

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH

**THEORIES OF POLICY FORMATION
POLICY STUDIES 501**

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 4:00 – 5:30pm or by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1979) (photocopy)
2. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961)
3. Thomas R. Dye, *Top Down Policymaking* (2001)
4. Stephen Elkin, *City and Regime in the American Republic* (1987)
5. other articles and books on library reserve or available through J-STOR

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course surveys the leading theories and models of the policy-making process, including systems analysis, pluralism/group theory, elitism, structuralism, and the state autonomy/bureaucratic model. The course examines how different theories view the role of citizen participation, political leadership, bureaucratic institutions, interest groups, academic experts, and business in the policy-making process. The course provides students with the analytic tools to understand variations in the policy-making process across issues and policy sectors and the opportunity to develop their own ideas and applications.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The class is designed to develop and document skills in three areas: (a) to demonstrate a substantive understanding of the major theories and models of the policy-making process, (b) to develop theoretical and analytical skills for comprehending policy issues and related information in terms of abstract concepts, and (c) to improve writing skills by requiring students to organize and articulate complex thoughts and ideas in a concise essay form.

COURSE OUTLINE

TOPIC 1. SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AND POLICY FORMATION

The concept of general theory and the methodological assumptions of behavioral social science. The fundamental categories of systems of analysis. The relationship between systems analysis and policy analysis. Methodological and theoretical limitations of systems analysis.

Week 1 General Theory, Behavioralism, & Fundamental Categories

Required Reading:

Easton, *A Systems Analysis*, Chaps. 1-2

Barrow, "Political Science."

Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences*, pp. 89-106

Week 2 Demand Inputs, Support Inputs, and Stress

Required Reading:

Easton, *A Systems Analysis*, Chap 3-4, 10, 14-15.

Week 3 System Outputs & the Feedback Loop

Required Reading:

Easton, *A Systems Analysis*, Chaps. 22-23, 26

Week 4 Criticisms of Systems Analysis & Critical Theory of Systems Analysis

Required Reading:

Barrow, *Critical Theories*, Chap. 4

TOPIC 2. GROUP THEORY & PLURALISM

The concepts of groups, interest groups, and pluralism as an explanation of public policy. The origins of the community power debate.

Week 1 Fundamental Categories of Group Theory

Required Reading:

Truman, *The Governmental Process*, Chaps. 2-3

(pp. 14-65) and pp. 503-516.

Week 2 American Political Development: From Oligarchy to Pluralism?

Required Reading:

Dahl, Book I, Chaps. 2-7 (pp. 11-88).

Week 3 Dispersed Inequalities: Influence and Political Resources

Required Reading:

Dahl, Book II, Chaps. 8-12 (pp. 89-168); Book IV, Chaps. 19-23 (pp. 223-270).

Week 4 Criticisms of “Pluralism” as Special Interest Policy

Required Reading (any one of the following):

McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (1966), Chap. 1
or

Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (1979), Chap. 1.

EXAMINATION 1 – (due March 21, 2005)

TOPIC 3. ELITE THEORY

The concept of elites, the concentration of economic power, and inequality as a non-decision. The role of economic elites, think tanks, and the policy planning network in policy formulation.

Week 1 Elite Theory, Elite Cohesion, & Policy Formation

Required Reading:

Dye, *Top Down Policymaking*, Chaps. 1-3.

Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, Chap. 1, pp. 13-41.

Suggested Reading:

Domhoff, *Who Rules America*, 3rd Edition (1998), Chaps. 2-4.

Week 2 Dominating the Policy Process

Required Reading:

Dye, *Top Down Policymaking*, Chaps. 4-7

EXAMINATION 2 – (due April 11)

TOPIC 4. STRUCTURALIST THEORY

The relationship between city, state, and market. The dependency principle and the evolution of municipal powers in the United States. Types of urban political economies and policy restraint.

Week 1. The Dependency Principle

Required Reading:

Elkin, *City and Regime*, Chap. 2.

Barrow, *Critical Theories*, Chap. 2, pp. 58-63

AND any one of the following:

Charles E. Lindblom, “The Market as Prison,” *Journal of Politics*,
Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1982): 324-32 (Available through J-STOR).

Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist
Theory of the State,” *Socialist Revolution*, Vol. 7, No. 33 (1977):
6-28.

Claus Offe, "The Theory of the Capitalist State and the Problem of Policy Formation," In Leon Lindberg, ed., *Stress and Contradiction in Modern Capitalism*, pp. 125-144 (1975).

Week 2 Urban Political Economies

Required Reading:

Elkin, *City and Regime*, Chap. 3-4.

Barrow, "State Theory and the Dependency Principle: An Institutional Critique of the Business Climate Concept." Journal of Economic Issues 32 (March 1998): 1-38.

