Political Science 974
Seminar in Politics and Public Policy
Spring 2020
W: 4-6:40pm

Prof. Paru Shah
Bolton 646
shahp@uwm.edu
Office Hours: M 1-2pm

Course Description and Objectives:

This course is a seminar on public policymaking in the American context. While we will focus on recent scholarship on the policymaking process, we will also read several “classics” that deal with the relationship between the policy process and policy outcomes. Our study of policymaking will be based on the proposition that a rigorous understanding of policymaking depends upon a sophisticated understanding of institutions and political behavior. Many of the scholars we will read built their professional reputations in one or more of the traditional subfields in American politics (Congress, voting, public opinion, interest groups, etc.) and their conceptualizations of policy processes and outcomes are explicitly based on their understandings of these more traditional subfields. Though we will not ignore the details of the policymaking process, we will make a concerted effort to understand the impact of broad societal forces on policy development, choice, implementation and evaluation. We will spend a significant amount of time discussing examples from specific substantive policy areas, but this is probably not a course for students whose interests are limited to a single policy area. Students who have no formal background in American politics should meet with me before enrolling in the course.

At the end of the course, each student should be able to:

1. Identify distinct interpretations of democracy and their implications for our understanding of public policymaking.
2. Describe and discuss the significance of various categories of public policy and explain the pros and cons of prominent policy typologies.
3. Identify and discuss various theoretical orientations towards public policymaking and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches.
4. Explain the fundamental characteristics of and the political dynamics associated with the various stages in the policy process.
5. Discuss techniques and demonstrate the ability to implement techniques for estimating policy impacts and evaluating policy effectiveness.
Course Requirements:

Class Participation: 10%
Discussant Role: 10%
Reaction Papers/Mini Empirical Papers: 30%
Final Paper: 25%
Final Exam: 25%

Class Participation and Discussion
To develop the knowledge and competencies required to satisfy these objectives, it will be very important for you to prepare carefully for class and to participate fully in class activities. You will also need to spend time thinking about the issues we raise in class. As this is a seminar, the burden of preparation and discussion will be shared by all. Failure to participate in class discussions will be considered an indicator that you are not prepared.

Discussants
Each week, we will read and discuss a number of articles. Though all students are expected to read all of them carefully and prepare to discuss them in class, each week one or two student(s) will lead discussion on the readings.

For the presentation/discussion leadership, the following guidelines apply:

1) You must email a typed list of the questions you plan to raise during the discussion to me by 5:00pm the day before your presentation. This should be a specific set of questions with which you will start your discussion. Include both specific points and general issues you wish to raise. This should be your guideline for the class discussion and as such, should be as complete and as far-reaching as possible. My notes for discussion, for example, usually span at least one typewritten page of questions for each work. In the case of an entire book, I might have a page for each chapter. This is the sort of coverage for which you should aim.

2) Your extensive list of questions should be analytical in nature. We are making the assumption that everyone in the class has done all the reading. Therefore, asking what the authors said about something or what their findings were with respect to some model is not useful. You should certainly give a short introduction summarizing the material in the readings for the day to refresh everyone’s memory, but don’t ask students to regurgitate the material. Ask them what they thought of a certain assertion the authors made or whether a given analysis was problematic in their view or how the authors might better test their second hypothesis. Don’t ask them what the assertion was or how the analysis was conducted or what their second hypothesis suggested.

3) If you are sharing your presentation with another person, you are still expected to turn in discussion questions over all of the material. In addition, as you are “on” that day, you should have something to say about all of the material during class. You may split presentation duties and may have one of you “more” responsible for a certain portion of the reading than the other (at least for the summary part of the presentation). But during the
discussion, you should jump in and add comments and questions whenever relevant and should make sure all of your questions are covered as well, even on the material for which you are not directly responsible. All students are expected to read all of the reading and the one or two people presenting should have read it all very carefully. I did not intend for one of you to read half and the other to read the other half. Your job is to lead the discussion over that entire day. I would prefer a tag-team sort of style in which you each jump in, back and forth, and provide a real jumpstart to the discussion, leaving neither of you truly responsible for one article or another, but I do leave the option up to you to split the presentation should you so desire. You should definitely talk with your partner, though, and make some sort of plan as to how the class will run. You should have enough material to cover the entire class period, and it should appear as seamless and as comprehensive as possible. Be a team – be devil’s advocate to each other – complement one another in terms of background knowledge and expertise – but certainly, be prepared to cover everything.

