Module Name: Theories and Actors of the Policy Process
Module Code: PUBLG074
Teaching: 10 hours of lectures, 10 hours of seminars
Credits: 30
Assessment: Three Hour Examination
Essay Deadline/s: N/A
Lecturer: Margarita Gelepithis and Tim Hicks
Office Hours: TBC

*Please note that this is a core module for students registered on the MSc Public Policy programme and is not available as an optional module.

USEFUL LINKS
Lecture and Seminar Times:
Online Timetable at www.ucl.ac.uk/timetable

Extenuating Circumstances
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/intranet/pg/assessment/extenuating-circumstances

Penalties for Late Submission and Overlength Essays
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/intranet/pg/assessment/essays/#tabs-5

Essay Submission Information
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/intranet/pg/assessment/essays

Examinations
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/intranet/pg/assessment/examinations

Plagiarism and TurnItIn
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/intranet/pg/assessment/plagiarism-turnitin


MSc in Public Policy 2014-15

PUBLG074

Theories and Actors of the Policy Process

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the course is to further understanding of the different actors, processes and stages involved in formulating public policies in liberal democracies, using a range of analytical approaches. At the end of the course, students should have acquired a working knowledge of different theories of public policy—their methods, assumptions and limitations.

Aims

1. To provide a sound account of the logic and structure of the main analytical approaches to the making and evaluation of public policy.

2. To show how these approaches enable us to understand the role of key actors in the policy process.

Learning Outcomes

After taking the module, you should:

1. Be familiar with the main analytical approaches to the study of public policy.

2. Understand the underlying logic of each approach, and also understand how each theory can be applied to public policy processes.

3. Be familiar with the main criticisms applicable to each approach and be in a position to evaluate the validity of those criticisms.
Lectures and Seminars

Sessions will consist of the following:

1. A seminar, based on the previous week's reading. After a short question and answer session to review the week’s topic, there will be a presentation by two to three of the students on the course raising interesting questions for discussion. In most weeks we will take a case study to illustrate the topic of the lecture and to provide a practical example of public policy decision-making. Seminar groups will be allocated during Induction Week. Topics will be allocated in the first seminar of the term. Students are required to read at least the core reading before a seminar—even if you are not presenting. It is much more likely that there will be a lively and useful discussion if everyone has familiarised themselves with the key arguments.

2. A lecture of one hour, on Tuesdays at 9am, which is aimed to introduce you to both the coming week's reading and a wider view of the literature. Note: therefore, the date for each session denotes the topic for lecture rather than the seminar, which will be a week later.

Most theories of the policy process are based on the UK, the USA and Western Europe, but they often apply to the rest of the world. Nonetheless, seminar participants are very much encouraged to introduce examples from other countries and places, including those they may be familiar with.

Seminar presentations should be accompanied by a Powerpoint or Beamer presentation and/or a handout. Students should make an appointment to discuss preparation for their seminar presentations with the relevant lecturer beforehand. If the student gives a ‘dry run’ of the presentation, the lecturer will be able to give feedback that can improve the final presentation.

Assessment: Examination and Essays

The course will be assessed by a three-hour examination in Term 3. A revision class will be held at the beginning of Term 3.

Students will be able to write a non-assessed practice essay question (using a question from a past examination questions available on Moodle) that may be handed in at the start of the second term in January.

Guidance

Students are always welcome to make an appointment to see Margarita Gelepithis or Tim Hicks about the course at a mutually convenient time or during office hours (see the Moodle page for booking online). Students will also be allocated personal tutors during the first three weeks of term.

Readings

A list of reading material is given for each session of the course below. Each week the lecture will include an introduction to the reading, indicating which items are most important for each sub-theme of the topic. Some items are marked with a ‘*’ to indicate core reading for the week.

For those interested in various general perspectives on and treatments of policy-making, there are several texts that you may find to be of value:

- G. Allison and P. Zelikow (1999), Essence of Decision (2nd edition) [first edition from 1971 is just as good]. This book has rightly been much discussed and it illustrates very well the interplay of analysis and empirical understanding.
Lecture Plan

1. Introduction to Public Policy (MG/TH)
2. Collective Action and Interest Groups (MG)
3. Spatial Theories of Voters and Politicians (TH)
4. Institutional Approaches with Rational Actors (TH)
5. Bureaucrats and Delegation (TH)
6. READING WEEK
7. Bounded Rationality (TH)
8. Ideas and Sociological Institutionalism (MG)
9. Agenda Setting, Public Opinion and the Media (MG)
10. Implementation (MG)
11. Review and Synthesis (MG/TH)

Note: dates refer to lectures, seminars on the same topic follow the week after).
1. Introduction to Public Policy (MG/TH: 30 Sep)

Defining terms - theories and actors – "rational" and "less rational" approaches


Further General Introductory Reading


Seminar Question:

Is 'homo economicus' a good starting point for the study of public policy?

