

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 433/507**  
**COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE**

*Colin Bennett*

**FALL 2014**

*Office Hours DTB A336: MON: 2pm-5pm*

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This is an interdisciplinary seminar for graduate students and advanced fourth year undergraduates in Political Science, Public Administration and other cognate disciplines. Undergraduate students should have taken at least one 300-level Political Science course in Canadian Politics, Public Administration or Public Policy, or have the permission of the Instructor.

We will not be addressing directly any substantive policy concerns or problems in this class. Neither will we focus on any one particular country or political system. This is not a course about *policy analysis*; there will be little attention, therefore, to the more normative questions about how to construct public policy, and how to evaluate those policies that work and those that do not. Rather, it is a course in *policy studies*, that branch of the subfield that addresses why governments do one thing rather than another. The course is organized according to certain analytical frameworks and concepts, each of which is designed to explain policy outcomes in different jurisdictions. Each concept rests on certain assumptions about the autonomy of the state, about the role and rationality of various actors, and about patterns of state/society relations. We will review these approaches and interrogate these assumptions.

The course also has the word *comparative* in the title, because policy studies cannot be anything but comparative – across jurisdictions and across time. Comparison is, of course, a natural and inevitable aspect of all human inquiry. It is also a more explicit methodology. We build broad generalizations about politics and policy by continually testing hypotheses about the relationship between conditions and outcomes through comparative investigation. Some social scientists would call that approach *theory-building*. By the end of the course, students will be able to judge whether any progress has been made over forty years in building these broader generalizations about the causes and consequences of public policy formation.

## REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Everyone is to complete required readings listed under each topic before the seminar. In each session, I will go around the class and ask for a brief reflection on the major question that is listed under each topic with reference to the readings as a whole. Each student is also responsible for a presentation on one of the articles (5%)
- 2) A late midterm examination (over Reading Break), consisting of essay questions, and worth 40% of your final grade.
- 3) An application of at least two approaches to a policy outcome of interest to you (15 pages). Here the task is to try to explain a defined policy outcome using the literature addressed in class. This final paper will be presented during the final two classes. The paper is worth 40% of your grade (See below)
- 4) Class presentation on your final paper (5%).
- 5) Attendance and general participation (10%)

## READINGS

There are two required texts available for purchase at the UVIC bookstore:

M. Howlett, M. Ramesh and A. Perl, *Studying Public Policy (Third Edition)* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Longman, 2011)

Other readings and the course schedule are listed on CourseSpaces, and have been placed on library reserve.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### September 4: Introductions and topic selections

### September 11: What is (Comparative) Policy Analysis?

*What does it mean to compare?*

*What does it mean to compare public policy?*

*Why compare public policies?*

*What might account for cross-national variation?*

#### REQUIRED READINGS

Howlett, Ch. 1

Richard Rose, "Comparing Forms of Comparative Analysis" *Political Studies* XXXIX (1991): 446-462

Colin J. Bennett, "[Comparative Policy Studies in Canada: What State? What Art?](#)" In L. Dobuszinskis et al. *Policy Analysis in Canada: The State of the Art* (University of Toronto Press, 1996)

Kuhika Gupta, "Comparative Public Policy: Using the Comparative Method to Advance our Understanding of the Policy Process," *Policy Studies Journal* 40 (2012): 11-26

### September 18: Policy and Theory-Building

*What does it mean to develop theory about public policy?*

*What are the main approaches to policy studies?*

#### REQUIRED READINGS

Howlett, chs. 2 and 3

Richard Simeon, "Studying Public Policy," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 9. No. 4 (1976): 548-580

### September 25: Policy Networks, Communities and Advocacy Coalitions

*How might we explain policy choices and outcomes according to the prevailing interests of policy networks and advocacy coalitions?*

#### REQUIRED READINGS

G. Jordan and K. Schubert, "A Preliminary Ordering of Policy Network Labels," *European Journal of Political Research* 21 (1992): 7-27

Paul A. Sabatier, "An Advocacy Coalition Framework of Policy Change and the Role of Policy-Oriented Learning Therein," *Policy Sciences* 21 (1988): 129-168

