

POLI 405: Capstone: Information and Policy-making

College of Charleston

Spring 2017

Time: TR 1:40 p.m. – 2:55 p.m.

Place: Maybank, 207

Instructor: Professor Matthew Nowlin

Email: nowlinmc@cofc.edu

Office Location: Political Science building, 114 Wentworth, #102

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1–3 p.m. and by appointment

Course Description

Catalog course description

*Our responsibility is one of decision—for to govern is to choose. -
John F. Kennedy*

As stated by President Kennedy, making choices is at the heart of governing. How do policymakers make choices regarding public policy? From where do policymakers draw information? How do policymaking institutions help or hinder the processing of information for policy making? These are the questions that we will examine this semester.

The capstone seminar in Political Science is designed to be a culminating experience. Therefore, you will be expected to draw upon the ideas and skills you have gained thus far to explore a new topic within the field of Political Science. The major focus of the course is on the development of an original research project centered around questions of information use in the policymaking process. The readings in this course are designed to provide you the theoretical and conceptual background needed to develop a project in this area.

This course will be structured as a seminar, meaning that classes will be *discussion* based rather than lecture based. This requires you to come to class prepared by having done the assigned readings prior to class. In addition, you should be prepared to participate in class by asking questions and making informed comments that add to the class discussion. *Cell-phones and laptops must be put away during class discussions.*

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

The goals for this course are to:

- Develop an understanding of the major policymaking institutions including the Congress, the President, Executive Agencies, the Courts, and how they use information.

- Develop an understanding of the process of policymaking in the U.S. and the utilization of information within that process.
- Develop an understanding of the latest research in Political Science and public policy on information use in the policymaking process.
- Develop a research project that draws on the skills you have developed in your Political Science courses.
- Develop in-depth knowledge about a particular policy topic or issue.
- Practice effective oral presentations of independent research.

Required Materials

- Esterling, Kevin M. 2004. *The Political Economy of Expertise: Information and Efficiency in American National Politics*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 2015. *The Politics of Information: Problem Definition and the Course of Public Policy in America*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.
 - Interview with Frank Baumgartner (Podcast)
- Curry, James M. 2015. *Legislating in the Dark: Information and Power in the House of Representatives*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.
 - Interview with James Curry (Podcast)
- **Website:** Comparative Agendas Project.

Course Requirements and Grading

Performance in this course will be based on course participation, a research project, and a professional portfolio. As part of your participation grade, you will be assigned several discussion papers that summarize the readings for that week.

There will be no opportunities for extra credit

Assignments

Participation (300 points):

Late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances

- *Discussion papers* (200 points): As part of your participation grade you are required to do several discussion papers over the readings assigned for each week. These are *short* papers that include a 1 to 2

paragraph summary of the major concepts in the readings and one discussion question for each reading. There will be *8 eight assigned discussion papers, worth 25 points* each and they are due before class on Tuesdays in the dropbox on **OAKS**.

- *Attendance and in-class participation* (100 points): This is a discussion based course and to make it work you need to have read assigned material and be prepared to participate in course discussions. Note that the professor has final say over what does or does not count as adequate participation.

Research project (600 points):

Over the course of the semester, you will undertake an independent research project that deals with the use of information in the policy-making process. The research project should deal with a specific policy issue or area of your choice (e.g., climate change, poverty). I advise you to make use of the **Comparative Agendas Project** website and the classification of policy topics and sub-topics when deciding on your policy area. The following pieces of the research project will be due throughout the semester and then combined into the final paper and presentation.

| Component | Due Date | Possible Points |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Topic (Policy area) Selection and Bibliography | Feb 14th | 100 |
| Research Design | March 14th | 50 points |
| Data Collection and Analysis | April 13th | 150 points |
| Presentation | April 18th–27th | 50 points |
| Final Paper | April 27th | 250 points |

Professional Portfolio (100 points):

This assignment has two parts a resume / CV and a summary of skills gained throughout your college experience OR an application letter for graduate/law school. These will be accepted on an ongoing basis throughout the semester up *until April 27th*.

Grades

There are **1000** possible points for this course. Grades will be allocated based on your earned points and calculated as a percentage of **1000**. A: 94 to 100%; A-: 90 to 93%; B+: 87 to 89%; B: 83 to 86%; B-: 80 to 82%; C+: 77 to 79%; C: 73 to 76%; C-: 70 to 72%; D+: 67 to 69%; D: 63 to 67%; D-: 60 to 62%; F: 59% and below.

Course Schedule

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

All scheduling changes will be announced in class

Readings and Assignment Due Dates

Some of the readings listed below will be on the **OAKS** course page under Content -> Readings. *For the journal articles listed below YOU are responsible for obtaining a copy. You can make use of the [library website](#) OR [Google Scholar](#). Note: you will need to be on campus or signed in through the library to obtain a pdf.*

All readings should be completed prior to Tuesday class. I recommend reading them in the order listed.

Part I. Foundations

JAN 12TH: INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OVERVIEW

JAN 17TH–19TH: EXPERTISE AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

- *Readings:*
 - Can epistocracy, or knowledge-based voting, fix democracy?
 - Kuklinski, James H. 2007. “The Limits of Facts in Citizen Decision-Making” *Extensions*. on **OAKS**
 - **Esterling Chaps 1 and 2**
- **Discussion Paper 1 due on Jan 17th**

JAN 24TH–26TH: THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

- *Readings:*
 - Dye, Thomas R. 2012. “Models of Politics” and “The Policymaking Process: Decision-Making Activities” from *Understanding Public Policy* on **OAKS**
 - Gormley, William T. 2007. “Public Policy Analysis: Ideas and Impacts” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10(1): 297–313 on **OAKS**
- **Discussion Paper 2 due on Jan 24th**

JAN 31ST–FEB 2ND: POLICY SUBSYSTEMS AND PUNCTUATIONS

- *Readings:*
 - Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 1991. “Agenda Dynamics and Policy Subsystems.” *The Journal of Politics* 53(4): 1044–74.
 - Worsham, Jeffrey. 2006. “Up in Smoke: Mapping Subsystem Dynamics in Tobacco Policy.” *Policy Studies Journal* 34(3): 437–52.
 - Nowlin, Matthew C. 2016. “Policy Change, Policy Feedback, and Interest Mobilization: The Politics of Nuclear Waste Management.” *Review of Policy Research* 33(1): 51–70.
- **Discussion Paper 3 due on Jan 31st**

Part II. Information and Attention in the Policy Process

FEB 7TH–9TH: INFORMATION PROCESSING

- *Readings:*
 - Workman, Samuel, Bryan D. Jones, and Ashley E. Jochim. 2009. “Information Processing and Policy Dynamics.” *Policy Studies Journal* 37(1): 75–92.
 - Mortensen, Peter B. 2009. “Political Attention and Public Spending in the United States.” *Policy Studies Journal* 37(3): 435–55.
 - **Baumgartner and Jones Chapter 1**
- **Discussion Paper 4 due on Feb 7th**

FEB 14TH–16TH: ORGANIZATIONS AND INFORMATION PROCESSING

- *Readings:*
 - **Baumgartner and Jones Chapters 2,3,4**
- **Topic (Policy area) Selection and Bibliography due Feb 14th**
- **Moore Conference Applications due on Feb 17th.** Here is the [form](#)

FEB 21ST–23RD: INTEREST GROUPS AND INFORMATION

- *Readings:*
 - **Esterling Chapters 3 and 4**
 - Hall, Richard L., and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review* 100(01): 69–84.
- **Discussion Paper 5 due on Feb 21st**

FEB 28TH–MAR 2ND: BUREAUCRACY AND INFORMATION

- *Readings:*
 - Workman, Samuel, and JoBeth S. Shafran. 2015. “Communications Frameworks and the Supply of Information in Policy Subsystems.” In *Policy Paradigms in Theory and Practice*, edited by John Hogan and Michael Howlett, 239–67. Studies in the Political Economy of Public Policy. Palgrave Macmillan UK. on [OAKS](#)

- Workman, Samuel, JoBeth Shafran, and Tracey Bark. 2017. “Problem Definition and Information Provision by Federal Bureaucrats.” *Cognitive Systems Research* Forthcoming. on [OAKS](#)

- **Discussion Paper 6 due on Feb 28th**

MAR 6TH–9TH: SPRING BREAK

Part III. Information and Congress

MAR 14TH–16TH: THE STRUCTURE OF CONGRESS

- *Readings:*
 - Gilligan, Thomas W., and Keith Krehbiel. 1990. “Organization of Informative Committees by a Rational Legislature.” *American Journal of Political Science* 34(2): 531–64.
 - Binder, Sarah A. 2015. “The Dysfunctional Congress.” *Annual Review of Political Science* on [OAKS](#)
 - **Baumgartner and Jones Chapter 5**
- **Research Design due March 14th**

MAR 21ST–23RD: CONGRESS AND ISSUE-EXPANSION

- *Readings:*
 - **Baumgartner and Jones Chapters 6 and 7**
- **Discussion Paper 7 due on Mar 21st**

MAR 28TH–30TH: INFORMING CONGRESS: PARTIES

- *Readings:*
 - **Curry Chapters 1,2,3**
- **Discussion Paper 8 due on Mar 28th**
- **Moore Conference Mar 31st**

APRIL 4TH–6TH: INFORMING CONGRESS: PARTIES

- *Readings:*
 - **Curry Chapters 4 and 5**
- **No class April 6th**

APRIL 11TH–13TH: WRAPPING UP

- *Readings:*
 - Baumgartner and Jones Chapters 9 and 10
 - Curry Chapter 8
- **Data Collection and Analysis due April 13th**

APRIL 18TH–20TH: PRESENTATIONS

- TBD

APRIL 25TH–27TH: PRESENTATIONS

- TBD
- **Final Paper due April 27th**
- **Professional Portfolio due April 27th**

*Important Information**Center for Student Learning*

I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL [website](#) or call (843) 953-5635.

Students with Disabilities

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply at the [Center for Disability Services](#) located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me at least one week before any accommodation is needed.

Cheating or Plagiarism

A grade of zero will be given to anyone cheating on any exam, homework assignment or committing plagiarism in a paper. As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own ideas, the words, writings, music, graphs/charts, etc that were created by another. In accordance with this definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you have the permission of that person. It does not matter from where the material is borrowed—a book, article, material off the web, another student's paper—all constitute plagiarism unless the source of the work is fully identified and credited. Plagiarism is cheating and a violation of academic and personal integrity and will not be tolerated. It carries extremely serious consequences. To avoid plagiarism it is necessary when using a phrase, a distinctive idea, concept or sentence from another source to reference that source in your text, a footnote, or end-note. Please contact me if you need assistance in citing a source.

Religious Holiday Policy

It is the policy of the College to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required class work

that may fall on religious holidays. Please see me immediately if you will need to miss class any time during this semester.