Instructor Information

- Kristina Arakelyan
- Email: kristina.arakelyan@nyu.edu
- Office Hours: by appointment

Course Information

- Class Meeting Times: Thursdays, 9/5 – 12/15, 6:20 – 8:50 pm
- Class Location: GCASL (238 Thompson Street), Room 269

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the political institutions and the processes through which public policy is made and implemented in the United States. We begin by exploring the Constitutional foundations of public policy in the U.S. and proceed to examine the enduring and changing roles of political institutions—predominantly at the federal but also state and municipal levels—in shaping policy; and, we analyze the structural, political, and social factors supporting and hindering those political institutions. We also look at how citizens, residents, interests groups, lobbyists, and the media influence both public policy and political institutions, discussing social and economic power dynamics—both emerging and entrenched. In the process, we analyze voting, welfare, health, education, labor, fiscal and monitory, national security, environmental, and trade policy.

Course and Learning Objectives

1. To understand the politics of the policy process
2. To develop conceptual tools to analyze and assess political institutions
3. To understand the powers and limitations of political institutions to shape policy
4. To understand the effect of the structure of political institutions on policy
5. To understand the role of individuals and organized interests in the policy process
6. To deconstruct and analyze federal, state, and local policies
Learning Assessment Table

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Materials and Assignments

All of the readings listed on the syllabus are found online (hyperlinked in the syllabus and on Brightspace).

Course assignments will include:

- **Op-Ed (15%)**: Students will write an op-ed on a policy topic. **Due**: Monday, September 25 (week 4) via Brightspace by 11:59 pm ET
- **Midterm Exam (20%)**: In class exam covering the material up to this date. **Date**: Thursday, October 19 (week 7)
- **Group Policy Presentation (20%)**: Students will work in groups to argue in support of a municipal bill (in class presentation). **Date**: Thursday, December 7 (week 13)
- **Final Exam (30%)**: The final exam will take place during finals period. It will be cumulative, but focused on the second half of the course. **Final exam date**: TBD
- **Class Participation (15%)**: You are expected to be prepared for class discussions and to participate fully. You are encouraged to share your experiences relevant to the topics and cases being explored. Not attending class (barring excused absences) and failing to participate will hurt your participation grade.

Attendance Policy:

Since we only meet once a week, I expect everyone to attend every class. If for any reason you will be unable to attend class, please let me know in advance.

If you are feeling unwell, please rest and focus on your health. Absences on account of illness, quarantine, travel disruptions, and other extenuating circumstances will, of course, be excused.

Late Policy:

Please let me know in advance if you are having difficulty completing an assignment on time so that we can discuss your situation. Assignments that are late without notification will automatically be downgraded 5% per day.
Syllabus Modification:
I reserve the right to modify the syllabus based on input, class pace, and other factors as the term progresses.

NYU Brightspace:
Class announcements, updated assignments, syllabus modifications, etc., will all be made via NYU Brightspace, so please check the website regularly.

Academic Integrity
Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by Wagner’s Academic Code. All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath. Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays
NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

NYU/Wagner Grading Policy
Per the Wagner grading policy, students will receive grades according to the Wagner grading scale. This information is posted here.

Course Schedule
**Readings are due the day they are listed**

Week 1: Thursday, September 7: Let’s talk policy!

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will cover political culture, looking at education and welfare policy. We will discuss what policy means to individuals and communities as well as municipal, state, and federal institutions. We will also talk about how we learn of policy changes, how we formulate opinions on these changes, and how we might influence policy. Lastly, we will
begin to look at public policy rhetoric, to which we will regularly return throughout the course.

Readings:
- Richardi, Nicholas and Linley Sanders. (14 July 2023). Americans are widely pessimistic about the state of democracy in the U.S., AP-NORC poll finds. PBS. Retrieved here.

Week 2: Thursday, September 14: The Constitutional Foundations of Public Policy

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will examine the Constitution, the powers to shape policy that it grants elected officials, the provisions it includes to curb those officials, and the safeguards in place to prevent abuses of power. To reinforce these topics, we will analyze national security policy. We will also look at how voters and popular influence impact public policy, examining voting and redistricting policies. Lastly, in looking at healthcare policy, we will explore how the Constitution and history have weighed in on whether federal or state institutions have the upper hand in directing policy.

Readings:
- Massie, Betsy. Use it or lose it...The Constitution belongs to the citizens. TEDx. Retrieved here [video].

Week 3: Thursday, September 21: Civil Rights Policy

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will explore civil liberties in the U.S.—past and present. We will review major Supreme Court decisions on civil rights, along with the 14th Amendment and the
1964 Civil Rights Act. Looking at civil rights enforcement, we will discuss the ways in which people do or do not receive equal treatment. And, we will examine policies that help or hinder access to political and social institutions, including university admissions policies.

