

Energy and Environmental Policy (POLS: 4392)
Spring 2026
Mondays and Wednesdays 1:00 - 2:20 PM in University Hall, 02

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Course Description

This course will familiarize students with the development of energy and environmental policy and policymaking in the United States. Specific topics include how beliefs and values inform views on energy and environmental issues, the risks and benefits associated with various energy sources, and the role of markets and political institutions in energy and environmental decision-making.

This course is an advanced undergraduate course. We will examine the central dimensions of energy and environmental politics and policy in the United States, using four analytical frameworks: 1) Environmental Rights, 2) Sustainable Development, 3) Utilitarianism and Cost-Benefit Analysis, and 4) Environmental Justice.

The first part of the course will provide an introduction to energy and environmental politics and policymaking in the US. In the first few weeks of the semester, we will discuss the four analytical frameworks, environmental values and ethics, and provide a brief overview of the development of energy and environmental policy in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Then, over the next five weeks, up to the midterm, we will discuss the significant components of energy and environmental policymaking, including the process, institutions, policy actors, federal agencies, and the role of federalism.

The second part of the course will examine energy sources and markets, as well as environmental policy instruments, including regulation, market-based approaches, and subsidies, among others. Next, we will discuss several environmental issues and policies aimed at addressing them, including air pollution, water pollution, ecosystem management, and climate change. Finally, we will conclude with a brief discussion of environmental policy analysis and evaluation.

Prerequisites

POLS 2311 and POLS 2312

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand the actors and institutions involved in the energy and environmental policymaking process
2. Explain the key policy debates within energy and environmental issues

3. Develop an understanding of the development and evolution of energy and environmental policy and politics in the U.S.
4. Develop in-depth knowledge about several topics within the broad field of energy and environmental policy

Course Information

[Canvas](#) is the course management software we will use for this class. It will be used to provide the syllabus, class materials, and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. Check [Canvas](#) regularly.

Readings and Required Texts

The following book is **required**. It will be made available on [Canvas](#) as a pdf. Additional readings will be listed on the schedule below and provided in [Canvas](#).

- Rinfret, Sara R., and Michelle C. Pautz. 2023. *US Environmental Policy in Action*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Technology Policy

You are encouraged to bring a laptop or tablet to class; however, during class lectures and discussions, please put away your computer, phone, and tablet to ensure a focused learning environment. Tablets are allowed if you are taking notes with an Apple Pencil, stylus, or similar device. *You should take notes by hand, using a pen and paper. [You learn better that way](#).* Also see [Why You Should Stop Bringing Your Laptop to Class](#). I recommend taking notes using the [Cornell Method](#). I will consider exceptions if you send me an email explaining why you need a laptop to take notes in class.

Please keep cell phones stored and remove earphones or AirPods from your ears during class.

Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken for each class session using aPlus+ attendance in [Canvas](#). *Each class session is worth four points*. Attendance will be taken at different times during class, and you must be present when attendance is taken to receive the points.

Late Work Policy

Note: this is only applicable for the policy memo assignments. Late work is accepted; however, it will be penalized 10% each day (within 24 hours) it is late, up to a maximum of 3 days. After 3 days, the assignment will not be accepted. For example, if an assignment is due on Wednesday at 2:00 PM, it is considered late as of 2:01 PM, and you will incur a 10% penalty. After Thursday at 2:01 PM, you will incur an additional 10% penalty; after Friday at 2:01 PM, another 10% penalty will be applied; and no work will be accepted after Saturday at 2:00 PM. *No late work will be accepted 72 hours after the assignment due date and time.*

AI Use

In this course, the focus is on developing independent critical thinking and mastering subject-specific content. To ensure that all submitted work accurately reflects personal understanding and original thought, **the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools in completing assignments or assessments is strictly prohibited.**

This policy supports our commitment to academic integrity and the direct measurement of each student's learning against the course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Any work found to be generated by AI will be subject to academic review.

Course Requirements and Grading

Performance in this course will be evaluated based on in-class quizzes, a mid-term exam, a final exam, and two policy memos. Points will be distributed as follows:

Assignment	Possible Points
Quizzes (10 at 20 points each)	200 (total)
Mid-Term Exam	100
Final Exam	100
Memo 1	100
Memo 2	100
Attendance	100
Total	700

Letter grades will be based on the earned percentage of possible points. The grading scale:

Earned %	Letter Grade
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

Students are expected to track their performance throughout the semester, which [Canvas](#) facilitates, and seek guidance from available sources, including the instructor, if their performance drops below satisfactory levels. Refer to the Student Support Services section below.

