



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

UPADM-GP 101

The Politics of Public Policy

Spring 2022

Instructor Information

- Anthony Thomas (ast439@nyu.edu)
- Guest Lecturer Alex Gleason (gleaa181@gmail.com)

Course Information

- Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 06:20pm -- 08:50pm
- Class Location: Silver 520 (Silver building is located at 100 Washington Square East)
- Dates: Tuesday, January 25, 2022 and ends on Wednesday, May 3, 2022

Course Description

This course explores issues in American public policy. First, students will study the role of each major governing institution in the policymaking process. We will analyze the tools available to each institutional actor to shape policy as well as the constraints on their use. Throughout, we will discuss how institutional design shapes policy outcomes. Then the course considers the role of citizens and interest groups in the policy process. The class asks what citizens know about politics and policy, who participates, and whether political leaders are responsive to the public. We consider the role of organized interests in policymaking, including the collective action problem, the role of moneyed interests, and lobbying.

Course and Learning Objectives

1. To understand the politics of the policy process
2. To understand the tools available to different political actors to shape policy and the constraints on their use
3. To understand the effect of the structure of governing institutions on policy
4. To understand the role of citizens and organized interests in the policy process

Learning Assessment Table

| Course Learning Objective Covered | Corresponding Assignment Title |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| #1, 3 | Op-ed |
| #1, 2, 3 | Midterm exam |
| #1, 2 | Policy memo |
| #1, 3, 4 | Final exam |
| #1, 2, 4 | Participation and discussion |

Materials and Assignments

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.

Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened to the Party of the People?, Thomas Frank, 978-1250118134

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, Neil Postman, 978-0143036531 (Will Share via pdf)

Course assignments will be a combination of short written assignments and exams. Course assignments must be submitted on Brightspace by 11:55 pm ET (not by class time) on the day they are due.

- **Op-Ed (20%)**: Students will write an op-ed on a policy topic. **Due: (week 5) via Brightspace by 11:55 pm ET**
- **Midterm (20%)**: Take home exam covering the material up to this date. **Date: (week 8) via Brightspace by 11:55 pm ET**
- **Policy Memo Assignment (25%)**: Students will write a memo to their Congressman or woman on a policy issue area. **Due: (week 12) via Brightspace by 11:55 pm ET**
- **Final Exam (20%)**: 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 via Brightspace**
- **Participation, Discussion, and in Class Activities (15%)**: Not attending class and failing to participate will hurt your participation grade. In addition to participating in class, you must write a weekly discussion post and respond to one of your classmates' posts. Your weekly discussion post is due each week on Saturday, and your response is due on

Monday. The weekly discussion posts can be found on Brightspace under the forums tab in the “weekly discussion post” section.

Classroom Policies

Late Policy:

Please email me. I will make determinations on a case by case basis. I am very flexible if you talk to me ahead of time!

Syllabus Modification:

I reserve the right to modify the syllabus based on input, class pace, and other factors as the term progresses.

Brightspace:

All announcements will be delivered through Brightspace, so please check the website. I may modify assignments, due dates, readings, and other things, so please do check periodically. Our discussion boards will also be hosted on Brightspace, and you’re expected to participate!

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: Tuesday January 25th, 2022: Introduction to Policy, Separation of Powers, Congress, the Executive Branch, and the Judiciary

Learning Objective:

- This week focuses on the role of the main policymaking body of the United States - the legislative branch. We also take a look at factors that have complicated how the legislative branch functions, particularly the rise of political parties and increasing polarization. We will also analyze the executive branch's impact on the policymaking process. Historically the executive has had a limited policymaking role, but that dynamic has shifted since the Kennedy administration. This week also examines the role of the judiciary in policymaking. What is judicial activism? How does it play a role in our policy process?

Readings:

- "America Is Now the Divided Republic the Framers Feared", Lee Drutman, *the Atlantic*, January 2020, [Retrieved here.](#)
- "Republicans Use Filibuster to Block Voting Rights Bill", *The New York Times*, October 22, 2021, [Retrieve here.](#)
- "Policing the Separation of Powers", Yuval Levin, *National Review*, January 2021, [Retrieved here.](#)
- Noam Chomsky Lecture on Power & Ideology, 2015, [Retrieved here.](#)

Week 2: Tuesday February 1, 2022: Policymaking in the States, Federalism, Interest Groups, and Lobbying

Learning Objective:

- This week we will evaluate the impact of federalism on our policy process. We analyze several important examples of policy initiated at the state level, including minimum wage laws and marijuana policy. We will also analyze the role of interest groups, lobbyists, and outside influences on the policymaking process. And, we'll examine the impact of one of the most successful lobbying groups in the modern era – the NRA – and examine how interest groups and outside stakeholders are able to be heard.

