# **NYU Wagner logo**

# **UPADM-GP 101**

# **The Politics of Public Policy**

# **Fall 2021**

## Instructor Information

* Michael Laskawy
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* Office Address: TBD
* Office Hours: Friday 1:45 – 2:45 or by appointment

## Course Information

* Class Meeting Times: Fridays, 9/2 – 12/13, 11 am – 1:45 pm
* Class Location: MEYR Room 122

## Course Description

One of the greatest and often dispiriting challenges that many students of public policy face when they enter public service is that their aspirations for what policy can achieve seem so readily thwarted by the political process. This class will use a series of case studies from all levels of government to explore this challenge, and to try to provide students with an intellectual framework for thinking about the dynamic relationship between politics and public policy in order to understand how politics shapes, determines and sometimes warps the policy making process. We’ll study the structures of American government, the importance of interest groups, the impact of public opinion, the role of the media, the challenge of fiscal constraints, the authority of expertise, the impact of personalities, and more as factors that often lead policies to be altered and negotiated as they move from proposal to practice.  The real world case studies we focus on will both help us to understand why public policy outcomes so often deviate from what might be described as best practices, and provide us with the opportunity to consider how we might, as potential policy makers ourselves, improve the policy making process.

## Course and Learning Objectives

1. To understand the processes by which public policy is developed, negotiated, and implemented in the United States
2. To understand the role of various institutional actors in that process, including but not limited to:
	* The three branches of the Federal government
	* States and localities
	* Organized interest groups
	* The media
	* Independent experts
	* Public policy professionals
	* Voters
3. To develop a familiarity with major critiques of the process of policy making in the United States
4. To learn certain techniques of policy advocacy utilized by public policy professionals

### **Learning Assessment Table**

| **Course Learning Objective Covered** | **Corresponding Assignment Title** |
| --- | --- |
| 1,2,4 | Policy brief |
| 1,2,3 | Midterm paper |
| 1,2,4 | Policy press release |
| 1,2,3,4 | Final paper |
| 1,2,3,4 | Participation and discussion |

## Materials and Assignments

You are expected to do the reading, attend class, be prepared for class discussions, and participate on a regular basis.

The readings on the syllabus should be available on-line, or I will post them on Brightspace.

There will be four writing assignments over the course of the semester. They will include one short policy brief, a take-home midterm essay, a policy press release, and a final paper. In addition, there will be occasional online discussion posts to which you will be asked to respond.

Your grade will be calculated as follows: Policy brief (10%), Midterm (25%), Policy Press release (10%), Final (40%), Participation (15%)

Please be aware that the syllabus may change as the semester progresses, based on our pace, student feedback, and choices I make with regard to subject matter, the availability of guest speakers, etc. I will post all updates on Brightspace, and make sure you are apprised of any changes to our schedule or assignments.

## Classroom Policies

### 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.

### Late Paper Policy:

Please let me know in advance if you are having difficulty completing an assignment on time so that we can discuss your situation. Papers that are late without notification will automatically be downgraded.

### 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](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/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.

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### 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](https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities.html) 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](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html) 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](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/grading).

## Course Schedule

*\*\*Readings are due the day they are listed\*\**

### Week 1: Friday September 3rd: Introduction

#### Learning Objective:

* This week will be an introduction to the course and to each other. We will begin with a broad overview of the semester, our methods and our goals. We will try to define some of our terms, in particular to understand what we mean when we talk about ‘politics’ and ‘policy.’ And we will start our exploration of the challenges that politics presents to policymakers and policymaking by discussing two issues - the Federal, state and local response to Covid-19 and the Biden administration decision to withdraw American military forces from Afghanistan.