Assignments

Due dates for the exams and policy memos are listed in the following *Course Schedule* and will also be posted on [Canvas](#). **Both the mid-term and final exams will be taken in class.**

Quizzes: There will be 10 multiple-choice quizzes given on [Canvas](#). Each quiz will consist of 4 to 5 questions, each worth 4 to 5 points for a total of 20 points. *The quizzes are timed, and you will have five minutes to complete each quiz.* The quizzes will be available on Monday mornings, and they must be completed by Friday at 11:59 PM each week they are due. *Quizzes cannot be made up.* The quiz questions will cover material from the readings and/or class discussion.

Mid-term: The mid-term exam will be given on **Wednesday, March 4, and will be taken in class during the regular class period.** All material from the readings, lectures, and in-class

discussions is fair game for the midterm exam. The exam will be a short-answer format, and your answers will be handwritten in a blue book or on notebook paper.

Final Exam: **The final exam period is Friday, May 1, from 11:00 AM to 1:30 PM.** The final will NOT be comprehensive and all material from the readings, lectures, and in-class discussions *since the midterm* is fair game. The exam will consist of short-answer and short-essay questions, and your answers will be handwritten in a blue book or on notebook paper.

Make-up exams are only allowed in cases of emergencies. Please note that travel plans are not considered emergencies.

Policy Memos: A policy memo provides a specific decision-maker with an overview of an energy or environmental issue and possible policies to address it. Over the semester, you will write **two decision memos about two different problems**. The first memo is due *before the midterm*, and the second memo is due *before the final*. Further instructions are provided on [Canvas](#).

University Policies

Institutional Policies

UTA students should review the [University Catalog](#) and the [Syllabus Institutional Policies](#) page for institutional policies and contact the specific office with any questions. The institutional information includes the following policies, among others:

- Drop Policy
- Disability Accommodations
- Academic Integrity
- Electronic Communication

UTA Honor Code

UTA students are expected to adhere to and observe standards of conduct compatible with the University's functions as an educational institution and live by the [University of Texas at Arlington's Honor Code](#). It is the policy of The University of Texas at Arlington to uphold and support standards of personal honesty and integrity for all students consistent with the goals of a community of scholars and students seeking knowledge and responsibility.

Student Support Services

The [Student Services page](#) provides links to many resources available to UTA students, including:

- Academic Success
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Health Services
- Students with Disabilities
- Veteran Services

Students are also encouraged to check out [Career Center](#) resources to enhance their career readiness, find student employment, search for internships, and more. We encourage [Major](#)

[Exploration](#) and the use of [Experiential Major Maps](#) to keep students on track for graduation. Refer to the [Graduation Help Desk](#) for more details.

Important Dates

- **Mon., Jan 19:** MLK day; no class
- **Wed., Feb 18:** Memo 1 due
- **Wed., March 4:** Mid-term exam
- **Fri., April 3:** Last day to drop (by 4:00 PM)
- **Wed., April 22:** Memo 2 due
- **Fri., May 1:** Final exam

Course Schedule

Dates	Topic	Assignments Due
Week 1: Jan 12-14	Course Introduction and Overview	
Week 2: Jan 21	Environmental Ethics	
Week 3: Jan 26-28	Evolution of Energy and Environmental Policy in the United States	Quiz 1
Week 4: Feb 2-4	Policymaking: Process	Quiz 2
Week 5: Feb 9-11	Policymaking: Institutions and Official Actors	Quiz 3
Week 6: Feb 16-18	Policymaking: Agencies and Rulemaking	Memo 1 due Feb 18
Week 7: Feb 23-25	Policymaking: Unofficial Actors	Quiz 4
Week 8: March 2-4	Policymaking: Federalism	Midterm Exam, March 4
Week 9: March 9-11	SPRING BREAK	
Week 10: March 16-18	Energy Sources and Markets	Quiz 5
Week 11: March 23-28	Environmental Policy Instruments	Quiz 6
Week 12: March 30 - April 1	Air Pollution	Quiz 7
Week 13: April 6-8	Water Pollution	Quiz 8
Week 14: April 13-15	Ecosystem Management	Quiz 9
Week 15: April 20-22	Climate Change	Quiz 10; Memo 2 due April 22
Week 16: April 27	Policy Analysis and Evaluation	
FINAL EXAM: May 1	11:00 AM - 1:30 PM	

Readings

- **RP:** Rinfret, Sara R., and Michelle C. Pautz. 2019. *US Environmental Policy in Action*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 1: Course Introduction and Overview

- *Readings:*
 - *Four Analytical Frameworks*, from Salzman, James, and Barton H. Thompson Jr. 2019. *Environmental Law and Policy*. 5th ed. St. Paul, MN: Foundation Press.

Week 2: Environmental Ethics

- *Readings:*
 - Chapter 2, *Ethical Theory and the Environment*, from Desjardins, Joseph R. 2005. *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*. 4th ed. Wadsworth, Paperback.

