

**Columbia University**  
**School of International and Public Affairs**

Public Affairs/EMPA U6223  
The Political Environment of Policymaking  
Summer 2004

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This course is an introduction to practical political analysis for public- and nonprofit-sector managers and consultants. Public- and nonprofit-sector managers operate within a political environment, in which strategic, purposive actors seek to advance their own goals. These goals may take a number of forms — substantive policy outcomes, of course, but also political advancement or material advantage. Actors, moreover, may disagree about the goals they seek, and making policy requires some means of resolving those disagreements. Actors also differ in the resources they have at their disposal to seek their goals. Finally, policymaking actors cannot do anything they want to seek their goals; they are constrained by the rules and structures that make up the policymaking system. These factors — actors, goals, resources, and rules — shape the strategic options available to would-be policymakers.

Ultimately, then, this is a course about strategy. Managers who understand the strategic political environment within which they operate, and who can integrate political, managerial, and policy analysis, are likely to prove far more effective than managers who do not and cannot. The concepts, skills, and analytical tools that this course presents rest upon a foundation of positive political theory and political economic principles and, to a lesser extent, social psychology, historical analysis, and law. They identify patterns of behavior and outcomes, ways of thinking about those patterns and outcomes, and methods of analysis that facilitate understanding, prediction, and, ultimately, the shaping of strategies to improve the performance of public and nonprofit managers.

This course introduces these tools and principles through a close examination of the political institutions and processes that produce national public policy in the United States. Training these analytical lenses on the United States will help us address several basic questions about American national policymaking. How does the political system identify public issues as problems requiring public action, and how does it arrive at and implement policy solutions? Why is it so hard for the government to do anything, and why does it often seem to do it so badly? More generally, can politics help explain why the government produces outcomes that economics-based policy analysis would call “inefficient”?

### Readings

The principal source of course readings is [Margaret Weir, ed., \*The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government\*](#) (Brookings Institution, 1998), which is available as an e-book through the Columbia library web page. It is also readily available from online booksellers

such as [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [bn.com](http://bn.com). The remainder of the assigned readings are either available online or collected in a course reader.

### Course Requirements

- 1) Regular attendance, reading, and participation (20% of final grade)
- 2) A paper of 4-5 pp. (12-point type, double-spaced, normal margins), due in class on 22 June, covering general features of the policy process (detailed assignment to be handed out in advance) (30%)
- 3) A case analysis, due in class on 20 July, based on a packet of materials that will be distributed in advance. The case analysis will simulate a “real-life” political situation, in which you will be asked to apply the tools and principles we have developed in order to devise and present a political strategy for policymaking. (50%)

### Course Outline and Required Readings

18 May

#### **Actors, Goals, Strategies, Rules: Theories of Public Policy**

Clarkson Airport Authority Case (posted on Courseworks)

Charles L. Schultze, *The Public Use of Private Interest*, chap. 3

Charles E. Lindblom, [“The Science of ‘Muddling Through’,” \*Public Administration Review\* 19 \(1959\): 79-88](#)

25 May

#### **Defining Public Policy Problems and Setting the Agenda**

John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, chaps. 1, 8

1 June

#### **Parties, Interests, and Representation**

Margaret Weir, “Political Parties and Social Policymaking,” and Cathie Jo Martin, “Inviting Business to the Party: The Corporate Response to Social Policy,” in *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government*, ed. Margaret Weir

The Party Game (rules from Michael Laver, *Playing Politics*, posted on Courseworks)

8 June

#### **Public Opinion and Policymaking**

Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, “The Politicization of Public Opinion: The Fight for the Pulpit,” in *The Social Divide*, ed. Weir

15 June

**Congress: Maker of Policy or Agent of Gridlock?**

John Ferejohn, "A Tale of Two Congresses: Social Policy in the Clinton Years," in *The Social Divide*, ed. Weir

22 June

**Congress: Organization and Strategy**

First papers due

The Agenda Game (rules from Michael Laver, *Playing Politics*, posted on Courseworks)

29 June

**The President: Power, Persuasion, Politics**

Charles O. Jones, "Campaigning to Govern: The Clinton Style," in *The Clinton Presidency: First Appraisals*, ed. Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman

6 July

**Implementing Policy: The Bureaucracy**

Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Implementation*, chaps. 1, 3

13 July

**Political Strategy and Policymaking: Health and Welfare**

Mark A. Peterson, "The Politics of Health Care Policy: Overreaching in an Age of Polarization," and R. Kent Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," in *The Social Divide*, ed. Weir

20 July

**Conclusion**

Case analyses due

Discussion of case analyses