COURSE SYLLABUS

Political Science 311:

Contemporary Issues in American Public Policy

CRN: 49803
Semester: Fall 2013
Class Meets: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11:15 AM to 12:05 PM
Room: HSS 113
Instructor: Dr. Hemant Sharma, B.A. Cornell University, Ph.D. University of Tennessee
Office: McClung Tower 1013
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-11:00
Office Phone: (865) 974-2261
Email: hsharma@utk.edu

Course Description: This class provides an introduction to the process of public policy-making in the United States. Models of the policy-making process are examined and applied to a broad range of substantive policy issues. In short, we will discuss the major issues confronting American society and American government through the lens of a systematic framework for policy analysis. More specifically, each week, we will blend discussion of theoretical policy analysis with discussion of “real world” issues.

University/College/Departmental curricular requirements met: Political Science 311 is a writing emphasis course and can satisfy the upper level distribution requirement of the University of Tennessee’s College of Arts and Sciences. It also applies three hours toward the political science major.

Program level learning objectives that the course supports: Students will gain basic knowledge of, understanding of, and the ability to apply, political science principles.

Central learning objectives that the course supports: Students will gain basic knowledge of, and understanding of, the actors and processes involved in formulating public policy, the functions and tools of policy analysis, and the alternative perspectives on public policy issues.


Required Instructional Technology: None
Student Assessment and Evaluation Methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Element</th>
<th>Contribution to final grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance and participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Exam #2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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**Attendance and participation:** Regular attendance is expected. Please email the instructor if extenuating circumstances will mandate prolonged absence. No set formula is used to reduce a student’s grade simply based on number of absences, but obviously, class participation is impossible if a student is not present. Participation grades will be based on a student’s effort to engage in discussion over the policy issues presented. Public speaking is an essential component of many jobs today, and thus students will be rewarded for making an effort to verbalize facts and issues associated with the court cases that we will confront. Quality of participation will be taken in account, in addition to quantity.

**Examinations:** The format for the exams will include a medley of multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and hypothetical scenarios which require you to apply public policy principles to a set of facts. Under special circumstances, make-up exams will be offered. If such circumstances arise, please contact the instructor as far in advance as is feasible.

**Term Paper (Problem Definition Paper Assignment):**
The purpose of this paper is to develop an appreciation of policy debates as a competition among alternative definitions of a public problem. Each student will be asked to address a problem facing contemporary American society, to assess existing policy that addresses the problem, to evaluate competing alternatives for new policy solutions, and to advocate for a particular solution. The length of the paper should a minimum of six double-spaced pages, using a 12 point font, with 1 inch margins all around; there is no maximum length.

**Grading Scale**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A -</td>
<td>90 – 92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B +</td>
<td>87 – 89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B -</td>
<td>80 – 82%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C +</td>
<td>77 – 79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73 – 76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C -</td>
<td>70 – 72%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D +</td>
<td>67 – 69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63 – 66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D -</td>
<td>60 – 62%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Less than 60%</td>
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Outline of the Semester

I. PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

Week 1: Introduction

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #1.
Outline of topics covered:
- Defining public policy
- Reasons for government involvement
- Policy goals
**Discussion Topic:** NSA Surveillance, “Stop and Frisk” Searches

Week 2: Institutions and Actors

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #2.
Outline of topics covered:
- Institutional actors
- Federalism
- Non-institutional actors
- Constitutional limitations
**Discussion Topic:** Gun Control Laws / Stand Your Ground Laws

Week 3: Theories of the Public Policy Process

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #3
Outline of topics covered:
- Elite theory
- Group theory
- Institutional theory
- Rational choice theory
- Political systems theory
- Policy process model
**Discussion Topics:** Same-Sex Marriage, State Abortion Restrictions

Exam 1: Tuesday, September 24th
II. POLICY ANALYSIS

Week 4: Introduction to Policy Analysis

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #4.
Outline of topics covered:
   - Defining policy analysis
   - Policy analysis process
   - Purposes of policy analysis

