

Politics and Policy

Last Updated: Fri, 01/02/2026

Course prefix: PUBP

Course number: 3510

Section: RB

CRN (you may add up to five):
30255

Instructor First Name: Richard

Instructor Last Name: Barke

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Politics and policy overlap in a seemingly infinite number of ways involving procedures, people, institutions, etc. The course will be built around the role of politics at each of the "stages" of the policy process, exploring the political forces shape policy agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. Readings and concepts will be introduced from the fields of political science, policy studies, and related disciplines. Ideas will be synthesized at the end of the course in an exercise that simulates the interplay of politics and policy making. Our purpose is to improve our understanding of how politics and policy affect each other, for better or worse.

Course learning outcomes:

- What are the major tools by which the political process can affect policies?
- How are these tools used at each of the major stages of the policy process?
- Who uses those tools, and how effectively?
- How is the "real" problem determined? According to whom? How clear are the objectives?
- What is the political time horizon? The policy time horizon?
- How much do various stakeholders and decision makers know about the problem?
- How is policy "success" or "failure" to be defined and measured?
- How do constitutional and legal prescriptions and constraints, ideological and partisan interpretations of rights, and ethical arguments influence policy making?
- How can we become more effectual agents of policy change?

Required course materials:

No textbook. Anchored primarily by academic articles and government reports, we also will exploit a wide range of news sources, including mainstream newspapers, magazines, blogs, and other sources. Readings will incorporate a variety of ideological and practitioner perspectives. It is very unlikely that anyone will agree with everything they read but grappling with unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable ideas is one of the primary purposes of a college education.

Grading policy:

These assignments are subject to change. In response to the Institute's call for AI to be integrated in all courses we will be exploring opportunities to use it for novel forms of participation and deliverables.

Reports on readings: 40%

Midterm quiz: 20%

Congressional hearing: 30% At the end of the semester we will conduct four congressional hearings. Students will be assigned a role as a member of Congress or as a witness (e.g., advocate for an NGO, academic expert, agency official). Roles will be assigned randomly.

Participation: 10%. Class discussion is vital in this course. The standard for “adequate” participation is (a) not waiting to be called on, (b) cogently summarizing readings or providing new perspectives on issues, and (c) engaging in respectful exchanges with classmates in response to their reports on readings. At mid-semester you will be given feedback on the quantity and quality of your involvement.

A: 90-100: Superior performance—you clearly demonstrate excellence: going beyond what is required by showing enthusiasm and creativity on the memo, participation in class, generosity in responding to other students’ Discussion and Perusall postings, etc.

B: 80-89: Above-average, high-quality performance—basically, you satisfy the requirements as prescribed in the syllabus.

C: 70-79: Average performance. Competent and acceptable but not totally compliant with expectations for many of the assignments..

D: 60-69: Below-average performance. Demonstrated a lack of ability or motivation to read and be able to discuss reading assignments, unfamiliarity with topics discussed in class, and a failure to follow instructions on course expectations.

F: 0-59: Unacceptable performance. Failure to meet minimum criteria.

Attendance policy:

If you know in advance that you must miss a class (scheduled surgery, court date, asteroid forecast), email me. If post hoc, you'll need to provide something tangible. Unexpected things happen. But during the final portion of the course it will be particularly important to attend and participate in your assigned roles. If a legitimate need for an absence occurs, it is vital that you notify me as soon as possible.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

The course will satisfy designated learning objectives for courses carrying social sciences credit (Core Area E) at Georgia Tech: “how political relationships develop, persist, and change,” and an understanding of “the complexity of human behavior as a function of the commonality and diversity within groups.” Furthermore, These objectives satisfy learning objectives for “general education” social sciences courses at Georgia Tech: “Students will be able to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.”