

TO: GOVT 350 Students, Introduction to Public Policy (aka The Policy Process)

FR: Larry Evans

DT: June 1, 2020

RE: Course information and schedule

The purpose of this memo is to provide background information about GOVT 350, Introduction to Public Policy, for Summer 2020. GOVT 350 is a comprehensive introduction to domestic public policy making in the U.S. There are no prerequisites beyond an interest in public affairs, and my hope is that any student interested in politics and policy making will find the class enjoyable and informative. Our focus will be on developing precise generalizations about the processes through which domestic public policy is formulated in American government and the forces that shape the contents of policy outcomes. For purposes of illustration, this summer we will place particular emphasis on the COVID-19 crisis and the unfolding governmental response, but we also will explore a range of other issue areas, including environmental challenges, immigration, and the budget deficit, among others. Throughout, our main goal will be to develop the general conceptual tools necessary to understand the policy-making process.

Structure and Expectations

Our class is structured to reflect that interactions between participants are occurring online and over the summer months.

First, the foundation is a series of readings exposing students to the essential conceptual tools required to understand the process of domestic policy making. For the most part, each conceptual reading is paired with shorter application pieces to facilitate the application of what we are learning to COVID-19 and other pressing issues. There is no need to buy any books. In my view, none of the existing “textbooks” that relate to public policy are adequate for this course and students of the caliber that we have at William & Mary. As a result, I have pieced together the readings from diverse sources – chapters from books and edited volumes, journal articles, think tank studies, government reports, and media accounts. All of the readings are provided as links or PDF’s on the Blackboard site for GOVT 350.

Second, to complement and extend the readings, I have pre-recorded a set of lecture videos that cover core course concepts. The lecture videos are relatively short (about 20 minutes or less) and summarize the main concepts and raise questions that set up the written assignments for this class. With the exception of week 1, which also includes a short introductory video, there will be two video lectures per week. A schedule for the readings, videos, and other assignments is provided below. As much as feasible, you should try to have read the designated material and watched the relevant video assigned for a particular day by that day.

Third, we will conduct one “discussion” session per week via Zoom to reinforce and extend your understanding of the readings and lectures. These discussions sessions will occur on Thursdays (June 4, 11, 18, and 25, to be precise) with two options provided (one at 10:00am and another at 3:00pm) to account for the scheduling constraints of students. These sessions are required and will last about fifty minutes each. If, for some reason, a student cannot attend either discussion

session on a particular day, she/he should contact me to make alternative arrangements. As always, I will do what I can to accommodate the scheduling and other needs of participants.

Fourth, in addition to the weekly discussions with me, there will be two Zoom sessions with outside guest experts about key course topics. This summer, both guests are authors of items included on the reading list, and the plan is to deepen your understanding by directly discussing these readings with them. The first outside expert is an academic scholar, Jennifer Selin of the University of Missouri, who is doing interesting work on how federalism shapes our response to COVID-19. The session with Professor Selin will take place on Tuesday, June 9, with the time TBA. The second is a journalist, Cristina Marcos of *The Hill*, who is covering congressional action on the coronavirus crisis. Ms. Marcos will “zoom” with us on Monday, June 21, also at a time TBA. My expectation is that students will do their very best to attend the two Zoom sessions with guests. Since these sessions integrate outside speakers, however, only one time option can be provided.

Written Requirements and Grading

The grades for GOVT 350 will be based on a policy paper (40 percent), three short quizzes (15 percent each), and class participation (15 percent). All of the written assignments are “open book” and “open notes.” For the quizzes, however, and also for the actual writing of the paper, I expect that you will work individually. Beyond that stipulation, the more collaboration and outreach, the better.

The *policy paper* is the core assignment. Here, I expect students to select a domestic policy issue of interest to them and write a paper (10-15 pages, double spaced) that addresses key questions about the forces shaping policy making in that particular issue area. The key questions are drawn from the conceptual material at the heart of the class. In choosing a policy area, I ask that students stay away from the coronavirus response because of its prominence in the assigned readings and associated discussions.