Weekly Reaction Papers/Mini-Empirical Papers
During the first three weeks of class, you will be required to submit weekly reaction papers. The reaction papers should be based on the required readings, and should respond to some or all of the questions listed under the topic heading and covered by the readings. While the papers should describe the main ideas being presented, they should not be annotative bibliographies that summarize what each author presents; they should be organized around ideas and as much as possible relate to theoretical and/or conceptual concerns, not simply description. The papers should include an evaluative/critical paragraph of the research. Are their findings new and/or nonobvious? Are their methods innovative? Do they advance understanding of their question? Is their model superior to others on point in terms of prediction? What ramifications does the work have for the way we understand politics and public policy? Be sure to substantiate any claims you make.

For the last 9 weeks of the course, you will be required to write 5 “mini” research papers (3-5 pages long). The purpose of this exercise is to begin working with data, thinking about the research questions that flow from the weekly readings, and practicing writing succinctly and clearly. We will discuss possible data cites and I will provide some examples in class.

Each weekly reaction/mini-empirical paper will be worth 10 points, and is due at the beginning of class.
Empirical Paper
You are required to write an empirical paper for this class, on a topic of your choice. Given the time constraints of a 15-week course, this will be a paper that focuses on replication of another study, or a pilot study (20-25 pages).

My expectation is that all of you have had POL SCI 700 and 701 or their equivalent. If this is not the case, please come and see me.
The paper must include the following, and over the course of the semester, I will ask you to turn in different sections to assure you are on the right path.

1. An extensive, comprehensive literature review of the work done in your area of interest. This requires substantial searching in the various databases maintained by the library, and a large amount of reading. You should note that once you find an adequate number of sources to begin with, you should consult their references for further readings on topic. You must read each of the sources you find carefully, summarize them, critically analyze the findings reported in them, show how their work is related to your research question, and draw from them the findings you deem to be worthwhile considerations in your research. This literature review will be sort of an extended version of the weekly papers. That is, do the same thing you did for the weekly papers, only on a much grander scale.

2. A well-formulated and thought-out research question that poses some problem of interest to judicial politics scholars. Tell me why what you wish to study is important, why we need a study such as yours, and what you will tell us through your research. Tell me what your theory is, and how you will apply that theory to the research question you seek to answer.

3. A list of hypotheses to be tested. You should explain each of your hypotheses, justifying why you think they will be confirmed or disconfirmed. Presenting the hypotheses in tabular form at the end of the paper is oftentimes useful as well.

4. Description of the data to be used, the operationalization of the variables, and the methodology to be employed. Tell me in detail how the data were collected, how reliability and validity concerns were addressed, and how you obtained the data. (Note: I will get you links to potential data sources and discuss them in class.) Choose variables to test your hypotheses and defend their utility in testing the hypotheses you hope to test. Explain how each variable is measured, why you made the choices you did in measurement, and why you think they are the best measures possible. Finally, discuss the methodology you will use and tell me why it is appropriate. What does this method do and how does it work? Why do you use it over other available alternatives?

5. Presentation of the model and the results of the estimation. Given your hypotheses, variables, and methodology, what model will you test? Before estimating it using your method, discuss the bivariate relationships among the variables in your data. Is there enough support at the bivariate level to expect relationships to remain once controlling for other influences? After you’ve discussed what the data tells you up front, continue with the estimation of your model and provide your results in tabular and/or graphical form. What did you find? Which of your hypotheses are confirmed? Which are disconfirmed? Which variables are significant and at what level? How well does your model fit your data? What is your reduction in error? How much influence do the individual variables exude on your dependent variable? Which is the most important? How much confidence can you have in your findings?
6. **Discussion of the findings.** What can you conclude from the findings of the analysis? Is the relationship among the variables as you expected it to be? If not, can you speculate as to why you obtained findings you did not expect? What are the issues we should have with your findings? Are they time bound? Issue bound? Are there problems in your operationalization, perhaps? What still needs some explanation? What have we learned? How do your findings comport with other studies on point?

7. **Conclusions and directions for future research.** Recap your most significant findings, and tell us why your study was important and what we have learned from it. Tell us what we still don’t know and where we should go from here. What will you do in future research? What should others do to build on your work?

Each of you will present your paper the last week of class, and another student will be assigned as a peer reviewer. More details will be given in class.

**Final Exam**
There is will one exam given during finals week, which will cover the entire course and will be delivered as a prelim question.

**Grade distribution:**
Letter grades will be assigned according to the following distribution:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A-</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B-</th>
<th>C+</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C-</th>
<th>D+</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D-</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Points</td>
<td>100-94%</td>
<td>93-90%</td>
<td>89-88%</td>
<td>87-82%</td>
<td>81-80%</td>
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<td>71-70%</td>
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Students are encouraged to keep track of their progress in the course and consult with me in person should they have questions or concerns about their performance. Please note I will not discuss grades via email or telephone.

