“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).

Course Objectives and Overview

This course surveys a range of approaches to comparative public policy. It has two objectives. First, it seeks to impart an understanding of approaches used in comparative public policy in terms of their basic concepts, their conception of what studying policy entails, and the sorts of explanation they seek to provide. Second, it aims to encourage 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). At the end of the course, participants should be capable of critically discussing the merits of the different approaches, and of situating their own research within this field of competing theories.

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. The course will proceed
through in-class discussion of each week’s readings. Students will be evaluated on their comprehension and ability to apply the approaches analyzed over the course of the semester, as well as on their contribution to class discussions.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Participation: 15%
Seminar Leadership: 10%
Term Paper Précis: 10% (by November 6)
Term Paper: 35% (November 27)
Take-home Exam: 30% (Distributed December 4, due December 8, 4pm)

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.

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?

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) above, they are invited to lead the class in addressing points (b) and (c).

Term Paper (35%) and Term Paper Précis (10%)
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 be far 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. Late papers will be assessed a penalty of 2 percentage points per day.

As a step to ensure the timely completion of the paper, students should submit a 4 pages précis, including a preliminary bibliography by November 6. 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.

*Take-Home Exam (30%)*
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.

**Course Materials:**

Most of the assigned course readings are journal articles that are available on-line through the library catalogue. Those readings that are book chapters will be made available either through Avenue to Learn, or through the filing cabinet located in KTH-502.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

**September 11: Week 1: Introduction**

*Additional reading:*

**September 18: Week 2: Questions of Ontology, Epistemology and Method**


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).


Taylor, Mark Zachary. 2007. “Bivariate & Multivariate Regressions: A Primer.” Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology, unpublished paper.
September 25: Week 3: Power and Policy I: Pluralism


Additional Reading:


October 2: Week 4: Power and Policy II: Power Resources and Neo-Marxism


Additional Readings:


October 9: No Class, Thanksgiving Day Holiday

October 16: Week 5: Power and Policy III: Social Relations and Policy


And two of:


Additional Reading:


October 23: Power and Policy IV: Governmentality and Post-positivist Policy


Chapter 2.


And one of:


or
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423916001189

Additional Reading:


October 30: Institutions and Policy I: Rational Choice


And one of:


Additional reading:


November 6: Institutions and Policy II: Historical Institutionalism


And two of the following:


Additional Readings:


November 13: Ideas, Cognition and Policy


*Additional Readings:*


**November 20: Applications 1: Policy Change**


*And one of:


*Additional reading:*


**November 27: Applications II: Policy Transfer and Learning**


**And one of:**


*Additional Readings:*


**December 4: Applications III: Internationalization and Globalization**


Additional Readings:


McMaster Statement on Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and 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 kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at: http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies
The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:
• Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
• Improper collaboration in group work.
• Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodations for 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. 2865 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

Course Modifications
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.

Statement on Electronic Resources
In this course we will be using AvenueToLearn. 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.

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.