

Syllabus

How Washington REALLY Works

George Mason Govt 467
Issues in Economic Policy

University of Pennsylvania Pol. Sci. 398

Spring, 2022

Professors

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Teaching Assistants

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Fridays, Noon to 3PM
Penn Biden Center
Constitution Ave. at C Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to provide students with an understanding of how decisions and policy are **really** made in Washington. Through eight case studies, ranging from the 1957 Civil Rights Act to welfare reform to Obamacare the course will explore policy debates, political dealing, institutional dynamics and the personalities, motivations, and ambitions of the people involved in enacting legislation and operating the federal government. The role of interest groups, think tanks and the media will also be examined. The course will use Socratic-style lectures, class discussions, and weekly class luncheon speakers to explore these issues. In the final weeks, students working in groups of politically-like-minded colleagues, will be tasked with coming up with comprehensive and politically-realistic policy proposals to deal with immigration, poverty and taxes.

Two Schools, One Course

This course will be offered jointly to students from both the University of Pennsylvania and George Mason University by one professor from each school. The course will be held on neither campus, but at Penn's Biden Center located at the base of Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. Once enrolled, students from both schools will attend the same class sessions, read the same materials and be evaluated in the same manner. To accommodate differences in academic calendars at the two schools, students at both schools are asked to make slight adjustments to their schedules at the beginning and the end of the semester and during spring break (see Class Schedule, below). Enrollment at both schools requires permission of the professor to ensure students will be able to accommodate the unique structure of the course.

Course material—readings, group lists, periodic announcements, quizzes, grades—for Penn students will be available through Canvas, for Mason students through Blackboard.

Class Sessions

Class sessions will generally begin with an hour-long Socratic lecture by one of the professors focused on a major policy initiative from recent history. Students are expected to have done the reading on the case study and able to respond to questions posed by the professor. After the lecture, lunch will be served and there will be a guest speaker from the Washington policy community. Following the luncheon speaker, there will be an hour-long class discussion about that week's policy case study.

During the final three weeks of the course, class sessions will be given over the group presentations.

Penn students will be provided train tickets to and from Washington to attend all class sessions. Mason students will be provided with Metro cards.

Luncheon Speakers

Most weeks during lunch there will be a well-known speaker from the Washington policy, political, and media communities – a politician, administration official, journalist or think tank expert. Professors will “interview” the guest for about 30 minutes, followed by questions and discussion by students. Students are expected to come to class with probing, knowledgeable questions for guests.

[Among possibilities: pandemic adviser Dr. Toni Fauci, journalists Jane Mayer and Elisabeth Bumiller, former Homeland Security Secretary Jed Johnson, Biden adviser and former think tank presidents Neera Tandon, Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Bill Cassidy,

Reps. Liz Cheney and Rosa DeLauro, former Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle, former House Speaker Paul Ryan, business lobbyist and Bush White House Chief of Staff Joshua Bolten, former Deputy Attorney General Jamie Gorelick, former Solicitors General Paul Clement and Neil Katyal.]

Complimentary lunch will be provided to students for all class sessions at the Biden Center.

Quizzes

At the beginning of each class session, there will be a very short quiz on the week's readings. The purpose of the quizzes is simply to determine if students have done and digested the reading. There will be no makeup quizzes, but the worst quiz grade will be dropped from consideration.

Midterm Essay

Students will write an essay of up to ten (10) pages midway through the course on the tension that policy makers face between creating what they feel to be the best policy and accommodating political realities. These are not meant to be research papers. Rather, students are meant to draw on what they have learned so far in the course from the readings, lectures, discussions, and guest speakers.

Group Presentations

Early in the course, students will be divided into nine presentation groups based on their political leanings (liberal, centrists and conservative) and their relative interest in three topics (immigration, taxes and poverty). Prior to the start of the course, students will be asked to complete and return a brief questionnaire on their ideological leanings and policy interests that will be used to make the group assignments.

The task for each group will be to come up with a five-point policy proposal on one of the three topics that is politically viable and consistent with the group's ideological leanings. During each of the final three class sessions, three groups will give a 25-minute presentation explaining their proposals on policy and defending it on policy and political grounds. Group members will then respond to questions and comments from students, including those in competing groups.

Groups will be scored and evaluated on their plans by the professors and a guest evaluator from the Washington policy, political, or media communities. Scores will be based on the thoroughness of research, the clarity with which they define the problem, the sophistication and originality of their proposal to solve it, the soundness of the policy and political logic, and the quality of the oral and graphic presentation.

For the presentations, groups may use up to 15 slides and should provide a single-page summary of their plan that the rest of the class can use to follow along with the presentation.

Although groups should try to operate by consensus, each should select one student to moderate discussions, assign tasks and communicate with professors.

