MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
POLITICS OF PUBLIC POLICY
Political Science 4G06
Course Outline

Instructor
Greg Flynn
flynngl@mcmaster.ca
Office: KTH 543
Office Hours: Monday 10:30 – 12:00
Wednesday 12:00 – 1:30

Class Meetings
Tuesday 8:30 - 11:20
Building: Fall/Winter KTH 105

I. Introduction

The course will examine the factors that influence the making of public policy decisions in Canada and around the world. It will focus on complex public policy issues, otherwise known as “wicked problems”, as a means of exploring the tensions and difficulties underlying public policy decisions by governments around the world. The course will employ a neo-institutionalist theoretical approach to understanding public policy decisions as a function of both structures of governance as well as individual policy actor agency. It will also employ a comparative methodological approach and rely upon both Canadian and foreign case studies of wicked policy problems to more fully explore the competing factors influencing policy decisions and outcomes across the planet.

II. Objectives

The course is intended to achieve four main objectives. First, it aims to introduce students to neo-institutionalist theories of politics and policy-making in democratic states as means of understanding not only the constraints faced by political actors in systems of governance, but also how changes to those constraints will affect the ability of those actors to pursue their political and policy goals. Second, it will provide a greater understanding of the factors inherent in and the complexities associated with the policy making process for governments around the world. Third, it will introduce students to a number of different concepts, agendas and research projects associated with the study of public policy as grounds for pursuing further academic work. Fourth, it will enhance the written and oral communication skills of students as well as further developing student presentation and participation skills in a small group format.

III. Required Texts

There are no required texts for this course. All applicable readings listed on the reading list are available in electronic format through either the McMaster University Library or Google Scholar. In addition, other readings will also be made available through Avenue to Learn.
In order to fully comprehend and be prepared for class seminars and discussions, students should complete assigned readings prior to class.

IV. Class Schedule

TERM I

Week 1    September 05, 2017    Introduction and Organization

No Readings

Week 2    September 12, 2017    Wicked Problems and Comparative Methodologies
                                Discussion on Consideration of Articles


Week 3    September 19, 2017    Neo-Institutional Theories
                                Rational Choice Institutionalism


Week 4    September 26, 2017    RCI – Game Theory and Strategic Decision-Making
                                Discussion on Literature Reviews


**Week 5  October 03, 2017  RCI and Common Pool Resources**


**Week 6  October 10, 2017  Reading Week - No Class**

**Week 7  October 17, 2017  Historical Institutionalism**


**Week 8  October 24, 2017  HI – Bounded Rationality and History as a Method**

Literature Review Due


Week 9  October 31, 2017  HI – Punctuated Equilibrium


Week 10  November 07, 2017  Sociological Institutionalism


Week 11  November 14, 2017  SI – Advocacy Coalitions


Week 12  November 21, 2017  Discursive Institutionalism

Research Design and Abstract Due


**Week 13  November 28, 2017  DI – Policy Framing and Agenda Setting**


**Week 14  December 05, 2017 DI – Venue Shifting**


**TERM II**

**Week 1  January 09, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**

**Week 2  January 16, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**

**Week 3  January 23, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**

**Week 4  January 30, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**

**Week 5  February 06, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**

**Week 6  February 13, 2018  Student Policy Presentations**


Week 7  February 20, 2018  Reading Week - No Class

Week 8  February 27, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Primary Research Summary Due.

Week 9  March 06, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Week 10  March 13, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Week 11  March 20, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Week 12  March 27, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Take Home Exam due.

Week 13  April 03, 2018  Student Policy Presentations

Research Papers due.

V. Teaching Methods

The class is scheduled for one three-hour seminar session per week.

As a fourth year seminar, students are expected to play an active role in the teaching and learning process. One of the goals of the course is to prepare yourself for further study or to be able to work on your presentation skills if you decide to enter the workforce. The role of the instructor will be to help provide the broader context for the material being reviewed and to facilitate the class discussion when it falters. During the first semester, discussions will take place in small and larger groups and students are expected to participate in both discussions on a weekly basis. The instructor will contribute to the discussion by adding insights and posing or reframing questions. To have a thoughtful and intellectual discussion, students will be required to read the readings each week. All students must be prepared for and attentive in class.

As broad participation in the discussions is essential for deeper learning of course materials, the instructor reserves the right to use the Socratic method of calling on individual students without warning for contributions to the discussions.

In addition to formal class time, students are invited to meet with the instructor during regular office hours or by appointment to discuss course content or any other concerns.
VI. Evaluation

The following evaluations will determine the grade received by students.