**CLASS POLICIES (READ CAREFULLY):**

**Attendance Policy:** This course is designed to be an intensive seminar with student participation and discussion. In order for rich classroom discussion, students must attend all sessions. If you have an emergency or scheduling conflict, please notify me.

**E-mail:** The best way to contact me is via e-mail, but I am generally off-line after 9pm and before 9am.

**Academic Misconduct:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and disciplinary sanctions by the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. If you are unfamiliar with university rules related to cheating and plagiarism, please consult:

http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html

**Disability Accommodations:** At the beginning of the semester, students with disabilities who need special accommodations should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Student Accessibility Center (SAC). To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations are
provided, students should contact the SAC Office. For more information, see: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf

**Religious Beliefs Accommodation:** On occasion, students may find it necessary to miss class in order to observe a religious holiday. In order to ensure reasonable accommodation, students should inform the instructor of the conflict prior to the holiday.
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm

**Military Duty:** Students called up for active military duty should contact the instructor for accommodation. For more information on the university’s policies, see: http://www3.uwm.edu/des/web/registration/militarycallup.cfm

**Discriminatory Conduct:** For information on definitions of discrimination, harassment, abuse of power, and the reporting requirements of discriminatory conduct, see: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S47.pdf
Course Schedule

I. Introduction

January 22: What is Public Policy?
Discussion Question: How do political scientists think about and study public policy?

Reaction paper #1 Due

- Sabatier and Weible. 2014. Theories of the Policy Process. Introduction

January 29: Studying Policy: Theories, Types and Typologies
Discussion Questions: What makes a good theory? Which one of these theories is a good theory of public policy? Why?

Reaction paper #2 Due

- Sabatier and Weible. 2014. Theories of the Policy Process. Part I; Chapters 1-6
February 5: Studying Policy: Epistemology and Methodology
**Start at 3pm

Discussion Questions: TBA

Reaction paper #3 Due


II. Constructing Public Policy

February 12: Problem Definition and Framing

Discussant: Jason

Discussion Questions: How do “problems” and “issues” get defined and framed? How do issues reach the policy agenda? What determines whether issues on the policy agenda get acted upon? How does the policy agenda change?

Mini-Empirical Paper #1 Due


February 19: Agenda Setting

Discussants: Jason and Will

Discussion Questions: How does the structure of Congress affect the policy-making process and policy outcomes? What are the motivations and incentives driving congressional behavior? In what ways does legislative organization affect policies and outcomes? To what extent and how do “voters” control congressional behavior and public policy?

Mini-Empirical Paper #2 Due

February 26: Interest Groups and Policy Making

Discussants: Taraleigh and Will

Discussion Questions: Why is it difficult for interests to organize into groups? Why and how do some do so anyway? What resources do interest groups bring to bear on the political process, and how does this vary by type of interest group? How do interest groups attempt to influence public policy? How successful are they?

Mini-Empirical Paper #3 Due


March 4: Public Opinion, Parties, and Citizen Participation

**Start at 3pm

Discussants: Taraleigh and Jason

Discussion Questions: What role does public opinion play in policy making? Is public policy responsive to public opinion or does it shape public opinion? How does policy feedback affect public opinion?

Mini-Empirical Paper #4 Due

- Jacobs, Lawrence, and Shapiro, Robert, Politicians Don’t Pander, chs. 1,2.
March 11: Implementation
Discussant: Jackie

Discussion Questions: To what extent is – and should - implementation be considered in the policy design process? How can policy makers insure that policies are carried out to meet their objectives? How can appointed officials control bureaucratic behavior at the point of contact?

Mini-Empirical Paper #5 Due


March 19: Spring Break!

III. Change
March 25: Path Dependence, Policy Feedback, and Change
Discussant: Benjamin

Mini-Empirical Paper #6 Due

April 1: Policy Innovation, Diffusion and Transfer
Discussants: Jackie and Taraleigh

Discussion Questions: How do governments innovate, and how do innovations diffuse across governments (state or national)? What determines whether policy innovations diffuse and the order in which they do so?

Mini-Empirical Paper #7 Due

- Sabatier & Weible, Chapter 7

IV. Public Policy Issues

April 8: Criminal Justice and Immigration
Discussants: Jackie and Ben

Discussion Questions:

Mini-Empirical Paper #8 Due

Readings TBD
April 15: Rights and Policy
Discussants: Will

Discussion Questions:
Mini-Empirical Paper #8 Due


April 22: Inequality and Representation
Discussant: Ben

Mini-Empirical Paper #9 Due

- Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (September 2014): 564-581

April 29: Paper Presentations

May 6: Final Exam