Readings:

- "How the Constitution's federalist framework is being tested by COVID-19", Jennifer Selin, Brookings, June 2020, [Retrieve here.](#)
- Drutman, Lee. (20 April 2015). How corporate lobbyists conquered American democracy. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved [here.](#)
- ***Listen, Liberal***, Chapters: Introduction-Ch 2
- "Dark Money Rises: Federal and State Attempts to Rein in Undisclosed Campaign-Related Spending", Kristy Eagan, *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, Volume 40 Number 2, 2016. [Retrieve Here.](#) **You Only Need To Read This Section: "The Evolution of the Federal Election Campaign Act: From Buckley to Citizens United"**

Week 3: February 8, 2022: Education Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week we will look at the history of education in the United States, and the laws and policies that underpin our current system. We will also look at the difference between state and federal funding, as well as examine the role of states and the US Department of Education. And, we will cover some of the more recent topics that have roiled higher ed, including admissions, cost, free speech on campus, collegiate athletics, and whether everyone should go to college.

Readings:

- Listen, Liberal: Chapters 3-6
- “COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning”, McKinsey, July 2021, Retrieved [here](#).
- Ripley, Amanda. (11 September 2018). Why is college in America so expensive? The Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Frontline, “The Education of Michelle Rhee”, John Merrow, 2013, [Retrieve here](#)

Week 4: February 15, 2022: Civil Rights Policy and Discrimination

Learning Objective:

- This week looks at the way in which people do or don't receive equal treatment, and looks at the laws and policies that either help or hinder an individual's access to education, employment, housing, lending, voting, and more.

Readings:

- Listen, Liberal: Chapters 7-9
- “The EQUAL Act would finally close the cocaine sentencing disparity”, Gabby Birenbaum, Vox, March 2021, [Retrieved here](#).
- “The Double Standard of the American Riot”, Kellie Carter Jackson, June 2020, The Atlantic, [Retrieved here](#).
- (3 November 2019). Voting machines: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. Last Week Tonight. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 5: February 22, 2022: Healthcare Reform (revised)

*Op-Eds DUE THIS WEEK

Learning Objective:

- This week reviews recent health care initiatives including the Clinton health care efforts in the 1990s, the ACA, and the AHCA effort and provides practical examples of policy development, and the impact of politics on policy.

Readings:

- Listen, Liberal: Chapters 9-Conclusion
- Public Policy & Public Finance textbook (Gruber): Chapters 15 & 16

Week 6: March 1, 2022: Immigration Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week examines the complicated history of immigration policy in the United States, going all the way back to the 1700s. However, we will focus most of our exploration on the events that followed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

Readings:

- LS and EH. (16 April 2018). The case for immigration. The Economist. Retrieved [here](#).
- Briggs, Amy. (31 October 2018). How the Founding Fathers understood US citizenship. National Geographic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Frum, David. (April 2019). If liberals won't enforce borders, fascists will. The Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Miroff, Nick. (24 October 2018). The border is tougher to cross than ever. But there's still one way into America. Washington Post. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 7: March 8, 2022: Environmental and Energy Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week dives into conservation and environmental movements from the 1970s on. We will look at several different issues and initiatives and dilemmas related to modern-day efforts to curb climate change.

Readings:

- Rinde, Meir. (Spring 2017). Richard Nixon and the rise of American environmentalism. Science History. Retrieved [here](#).
- Meyer, Robinson. (19 March 2017). How the US protects the environment, from Nixon to Trump. The Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Frum, David. (3 December 2018). A forgotten legacy of George HW Bush. The Atlantic. Retrieved [here](#).
- Haggerty, Meredith. (27 December 2019). We were all right to hate the plastic straw ban. And we need more legislation like it. Vox. Retrieved [here](#).

MARCH 15, 2022: *SPRING BREAK* NO CLASS

Week 8: March 22, 2022: Tech Regulatory Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week explores some of the biggest policy issues brought about by the development and expansion of the internet, machine learning, and big data. We'll scratch the surface on privacy, property rights, freedom of speech, cybersecurity, and more, in an attempt to understand how technology is reshaping laws, policy, and political authority.

Readings:

- **Amusing Ourselves to Death [Ch: Medium is the Metaphor & Media as Epistemology]**
o **(In your pdf copy this first page until page 25)**
- Hill, Kashmir. (18 January 2020). The secretive company that might end privacy as we know it. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).
- Laslo, Matt. (13 August 2019). The fight over section 230 – and the internet as we know it. Wired. Retrieved [here](#).