Directions for preparing the paper are provided via a separate memo included under “assignments” on the Blackboard site. As part of the final product (but not counting toward the 10-15 page target), I also expect students to provide a short, 1-2 page executive summary of the contents. Between the two elements of the project, then, students should leave the course with first-rate writing samples (one short, and one of medium length) for use in applying for internships and jobs down the line.

Also as part of the paper preparation process, I will expect students to conduct two personal Zoom sessions individually with me, to be scheduled at their convenience. The first should occur during the second week of class (beginning June 8) and will concern topic selection and overall plans for the project. The second will take place during week 4 (beginning June 22) to discuss how the paper is proceeding and (ideally) review an outline.

Now for the *quizzes*. The purpose of the three quizzes is to ensure that students are keeping up and learning the material as the class proceeds. The quizzes will be due to me as an email

attachment by the end of the day on each of three Fridays: June 12, 19, and 26. Each will include a question or two about core course concepts from that week, and will ask students to relate their answers to the policy topic of their paper. Answers to each quiz will require about 2 pages (double spaced) and are also intended to feed into the policy paper assignment. In other words, much of the quiz responses likely will end up in your final paper.

Finally, class *participation* grades will be based on the quality of student involvement in the Zoom sessions, the extent to which you are prepared for the individual consultations with me about the paper, and to a lesser extent, the quality of any contributions you might make to discussion threads on the Blackboard site. Generally, I treat the participation component of a course as a residual category when calculating final grades. I value student participation and want to encourage it, but also recognize that some students are hesitant to take the lead. So, I calculate grades based on the other components (in this case, the policy paper and quiz responses), and then look at participation and weigh whether a students' contributions merit raising the grade (or, in very rare occasions, perhaps lowering it a tad). The bottom line is that I will be especially flexible in gauging participation during an online summer course, and the core assignments are the paper and the quizzes that feed into it.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Mon, 6/1 Watch Video 1: *Introduction*

Optional Zoom organizational meeting 10:00am or 3:00pm

A. *Problems and Agendas*

Tue, 6/2. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, Ch. 1

Ed Yong, "Why the Coronavirus Is So Confusing," *The Atlantic*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/pandemic-confusing-uncertainty/610819/>

Andre M Perry and Tawanna Black, "George Floyd's death demonstrates the policy violence that devalues Black lives," *Brookings Institution*, May 28, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/05/28/george-floyds-death-demonstrates-the-policy-violence-that-devalues-black-lives/?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=brookingsrss/topfeeds/latestfrombrookings

Watch Video 2: *Defining the Problem*

Wed, 6/3. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, Ch. 2

Kayla Epstein and Sonam Sheth, “A timeline of how years of missteps and budget cuts undermined the Trump administration's preparedness for COVID-19,” *Business Insider*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-timeline-trump-failures-undercut-pandemic-response-2020-4>

Watch Video 3: *Agenda Setting*

Thu, 6/4. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, Ch. 5

Zoom discussion session 1 10:00am or 3:00pm

B. Federalism

Mon, 6/8. Paul Peterson, *The Price of Federalism*, Chapters 2-3

Watch Video 4: *Why Federalism Matters*

Tue, 6/9. Jennifer Selin, “Trump versus the states: What federalism means for the coronavirus response,” *THECONVERSATION*, <https://theconversation.com/trump-versus-the-states-what-federalism-means-for-the-coronavirus-response-136361>.

Ed Yong, “America’s Patchwork Pandemic is Fraying Even Further,” *The Atlantic*, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/patchwork-pandemic-states-reopening-inequalities/611866/>

Zoom Guest Speaker, time TBA: Jennifer Selin, Dept. of Political Science, University of Missouri

C. Public Opinion and Policy

Wed, 6/10. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro, “The Politicization of Public Opinion” (in *The Social Divide*, Wier)

Watch Video 5: *Public Opinion as Process*

Thu, 6/11. *Pew Research Center* reports on public attitudes about COVID-19. <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/>. Read (a) 5/20 “Americans Who Rely Most on White House for COVID-19 News More Likely to Downplay the Pandemic;” (b) 5/12 “Most Americans Say Federal Government Has Primary Responsibility for COVID-19 Testing;” and (c) any two

of the other Pew studies reporting the results of opinion surveys about the coronavirus disease.