Week 3: Evolution of Energy and Environmental Policy in the United States

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 2, *The Development and Context of American Environmental Policy*
 - Chapter 4, *The Long Search for Sustainable Energy Policy*, from Geri, Laurance R., and David E. McNabb. 2017. *Energy Policy in the U.S.: Politics, Challenges, and Prospects for Change*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Week 4: Energy and Environmental Policymaking: Process

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 3, *The Messy Process of Making Environmental Policy*
 - Chapter 3, *The Art and Science of Crafting Public Policy*, from Geri, Laurance R., and David E. McNabb. 2017. *Energy Policy in the U.S.: Politics, Challenges, and Prospects for Change*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Week 5: Energy and Environmental Policymaking: Institutions and Official Actors

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 4, *Official Actors in the Policy Process*
 - Jeong, Gyung-Ho, and William Lowry. 2021. "The Polarisation of Energy Policy in the US Congress." *Journal of Public Policy* 41(1): 17–41.

Week 6: Energy and Environmental Policymaking: Agencies and Rulemaking

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 6, *Translating Vague Statutes into Rules and Regulations*
 - [From watts to warheads: Secretary of energy oversees big science research and the US nuclear arsenal](#)

Week 7: Energy and Environmental Policymaking: Unofficial Actors

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 5, *Unofficial Actors in the Policy Process*
 - Hess, David J. 2019. "Cooler Coalitions for a Warmer Planet: A Review of Political Strategies for Accelerating Energy Transitions." *Energy Research & Social Science* 57: 101246.

Week 8: Energy and Environmental Policymaking: Federalism

- *Readings:*
 - Fiorino, Daniel, and Carley A. Weted. 2020. "Environmental Federalism in a Polarized Era." *State and Local Government Review* 52(2): 138–51.

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Energy Sources and Markets

- *Readings*
 - Yacobucci, Brent D., Kelsi Bracmort, Phillip Brown, Corrie E. Clark, Mark Holt, Ashley J. Lawson, Martin C. Offutt, et al. 2024. *U.S. Energy Supply and Use: Background and Policy Primer*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

Week 11: Environmental Policy Instruments

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 7, *Implementing Environmental Policy and Regulations: Where the Rubber Meets the Road*
 - Chapter 8, *Principles of Market-Based Environmental Policy*, from Keohane, Nathaniel O., and Sheila M. Olmstead. 2016. *Markets and the Environment*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Week 12: Air Pollution

- *Readings:*
 - [EPA: Summary of the Clean Air Act](#)
 - Schmalensee, Richard, and Robert N. Stavins. 2019. “Policy Evolution under the Clean Air Act.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33(4): 27–50.
 - Liu, Jiawen, Lara P. Clark, Matthew J. Bechle, Anjum Hajat, Sun-Young Kim, Allen L. Robinson, Lianne Sheppard, Adam A. Szpiro, and Julian D. Marshall. 2021. “Disparities in Air Pollution Exposure in the United States by Race/Ethnicity and Income, 1990–2010.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 129(12).

Week 13: Water Pollution

- *Readings:*
 - [EPA: Summary of the Clean Water Act](#)
 - Chapter 6, *Water Governance*, from Anderies, John M., and Marco A. Janssen. 2016. *Sustaining the Commons*. 2nd ed. Tempe, AZ: Center for Behavior, Institutions, and the Environment.
 - Chapter 7, *Water Pollution*, from Salzman, James, and Barton H. Thompson Jr. 2019. *Environmental Law and Policy*. 5th ed. St. Paul, MN: Foundation Press.
 - Switzer, David, and Manuel P. Teodoro. 2018. “Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Justice in Safe Drinking Water Compliance.” *Social Science Quarterly* 99(2): 524–35.

Week 14: Ecosystem Management

- *Readings*
 - Chapter 7, *Ecosystem Management*, from Rowell, Arden, and Josephine van Zeben. 2021. *A Guide to U.S. Environmental Law*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

- **RP:** Chapter 9, *The Intersection of Natural Resource and Energy Policy*

Week 15: Climate Change

- *Readings:*
 - Mildenberger, Matto. 2021. “The Development of Climate Institutions in the United States.” *Environmental Politics* 30(sup1): 71–92.
 - Hausfather, Zeke. 2025. “An Assessment of Current Policy Scenarios Over the 21st Century and the Reduced Plausibility of High-Emissions Pathways.” *Dialogues on Climate Change* 2(1): 26–32.

Week 16: Environmental Policy Analysis and Evaluation

- *Readings:*
 - **RP:** Chapter 8, *Is It Working? Evaluating Environmental Policy*