#### Readings:

* J. David Goodman, "[N.Y.C. Health Commissioner Resigns After Clashes With Mayor Over Virus](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/nyregion/oxiris-barbot-health-commissioner-resigns.html)," *The New York Times* (August 4, 2020)
* David Leonhardt, "[A Confusing Message](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/briefing/mask-guidance-cdc-vaccinated.html)," *The New York Times* (July 28, 2021)
* Brian Lopez, "[Gov. Greg Abbott's order banning mask mandates in Texas schools faces lawsuit, defiance, by big city districts](https://www.texastribune.org/2021/08/09/texas-mask-order-schools/)," *The Texas Tribune* (August 9, 2021)
* BRUCE SCHREINER and PIPER HUDSPETH BLACKBURN, "[Kentucky governor orders masks in schools as virus surges](https://apnews.com/article/health-education-coronavirus-pandemic-kentucky-1847ac4ef8ec24b71aa9efa7b500e968)," AP Newswire (August 10, 2021)
* Brady Williams, "[Attorney General Cameron pleading with Ky Supreme Court to halt Governor Beshear's order on masking](https://www.14news.com/2021/08/12/attorney-general-cameron-pleading-with-ky-supreme-court-halt-gov-beshears-order-masking/)," NBC14 News (August 12, 2021)
* "[Texas drops mask mandate ban enforcement in public schools](https://www.politico.com/news/2021/08/19/texas-drops-mask-mandate-ban-schools-506339)," AP Newswire (August 19, 2021)
* Jack Brammer and Valarie Honeycutt Spears, "[Beshear cancels his mask order for schools but considers a statewide mask mandate](https://www.kentucky.com/news/coronavirus/article253682103.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)," *Lexington Herald Leader*, (August 23, 2021)
* Sarah Kline, "[Masks to be required in Oregon's Outdoor Public Settings](https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-music-health-oregon-coronavirus-pandemic-947bd5fe02d802978cf4318f5ab93e40)," AP Newswire (August 25, 2021)
* Crystal Lewis, "[MLC to File Complaint Over Mayor's Failure to Bargain on Vaccine](https://thechiefleader.com/news/open_articles/mlc-to-file-complaint-over-mayors-failure-to-bargain-on-vaccine/article_df27fd88-0525-11ec-88d0-1f3e3136c28a.html)," *The Chief*, August 25, 2021)
* David Zweig, "[The Science of Masking Kids at School Remains Uncertain](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/08/the-science-of-masking-kids-at-school-remains-uncertain.html)," *New York Magazine* (August 20, 2021)
* Annie Linskey, Yasmeen Abutaleb and Tyler Pager, "[Four weeks in July: Inside the Biden administration’s struggle to contain the delta surge](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-delta-covid/2021/08/21/7ac3daf6-fbb1-11eb-943a-c5cf30d50e6a_story.html)," The Washington Post (August 21, 2021)
* Ezra Klein, "[Let's Not Pretend That The Way We Withdrew from Afghanistan Was The Problem](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/26/opinion/afghanistan-us-withdrawal.html?referringSource=articleShare)," *The New York Times* (August 26, 2021)

### Week 2: Friday September 10th: American Democracy – Origins and Structure

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will focus on the origins of American democracy, and the structure of American government. We will take an historical perspective, and our focus will be original source material, emphasizing two key philosophical ideas that have been central to the American democratic project – the concept of rights as it was initially theorized by John Locke, and the concept of interests as it was initially theorized by Adam Smith. We will then explore how these ideas were transformed from theory to practice by the writers of the U.S. Constitution. We will interrogate these concepts to understand their strengths and weaknesses as a basis for political governance, how they have evolved, and where they fall short.

#### Readings:

* John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* [selections]
* Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* [selections]
* James Madison, Alexanders Hamilton & John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* [selections]

### Week 3: Friday September 17th The Rise of the Modern State

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will continue our historical conversation, focusing on the rise of the modern state, and its relationship to the development of industrial capitalism. We’ll delve into the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber, whose attempts to understand the relationship between politics, economics and government will provide us with theoretical tools that we will utilize throughout the course. We will begin, with the work of W.E.B Dubois, to confront the centrality of race and its persistence in the shape and structure of modern American politics and government.

#### Readings:

* Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* [selections]
* Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* [selections]
* Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” [selections]
* W.E.B Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folks* [selection]

### Week 4: Friday September 24th In Sickness and In Health

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will begin our study of specific policy issues by focusing on healthcare policy. We will grapple with the question of why there is no true universal health insurance program in the United States, and how this relates to ideas of rights and interests. We will use the battle over the Affordable Care Act as a case study to understand the particular challenges presented by attempts to make major changes to the social safety net. And we will also look at other less sweeping health policy proposals, including those around healthy school lunches and sugar taxes, to explore the issues with policies designed to incentive or disincentive certain behaviors, and the associated critique of policy overreach that focuses on the ‘nanny state.’