Zoom discussion session 2 10:00am or 3:00pm

Friday, 6/12. **QUIZ 1 DUE**

D. Organized Advocacy

Mon, 6/15. Allan Cigler and Burdett Loomis, “The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics” (Interest *Group Politics*, 7th ed., Cigler and Loomis)

Lara Putnam, Erica Chenoweth, and Jeremy Pressman, “The Floyd protests are the broadest in U.S. history – and are spreading to white, small-town America,” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/06/floyd-protests-are-broadest-us-history-are-spreading-white-small-town-america/>

Watch Video 6: *Why Organization Matters ... Or Doesn't*

Tue, 6/16. Theda Skocpol, “Naming the Problem: What it will Take to Counter Extremism and Engage Americans in the Fight Against Global Warming,” prepared for the Symposium on America’s Fight Against Global Warming, Harvard University, February 14, 2014.

E. Parties and Policy

Wed, 6/17. Matt Grossman and David A. Hopkins, “Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Party Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2015

Zach Beauchamp, “The coronavirus killed American exceptionalism” Vox, May 6, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/5/6/21222433/coronavirus-covid-19-trump-american-exceptionalism>

Watch Video 7: *Parties in the Policymaking Process*

Thu, 6/18. Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States,” *Politics and Society*, 2010

Zoom discussion session 3 10:00am or 3:00pm

Fri, 6/19 **QUIZ 2 DUE**

F. Congress and Policy

Mon, 6/22. C. Lawrence Evans and Wendy J. Schiller, “*The U.S. Senate and the Meaning of Dysfunction*,” (*Congress Reconsidered*, 12th ed., Dodd, Oppenheimer, and Evans)

Cristina Marcos, “Democrats frustrated in coronavirus oversight efforts,” *The Hill*, May 5, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/496246-democrats-frustrated-in-coronavirus-oversight-efforts-while-trump-blasts-house>

Zoom Guest Speaker, time TBA, Cristina Marcos, congressional reporter for *The Hill*

Tue, 6/23. Nolan McCarty, “Polarization, Dysfunction, and Constitutional Change,” *Indiana Law Review*, 2016.

Watch Video 8: *The Impact of Congress*

G. Presidents as Policy Makers

Wed, 6/24. David W. Brady and Craig Volden, *Revolving Gridlock*, 2nd ed. (Ch. 2)

Watch Video 9: *Presidents in the Policymaking Process*

Thu, 6/25. Edward Luce, “Inside Trump’s Coronavirus meltdown,” *Financial Times*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/97dc7de6-940b-11ea-abcd-371e24b679ed>

Zoom discussion session 4 10:00am or 3:00pm

Fri, 6/26. **QUIZ 3 DUE**

H. The Bureaucracy

Mon, 6/29. Terry Moe, “The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure” (in *Can the Government Govern?*, Chubb and Peterson)

Watch Video 10: *Is There a Deep State?*

Tue, 6/30. Lindsay Maizland, “U.S. Coronavirus Response: Who’s in Charge of What?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/us-trump-coronavirus-response-covid19-agencies-in-charge>

Yasmeen Abutaleb et al, “The U.S. was beset by denial and dysfunction as the coronavirus raged,” *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2020,
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true>

I. The Courts

Wed, 7/1. Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope*, Chapters 1-2

Watch Video 11: *Courts as Policymakers*

Thu, 7/2. Jill Lepore, “Battleground America: One Nation Under the Gun,” *The New Yorker*, April 23, 2012

Justice Antonin Scalia, “Opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court in *D.C. v. Heller*,” 2008

Zoom discussion session 5 10:00am or 3:00pm

Fri, 7/3. **POLICY PAPERS DUE**