COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY
POLSCI 783
Term 2, Winter 2019

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Office: KTH-512
Office Hours: Thursday, 11:30-12:30

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Course Description

“Policy matters. In part at least, this is because policy involves social processes that are intertwined with people’s lives, often in very profound, sometimes oppressive, and even violent ways” (John Clarke, Dave Bainton, Noémie Lendvai and Paul Stubbs (eds.) Making Policy Move, 2015, p. 9)

“Focusing on policy encourages a focus on substance. After all, the main reason politics matters is because those who exercise political authority make decisions that have profound effects on their societies. To understand patterns in public policy is to understand a great deal about the content of politics, of what people are fighting for and why, and of why and how some are more successful than others.” (Paul Pierson, in Comparative Political Studies, 40:2 (2007), p. 156).

This course surveys a range of theoretical approaches to comparative public policy. It seeks to impart a basic understanding of approaches used in comparative public policy in terms of their basic concepts and the sorts of explanation they seek to provide. It also encourages course participants to situate the different approaches in relation to one another along a number of axes (e.g., assumptions, levels of analysis, ability to explain different phenomena).

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Describe and compare key approaches used in comparative public policy, particularly in terms of their basic concepts, their conception of what studying policy entails, and the sorts of explanation they seek to provide;
- Situate the different approaches in relation to one another along a number of axes (e.g., assumptions, levels of analysis, ability to explain different phenomena);
- Critically discussing the merits of the different approaches, and of situating their own research within this field of competing theories.

Required Materials and Texts

- Most of the assigned course readings are journal articles that are available online through the library catalogue. Those readings that are book chapters will be made available either through Avenue to Learn.

Class Format

(i) Reading Preparation: Any week’s required readings may include pieces devoted primarily to describing a particular approach to public policy, critiques of that approach, and illustrative applications of that approach, particularly when used in a comparative research design. For every reading before class,
students should try to answer the following three basic questions in one sentence each: a) what is the reading’s main research question; b) what is the answer to the research question; and c) what evidence is used to support that answer? Being able to identify the answers to each of these questions is the first step in preparing for class discussion.

(ii) **Class Preparation**: This course surveys widely-used approaches to studying public policy. While it is important to come to an understanding of their shortcomings and limitations, it is also important to understand how they work, and why verifiably intelligent scholars have found them a useful way of understanding variations in policy over time and space. Before coming to class, students should have jotted down some notes on the following:

a. What are the key concepts in play, and how are these concepts assembled in order to produce explanations?
b. What are the strengths and limitations of this sort of explanation?
c. How is this approach similar to or different from other explanations encountered in the course?

(iii) **Class Procedure**: The class will begin with the instructor creating a list of core concepts that students wish to have clarified. After that list is created, the student who has taken on the role of seminar leader for that week will draw at least two pictures/diagrams in an attempt to illustrate the arguments or approaches from the week’s readings. They will then lead the class through the collective discussion of the identified concepts. Upon completing that discussion, which addresses point (a) above, they are invited to lead the class in addressing points (b) and (c).

### Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Term Paper Précis – 10%, due by February 28
2. Term Paper – 35%, due March 29
3. Take Home Exam – 30%, distributed April 4, due April 8
4. Seminar Leadership – 10%
5. Participation – 15%

### Course Evaluation – Details

**Term Paper Précis (10%), due by February 28**

As a step to ensure the timely completion of the term paper, students should submit a 4 pages précis, including a preliminary bibliography by February 28. This précis should precisely and clearly set out what the paper seeks to explain. In other words, what is the pattern of variation over time and/or space that is at the heart of the paper? In addition, it should present some of the arguments in the existing literature that will be mobilized in the paper.
Term Paper (35%), due March 29
Students will provide a term paper that considers policy variation in time and/or space. The paper might try to explain why policies are the same/different across two polities, or why they change or stay the same across time.