TOPIC 5. NEW INSTITUTIONALISM & STATE AUTONOMY THEORY

Week 1 State Autonomy, State Capacity, & Political Development

Required Reading:

Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, Chap. 1

Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, Chap. 5

Week 2 Case Studies in Policy Formation

Required Reading:

Weir, Orloff, Skocpol, *Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, pp. 3-27.

Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," in King, ed., *The New American Political System*.

Additional Required Reading (any one of the following):

Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (Summer 1982): 255-78. (see J-STOR)

Gregory Hooks, "From an Autonomous to a Captured State Agency," *The Decline of the New Deal in Agriculture*, *American Sociological Review* 55 (February 1990): 29-43. (see J-STOR).

EXAMINATION 3 – (due May 16)

GRADING AND EVALUATION

Students will be evaluated and graded on the results of several different assignments:

1. Analytic Essays (75%): A majority of the final grade will be based on three short (six- to seven-page) critical essays. Students will be provided with a common set of questions and allowed one week to complete each essay as a "take-home" assignment.

a. Late Papers and Make-Ups. Under normal circumstances, papers that are handed in late will be penalized one grade level for each day they are late. For example, an "A" paper that is handed in one day late would be reduced to an "A-". Two days late would reduce it to a "B+", etc. It is possible on exceptional occasions to turn in a late paper or to make-up a missed essay. However, there must be a legitimate excuse such as illness, death in the family, extracurricular university activities, and so forth. Where possible, you should discuss this with the professor in advance.

b. Appealing Grades. It is possible to appeal grades back to the professor. I can be persuaded to raise grades on an appeal. However, I wish to emphasize that you are graded only on what appears in the essay. What you *meant* to say, but forgot to say is not a persuasive argument. All of the essays will have written comments explaining the grade. These will point out strengths on which to build in the future, logical flaws in the argument, failures of precision or definition, omissions, errors, and strategies for improvement. If you disagree with the assessment, you must be prepared to demonstrate your case in specific terms, i.e., how and where in the essay you think the assessment is incorrect.

c. Drops and Incompletes. You may drop any course within the guidelines established by the University. You will not be penalized simply for dropping a course. However, it is the student's responsibility to drop a course. It is my policy that anyone who merely stops attending class, fails to turn in course work, but remains enrolled in the class will receive an "F." Moreover, University policy prohibits professors from awarding an "I" to any student who fails to complete their course work, unless the student specifically requests an Incomplete by the last week of classes. I am receptive to awarding Incompletes under exceptional circumstances (such as late papers and make-ups above). However, these must be arranged prior to the end of the semester.

2. Book Review (25%). Every student is required to critically review a book other than the required texts that deals with a specific public policy issue from a theoretical perspective. The book review should identify the author's purpose or objectives, describe the author's theoretical framework, and summarize the book's substantive analysis. It should offer a brief (one or two paragraph) analysis of whether the author successful achieves his or her objectives in the book. The book review should also analyze whether the author's theoretical framework is useful in analyzing a particularly public policy issue.

The book review should be approximately 5-7 pages and is **due by May 16, 2007**. You may select any secondary work dealing with a contemporary public policy issue. However, ***before reviewing a book, it must be approved by the professor***. Students will find examples of the format and technique for writing a book review in the *Policy Studies Journal*, *Journal of Politics*, or similar scholarly journals.



ON LIBRARY RESERVE

- Barrow, Clyde W., *Critical Theories of the State* (1993)
- Barrow, Clyde W. "State Theory and the Dependency Principle: An Institutionalist Critique of the Business Climate Concept." Journal of Economic Issues 32 (March 1998): 1-38.
- Barrow, Clyde W. "Political Science." In International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson Gale, 2007.
- Block, Fred, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State," *Socialist Revolution*, Vol. 7, No. 33 (1977): 6-28.
- Domhoff, G. William, *Who Rules America*, 3rd Edition (1998)
- Heclo, Hugh, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," in Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (1978).
- Hooks, Gregory, "From an Autonomous to a Captured State Agency," The Decline of the New Deal in Agriculture," *American Sociological Review* 55 (February 1990): 29-43 (Available through J-STOR).
- Lindblom, Charles E., "The Market as Prison," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (May 1982): 324-32 (Available through J-STOR).
- Lowi, Theodore, *The End of Liberalism* (1979)
- McConnell, Grant, *Private Power and American Democracy* (1966)
- Offe, Claus, "The Theory of the Capitalist State and the Problem of Policy Formation," In Leon Lindberg, ed., *Stress and Contradiction in Modern Capitalism*, pp. 125-144 (1975).
- Skocpol, Theda and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (Summer 1982): 255-78 (Available through J-STOR).
- Skowronek, Stephen, *Building a New American State* (1982).
- Truman, Dav id B., *The Governmental Process* (1951).
- Weber, Max, *Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949).
- Weir, Margaret, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (1988).