

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

PPA 210: Political Environment of Policy Making Spring 2026

Instructor:

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Class Meeting Time and Place:

Mondays, 6:00 PM-8:50 PM
304 S Street, Sacramento State Downtown Campus, Room 104/105

Office Hours:

By appointment

OVERVIEW

Policy choices are made by politics. Politics gives decisionmakers and influencers their options, resources, and perceptions. Politics reduces their values and interests into objectives and constituencies. Politics shapes opportunities to take action and actions shape politics. Because politics determines the development and implementation of policies (whether legislative, regulatory, or administrative), it is crucial that MPPA students gain an understanding of the political arena.

This course has three broad aims along with specific learning goals:

1. Improve your understanding of and effectiveness in the political arena.
2. Equip you to consider an ethic of politics, including individual ethical obligations and the ethics of policy choices.
3. Provide you with the opportunity to reflect on and articulate your own values, strengths, and role in the policy process.

RESPECT AND INCLUSION

This course provides an opportunity for us all to learn from each other. We must strive to affirm and value each individual's beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. Because this is a course about politics, we will inevitably find points of disagreement and may step on emotionally charged issues, however every member of this learning community must be treated with dignity and respect.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sacramento State is proud to recognize the California Native Nations, communities, and peoples throughout the state and acknowledge the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory. Our campus operates on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Miwok, Wintu, Maidu, Nisenan (Southern Maidu), and Patwin Native peoples.

LEARNING GOALS

PPA faculty have established a set of learning goals for the program as a whole and have identified particular ones that are relevant to PPA 210. Following are the primary goals for the course (we also have secondary goals) and how they are to be met in PPA 210.

Primary MPPA Program learning objectives covered for PPA 210 What we expect students to learn in PPA 210	What we expect students to learn in PPA 210
Diagnose, map, and analyze decision-making processes, actors, and context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and apply theoretical approaches to policy (and their limitations) for determining how and why policies advance in the political arena. • Recognize when windows of opportunity for policy arise, change, or close. • Understand how the way a policy choice is framed affects its potential for support. • Understand the political tools available to influence policy after legislative enactments.
Analyze systems and practices to surface systemic biases, including structural racism, that advance or impede a more just and equitable society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how differences in resources and ability to gain attention advantage some actors and hurt others.
Effectively communicate with different audiences to build understanding of public problems and policy and administration strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn different styles of communication most appropriate for the advocate, analyst, and advisor in the political arena. • Understand the importance of and develop skills in communicating across partisan differences.
Understand obligations to advance public value consistent with rule of law and an enduring search for reasonable and just action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an understanding of different approaches to advance public value. • Articulate your own values as they relate to public service.
Consider ethical dimensions of choices in public policy and administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an appreciation of the choices inherent in both policy decisions and how policy makers carry them out.
Understand differences between analysis and advocacy including insider and outsider roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understood the differences between the advocate and analyst roles. • Understand and articulate your own strengths within those roles.
Recognize professional role and responsibility/duty of care to your organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the obligations and limitations that follow from an understanding of role ethics.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE

This course relies heavily on student participation. We will make regular use of exercises that simulate and illustrate principles of political environments of policymaking. Students may be asked to take the lead in facilitating class discussions. To be successful, students will need to read class materials prior to class, prepare for the exercises, and engage fully in each session.

READINGS

Two books are required:

Stone, Deborah. 2012. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making, Third Ed.* W.W. Norton & Company.

Disch, Lisa Jane. 2021. *Making Constituencies: Representation as Mobilization in Mass Democracy.* University of Chicago Press.

Further readings are available on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING WEIGHTS

Assignment due dates are specified in the class schedule section at the end of this syllabus. Course grades will be determined in accordance with the following weights:

Individual Presentation	20%
Group Presentation	20%
Take-Home Final Examination	20%
Class Participation Throughout the Course	40%

LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED CLASSES

I will accept late assignments (or allow for a make-up examination) only in unusual circumstances. I expect students to attend all class sessions unless they have a compelling reason not to do so. You should notify me in advance if you need to miss a class. Unless exceptional circumstances exist, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g. an A- for the course will become a B-), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

SPECIAL NEEDS RELATED TO DISABILITIES

Should you need assistance with portions of class due to disabilities, please let me know as soon as possible. The University offers services to students with disabilities and I would be glad to refer you to the appropriate campus unit.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please come to class each session having already read the *Readings* indicated for that session.

Part One: Presuppositional Values and Networks

January 26

Readings:

- Stone, Introduction
- Weible, Chapter 1. Multiple Streams Framework

February 2

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 1. The Market and the Polis
- Weible, Chapter 4. Advocacy Coalition Framework

Exercises:

- