

PPL 807: Public Policy

Course Information

Semester: Fall 2025

Credits: 3

Class Time: Thursdays, 6-9 PM (we'll begin promptly at 6:10)

Room: 113 Bessey Hall

Instructor Information

Instructor: Prof. Josh Sapotichne

Email: sapotich@msu.edu

Office hours: Wed, 10-12

SKH Office: 310 SKH

Zoom Office: <https://msu.zoom.us/j/2841002762> (Passcode: 975135)

Course Overview, Goals

This course introduces the study and practice of public policy. We draw from the fields of political science, economics, sociology, policy sciences, and public administration to help us understand the theory and practice of formulating, adopting, enacting, analyzing, implementing, and evaluating public policy.

Students with more applied interests in particular policies, policy areas, or specific levels of government will find the course useful in thinking about how political and structural forces shape the willingness of government decision makers to consider different courses of policy action. All students will find the course useful in (1) providing frameworks for understanding different aspects of public policy and, most importantly, (2) grasping and analyzing the politics of the policymaking process.

For much of the semester, we will be moving back and forth between theoretical/conceptual discussion and the application of theory to the study and/or assessment of an example (or several examples).

Required content will generally consist of a few chapters in our texts, supplementary readings that apply and advance the perspectives covered in the texts, and a case study or analytical exercise that helps bring the conceptual perspectives to life.

Course Requirements, Grading

Grades will be based on a combination of performance on a research paper and contributions to the seminar. Each component will be assessed as follows:

Political Feasibility Analysis Paper:

This will be developed in a series of steps that include:

- preliminary topic paper;
- refinement of the topic of your analysis and one-on-one discussion;
- the submission of a draft policy menu;
- the submission of a draft interest group table and policy map;
- presentation of the results of your analysis;
- the final paper itself, due Sunday Dec 15;

A single decimal grade will be provided, and it will constitute 60 percent of the course grade. More detailed guidance for the topic and research papers is posted to the D2L page.

Contribution to the Seminar:

This is a seminar course. Each of you is expected to participate and come ready to discuss the required readings, apply the concepts and frameworks to real-world scenarios, and participate in in-class exercises. Your contributions to the seminar will be assessed with respect to:

- your involvement in and contribution to small group and seminar discussions, in-class assignments, and decision cases;
- your attendance at MPP Speaker Series, 2nd year and alumni panels, and other MPP events run by the MPP Program.

Each student's contributions to the seminar will be evaluated on an overall scale of "stellar contributions" (4.0), "solid contributions" (3.5), "acceptable contributions" (3.0), or "less than desired contributions" (less than 3.0). A single grade will be provided for this component, and it will constitute 40 percent of the course grade.

Course Materials, Books, Resources

The following two books are required for this seminar:

- Thomas A. Birkland. 2020. An Introduction to the Policy Process. 5th Ed. New York: Routledge. Available from msu libraries via ProQuest Ebook Central: <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/lib/michstate-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5793861>
- 2. Kevin B. Smith and Christopher W. Larimer. 2017. The Public Policy Theory Primer. 3rd Ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Earlier editions are acceptable, though chapter numbers, sequencing, and content may change from one edition to the next. **It is up to you to identify these changes and read the appropriate material.**

An array of additional readings and material – including articles, case studies, handouts, in-class exercises, blog posts, podcasts, videos etc – will be made available on the [course D2L page](#). All supplemental material will be posted under Content and will correspond with the topic and date listed on the course schedule (beginning on p. 7). Discussion questions will be posted to D2L in advance of class sessions. The site also provides updates on assignments and requirements, as well as useful research sites. Please check the page frequently.

Class Norms, Civility, Academic Integrity, Code of Conduct

A positive climate that prioritizes mutual respect is essential to advancing the intellectual mission of the University and the Department of Political Science. We resolve to achieve our mission by celebrating those who advance our collective integrity. Consistent with the [College of Social Science Faculty Handbook statement on Tolerance and Civility](#), my intent is that adherence to this code enables civil conversation. Civility is a hallmark of a healthy intellectual community. Civility does not imply homogeneity or the absence of conflict; intellectual exchange (even heated intellectual exchange) is pivotal to our academic mission. That said, **we need to engage in exchanges that are professional, respectful, and considerate of individuals and their differences.** Everyone shares ideas and works in progress. And public policy touches everyone's lives a little differently. Who we are and how we experience policy and politics shapes our perspectives. **For the best ideas to emerge, and for our class to be a space to develop and hone your public policy analytic toolbox, class discussions and conversations *must* be supportive, constructive, and open.**

We all have a responsibility to foster and maintain respectful relationships with others and to promote an equitable and supportive workplace environment. Please consult the [College of Social Science Code of Conduct Policy](#) for more details on expectations.

[The Spartan Code of Honor](#) states, "As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do."

In addition, Article 2.III.B.2 of the [Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SRR\)](#) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." The Department of Political Science and Master of Public Policy Program adhere to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations (See [MSU Policies, Regulations and Ordinances Regarding Academic Honesty and Integrity](#)).

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to develop original work for this course. **Students are strongly cautioned not to copy any text verbatim without appropriate quotations and source citations.** (please consult the [Office of the University Ombudsman](#) page for more detail). You may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course without the express consent of the instructor. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the [Academic Integrity](#) webpage).

An Important Word on Turnitin

I use a tool called Turnitin to compare your written work with an extensive database of current and archived online content, thousands of periodicals, journals, and publications, as well as a repository of works other students have submitted to Turnitin. The software highlights wherever your writing is similar to text from any of these sources, provides links to possible matches, and generates a “similarity score.” The tool **does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not.** Your topic paper and final paper will be checked using this tool. Check out [Turnitin’s new student hub website](#) for more information and guidance.

An Important Word on AI Tools

AI (artificial intelligence) resources such as ChatGPT can be useful in a number of ways. They can also be abused. As such, **you are required to acknowledge use of AI in any work you submit for class.** Text **directly copied** from AI sites must be treated as any other direct quote and properly cited (this includes in-text citations, use of quotations, and entry in your reference list). **Other uses of AI must be clearly described at the end of your assignment. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution qualifies as academic dishonesty.** Please see MSU’s new [MSU IT site on AI tools](#) for additional resources and more information on guidelines.

Desire2Learn: D2L

We will be using Desire2Learn (D2L) as our online course management software. The website is <https://d2l.msu.edu>. This is where you will go to access course material, submit your assignments, access guidance on assignments, access class announcements, review deadlines. You can setup D2L to email or text you whenever a new announcement is posted. I encourage you to take advantage of this. To do so, log in to D2L, click your name in the top right part of the screen, and then select “Notifications.” You can check the boxes under “Instant Notifications” for both “Announcements” items. For any D2L issues, **call** for tech support: 844-678-6200 or 517-432-6200

Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD)

Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting RCPD at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has

been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term. Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Basic Needs

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact [Student Affairs and Services](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to connect you more directly to sources of support.

Counseling and Mental Health Support

Visit Counseling and Psychiatric Services CAPS for online health assessments and additional CAPS services or call (517) 355-8270 any time, day or night. 24-Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line: (517) 372-6666 or visit centerforsurvivors.msu.edu.

Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Education and Compliance (OCR)

MSU is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive community in which students, faculty, and staff can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination. OCR reviews concerns related to discrimination and harassment based on sex, gender, gender identity, race, national origin, religion, disability status, and any other protected categories under the [University Anti-Discrimination Policy](#) and [Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct](#). If you experience or witness acts of bias, discrimination, or harassment, please report these to OCR.

Neighborhood Engagement Centers Services

The Engagement Centers, located in each Neighborhood, are also home to the Math Learning Center, the Writing Center, the Social Science Help Room, and other academic support services to assist students with math coursework, writing papers, and other academic subjects. The NSSC provides academic and wellness support through midterm and finals preparation events. Peer Educators are another academic service that works with students on various academic skills like “learning how to learn,” time management skills, study skills, goal setting, test preparation, and provide tutoring in chemistry, physics, computer science, and more. In addition to academic support, the Neighborhoods offers Career and Major Exploration resources and various health and wellness resources through Recreation and Fitness Programs, the Health Clinic, and Counseling and Psychiatric services. Intercultural Dialogues and Identity Consciousness programs are resources to support the inclusion and equity of students. For more information about NSSC programs or resources, visit <https://nssc.msu.edu> and follow the NSSC on Instagram at @nsscmsu. To schedule an appointment, email nssc@msu.edu.

Land Acknowledgement

[Understanding our history](#) helps us understand and more equitably remake interactions, policies, systems, and power. The history of our University and the space we occupy is no exception, as our physical space, and the land in land grant, have a deep legacy. Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabeg - Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the university resides on land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize Michigan's 12 federally recognized Native Nations, historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and those who were forcibly removed from their homelands. In offering this land acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty, history and experiences.

Syllabus and Course Schedule Adjustments and Tweaks

I reserve the right to make modifications to this syllabus and the course schedule as necessary to account for the unique dynamics of our class. If changes are made, they will be announced on D2L. A revised version of the syllabus will be posted, as well. Please stay informed.

-- the course topics, schedule, and readings section begins on p. 7 --

Course Topics and Required Readings

* Designates a reading, assignment, or case that is posted to the course D2L page.

Part 1. Orientation

1. September 4 – Course Introduction and Overview

READINGS

- Paul Cairney. [12 things to know about studying public policy](#).
- Birkland – Ch 1, Ch 2. (also posted to d2l)

EXERCISE

- Introductions; syllabus walkthrough; course Q&A

2. September 11 – How to Research and Analyze Public Policy: A Morphology

READINGS

- *Paul Cairney. [What is public policy and why does it matter?](#)
- Smith and Larimer – Ch.1
- *Michael Munger. 2000. “Policy Analysis as a Profession and a Process: An Overview.” pp. 3-26.
- *Paul Cairney. [The Policy Process](#) and [Contradictions in Policy and Policymaking](#).
- *Deborah Stone. 2002. “Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision-Making.” pp. 1-14.
- *Paul Cairney and Christopher Weible. 2017. “The New Policy Sciences.” *Policy Sciences* 50: 619-627.
- OPTIONAL: *Josh’s undergrad lecture material posted to D2L

EXERCISE

- *Analyzing COVID response policies from different (and integrated) perspectives.

CASE

- *Combat and Collaboration in Seattle’s Historic Minimum Wage Debate

3. September 18 – The Logic and Practice of Policy Analysis (with a particular focus on Cost-Benefit Analysis)

READINGS

- Smith and Larimer – Ch.6
- *Michael Munger. 2000. “Experts and Advocacy: The Limits of Policy Analysis.” 134-161.
- Charles Wheelen. 2011. “Cost-Benefit Analysis.” pp. 405-443.
- OPTIONAL: *Aaron Wildavsky. 1977. Policy Analysis as Craft.
- OPTIONAL: *Death Panel Podcast: [Cost-Benefit and COVID](#)

CASE:

- *London's Crossrail: the Business Case (A) and The Politics of Approval (B)