## **October 2nd: Institutions, Institutionalism and Public Policy**

*What are institutions? How can we explain policy choices and outcomes according to institutional designs and structures?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, "Political Science and the three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies*, (1996): XLIV: 936-957

B. Guy Peters, J. Pierre and Desmond King, "The Politics of Path Dependency: Political Conflict in Historical Institutionalism," *The Journal of Politics* 67 (2005): 1275-1300

## **October 9th: Policy Agendas and Agenda-Setting**

*What is a political agenda? How might we understand policy choices and outcomes according to the nature and scope of the policy agendas?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

Howlett, ch. 4

J. Kingdon, [Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies](#), (3<sup>rd</sup> edition): entire

## **October 16th: Policy Instruments and Design**

*How might we explain policy choices and outcomes according to the repertoire of governmental policy instruments?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

Howlett, chs 5-8

T. Lowi, "Four Systems of Policy, Politics and Choice," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4. (Jul. - Aug., 1972), pp. 298-310.

Christopher Hood and Helen Margetts, *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, ch. 1 and 6

## October 23rd: Policy Learning, Convergence, Transfer and Diffusion

*How might we understand policy choices and outcomes according to learning and lesson-drawing from other jurisdictions?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

P. Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning and the State" *Comparative Politics* 25 (1993): 275-96.

C. Bennett, "Review Article: What is Policy Convergence and What Causes it?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1991): 215-233

Dolowitz, David P. & David Marsh, "Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making," *Governance*, 13 (2000), 5-24.

## October 30th: Feminist Approaches to Policy Studies

*What does it mean to conduct feminist policy studies?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

Susan Phillips, "Discourse, Identity and Voice: Feminist Contributions to Policy Studies" in *Policy Studies in Canada: The State of the Art*, eds. L. Dobsuzinskis, M. Howlett and D. Laycock (1996).

Burt, Sandra (1995) "The Several Worlds of Policy Analysis: Traditional Approaches and Feminist Critiques." In *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice*, ed. Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 357-378.

Amy Mazur, "Comparative Gender and Policy Projects in Europe: Current Trends in Theory, Method and Research," *Comparative European Politics*. 9 (1) April 2009: 12-36

## November 6th: Policy Framing and Discourse

*How might we understand policy choices and outcomes according to the language and discourse in which policies are framed?*

### REQUIRED READINGS

A. Schneider and H. Ingram, "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy," *American Political Science Review* 87 (June 1993): 334-347

L. Pal, "Competing Paradigms in Policy Discourse: The Case of International Human Rights," *Policy Sciences* 28 (1995): 185-207.

D. Stone, "Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas," *Political Science Quarterly* 104 (1989): 281-300.

**November 20th: Reading Break (TAKE-HOME MIDTERM)**

November 27th: Reports on Final Papers

December 4th, Reports on Final Papers

## THE RESEARCH PAPER

The task for the paper is to review a policy outcome and to explain it according to two of the approaches reviewed in the class. Your job is to paint a picture of the evolution of a particular policy decision, demonstrating how different influences shaped the outcome. From here you should move to a more general or theoretical level. Stand back from the specific issue and ask yourself how the outcome might be explained. The better papers will be those that take the opportunity to critique the approaches in question. Where are the gaps and blindspots? What is left unexplained? What are the biases? How well does the approach “travel” to another jurisdiction?

The paper will be easier to conceive and execute if you frame your question comparatively: why is X like this here, and like that there? Why is X like that now, and like that then? Thus you might conclude, for instance, that an advocacy coalition or policy network was powerful then, but not now, or influential there but not here. Or you may argue that a policy was “framed” one way then, and another way, now. This is not a research paper, and I cannot expect you to review a complex policy decision in any detail. The goal is more analytical. The assignment tests your ability to move from empirical observation to theory and back again. It examines your capacity to tell a theoretically informed story about a policy issue in which you presumably already have an interest and knowledge.

In one of the last two classes, each of you will be responsible for a powerpoint presentation on this assignment. This powerpoint should be posted on CourseSpaces in advance for the benefit of the class. The final paper (15 pages) is due to be posted on Course Spaces or before December 5<sup>th</sup>. Each of you should consult with me and make an early decision on the topic for this paper. This paper is worth 40% of your grade.