MPP 501 Policy Analysis and Theory

Professor Gregory P. Williams, Ph.D.

Simmons University, Fall 2025

Instructor: Gregory P. Williams, Ph.D.
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Office hours: Mondays, 2:00 to 3:30pm, in Main College Building A-340H, and by appointment
Course information: MPP 501 Main College Building (A), Room 302, Mondays 5:00-7:50

Description

This course examines the theoretical traditions of public policy and the many fields devoted to studying it. Students should be able to develop critical perspectives on the study of public policy and strategies for policy evaluation and policy analysis.

Booklist

1. Christopher Weible, ed., *Theories of the Policy Process*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023).
2. Eugene S. Bardach and Eric M. Patashnik, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2019).
3. Erwin Chemerinsky, *The Case Against the Supreme Court*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 2023).
4. *Recommended*: Kevin B. Smith and Christopher W. Larimer, *The Public Policy Primer*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).

Course Schedule

Week 1 (9/1): No class—Labor Day

Week 2 (9/8): Welcome to Policy Analysis and Theory

Week 3 (9/15): The American State and Stupid Politics

1. William Novack, "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State," *American Historical Review* (2008): 752-772.
2. Jonathan Haidt, "After Babel," *The Atlantic* (May 2022): 54-66.
3. "On Point" interview with Jonathan Haidt (April 25, 2022)

Week 4 (9/22): Stages and Multiple Streams Traditions

1. Weible chapter 1: Herweg, et al, "Multiple Streams Framework."
2. Mark E. Rushefsky, "Process, Structure, and Ideology (2018)

Week 5 (9/29): Policy Process and Punctuated Equilibrium Traditions

Weible, chapters 2 and 4: Baumgartner, et al., "Punctuated Equilibrium Theory," and Nohrstedt, et al., "The Advocacy Coalition Framework"

Paper 1 topic handed out

Week 6 (10/6): Narrative and Critical Policy Traditions

1. Weible, chapter 5: Jones, et al, "The Narrative Policy Framework"
2. Gregory P. Williams, "A Critique of Deep Engaement, the Social Narrative of U.S. Foreign Policy," *European Review of International Studies* 11, no. 2 (2024): 248-274.
3. Merlijn van Hulst, et al., "Discourse, framing and narrative: three ways of doing critical, interpretive policy analysis," *Critical Policy Studies* 19, no. 1 (2024): 74-96.
4. *Optional*: Weible, chapter 9: Cairney and Heikkila, "How Should We Compare Theories of the Policy Process?"

Week 7: October 14th (not 13th): **Tuesday class meeting** for Administrative Monday
Policy Theory, Policy Evaluation, and Policy Analysis

Bardach and Patashnik, Part I—Steps One and Two

Paper 1 due

Week 8 (10/20): Policy Analysis in the Age of Misinformation

1. Bardacha and Patashnik, Part I—Steps Three to Eight
2. Karel Van den Bosch and Bea Cantillon, "Policy Impact" (2008)

Week 9 (10/27): Policy Diffusion, and, What Happens When Government Does Not Work?

Reading to be announced

Prof. Williams' slide show on misinformation and polarization

Week 10 (11/3): What Happens When Government Does Not Work?

1. Weible, chapter 7: Osmany, et al, "Policy Diffusion and Innovation"
2. McKay Coppins, "The Man Who Broke Politics," *The Atlantic* (2018).
3. Podcast: "How Newt Gingrich 'Broke Politics,'" *Fresh Air* (November 2018).

Week 11 (11/10): Supreme Court and Public Policy

Chemerinsky: Preface, Introduction, and Part I (chapters 1-4)

Prof. Williams' slide show, "Partisan Gerrymandering and the Courts"

Week 12 (11/17): The Roberts Court

1. Chemerinsky: Part II (chapters 5-7)
2. Linda Greenhouse, "Is Clarence Thomas the Supreme Court's Future?" *The New York Times* (August 2, 2018).

Week 13 (11/24): Good Institutions vs. Good Policy: Case Study of Gun Rights

Podcast: "The Gun Show," *More Perfect* (October 12, 2017).

Paper 2 topic handed out

Week 14 (12/1): Reform, Courts and Bureaucracies

1. Chemerinsky: Part III (chapters 8-9)
2. Weible, chapter 10: Tosun and Workman, "Struggle and Triumph in Fusing Policy Process and Comparative Research"

Week 15 (12/8): Policy Theories of the Future

Paper 2 due

Grades

1) Paper 1 (25%)

Topic and instructions to be handed out. *Due 10/14*.

2) Paper 2 (25%)

Topic and instructions to be handed out. *Due 12/8*.

3) Critical Questions (20%). On one occasion, you will present to the class your impressions of the reading for that week. More instructions will be forthcoming. Due on the day you are scheduled to present. *All presentations shall be done before 11/10*.

4) Cultural Event Write-Up (20%)

Once during the semester, you will need to attend a Boston cultural event related to public policy. You must get your event approved by the instructor first. Then, write up a reaction paper that describes the event and draws connections to our class. After securing approval from Professor Williams, attend a relevant cultural event and write about its connections to the course material. Write-ups should be two pages, double spaced, given a brief overview of the event, and then discuss in greater detail the relevance of the event for the course. Superior essays will discuss the implications (or even contradictions!) for the course. *All cultural event write-ups shall be submitted before 11/11*.

5) In-Class Participation (10%). Grades are holistic and non-formulaic, based on the quality of your comments in class. Students with excellent participation may, in addition, see a 1/3 letter grade benefit at the end of the semester. This participation requirement presumes that students will attend all class meetings of this in-person course. *According to a policy of the Department of Politics and Policy, a student who has missed one-third or more of class sessions (five classes) shall* ***withdraw*** *from the course*.

Plagiarism and AI

Plagiarism is using another's words or ideas without proper attribution. Plagiarized work may result in disciplinary action.

The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT, even as a first draft, is considered plagiarism. Writing is hard, and it is only through practice that one becomes a strong writer. The writing process begins by staring at a blank page.

Editorial AI (e.g., Grammarly) is acceptable, and no AI statement or citation is needed. Data analysis and visualization AI (e.g., Tableau) are acceptable with proper attribution.

Other Policies and Notes

(a) Follow this link for Simmons University's policies on student ethical responsibilities and conduct: https://internal.simmons.edu/students/academics/syllabus-policies.

(b) Letter grades will be assigned to averages as follows: >93= A; 90-92.9= A-; 86-89.9= B+; 83-85.9= B; 80-82.9= B-; 76-79.9=C+; 73-75.9= C; 70-72.9= C-; 66-69.9= D+; 63-65.9= D; 60-62.9= D-; <60= F.

(c) Simmons University and Professor Williams are committed to equal access to programs and learning opportunities. Students who believe they may be entitled to an academic accommodation should consult with the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) at access@simmons.edu.

(d) This syllabus is not a contract. The instructor reserves the right to alter course requirements and/or assignments based on new materials, class discussions, or other legitimate pedagogical objectives.

(e) The course materials are the intellectual property of the instructor and Simmons University. Students may not share, in person or online, course material (such the syllabus, paper prompts, and tests). Unauthorized copying of courses materials violates the Simmons Honor Code and federal copyright laws. Students may not record lectures or class discussions without explicit permission of the instructor (unless recordings are permitted by a student's accommodation).