Discussion Topic: Texting and Driving Laws

Week 5: Activities in Policy Analysis

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #5.
Outline of topics covered:
   - Nature of public problems
   - Problem analysis
   - Constructing alternatives
   - Evaluating and assessing alternatives

Discussion Topic: Immigration Policy

Week 6: Tools of Policy Analysis

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #6.
Outline of topics covered:
   - Forecasts
   - Cost-benefit analysis
   - Regression Analysis
   - Political feasibility analysis
   - Implementation analysis
   - Program evaluation

Discussion Topic: The Death Penalty

Exam 2: Tuesday October 29th

III. ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES

Week 7: Economic and Budgetary Policy

Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #7.
Discussion Topic: Tax Policy
Week 8: Health Care Policy
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #8.
Discussion Topic: Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Week 9: Welfare and Social Security Policy
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #9.
Discussion Topic: The Future of Retirement

Week 10: Education Policy
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #10.
Discussion Topic: Student Loan Legislation

Week 11: Environmental and Energy Policy
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #11.
Discussion Topic: Alternative Sources of Fuel

Week 12: Foreign Policy and Homeland Security
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #12.
Discussion Topic: Military Action in Afghanistan

Week 13: Advocating for a Policy Position
Reading: Kraft and Furlong, Ch. #13
Discussion Topic: The Future of Political Dialogue in the United States

Additional Information
Key Dates
Exam 1: Tuesday, September 24th
Exam 2: Tuesday, October 29th
Final Exam: Monday, December 9th, 12:30
Final Paper Due: Tuesday December 10th, 5 PM, via email

Academic Integrity
All rules concerning academic honesty as set out in the current edition of Hilltopics will be enforced. Particular attention should be paid to the section on plagiarism. Students are reminded of their obligation to abide by the UTK Honor Code: “An essential feature of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the university, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus
affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity.”

**Disabilities that Constrain Learning**
Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 865-974-6087 in 2227 Dunford Hall to document their eligibility for services. ODS will work with students and faculty to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**The Student’s Role in Improving Teaching and Learning through Course Assessment**
At UT, it is our collective responsibility to improve the state of teaching and learning. During the semester, you may be requested to assess aspects of this course either during class or at the completion of the class. You are encouraged to respond to these various forms of assessment as a means of continuing to improve the quality of the UT learning experience.

**University Civility Statement**
Civility is genuine respect and regard for others: politeness, consideration, tact, good manners, graciousness, cordiality, affability, amiability and courteousness. Civility enhances academic freedom and integrity, and is a prerequisite to the free exchange of ideas and knowledge in the learning community. Our community consists of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and campus visitors. Community members affect each other’s well-being and have a shared interest in creating and sustaining an environment where all community members and their points of view are valued and respected. Affirming the value of each member of the university community, the campus asks that all its members adhere to the principles of civility and community adopted by the campus: [http://civility.utk.edu/](http://civility.utk.edu/).

**Communication of Announcements**
Announcements will be sent via e-mail to students’ official UTK e-mail addresses and/or posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for monitoring their UTK e-mail account and the course Blackboard site.

**Alteration of this Syllabus**
The instructor reserves the right to revise, alter and/or amend this syllabus, as necessary. Students will be notified by email and/or Blackboard of any such revisions.

**Key Resources For Students**
- Political Science Department Website: [http://web.utk.edu/~polisci/](http://web.utk.edu/~polisci/)
- Academic Planning: [http://www.utk.edu/advising](http://www.utk.edu/advising)
- Arts and Sciences Advising Services: [http://artsci.utk.edu/advising/](http://artsci.utk.edu/advising/)
- Student Success Center: [http://studentsuccess.utk.edu](http://studentsuccess.utk.edu)
- Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs: [http://catalog.utk.edu](http://catalog.utk.edu)
- Hilltopics: [http://dos.utk.edu](http://dos.utk.edu)
- Course Timetable: [https://bannerssb.utk.edu/kbanpr/bwckschd.p Disp Dyn Sched](https://bannerssb.utk.edu/kbanpr/bwckschd.p Disp Dyn Sched)
- Library: [http://www.lib.utk.edu](http://www.lib.utk.edu)
- Career Services: [http://career.utk.edu](http://career.utk.edu)