2. Collective Action, Interest Groups and Cooperation (MG: 7 Oct)

What is meant by ‘collective action’? - How might it become a problem? If individuals are rational, does it not follow that groups are rational? - If not, why not? How does it come about that collective actions problems are solved?


Modern discussions of collective action often start with the work of Mancur Olson. The core theoretical ideas are conveniently summarised in:

A useful survey of Olson's work is:

Further Reading


**Seminar Case Study: Climate Change**

How far are the predictions derivable from Olson's theory of collective action borne out by empirical evidence in the case of climate change policy? How far can we generalise about collective action in policy making?


**3. Spatial Theories of Voters and Politicians (TH: 14 Oct)**

*Voting as a form of collective choice – the median voter theorem – the dimensionality of political competition – stability and instability in policy*


**Further Reading**


The Classic Works in Spatial Theory


Seminar Case Study: Economic Reform in New Zealand

What general insights into major economic reform are provided by Nagel's study of neoliberal reforms in New Zealand? How far can the approach be applied to other cases of public policy?


The place of institutions in collective choice and policy-making – structure-induced equilibrium – varieties of institutions – institutions as constraints and institutions as facilitators – the concentration and dispersal of political power.
Further Reading


Applications to Specific Policies and Types of Policies

There is also a considerable public policy literature on how the institutional configuration of a country's political system constrains and enables certain types of policies.

Dyson, K. The State Tradition in Western Europe (Oxford: Robertson, 1980).


T J Lowi (1964) 'American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies and Political Theory' World Politics pp.677-715


Seminar Case Study: Comparative Health Policy Reform

How would we give an institutionalist analysis of the 'patchwork' quality of US health care reform?


See also:


5. Bureaucrats and Delegation (TH: 28 Oct)


Further Reading

Blais, and S. Dion (1991) The Budget Maximizing Bureaucrat (University of Pittsburgh)

N. Crowther-Hunt and P. Kellner (1980), Civil Servants: An Inquiry into Britain's Ruling Class (Raven Books)


Dunleavy P. (1991), Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice (Harvester/Prentice Hall), chs.6-8.


**Seminar Case Study: Managing Agencies in the UK**

Discuss the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats when reforming and managing agencies in the UK


---------------------------------
6. READING WEEK: NO LECTURES OR SEMINARS---------------------------------

7. Bounded Rationality (TH: 11 Nov)

*Uncertainty and bounded rationality – organizational process – social interaction and groupthink.*


**Further Reading**


L. Scott (ed.), Fifty Years Beyond the Brink: Writing the Cuban Missile Crisis, *International Relations*, September 2012; 26 (3)

**Seminar Case Study: High Level Foreign Policy Decisions**

How would you evaluate the importance of uncertainty, groupthink and analogy in important foreign policy decisions? Should we expect decision making on domestic issues to be different?


**8. Ideas and Sociological Institutionalism (MG: 18 Nov)**

*The role of ideas in the policy process - policy paradigms and the structure of belief systems in public policy – changes in belief systems – ideas and interests.*


*Daniel Béland (2009) Ideas, institutions, and policy change, Journal of European Public Policy, 16:5, 701-718


**Further Reading**


See also the symposium 'Towards Better Theories of the Policy Process' in PS: Political Science and Politics 24: 2 (1991)


The article by Hall and Taylor is discussed with a reply in the following:


For some specific examples of how ideas might play a role in policy formation, see among many others:


For instances in international relations, see:


Seminar Case Study: The Transition to Neo-Liberal Economic Policy

How are we to understand the role of ideas in the transition from a Keynesian paradigm of economic policy to a neo-liberal paradigm?


Problem definition - what gets policies onto the agenda - the role of public opinion in the formation of policy - supply versus demand models of policy-making - the role of the media - policy innovation – policy streams.


Further Reading


Seminar Case study: Nuclear power

What explains public attitudes to nuclear power?

*T. Birkland (1997), After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events, Chapter 5

F. Baumgartner & B. Jones (2005), Agendas and Instability in American Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Chapter 4


10. Implementation (MG: 2 Dec)


A. McConnell (2010), Understanding Policy Success. Rethinking Public Policy, (Basingtoke: Palgrave)


See also:

The special issue of Public Administration on Implementing Public Policy (June 2004, Vol. 82, Issue 2, pp. 235–545)

Seminar Case Study:

What can the study of public policy implementation teach us about NHS reform?


Mark Exworthy, Lee Berney and Martin Powell (2001)”‘How great expectations in Westminster may be dashed locally’: the local implementation of national policy on health inequalities’ Policy & Politics Vol.30 No.1 pp. 79-96.


Michael Harrison (2004) Implementing Change in Health Systems: Market Reforms in the United Kingdom, Sweden and The Netherlands (Sage)

11. Review and Synthesis (MG/TH: 9 Dec)

