate-there-are-no-solutions-only-tradeoffs>

### Week 2, 06/26 - 06/30: Introduction and Theories of Public Policy

- Introduction to Policy Studies
  - Birkland Ch. 1
- Science and Theory in Policy Studies
  - Birkland Ch. 11
- X-Hour: Introduction to Rocky Programs
- Assignment: Mandatory Office Hours

### Week 3, 07/03 - 07/07: Policy Change and the Policy System

- Policy Change
  - Kamarck (entire book by Wednesday)
- Elements of the Policymaking System
  - Birkland Ch. 2
- X-Hour: Independence Day, no class
- **July 9: Policy battlefield assignment due**

### Week 4, 07/10 - 07/14: Context of Making Policy

- Structural Elements
  - Birkland Ch. 2
  - Forms of Local Government (on Canvas)
- Historical, Political, and Social Context
  - Birkland Ch. 3
- Actors in the Policy Process
  - Birkland Ch. 4
- X-Hour: Research Tools and Resources (optional)
- **July 16: Policy memo topic proposal due**

**Week 5, 07/17 - 07/21: Actors in the Policy Process**

- Official Actors
  - Birkland Ch. 4
  - Ballotpedia. “The Administrative State.” [https://ballotpedia.org/Administrative\\_state](https://ballotpedia.org/Administrative_state) (June 13 2023).
  - Grossman, Matt and Brendon Swedlow. 2015. “Judicial Contributions to US National Policy Change since 1945.” *Journal of Law and Courts*, 3(1): 1-35.
- Unofficial Actors
  - Birkland Ch. 5
  - Timmins, Annmarie. 2023. “How a golf lover’s \$3.8 million gift to Dartmouth turned into a yearslong legal dispute.” *Valley News*, April 17.
- Agenda Setting
  - Birkland Ch. 6
- X-Hour: Local policymakers
- **July 23: Policymaking institutions assignment due**
- Recommended Reading
  - Butt, Daniel. 2007. “The Courts and Social Policy in the United States.” The Foundation for Law, Justice and Society.
  - Casey, John. 2011. “Understanding Advocacy: A Primer on the Policy Making Role of Nonprofit Organizations.” Center for Nonprofit Strategy and Management Working Paper Series.
  - Drutman, Lee. 2015. “How corporations turned into political beasts” *Business Insider*, April 25.
  - Walmart Environmental, Social and Governance Summary Report, FY 2022.

**Week 6, 07/24 - 07/28: Agendas and Policy Types**

- Agenda Setting
  - Birkland Ch. 6
  - Wohn, Donghee Yvette and Brian J. Bowe. 2016. “Micro Agenda Setters: The Effect of Social Media on Young Adults’ Exposure to and Attitude Toward News.” *Social Media + Society*, January-March: 1-12.
- Policy Types
  - Birkland Ch. 7 (after midterm)
- X-Hour: Midterm Review (optional)
- **July 26: Midterm Exam**

**Week 7, 07/31 - 08/04:** Analyzing and Designing Public Policies

- Policy Analysis
  - Birkland Ch. 8
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013. *CDC's Policy Analytical Framework*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
  - Crandall-Hollick, Margot L. 2018. *The American Opportunity Tax Credit: Overview, Analysis, and Policy Options*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. CRS R42561.
  - Foster, Gigi. 2022. "More Harm than Good." *Institute of Public Affairs Review*, 74(2): 26-33.
- Policy Design
  - Birkland Ch. 9
- X-Hour: None scheduled
- **Aug. 6: Policy memo annotated bibliography due**
- Recommended Reading
  - Hecl, H. Hugh. 1972. "Policy Analysis." *British Journal of Political Science*, 2(1): 83-108.

**Week 8, 08/07 - 08/11:** Implementing and Evaluating Public Policies

- Policy Implementation
  - Birkland Ch. 10
- Program Evaluation
  - Espinosa, Marlen Barajas, Micayla Richardson, Chelsea DeMasters, Jennifer A. Jones, and Kimberly Wiley. 2022. "Conducting a Process Evaluation in Nonprofit and Governmental Programs." University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension.
  - Baicker, Katherine, Sarah L. Tubman, Heidi L. Allen, Mira Bernstein, Jonathan H. Gruber, Joseph P. Newhouse, Eric C. Schneider, Bill J. Wright, Alan M. Zaslavsky, and Amy N. Finkelstein. 2013. "The Oregon Experiment - Effects of Medicaid on Clinical Outcomes." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 368(18): 1713-1722.
  - Wolf, Patrick J., Brian Kisida, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Nada Eissa, and Lou Rizzo. 2013. "School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, DC." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 32(2): 246-270.
  - Casey, Dara, John Keating, and Zoe McGuirk. 2023. "Criminal Mediation in New Hampshire." Dartmouth College Class of 1964 Policy Research Shop Brief 2223-05.
- X-Hour: None scheduled

**Week 9, 08/14 - 08/18:** Fiscal Policy

- Where Does the Money Go?
  - Bittle and Johnson (full book by Friday)
- X-Hour: State fiscal staff
- **Aug 20: Policy memo due**
- Recommended Reading
  - Saturno, James V. 2023. *Introduction to the Federal Budget Process*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. CRS R46240.

**Week 10, 08/21 - 08/25: Fiscal Policy and Course Conclusion**

- Fiscal Policy
  - Bischoff, Ivo and Frederic Blaeschke. 2016. "Performance Budgeting: Incentives and Social Waste from Window Dressing." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(2): 344-358.
  - Wehner, Peter and Ian Tufts. 2020. "Does the Debt Matter?" *National Affairs*, Fall 2020.
  - Weiner, Jennifer. 2011. "How Does New Hampshire Do It? An Analysis of Spending and Revenues in the Absence of a Broad-based Income or Sales Tax." New England Public Policy Research Center Research Report 11-1.
- X-Hour: Policy memo presentations
- **Aug. 23: Policy memo presentations**
- **Aug 29: Final Exam, 12:50 pm**