Course: Ideas, Politics and Crisis (Sociology 67 & Public Policy 82.2 )

Time: MWF 11:15-12:20
Tues 12:00-12:50 (X-hour)

Instructor: John Campbell
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Office Hours: Monday 1:00-3:00 (and by appointment)

E-Mail: I will try to answer e-mail queries as soon as I can. However, given the rather large amount of e-mail that I receive, I can make no guarantees how fast that will be. For the same reason, my responses may be rather short. Please do not take offense.

Course Description: Political efforts to cope with the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent “Great Recession” have drawn the world’s attention to the importance of new and innovative ideas in public policymaking. But where do these policy programs come from? How are they framed to muster support? What underlying intellectual, political and philosophical assumptions do they involve? How do they correspond to public opinion? How do they reflect the material and political interests of various supporters and opponents? Why do some ideas affect policymaking and others do not? This course explores these issues and others related to how and why ideas affect public policymaking, particularly during times of crisis. Special attention will be focused on the rise since the late 1970s of neoliberalism—a conservative set of ideas, which calls for lower taxes, less welfare spending and less business regulation, among other things. But the course also explores the fate of neoliberalism in the wake of the current crisis and the possibility that we are entering a post-neoliberal era. This is an upper division course that includes a major research paper requirement.

Required Texts: The following required texts for the course are available at the Dartmouth Bookstore and Wheelock Books. They are also on reserve at Baker Library.


General Course Requirements: All students are expected to attend lectures, do the reading, participate in class discussions, write two take-home exams and write a 10-15 double-spaced page research paper. Students are also required to do a (non-graded) oral presentation in class based on their research papers.
Examinations: There are two take-home essay exams. They are open book. However, you may not discuss them with anyone else. The exam dates are listed below in the course outline. **Exams must be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.**

Research Paper and Class Presentation: Each student is required to write a 10-15 double-spaced page research paper on a recent public policy reform initiative in the United States. These will be graded. You will make an oral presentation to the class based on what you learned from writing your individual research paper. Class presentations will not be graded. However, there will likely be an essay question on the second exam based on the presentations. A more detailed description of all of this follows at the end of this syllabus and is posted on the Blackboard site for this course. **The individual research reports are due in class on November 6. Class presentations will take place in class on November 13 through 18. Individual reports should be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.**

Due Date Policy: Exams and research papers turned in after the due date will be graded down automatically according to how late they arrive. (Failure to turn in an assignment will result in failing the course. So it is better to turn it in late than not to turn it in at all.) Due dates are specified in the syllabus below. In extraordinary circumstances late exams and papers may be accepted without being graded down if (1) you know in advance that you will be unable for extraordinary reasons to turn the assignment in on time and you make arrangements with the instructor at least one week before the scheduled due date, or (2) you are suddenly hospitalized or become seriously ill, have documentation to that effect from a doctor or dean, and consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Away games, job interviews, etc. are generally not acceptable reasons for turning assignments in late. Computer crashes are not an acceptable reason for turning assignments in late because you should routinely back up everything on your computer to a flash drive or other memory device.

Class Participation and Discussion: Students are encouraged to raise questions during the lectures. At the end of each unit of the course we will have a discussion of the ideas raised in that unit. Discussion will be organized around (but not necessarily restricted to) the readings for that unit of the course. Class discussion is an important component of the course and is graded.

Grading: Your grade will be based on the total number of points earned on the exams, research paper, and class participation. At the end of the term everyone’s point totals will be calculated, the distribution of these score totals will be calculated and initial cutting points for letter grades will be assigned. The overall class grade point average (GPA) will then be calculated. If the class GPA is too low (less than about 3.0), then cutting points will be adjusted as necessary to bring the class GPA up to an acceptable level. If the initial class GPA is higher than about 3.0, the cutting points will not be adjusted. Once the final cutting points have been determined, then each person will be assigned a final letter grade. If an individual’s total point score falls just below a cutting point, they may be bumped up to the next letter grade if they have shown significant improvement in the course.

| Exam #1 | 60 points |
| Exam #2 | 60 points |
| Research paper | 60 points |
| Class discussion | 20 points |
Honor Principle: All assignments will be conducted in accord with the principles of academic honor detailed in Dartmouth’s Organization, Regulations and Courses and the Student Handbook.

Students with Disabilities: I encourage students with disabilities, including “invisible” disabilities like chronic diseases, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities to discuss with me after class or during my office hours by the end of the second week of the term appropriate academic adjustments or accommodations that might be helpful to you. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Academic Skills Center may be consulted to verify the documentation of the disability.

Reading Assignments: The reading assignments for the course are listed below in the course outline. It is expected that you will have done the reading by the time class meets on the date for which the assignment is listed in the syllabus. There is a lot of reading so you should keep up with it as we go along. Otherwise you will be faced with an extraordinary amount of reading before the exams.