1. Participation 20%
2. Literature Review 10%
3. Research Design and Abstract 10%
4. Seminar Lead 10%
5. Primary Research Summary 10%
6. Take Home exam 10%
7. Final Research Paper 30%

Written assignments should be provided to the instructor, either in class or during office hours. As a last resort, assignments can be submitted to the box outside of the political science office. Assignments will not be accepted by the Department of Political Science Office staff or that are slipped under the instructor’s or any other door. Papers received by e-mail or fax will not be accepted without the prior express permission of the instructor on each assignment.

In the event that students are unable to attend class or complete required assignments and have submitted the appropriate documentation to their faculty or received the approval of the instructor for the incomplete work, the instructor reserves the right re-allocate the missed grades to the final take-home examination. The completion of an MSAF form does not absolve a student from the requirement to complete an assignment. Should a student complete an MSAF form, they should speak with the instructor to make arrangements for a new due date or other arrangements at their first opportunity or upon their first return to class.

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.

Late Policy

Students should make all reasonable attempts to submit papers on the due date. In the event that a legitimate extension is required, students should speak to the instructor in advance of the due date to make the appropriate arrangements for such an extension. Requests for an extension submitted by e-mail will not be considered – you must speak to the instructor in person.

Examinations and/or assignments related to other courses do not constitute or qualify as exceptional circumstances or legitimate excuses.

Late papers may be penalized at the rate of three percentage points per working day for each day of delay, up to a maximum of one week, and solely at the discretion of the instructor. After one week, the instructor, at his discretion, may refuse to accept any late assignments in the absence
of proper medical certification justifying an inability to fulfill academic requirements on a prolonged basis. Papers accepted after one week of lateness will be deducted by one full letter grade (ie. A to B or B to C) per each week of lateness.

In addition to or instead of the assignment of late penalties, the instructor reserves the right to not provide any comments or feedback on papers submitted after the original deadline, whether an extension is granted or not.

**Academic Dishonesty**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour 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 behaviour 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, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

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 other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**VIII. Assignments**

**Expectations**

Students are expected to attend seminars, read the required readings, and complete all of their assignments to the best of their ability, on time, and honestly. Although attendance is not mandatory, it is expected that students attend every seminar, preferably on time. As you are now a senior undergraduate student, it is a courtesy to inform your instructor ahead of time if you cannot attend a seminar. You are being assessed for participation, and so you should take care to attend and participate in every seminar.

Students who cannot complete any of the course requirements on time due to medical illness or bereavement are expected to alert the instructor as early as possible. Students should be aware of the rules for acceptable practices in this regard. In most cases, documentation is required for specific exceptions to the course requirements. However, unless agreed to by the instructor,
illness does not excuse a student from the completion of the assignment at the earliest possible time after the original deadline.

1. **Participation**  20%

Given the course format, it is anticipated that students will actively participate in the discussions each week. Students should complete the assigned readings before class and be prepared to contribute meaningfully to in-class discussions. Students will be assessed on their ability to make original points, express their own thoughts on the topic, ask meaningful questions, engage other students’ comments and incorporate the readings into their own comments. In this regard, students should, at a minimum, attend class having attempted to answer the following questions in relation to each reading:

1. What is the author’s primary purpose in writing the article?
2. What are the main arguments being advanced by the author?
3. What methodology and evidence has been employed in support of the argument?
4. What are the shortcomings or logical contradictions in the arguments advanced, if any?
5. How does this argument relate to the specific topic and or the broader course?

The following acts of participation will demonstrate that you have actually read the material assigned each week:

1. Ask a question.
2. Introduce a topic.
3. Use examples to illustrate a point.
4. Agree with or debate what you read or hear in seminar.
5. Offer your own interpretation of the material.

If you are having trouble interpreting the material, it is a good idea to see the instructor for extra help early in the first semester. Telling the instructor at the end of the course that you either have difficulty interpreting the material and/or that you are too timid to speak is not an acceptable reason for failing to participate; your mark will reflect negatively as a result. You need to be proactive about the need to complete this task effectively in order to receive a good mark.

2. **Literature Review – October 24, 2017**  10%

Students will submit a literature review based on the relevant literature(s) associated with the topic they have chosen for their research paper. The purpose of a literature review is to demonstrate why there is a continuing need to explore the topic in question from a theoretical, methodological and/or empirical perspective. As such, it is anticipated that the paper will summarize much of the existing literature on the subject, explore its strengths and weaknesses and identify shortcomings in the completed work to date.