Policy Memos

For their final paper, students will write a 15-page “policy memo” on the topic of their group’s presentation. Like the presentation, the memos should define the problem, outline a five-point plan for solving it and include a discussion of the policy and political logic behind the plan. The paper, however, need not be the same as the group plan, but may reflect the student’s individual, concerns, policy preferences and political calculus. Significantly, it can also incorporate feedback to the group presentations from professors and other students. Criteria for the papers will be the same as for the presentation. Papers will be due 10 days after the group presentation.

Course Evaluation

Class Participation	20%
Quizzes	10%
Midterm Essay	20%
Group Presentation	20%
Policy Memo	30%

Class Schedule

Jan. 14

No Class Session (Penn students)

Jan. 21

Introduction

In person on Penn campus for Penn students
Simultaneously online for GMU students

Watch: "All the Way," starring Bryan Cranston
and directed by Jay Roach
Listen: Selected Oval Office tape recordings from the
Johnson Library

Jan. 28

Lyndon Johnson and the Civil Rights Act of 1957

Reading:

Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate, The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, Ch. 31, 36-41 (Vintage)

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

Feb. 4

Ronald Reagan, Tip O'Neill and Saving Social Security

Reading:

Chris Matthews, *Tip and the Gipper, When Politics Worked*, Ch. 7, 8, 14, 15, 16 (Simon & Schuster)
Robert Ball, *The Greenspan Commission: What Really Happened* (Century Foundation)

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

Feb. 11

John Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Reading:

Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight, Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*, (selected chapters) (Vintage)

Serhli Plokhy, *Nuclear Folly*, Ch. 8-12, 17, 18 (Norton)

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

Feb. 4

Bill Clinton Welfare Reform

Reading:

Ron Haskins, *Work Over Welfare: The Inside Story of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law*, Ch. 5-15, Appendix (Brookings)

Rebecca Blank and David T. Ellwood, "The Clinton Legacy for America's Poor," (NBER Working Paper)

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

Feb. 25

George Bush, Joe Biden and Nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court

Reading:

Jane Mayer and Jill Abramson, *Strange Justice, the Selling of Clarence Thomas* (Houghton Mifflin)

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

Mar. 4

Bill Clinton, NAFTA and the China Trade Deal

Reading:

John R. McArthur, *The Selling of Free Trade, NAFTA, Washington and the Subversion of American Democracy* (Univ. of California)

Jordan Weissman, "Waking the Sleeping Dragon," Slate, Sept. 28, 2016

Luncheon Speaker: TBA

- Mar. 11 No Class Session (Penn Spring Break)
Presentation Groups Meet on Zoom
- Mar. 18 No Class Session (GMU Spring Break)
Presentation Groups Meet on Zoom
- Mar. 25 Barack Obama and the Affordable Care Act**
- Reading:
Jonathan Cohn, *The Ten Year War*, Obamacare and the Unfinished Crusade for Universal Coverage, Ch. 9-17 (St. Martin's Press)
- Luncheon Speaker: TBA
- Midsemester Essays Due**
- April 1 George Bush, Barack Obama and the Auto Bailout**
- Reading:
Steven Rattner, *Overhaul, An Insider's Account of the Obama Administration's Emergency Rescue of the Auto Industry* (Mariner)
- Luncheon Speaker: TBA
- April 8 Group Presentations: Immigration**
- Reading:
George Borjas, We Wanted Workers, Unraveling the Immigration Narrative (Norton)
- April 15 Group Presentations: Taxes**
- Reading:

Jay Shambaugh and Ryan Nunn, eds, *Tackling the Tax Code, Efficient and Equitable Ways to Raise Revenue* (Brookings/Hamilton Project)

April 22

Group Presentations: Poverty

Reading:

Isabel Sawhill, *The Forgotten Americans* (Yale)

April 29

Wrap-up

In person on Fairfax campus for GMU students
Online for Penn students

May 6

No Class Session (Mason students)

ELECTRONIC DEVICES: All cell phones and communications devices should be shut off during class. You may bring computers to class to take notes during lectures or look things up as we are discussing. If you are checking emails or social media, however, you will be asked to put your computer away.

COMMUNICATION: All students should check university e-mail accounts for class updates. If you cannot attend a class session, please your professor know in advance.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodation, please see the professor on the first week of class. Mason students should also contact the Disability Resource Center at 703-993-2474.

ENROLLMENT: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in the class. For Mason students, the last day to add or drop classes without penalty is XXXX. Please let your professor know if you drop the course before or after that date.

HONOR CODE:

1. No help may be given or received by students when taking quizzes, test or examinations, unless the instructor specifically permits.
2. All work submitted to fulfill course requirements is to be solely the product of the individual(s) whose name(s) appear on it. Except with permission of the instructor, no recourse is to be had to projects, papers, lab reports or any other written work prepared by another student.
3. Except with permission of the instructor, no paper or work of any type submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of another course may be used a second time to satisfy a requirement of this course.
4. No assistance is to be obtained from commercial organizations that sell or lease research help or written papers.
5. With respect to all written work, proper footnotes and attribution are required.