Course Outline:

PART 1: THE NATURE OF IDEAS AND POLITICS–BASIC CONCEPTS

Sep 16 Introduction to the Course: Why Should We Care About Ideas and Politics
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Begin reading)

Sep 18 What are Ideas?
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 20 Beware of the Experts: Sociology of Knowledge
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 23 Experts and Expertise: Who Are They? What Is It?
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 25 Discussion
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Finish reading)

PART 2: POLICY PARADIGMS: HOW DO BIG POLICY ASSUMPTIONS EMERGE & OPERATE?

Sep 27 The Power of Paradigms: Decline of Keynesianism and the Rise of Neoliberalism
David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Begin reading.)

Sep 30 The Neoliberal Paradigm and the Financial Crisis of 2008
Movie: Frontline’s The Warning.
David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Continue reading.)

Oct 2 International Diffusion of the Neoliberal Paradigm
David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Continue reading.)

Oct 4 Discussion
David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Finish reading.)
PART 3: POLICY PROGRAMS: WHERE DO SPECIFIC POLICY PROPOSALS COME FROM?

Oct 7  Policy Networks and Think Tanks in the United States
       Andrew Rich.  Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise.  (Begin reading)

Oct 9  Think Tanks Across Countries
       Andrew Rich.  Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise.  (Continue reading)

Oct 11 Do Think Tanks Influence Policy?
       Andrew Rich.  Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise.  (Continue reading)

Oct 14  Discussion
       Andrew Rich.  Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise.  (Finish reading)

       MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

PART 4: PUBLIC OPINION AND FRAMES: HOW DO THEY AFFECT POLICYMAKING?

Oct 16  Public Opinion: Does It Matter?
       Will Bunch.  Tear Down This Myth.  (Begin reading)

Oct 18  What Shapes Public Opinion?
       Will Bunch.  Tear Down This Myth.  (Continue reading)

Oct 21  What are Frames? Why Do They Matter?
       Will Bunch.  Tear Down This Myth.  (Continue reading)

       MID-TERM EXAM DUE IN CLASS

Oct 22  X-HOUR  Myths, Metaphors and Frames: How is Neoliberalism Framed?
       Will Bunch.  Tear Down This Myth.  (Continue reading)

Oct 23  Discussion
       Will Bunch.  Tear Down This Myth.  (Finish reading)

PART 5: WHAT RELATIONSHIP DO IDEAS HAVE TO POLITICAL INTERESTS?

Oct 25  NO CLASS
       Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson.  2012.  The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.  (Begin reading)

Oct 28  NO CLASS
       Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson.  2012.  The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.  (Continue reading)

Oct 30  Ideas, Money and Politics
       Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson.  2012.  The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.  (Continue reading)
Nov 1  Ideas, Voting and Political Parties
Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson.  2012.  *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*.  (Continue reading)

Nov 4  Discussion
Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson.  2012.  *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*.  (Finish reading)

**PART 6: ARE NEW IDEAS ASCENDENT IN U.S. POLITICS?**

Nov 6  Neoliberalism in Crisis: Institutional Roots of the U.S. Financial Meltdown
Tony Judt.  *Ill Fares The Land*.  (Begin reading)

**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN CLASS**

Nov 8  Response to the Crisis: Have We Seen The Last of Neoliberalism?
Movie: Frontline’s *Inside the Meltdown*
Tony Judt.  *Ill Fares The Land*.  (Continue reading)

Nov 11  Discussion
Tony Judt.  *Ill Fares The Land*.  (Finish Reading)

**PART 7: EVALUATING HOW IDEAS AFFECT PUBLIC POLICY: CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

Nov 13  Class Presentations

Nov 15  Class Presentations

**FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS.**

Nov 18  Class Presentations

Nov 22  **FINAL EXAMS DUE IN MY OFFICE, 123 Silsby Hall, by 5:00 pm.**
RESEARCH PROJECT:
EVALUATING THE EFFECTS OF IDEAS ON PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy in the United States has been heavily influenced since the late 1970s by neoliberal ideas—ideas favoring less government intervention into the economy. But since the Obama administration came into office some people thought that we might see a fundamental shift in the types of ideas that affected public policy. In order to shed some light on this, there is a two-step research requirement in this course. The first step requires that you write a research report about an important national public policy initiative. The second step requires that you make an oral presentation to the class based on your research report. The instructor will assign different policymaking cases to different students, but you will have a chance to express your preferences before the decisions are made. The individual research reports are due in class on November 6. Class presentations will take place in class on November 13 through 18. Individual reports should be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.