3. **Research Design and Abstract – November 21, 2017**  10%
Students will hand in a research design paper accompanied by a one paragraph abstract of their proposed paper.

The research design will build off of the literature review and highlight the research question to be explored, the relevance of it to the existing literature and/or current events, set out the methodology through which it will be explored and highlight the anticipated primary evidentiary sources along with a discussion of their relevance to the research.

The accompanying abstract should be between 150 and 200 words in length and address the following questions:

Why this question? There should be some reference to a gap or debate in the theoretical literature or some existing unexplored and under-explored phenomenon.

What is article about (ie. topic of the article)?

How are you going to research it (ie. what is your methodology)?

What do you expect to find and/or what conclusions do you expect to draw and how do the findings relate to your larger arguments.

The abstract does not have to be perfect or an expected final product for the paper. In fact, it will likely be revise a couple of times as the final paper is drafted.

4. Seminar Lead

Beginning in January 2018, students will be responsible for providing the course content for discussion on a weekly basis through seminars on specific policy problems or issues and/or specific policy fields. The list of policy areas to be explored will be determined solely by students through the various research projects that they undertake.

Given the number of students in the class, it is anticipated that students will be undertaking their seminar lead on the same day as one or two other of their colleagues. Student presentations will be grouped according to policy fields or policy issues under consideration. As such, students will have to have undertaken more than a cursory exploration of their research project by the end of the first semester. Students will also be provided with a date for their presentations that fits within the broader class schedule.

At least one week in advance of their presentation, students should provide the instructor with one or two readings to provide to the class. The readings should serve to provide the class with sufficient background and/or introductory materials so that other students in the class can knowledgeably participate in a discussion about the policy field. These readings will form the basis of the class discussion to occur during the student’s seminar lead.

The seminar lead should include a brief introduction into the policy issue/problem/field and the student’s research question. The seminar lead should also be prepared to identify key concepts.
or terms that require further elaboration, raise specific questions and issues for the week and relate the material to previous readings and class discussions. Students should not read or present a summary of the articles, but rather attempt to facilitate a thoughtful and active discussion of the topic with the class. In this regard, the discussions should focus on obtaining a better understanding of the core concepts and central arguments within the readings, comparing the arguments of different authors, and finally raising questions about the policy issue or policy area for a broader discussion. In this regard, the seminar lead will be graded on the basis of the readings chosen for class consideration (in terms of different approaches to understanding the topic as well as breadth and depth of coverage of the topic and level of scholarly difficulty) and the general discussion questions posed to the class.

It is expected that an individual student presentation and ensuing discussion will last about an hour. Students are welcome and encouraged to coordinate their presentations with their colleagues. However, students will be individually graded on their presentations, regardless of the degree of coordination.

5. Primary Research Summary – February 27, 2018 10%

Students will submit a two to three page summary of their primary research into their research topic. Building off of the research design submitted in the first semester, the summary should identify the source of the research, how it will be used as evidence in the final argument, the extent to which it supports the tentative hypothesis and what weaknesses, gaps or drawbacks exist.

6. Take Home Exam – March 27, 2018 10%

Students will submit a six to eight page paper based on a question posed by the instructor that will link both the various conceptual and theoretical issues raised in the first semester with the substantive policy issues/problems/fields raised in the second semester. In particular, students will be expected to provide a broad inclusion and application of the specific case studies raised in the student presentations to the theoretical and conceptual issues arising from the first semester.

7. Research Paper - April 03, 2018 30%

Students will write a major research paper of five thousand (5000) words or between twenty and twenty five pages (exclusive of bibliography) concerning a policy issue or problem. The focus of the paper should be on providing an explanation for a particular policy outcome and use at least one specific case study. Comparative papers are both acceptable and encouraged.

The paper should be analytical in nature and will be supported by empirical and academic research, including research of a primary nature. While there is no minimum number of sources that a student should include in their papers, the grade assigned will be dependent on the scope and depth of the research and how it is used in the paper. A good rule of thumb in all academic papers is at least one new academic source for each page of the paper. At the fourth year level, you can expect that this standard would be a bare minimum of acceptable theoretical research.
In addition to the research, the paper will also be graded on the basis of its understanding of at least one of the theoretical frameworks and/or conceptual issues raised in the first semester on the practices of politics and policy-making in democratic states, its comprehensiveness and comprehensibility in dealing with the policy issue/problem/field in question, and the contribution it makes to the understanding of policy making more generally.

The final completed paper is due on April 03, 2018.

**Statement on Electronic Resources**

In this course we will be using email and 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.

**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.

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.