COURSE OUTLINE

Rockefeller Center
Public Policy 40: Economics of Public Policymaking
Summer 2015

Professor Charlie Wheelan
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Office hours: Wednesdays 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. or by appointment

OBJECTIVES
The course will use the basic tools of economics to analyze current public policy issues in the United States. Given the time constraints of the course, we will focus on the most significant issues facing the country (and the ones most likely to come up during the 2016 presidential race). The goal is to understand both the substance and politics of each issue. We will examine the effects of recent policy changes and analyze the likely effects of prospective reforms, particularly those that are currently being debated or implemented.

In general, the Tuesday class will provide background on the policy issue at hand. The Thursday class will consist of student presentations and discussion. Given the broad scope of the course, students should expect a heavy reading load.

CANVAS
There is a Canvas site for the course where announcements, readings, grades and other material related to the course will be posted.

READING
The required texts are available at Wheelock Books. All other readings will be posted on the Blackboard site. You are responsible for doing all readings before the class for which they are assigned. Please note that for copyright reasons, you will only be able to access readings posted on Canvas from a computer recognized as part of the Dartmouth community.

COMPUTERS
Please do not use computers or other electronic devices in class. In years past, the distraction has outweighed the benefits of electronic note-taking. If you feel this creates undue hardship, please see me and we can work out a solution. (Evidence now suggests taking handwritten notes leads to better long-term retention.)

Required Texts:


ASSIGNMENTS

- **Quizzes:** There will be regular quizzes on the assigned readings. The quizzes may or may not be announced in advance. The quizzes will be drawn from the reading but will also ask you to analyze policy questions based on material covered in the course to date.

- **Group Presentation:** Each student will participate in one group presentation. The purpose of the presentation is to brief the rest of the class on a specific policy change related to the week’s topic (e.g. 1996 Welfare Reform).

- **Midterm Exam (8/4):** The exam will cover topics and readings through Week 6 of the class.

- **Policy Memo (8/11):** You will be asked to propose a policy change to be implemented at the state, local, or federal level. Your proposal must require some kind of institutional change, which typically means approval by some government body (e.g. a state legislature, a federal agency, Congress, etc.). The policy memo must identify a social challenge, propose a policy change (or package of changes) to ameliorate that social challenge, and defend your plan using tools from the course. *This memo may be rewritten; the final grade will be an average of the first and second drafts.*

- **Final Exam (8/29):** The final exam will cover topics from the second half of the course.

GRADING
The grade for the seminar is made up of the following: quizzes (20%); group presentation (15%); midterm (25%); policy paper (25%); “mini” final exam (15%). *If you choose to rewrite the policy project, your grade will be an average of the first and second drafts.*

SCHEDULE

**WEEK 1**
**Thursday, June 25th**
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
INTRODUCTION

Reading:

**WEEK 2**
**Tuesday, June 30th**
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY AND WHY IS IT SO HARD?

Reading:
Thursday, July 2nd
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR; MARKETS AND GOVERNMENT

Reading:
*Introduction to Public Policy*, Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8.

WEEK 3
Tuesday, July 7th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
WELFARE ECONOMICS AND THE POLICY PROCESS

Reading:

Wednesday, July 8th X-HOUR
3:00-4:15 p.m.
COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Reading:

Thursday, July 9th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
POLICY DESIGN AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Reading:
Wheelan. *Introduction to Public Policy*, Chapters 14 and 15.
WEEK 4
Tuesday, July 14th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
PRODUCTIVITY, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND EDUCATION

Reading:
“Mobility, Measured,” The Economist, February 1, 2014.

Thursday, July 16th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 p.m.
NO CLASS

WEEK 5
Tuesday, July 21st
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
INCOME INEQUALITY AND EDUCATION: WHAT TO DO?

Reading:
“Back to School,” This American Life, September 14, 2012.
“Skills Shortages Are Getting Worse Even as Youth Unemployment Reaches Record Highs,” The Economist, December 8, 2012.
“Is College Worth It?” The Economist, April 5, 2014.
“High-Fliers in the Classroom,” The Economist, February 14, 2015.

Wednesday, July 22nd  X-HOUR
3:00-4:15 p.m.
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Race to the Top
No Child Left Behind
New York City Value Added Indicators

Thursday, July 23rd
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
SPECIAL GUEST: FORMER NH SENATOR JUDD GREGG

Reading:

WEEK 6
Tuesday, July 28th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
HEALTH CARE

Reading:
“Where Do All the Dollars Go?” The Economist, January 10, 2008.

**Thursday, July 30th**  
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.  
HEALTH CARE CONTINUED

**Reading:**  

**WEEK 7**  
**Tuesday, August 4th**  
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.  
MIDTERM EXAM

**Thursday, August 6th**  
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.  
NO CLASS
WEEK 8

Tuesday, August 11th
10:00 a.m. –11:50 a.m.
ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Reading:

➤ POLICY MEMO DUE

Thursday, August 13th
10:00 a.m. –11:50 a.m.
ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT CONTINUED

Reading:
“Big Fracking Deal,” Assorted articles from Foreign Affairs, May/June 2014.

Student Presentations: The Kyoto Protocol; Australia Carbon Tax

WEEK 9

Tuesday, August 18th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
TAX POLICY

Reading:

Group Presentation: Tax Reform of 1986
Thursday, August 20th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
TAX REFORM

Reading:

WEEK 10
Tuesday, August 25th
10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
WRAP-UP AND STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Reading:

PRESENTATIONS:
Portugal Drug Decriminalization
NYC Smoking Ban
Colorado and Washington Marijuana Legalization
1996 Welfare Reform

Wednesday, August 26th

➢ 5:00 P.M. POLICY PROJECT REWRITE DUE (HARD COPY WITH ORIGINAL)

FINAL EXAM: Saturday, August 29th, 11:30 a.m.