#### Readings to come

#### Week 5: Friday October 8th: It’s Getting Hot In Here

#### Learning Objective:

* In this week’s class we will explore environmental policy, focusing on two key issues – global warming and the regulation of environmental toxins. We will take a particular interest in how science is used and communicated in public policy, and the way expertise serves as a form of political power. We will study how large corporations organize and participate in public policy debates, and the related issue of “regulatory capture,” when regulators appear more interested in helping the businesses they regulate than the public at large. And finally we will use the challenges presented by environmental regulation to understand the broader ‘collective action problem’ that challenges policy makers in many fields.

#### Readings to come

POLICY BRIEF DUE

### Week 6: Friday October 1st: No More Pencils No More Books

#### Learning Objective:

* In this week’s class, we will focus on education. We will use this topic as a way to explore American federalism, and the role of state and local governments in the American system. We will investigate how the Federal government and state governments attempt to shape education policy. But our main focus this week will be on local governance. Our central case study will be the New York City school system, and the various efforts made in recent decades to improve education outcomes for public school students.

#### Readings to come

### Week 7: Friday October 15th Justice Part I – Equal Treatment?

#### Learning Objective:

* This week, we will study issues of civil rights and criminal justice, and how the American political system continues to grapple with, and fails to grapple with, the nation’s history of racial discrimination. We will focus on the role played by advocacy groups in advancing their policy goals. While we take an historical perspective, we will place special emphasis on recent developments, including analyzing the movement to defund the police and responses to it.

#### Readings to come

### Week 8: Friday October 22nd: Justice Part II – Under The Law

#### Learning Objective:

* This week, we will continue our discussion of civil rights and criminal justice, but with a shift in emphasis, looking to the special role played by the judicial branch in American policy making and implementation. We will consider how law itself serves as an instrument of policy, the role of courts in setting policy, and discuss the challenges this presents to policy making in a democracy.

#### Readings to come

### Week 9: Friday October 29th: How Sacred is the Right to Vote?

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will continue our discussion of civil rights with an emphasis on what is the defining feature of democratic societies – voting. We will examine how the voting franchise has been extended over time, and more recent attempts to limit the opportunity to vote in the name of voting integrity, as well as the conflicts over the 2020 Presidential election. We will use the latter events to explore the contemporary politicization of voting, utilizing this as a way to examine political polarization in the American electorate more broadly, and its impact on policy making.

#### Readings to come

MIDTERM DUE

### Week 10: Friday November 5: Inequality

#### Learning Objective:

#### This week we will explore issues and policies related to economic inequality. We will discuss taxation policy in the United States, and longstanding conflicts in America over the redistribution of wealth. We will discuss policies that support and discourage the unionization of workers, including current debates over raising the minimum wage and regulating work in the ‘gig economy.’ And we will examine the history of welfare policies and the broader socialization of care in the United States, with a particular emphasis on how gender and race have impacted, and continues to impact, American economic policy making.

#### Readings to come

### Week 11: Friday November 12th: Yearning to Breathe Free

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will focus on immigration and immigration policy. Again we will take an historical perspective, but we will place particular emphasis on contemporary debates. We will study both current high profile political disputes including those surrounding Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the DREAM Act, and the border wall, as well as business-oriented policies such as EB5 and H1B visas.

#### Readings to come

### Week 12: Friday November 19th: Home Sweet Home

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will explore housing policy. We’ll examine the ways in which Federal taxation and finance policy encourages and supports homeownership, and the disparate impacts these policies have on non-homeowners. However, the bulk of our discussion this week will be on the challenges of urban housing, with a focus on New York City. We’ll discuss policies surrounding homelessness and affordable housing, and the political challenges they present to local government, as well engaging with the debate surrounding ‘gentrification.’

#### Readings to come

POLICY PRESS RELEASE DUE

### Week 13: Friday December 3rd: The Fourth Estate

#### Learning Objective:

* This week will be devoted to an analysis of the role of the media in policy making and implementation. We’ll analyze the symbiotic relationship between the press, advocates, interest groups, and policymakers. We’ll study techniques of political communications, including the role of political communication professionals. And we’ll explore the impact of social media on policy making specifically and politics more generally.

#### Readings to come

### Week 14: Friday December 10th: The Plague Year

#### Learning Objective:

* This week we will return to where we began, taking a deep dive into the policy making response to the emergence of the novel coronavirus. We’ll look at how what we’ve learned over the course of the semester has given us insight into the public policy response, how it succeeded, and how it has failed. And we’ll pay special attention to the challenges confronting policy makers as they deal with crisis situations where decisions must be made under conditions of great uncertainty.

#### Readings to come

**FINAL PAPERS DUE DECEMBER 17TH**