

Political Processes

Last Updated: Fri, 01/02/2026

Course prefix: PUBP

Course number: 2010

Section: RB

CRN (you may add up to five):

31379

Instructor First Name: Richard

Instructor Last Name: Barke

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Our focus is both on how politics shapes policies (social science) and how professionals and citizens can be effective as policy analysts or advocates (practice). Current politics and policy will be discussed but this is neither a casual survey of news events nor an introduction to political science or American politics. Attention to current electoral and policy issues is essential – you all are public policy majors. Students are expected to approach policy issues with a well-informed and (self-)critical perspective that requires active engagement with a variety of current issues. Because this is the gateway course for the BSPP program (and restricted to BSPP majors) we also will discuss the curriculum and course offerings, internship and career prospects, etc.

Course learning outcomes:

Your objective is to develop a coherent framework for understanding the role of political processes in how public policy is formulated, adopted, analyzed, implemented, and evaluated. By the end of the course you should understand:

- *The relationship between social science and policy studies, and between policy analysis and advocacy*
- *Fundamental constitutional principles such as representation, checks and balances, and liberty*
- *Differences between market decisions and political/policy decisions*
- *How people form political opinions and the roles of stakeholders in policy making*

- *Basic ideas about decision-making: rational choice, biases and heuristics, and narratives*
- *Agenda-setting, issue-framing, and problem definition*
- *The impact of political institutions, facts, and values on policy formulation, analysis, and implementation*

Required course materials:

The textbook for the course is **Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, 3rd ed., Norton, 2012.** I advise against earlier editions. Other assigned readings will be available over the web via links on the syllabus or on CANVAS in the "Files" folder for PUBP 2010.

Grading policy:

Two quizzes will consist of mostly short-answer questions that focus on course readings but also will include material from class meetings. (10% each)

The **final exam** will invite you to synthesize what you have learned. (20%)

Discussions: During the semester students will contribute comments and responses to **five (5) Canvas discussion forums** that pose assertions or questions related to course topics. (10% total)

Perusall readings: Use this device in Canvas to annotate **five (5)** of the assigned readings with questions, comments, arguments, responses to other students' postings, etc. (10% total)

The **professional memo** will be a three-page presentation of the political aspects of a particular policy issue or problem of your choice (with my approval). Memo-writing skills are crucial in almost any profession. This isn't an English composition class but you will be produce a professional-quality document (format, spelling, grammar, etc.). You will receive detailed feedback on your first submission and you must use it to revise and extend your memo. Detailed instructions will be provided; significant points will be lost for failure to adhere carefully to all instructions.

- The first iteration includes *Policy Background* and a *Stakeholder Analysis*. (20%)
- The final memo will be a substantial re-write of the first version based on the feedback and will add a discussion of the relevant *Institutions* and your *Recommendations*, with all four sections condensed into three pages (plus cover page and references). (20%)
- At the end of the semester students will offer brief presentations to the class to accompany the final versions of their memos. Specific instructions will be provided. (0%)

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:

Millions of people around the world would trade places with you (and many of your parents and grandparents sacrificed greatly for you to be here), so it's not just self-damaging but unethical to not engage fully with your courses. We will take roll on random days. A pattern of absences will be noted, especially if your final grade is near a cutoff. If you have advance knowledge of scheduled surgery, meteor impact, or the beginning of your prison sentence (but not already-purchased airplane tickets), let me know *before* the event if possible.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

It is your obligation to be familiar with the [Georgia Tech Honor Code](#) and to ask the professor if its application to any part of this course is unclear. Pay particular attention to the definition of plagiarism in its several forms. Also be acquainted with GT Student-Faculty Expectations (<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22.php>). CRUCIAL: if you're unsure about what is allowed, what constitutes plagiarism, etc., ask! In an online world it might be tempting to cut-and-paste, including inadvertently copying text from your notes – that were copied. Be very careful.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

The Learning Outcomes satisfy the designated learning objectives for the Core IMPACTS Social Sciences area: “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.”