This paper should normally be more a review of existing literature, rather than a fresh research paper. That is, the paper should engage existing accounts about how the outcome in question came to be. It should carefully describe the various claims of causality in the existing accounts, set out points of disagreement within them and evaluate the persuasiveness of the arguments in contention.

The final paper should be 16-20 pages, exclusive of bibliography. Students should choose a standard system of referencing and use it consistently.

Take-Home Exam (30%), distributed April 4, due April 8
The take-home exam will ask students to provide two 1000-1250 word essays. While four days are provided to complete the exam, the expectation is that students will spend about 4 hours in completing it.

Seminar Leadership (10%)
Starting with week 3, students will play a large leadership role in the seminar. The class will begin with the instructor creating a list of core concepts that students wish to have clarified. After that list is created, the student who has taken on the role of seminar leader for that week will draw at least two pictures/diagrams in an attempt to illustrate the arguments or approaches from the week’s readings. They will then lead the class through the collective discussion of the identified concepts. Upon completing that discussion, which addresses point (a) of class preparation (see p.4), they are invited to lead the class in addressing points (b) and (c).

Participation (15%)
A central feature of a seminar is that students learn from each other through discussion. As such, it is essential that all students do the readings in advance of the seminar and come prepared to participate actively in the class discussion.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Jan 10) Intro
  Topic: Introduction to the course

Readings: n/a

Additional Readings:

**Week 2 (Jan 17) Qs of Ontology, Epistemology & Method**

**Topic: Questions of Ontology, Epistemology and Method**

**Readings:**


**Additional Readings:**


Rueschemeyer, Dietrich. “Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge University Press, 2003).


**Week 3 (Jan 24) Power and Policy I**

**Topic: Power and Policy I: Pluralism Readings**

**Readings:**


And one of


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 4 (Jan 31) Power & Policy II**

**Topic: Power and Policy II: Power Resources and Neo-Marxism**

**Readings:**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 5 (Feb 7) Power & Policy III**

**Topic: Power and Policy III: Social Relations and Policy**

**Readings:**


And two of:


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 6 (Feb 14) Power & Policy IV**

**Topic: Power and Policy IV: Governmentality and Post-positivist Policy**

Readings:


And one of:


*Additional Readings:*


**Week 7 (Feb 21) Winter mid-term recess, NO CLASS**

**Week 8 (Feb 28) Institutions & Policy**

**Topic: Institutions and Policy I: Rational Choice**

Readings:


And two of:


Additional Readings:


Notes: February 28th is the last date to submit the term paper précis
Week 9 (Mar 7) Institutions & Policy II  
Topic: Institutions and Policy II: Historical Institutionalism

Readings:


And two of the following:


Additional Readings:


**Week 10 (Mar 14) Ideas, Cognition & Policy**

**Topic:** Ideas, Cognition and Policy

**Readings:**


**And two of:**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 11 (Mar 21) Applications I**

**Topic: Applications 1: Policy Change**

Readings:


And two of:


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 12 (Mar 28) Applications II**

**Topic: Applications II: Policy Transfer and Learning**

**Readings:**


And one of:


**Additional Readings:**


Construction, Coercion, Competition, or Learning?” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:449-472.


Notes: Term Paper due March 29th.

**Week 13 (Apr 4) Applications III**

**Topic: Applications III: Internationalization and Globalization**

Readings:


**OR**


Additional Readings:


Notes: Take-home exam distributed April 4, due April 8

**Course Policies**

**Submission of Assignments**
Papers should be submitted to the appropriate assignment folder on the course’s Avenue to Learn page by 11:59 of the due date.

**Grades**
Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

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<td>B-</td>
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**Late Assignments**
Late papers will be assessed a penalty of two percentage points per day.

**Absences, Missed Work, Illness**
Students should alert the instructor of any absences in advance of class. Students are expected to make efforts to catch up on missed work due to absences or illness.

**Avenue to Learn**
In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

**Turnitin.com**
In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted
work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy.

**University Policies**

**Academic Integrity Statement**
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**
Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.
Course Modification
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.