4. September 25 – Policy Evidence and Evidence Informed Policymaking

READINGS

- *Paul Cairney. [‘Evidence-based Policymaking’ and the Study of Public Policy](#)
- *Paul Cairney. 2021. The UK Government's COVID-19 policy: Assessing evidence-informed policy analysis in real time. *British Politics*, 16(1), pp.90-116.
- Urban Institute's statements/posts: [Equitable Research Requires Questioning the Status Quo; Community Voice Is Expertise](#)
- *Deborah Stone. Data Citizens: A Distinguished Lecture Series. [“There is No Such Thing as Raw Numbers.”](#)
- OPTIONAL: *Megan Mahajan et al. 2022. “Updated *Inflation Reduction Act* Modeling Using the Energy Policy Simulator.” Energy Innovation, Policy and Technology LLC. Access a pdf of the full report [here](#).
- OPTIONAL: *Paul Cairney's [resources on Evidence-Based Policymaking](#)
- OPTIONAL: *Flyvbjerg, Bent and Dirk W. Bester, forthcoming, "The Cost-Benefit Fallacy: Why Cost-Benefit Analysis Is Broken and How to Fix It," *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, accepted for publication.

CASES

- *Freeport City Council Takes on Juvenile Delinquency
- *The Geography of Poverty: Exploring the Role of Neighborhoods in the Lives of Urban, Adolescent Poor

5. October 2 – Policy Evaluation in Practice

READINGS

- Smith and Larimer – Ch.7
- *Charles Wheelen. 2011. “Program Evaluation.” pp. 444-475.
- REVIEW: *Jason Abaluck et al. “The Impact of Community Masking on COVID-19: A Cluster-Randomized Trial in Bangladesh”. The [website and paper](#). And the [Twitter thread](#).
- OPTIONAL: OMB's [Evidence and Evaluation page](#)

CASE

- *New York City's CEO Program

Part 2. The Policy-making Process and Political Feasibility

6. October 9 – Beginning Part 2 with the End in Mind: Political Feasibility – the Logic and a Useful Framework

READINGS

- *Peter May. 2005. "Policy Maps and Political Feasibility." In: Geva-May I, editor. Thinking like a Policy Analyst: Policy Analysis as a Clinical Profession. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 127–151.
- *Paul Cairney. [Political feasibility and policy success](#).
- OPTIONAL: *Giandomenico Majone. 1975. On the notion of political feasibility. *European Journal of Political Research*, 3, 259–274.

EXERCISE

- Individual and group-based work on topic selection; research. Note: Topic papers due **Tues Oct 14**.

7. October 16 – No class – Individual Consultations on Topics

Appointments scheduled with Josh for Wed-Thurs of this week.

[*Topic Paper Due this week on Tuesday Oct 14 at 11:59pm***]**

8. October 23 – The Politics of Policy Design (1): Problem Definition and the Social Construction of Target Populations

READINGS

- OPTIONAL: D2L Material on Policy Stages/Cycle
- Smith and Larimer – Ch.4
- Birkland – Ch.9
- Paul Cairney. [The Social Construction of Target Populations](#) and [Social Construction and Policy Design](#) and [Who are the most deserving and entitled to government benefits?](#)
- CHOOSE 1 of 3:
 - *Elizabeth Bell. 2021. "Deserving to whom? Investigating heterogeneity in the impact of social constructions of target populations on support for affirmative action." *Policy Studies Journal* 49.1: 268-299.
 - *Graeme Boushey. 2016. Targeted for Diffusion? How the Use and Acceptance of Stereotypes Shape the Diffusion of Criminal Justice Policy Innovations in the American States. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1), 198-214.
 - *Elizabeth Bell. 2020. The Politics of Designing Tuition-Free College: How Socially Constructed Target Populations Influence Policy Support, *The Journal of Higher Education*. 91:6, 888-926
- OPTIONAL: *Deborah Stone. 1989. Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas. *Political Science Quarterly*. 104:2. 281-300.