WARNING: This project will take time if you do it right!! It will require both considerable research in order to determine how your particular policymaking episode unfolded. It will also require independent thinking on your part to figure out how ideas and other factors affected the outcome (i.e., whether the policy proposal was eventually adopted or not into law).

STEP 1: WRITTEN RESEARCH REPORTS

The first step of this assignment asks you to become an expert on a particular episode of public policy reform. You will select a case where the government tried to pass a major policy reform. Then you will collect data on the case to determine how and to what extent different types of ideas affected the outcome. Your case could be one where the proposed reform was either passed or defeated. Your report should be about 10-15 double-spaced pages long excluding the bibliography.

Case Selection: You will select your case from those policy reform attempts that have been associated with a major crisis—either as a factor contributing to the crisis or as a response to it. These crises include the financial crisis of 2008, the U.S. health care crisis, the U.S. welfare crisis and so on. Some reform attempts occurred during the neoliberal era and some occurred during what some people hoped would be a post-neoliberal era. Your choices follow:

Pre-2008 Era
- Health Security Act of 1993 (Clinton: major health care reform failure)
- Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act (Clinton: banking deregulation)
- Commodity Futures Modernization Act (Clinton: financial services industry deregulation)
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Clinton: major welfare reform)
- Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (Bush II: major tax reform)
- Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 (Bush II: economic stimulus prior to financial crisis)
- Another case of your choice (with instructor approval)
Post-2008 Era

Troubled Asset Relief Program (Bush II/Obama: financial services industry bailout)
Affordable Health Care Act 2010 (Obama: health care reform)
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 (Obama: economic stimulus)
Helping Families Save Their Homes Act 2009 (Obama: mortgage assistance)
Estate Tax Relief Act (Obama: estate tax reform)
Dodd-Frank Financial Reform Act 2010 (Obama: financial services regulatory reform)
Another case of your choice (with instructor approval).

**Analysis:** Once you have your case, then you need to begin collecting information that will enable you to write a case study of your policymaking episode. Your report must address the six issue areas paying explicit attention to both those in favor of and opposed to the policy proposal. The questions following each one are intended to guide you. You are not required to answer each and every one, but the more you can address, the better your report will probably be. Be sure to use subheadings in your paper to clearly identify each part as follows:

1. **Program:** What were the basic elements of the policy being proposed? What problem was it intended to address? How was it supposed to fix the problem? How much was it supposed to cost? How long was it supposed to take to work? Who was supposed to be responsible for implementing the policy if it was adopted? Who’s idea was this policy proposal in the first place? Where did the idea come from?

2. **Frames:** How were frames used by proponents and opponents of the policy? What symbols, metaphors, analogies, data, anecdotes, etc. did each side use to try to sway others?

3. **Paradigms:** What paradigmatic assumptions did proponents and opponents hold? Did they assume that free markets were better than regulated markets? Did they assume that government was the problem or the cure? Did they assume that individuals were responsible for their own problems and their resolution or did they assume that individuals were not responsible for their problems and needed assistance in resolving them? Did they assume that there was one best way to fix the problem or that there might be appropriate alternatives?

4. **Public Opinion:** How did the general public view the proposed policy? According to public opinion polls, did the public favor it or oppose it? Did support or opposition vary significantly by things like political party affiliation, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, age or geographic region? Did public opinion change as debate over the policy unfolded? Did public policy diverge from public opinion?

5. **Interest Groups:** What interest groups supported or opposed the policy proposal? How did groups like business and labor view it? Was it supported or opposed by Republicans and Democrats in Congress or the White House? Did state governors or others play important roles in supporting or opposing it? In other words, who were the important participants in this policymaking episode? Were some participants more influential than others?

6. **Outcome:** What was the outcome? Did the policy proposal pass or fail? Most important, given your answers to the previous questions, how would you explain the outcome?
Data Sources: You will have to be creative in collecting information for your report. You may have to rely primarily on the print media especially for the most recent policymaking episodes about which scholarly articles and books have yet to be written. Here are some sources you might consider. The first one is required:

Print Media (required): To begin with, you are required to look at the editorial and op-ed pages of both “liberal” and “conservative” print publications. For example, on the liberal side you might consider The New York Times, The American Prospect, The Nation, The New Republic, Newsweek, The Boston Globe, The Washington Post, Slate Magazine, or Rolling Stone Magazine, among others. On the conservative side you might consider The Wall Street Journal, The Weekly Standard, The Washington Times, The National Review, The American Spectator, The Manchester (NH) Union Leader, or Business Week, among others. Editorial and op-ed pages are especially good for identifying the frames and underlying paradigmatic assumptions of arguments both for and against policy initiatives. The idea here is to explicitly compare how your policy initiative is treated in both the liberal and conservative press. Of course, you can also use the print media more generally to identify the key aspects of a policy proposal and to trace the details of the political fights that determine the outcomes. It is important to consider sources from both liberal and conservative perspectives!

