

Politics and Policy

Last Updated: Fri, 08/08/2025

Course prefix: PUBP

Course number: 3510

Section: SF

CRN (you may add up to five):
91100

Instructor First Name: Sarah

Instructor Last Name: Novascone

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

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. 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:

There are no assigned textbooks for this course. Students will read an assortment of items from scholarly publications, think tanks, government organizations, and the popular press. Because of the timeliness of the course topic, some assigned readings will be adjusted during the semester; students will be notified of any changes in advance by email.

Grading policy:

Students will select from a list of supplemental readings and provide 5 minute reports in class on them. The number of reports will depend on the enrollment in the course. Students will summarize the readings and offer 3-5 majors points regarding the relationship between politics and policy. Guidance for these reports will be provided.

Students will engage in a series of mock congressional hearings, either as representatives or as expert/interest group witnesses. Witnesses will prepare a ~3 page written statement to be provided to the committee members at least 48 hours before the hearing and offer a 3-5 minute oral presentation. Members of Congress for that meeting will prepare a set of questions for each witness (in writing, provided at least 24 hours before the hearing) and engage in an appropriate colloquy with the witnesses at the hearing.

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. This component of the course will count for 10% of the course grade.

Reports on readings: 30%

Midterm quiz: 20%

Congressional hearings: 40%

Participation: 10%

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:

Students are allowed two unexcused absences. More than that and you will lose 4 points from your course grade for each unexcused absence.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

The Academic Honor Code is a student initiative that became an official Institute policy in 1996. The objective of the Academic Honor Code is to increase academic integrity and strengthen trust in the Georgia Tech community. Students enrolled at Georgia Tech signed an agreement acknowledging their awareness of the Academic Honor Code. They are strongly encouraged to seek a full understanding of their instructors' expectations regarding academic honor. You can find the Honor Code (with a listing of responsibilities in Sections 3 and 4) at <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>

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.”