- French, David. (24 January 2020). The growing threat to free speech online. TIME. Opinion piece. Retrieved [here](#).
- Manjoo, Farhad. (22 January 2020). The apps on my phone are stalking me. New York Times. Opinion piece. Retrieved [here](#).
- Schneier, Bruce. (20 January 2020). We're banning facial recognition. We're missing the point. New York Times. Opinion piece. Retrieved [here](#).
- Mozur, Paul and Aaron Krolik. (17 December 2019). A surveillance net blankets China's cities, giving police vast powers. New York Times. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 9: March 29, 2022: Policy Design Options

Learning Objective:

- This week focuses on tactical decisions in policy design. How do policy design decisions influence the politics of institutional change? If you have an opportunity to shape the formation of new institutions, what should you consider trying?

Readings:

- **Amusing Ourselves to Death**
 - Ch. Typographic America, The Typographic Mind (p. 26-61 in your copy)
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Week 10: April 5, 2022: Science Policy

Learning Objective:

- This week examines a broad spectrum of science-related policies, including the way in which politics impacts the science policymaking process. We will discuss topics like how to think about science policy, how neglect can lead to unforeseen policy outcomes (medico legal death investigations), the importance of good data, forensic science in our criminal courts, genetic privacy, infectious disease outbreaks, and the role of outside companies and interests.

Readings:

- **Amusing Ourselves to Death**
 - **The Peek-a-Boo World (pages 49-61 in your copy)**
- Roland, Denise. (4 January 2020). Antibiotic makers struggle, hurting war on superbugs. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved [here](#).
- Kalil, Thomas. (2017). Policy entrepreneurship at the White House. Innovations. MIT Press. Volume 11 number 3/4. Retrieved [here](#).
- Molteni, Megan. (1 May 2019). The US urgently needs new genetic privacy laws. Wired. Retrieved [here](#).
- White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. (2016). Strengthening the medicolegal death investigation system: Accreditation and certification a path forward. National Science and Technological Council. Committee on Science. Medicolegal Death Investigation Working Group. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 11: April 12, 2022: Citizens in the Policy Process

Learning Objective:

- This week explores the options available to many different types of participants in public policy – ranging from street protestors to policy analysts – to change outcomes. You probably won't become majority leader of the Senate when you graduate – so what can

you do? Do individuals have any impact? Additionally, we will spend part of this lecture on the results and impact of the 2020 presidential election.

Readings:

- **Amusing Ourselves to Death**
 - **The Age of Show Business & “Now...This”**
- Page, Benjamin I. (18 September 2014). Theories of American politics. Elites, interest groups, and average citizens. Perspectives on politics (12) 3. Retrieved [here](#).
- Illing, Sean. (9 August 2018). Intellectuals have said democracy is failing for a century. They were wrong. Vox. Retrieved [here](#).

Week 12: April 19, 2022: Agenda Setting, Framing, and the Media

Learning Objective:

- This week explores limitations on the policy process (on systems and ordinary people) – and the consequences for policymaking. We examine how information is communicated and the frameworks through which it is understood. We also look at how our media system can exacerbate misunderstandings – and the consequences for policy as a result.

Readings:

- **Amusing Ourselves to Death [the remainder of the book]**
 - **Shuffle Off to Bethlehem**
 - **Reach Out and Elect Someone**
 - **Teaching as an Amusing Activity**
 - **The Huxleyan Warning**

Week 13: April 26, 2022: Policy Formation, The Sharing Economy [LEGO SERIOUS PLAY ACTIVITY]

Learning Objective:

- This week focuses on analyzing a policy change through the lens of the ‘sharing’ economy. How did it happen? Did the means ruin the end? Who worked together on it? What were the coalitions? Who were the stakeholders?

Readings:

- “UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND WORKER MOBILITY”, Brookings, 2018, [Retrieved here](#).
- “Perspectives on the Sharing and Gig Economy” EPI, Roundtable with Steven Hill, [Retrieved here](#).

Week 14: May 3, 2022: Policy Implementation, The Retirement Crisis

Learning Objective:

- This week focuses on the forthcoming retirement crisis, a study in “what can go wrong, will go wrong.” This week also asks how can we apply these lessons to current policy debates?

Readings:

- Report: “Disparities in NY retirement Coverage”, SCEPA The New School, 2018, [Retrieved here.](#)
- “The Top Ten Myths About Social Security”, Monique Morrissey, Economic Policy Institute, 2014, [Retrieved here.](#)
- “A Social Security Primer for the New Administration: Reform Needed Now”, Romina Boccia, The Heritage Foundation, 2017, [Retrieved here.](#)
- Frontline, “The Retirement Gamble”, Marcela Gaviria et. Al, 2013 [Retrieved here.](#)
- “Social Security’s Impact on the National Economy”, Gary Koenig, Al Myles, AARP Public Policy Institute, 2013, [Retrieved here.](#)
- “The New York City Nest Egg: A Plan for Addressing City”, NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer, 2016. [Retrieved here.](#)