Blogs: You might also consider blogs written by people from liberal think tanks (e.g., Brookings Institution, Urban Institute, Economic Policy Institute, Center for American Progress, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities) or conservative think tanks (e.g., American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, Hudson Institute, National Center for Policy Analysis). This might be an especially good source of information about frames and underlying paradigmatic assumptions because many blogs are sensationalistic and filled with hyperbole. Here you will also be able to find clear arguments for or against a policy proposal.

Congressional Testimony: Congressional committees typically convene hearings on major policy proposals. The committee will invite testimony from representatives of various points of view. These hearings are often public and published as verbatim transcripts by the U.S. government with lots of supporting documentation provided by people who testify. You can find these transcripts through Baker Library’s government documents section. A transcript will list in the front all of the people who testify and what their organizational affiliation is (e.g., whose interests they may represent). Both Democrats and Republicans invite people to testify so multiple points of view are often represented. These transcripts often run several hundred pages in length including supporting documents.

Books by Non-Academics: Books published by non-academics, especially journalists, high-profile pundits and public opinion makers from both liberal and conservative camps, may be a good source of information about both the details of a policy proposal but also clear statements of why one would want to support or oppose the policy.

Academic Books and Articles: Standard academic books and journal articles may provide a relatively balanced and informative discussion of policy proposals and why they succeeded or failed to be enacted.

Reporting Sources: Be sure to keep track of and document in your report the precise sources you used for all of the information you find. This includes web sites. In terms of style, you may use either parenthetical citations (e.g., see the American Sociological Review or American Journal of Sociology) or footnotes. But in either case you must also include a complete list of every reference that you cite in the
paper (i.e., a bibliography), which does not count toward the page limit.

**STEP 2: CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

Depending on how large the class enrollment is this term once your individual research report is finished one of two things will happen. (1) If the class is small enough, you will prepare an *individual* oral presentation based on your research report and present it to the class. (2) If the class is large, however, you will be grouped with some other students in class to prepare a *group* presentation for class. Either way your presentation will focus on how different types of ideas were used to affect policy outcomes. Class presentations will *not* be graded. Additional guidelines for the group presentations follow:

**Time Limit:** If an individual presentation, you will have 15 minutes maximum. If you are doing a group presentation you will have more time depending on how many groups there are. Please allow a few minutes for questions from the audience.

**Presentations:** Presentations are presented orally to class. You do *not* need to write up anything. However, you should prepare a PowerPoint presentation for the class and email it to the instructor, who will later post it on the course Blackboard site. PowerPoint presentations should be kept to a minimum (e.g., 10 slides). Slides should be clear and succinct. A few bullet points rather than long lines of text are the rule. Graphs and charts are fine. The idea is to create uncluttered, simple slides that can be read easily. Don’t cram too much into each slide! Simplicity is crucial! The oral and PowerPoint presentations will *not* be graded. Their purpose is to provide an opportunity for all of us in the class to think about how ideas have affected various policymaking episodes in the United States.

**Content of Presentation:** The presentation should be based on evidence from the individual research reports. You do *not* need to collect any additional information. Pay attention to the big picture; leave the little details aside (they might be discussed if people have questions for you after the formal presentation). You do *not* have time to give all the fascinating details!

**Examination:** I will likely include a brief question on the final examination that involves information presented in the oral reports. So, for the sake of your classmates, please keep the presentations straightforward, simple, and clear. You don’t have time for much more than that.
Student Preference Sheet

Please specify your preferences as to which policy episode you would like to be assigned to study for the research component of this course. Select your 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th choices by placing a 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, in the space next to the following list of topics:

**Neoliberal Era**

_____ Health Security Act of 1993 (Clinton: major health care reform failure)
_____ Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act (Clinton: banking deregulation)
_____ Commodity Futures Modernization Act (Clinton: financial services industry deregulation)
_____ Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Clinton: major welfare reform)
_____ Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (Bush II: major tax reform)
_____ Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 (Bush II: economic stimulus prior to financial crisis)
_____ Another case of your choice (with instructor approval) _______________________________

**Post-Neoliberal Era**

_____ Troubled Asset Relief Program (Bush II/Obama: financial services industry bailout)
_____ Affordable Health Care Act 2010 (Obama: health care reform)
_____ Financial Stability and Improvement Act (Obama: financial services industry regulation)
_____ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Obama: economic stimulus)
_____ Helping Families Save Their Homes Act (Obama: mortgage assistance)
_____ Estate Tax Relief Act (Obama: estate tax reform)
_____ Dodd-Frank Financial Reform Act 2010 (Obama: financial services regulatory reform)
_____ Another case of your choice (with instructor approval) _______________________________