EXERCISE

- Assessing social construction of groups, target populations

9. October 30 – The Politics of Policy Design (2): Racialized policymaking, policy feedback, and administrative burdens

READINGS

- *Jamila Michener. 2019. "Policy Feedback in a Racialized Polity" *Policy Studies Journal* 47(2): 423-450.
- *OPTIONAL*: *Joe Soss and Vesla Weaver, 2017, "Police Are Our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race-Class Subjugated Communities," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 565-591.
- *Herd, P., Hoynes, H., Michener, J., & Moynihan, D. 2023. Administrative burden as a mechanism of inequality in policy implementation. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 9(4), 1-30.
- *Elizabeth Bell, James E Wright, Jeongmin Oh, Does administrative burden create racialized policy feedback? How losing access to public benefits impacts beliefs about government, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Volume 34, Issue 3, July 2024, Pages 432–447
- *Presentation: Carolyn Barnes, Elizabeth Bell, Meredith Dost, and Donald Moynihan. "Approaches to Reducing Administrative Burdens in Accessing and Maintaining Services from Government Agencies and Public Programs." September 25 2024.
<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/approaches-to-reducing-administrative-burdens-in-accessing-and-maintaining-services-from-government-agencies-and-public-programs/>
- *OPTIONAL* stuff on administrative burdens:
 - BIT case study for Veteran's health: <https://www.bi.team/comment/how-to-avoid-creating-red-tape-a-guide-to-cutting-out-pointless-paperwork/>
 - *BARNES, Carolyn. 2023. "I Can't Get Ahold of Them": Perceptions of Administrative Burden and Administrative Exclusion across SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 706(1), 118-136.

CASES

- *Digital Government, Public-Private Partnerships, and Administrative Burdens: The Free File Program

10. November 6 – Interest Groups, Pressure, and Movements

READINGS

- Birkland – Ch.4; Ch.5
- Jason Webb Yackee and Susan Webb Yackee. 2006. "A bias towards business? Assessing interest group influence on the US bureaucracy." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (1): 128-139

CASES

- *A Rising Storm: Eric Garner and the Explosive Controversy over Race and Policing

- *In the Crossfire: Guns, Legislative Leadership and Recall Politics in Colorado

11. November 13 – Agenda Setting and the Politics of Policy Change

Draft Policy Menu Due

READINGS

- Birkland – Ch. 6; Ch.11 (part) – pp. 372-375; 377-379
- Smith and Larimer – Ch. 5 (part) – pp. 101-114
- *Cairney on [multiple streams \(a la Kingdon\)](#)
- *John Kingdon. 2001 “A Model of Agenda-Setting, with Applications.” pp. 331-337.
- *John Kingdon. 2011. “Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies.” pp. 196-208.
- *McGlynn, Morgan & Sparks, Aaron. (2024). Climate Change Policy Development: A Multiple Streams Analysis of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. *The Forum*. 22. 177-204. 10.1515/for-2024-2014.
- *OPTIONAL*: *Roger Cobb, et. al. 1976. “Agenda Building as a Comparative Political Process.” *American Political Science Review* 70(1): 126-138.
- *OPTIONAL*: *Cairney on [framing](#)

EXERCISE

- Applying Kingdon’s streams metaphor to the Inflation Reduction Act and to your political feasibility analysis

12. November 20 – Interest Groups and Advocacy Coalitions

Draft Interest Group Table and Map Due

READINGS

- Birkland – Ch.11 (part) – 375-377
- *Paul Cairney on [policy communities](#), [beliefs](#), and [advocacy coalitions](#)
- Smith and Larimer – Ch.5 (part) – pp. 94-101
- *Christopher M Weible and Karin Ingold. 2018. Why advocacy coalitions matter and practical insights about them. *Policy & Politics* 46(2): 325-343.

EXERCISE

- Identifying and Mapping Advocacy Coalitions in Political Feasibility Analysis

13. November 27 – No class – Thanksgiving/University Holiday

Josh will schedule open office hours for early in the week]

14. December 4 – In-Class Presentations, from 6-10 PM in Bessey 113

15. December 11 – No class – Individual Consultations on Wrapping up Political Feasibility Papers

[Schedule your 45min-1hour meeting with Josh for Tues-Wed of this week]

[***Final Research Papers Due Friday Dec 12 ***]