Readings:

Week 4: Thursday, September 28: The President and Congress on Policy

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will explore the roles of the executive and legislative branches in shaping policy and how the power dynamic between the two branches has shifted over the years. We will also look at the impact of partisanship, economic and social factors, and bureaucracy on the policy process. To illustrate these topics, we will examine food and welfare policy.

Readings:
- Jones, Dustin (1 January 2023). Despite infighting, it’s been a surprisingly productive 2 years for Democrats. NPR. Retrieved here.
Week 5: Thursday, October 5: The Courts and the People on Policy

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will explore how the judiciary branch impacts public policy and how the magnitude of that impact has changed over the past 200 years. As a case study, we will examine campaign financing policy. We will also look at how public opinion impacts the courts and policymakers. And, we will examine political movements that contributed to policy change and those that were unable to achieve sustained advocacy.

Readings:
- Smithson Learning Lab Collection: Motivating Agency with Posters (Smithsonian Summer Sessions) [peruse the collection]. Smithsonian Learning Lab. Retrieved here.
- Cohen, Tom. (28 February 2014). 5 years later, here’s how the tea party changed politics. CNN. Retrieved here.

Week 6: Thursday, October 12: Interests Groups, Lobbyists, and the Media on Policy

Learning Objective:
- This week, we will explore the impact of interests groups and lobbyists on public policy by examining consumer protection and gun policy. We will also look at how 24-hour news coverage, online media, and misinformation sway public opinion and policy.

Readings:
- Dodd-Frank Act. HISTORY. Retrieved here.
- Charlton Heston’s speech on the future of the National Rifle Association. Retrieved here (0:00-16:00).

Week 7: Thursday, October 19: MIDTERM EXAM

NB:
• Please make sure to bring a pen or pencil to class.
• Please try to be on time to have as much time as possible for the exam.

Week 8: Thursday, October 26: Municipal and Labor Policy

Learning Objective:
• This week we will explore the municipal policies that affect our day-to-day lives as well as the formal and informal ways in which those policies came into existence. We will discuss case studies from recent labor rights policymaking in New York City, focusing on the shifting alliances of various stakeholders depending on the policy at issue.

Readings:
• City Administrative Procedure Act (CAPA). Retrieved here.
• A Minimum Pay Rate for App-Based Restaurant Delivery Workers in NYC. NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Retrieved here.

Week 9: Thursday, November 2: Monetary and Fiscal Policy

Learning Objective:
• This week, we look at how the Federal Reserve and the executive and legislative branches shape monetary and fiscal policy through interest rates, taxes, and spending decisions. We will discuss case studies from recent economic downturns.

Readings:
• Kelton, Stephanie. The big myth of government deficits. TEDx. Retrieved here [video].

Week 10: Thursday, November 9: Welfare Policy

Learning Objective:
• This week, we will explore policies intended to alleviate poverty and support individuals and families in attaining financial independence. We will discuss how these policies evolved over time in the U.S. and the complex web of federal, state, and municipal jurisdictions in the welfare and tax systems.

Readings:
• Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Isom Makes Asylum Seeker Related Announcement. NYC Mayor’s Office. Retrieved here [video].

Week 11: Thursday, November 16: Policy and Religion

Learning Objective:
• This week, using both historical and modern-day lenses, we will explore how religion shapes policy in the U.S. and vice-versa. We will discuss party politics and analyze abortion and same-sex marriage policies.

Readings:
• Roe v. Wade. HISTORY. Retrieved here.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

Week 12: Thursday, November 30: Regulatory and Environmental Policy

Learning Objective:
• This week, we examine regulatory policy, focusing on domestic environmental policies. We will discuss how regulatory policies are formulated and enforced and how partisanship impacts regulatory changes. We will also look at what happens when regulatory policies and enforcement practices diverge.

Readings:
• Isaacs-Thomas, Bella. (3 August 2023). Climate change is hitting close to home for nearly 2 out of 3 Americans, poll finds. PBS. Retrieved here.
• Thunberg, Greta. (November 2018). The disarming case to act right now on climate change. TEDx. Retrieved here [video].
• Neubauer, Luisa. (July 2019). Why you should be a climate activist. TEDx. Retrieved here [video].

Week 13: Thursday, December 7: GROUP POLICY PRESENTATIONS

NB:
• Please make sure to e-mail me your slides the night before class.

Week 14: Thursday, December 14: Foreign Policy and Final Thoughts

Learning Objective:
• This week, we will wrap up by examining U.S. foreign policy, focusing on trade and environmental policy. We will also review key topics from the course and reflect on the dynamics of U.S. public policy.
Readings: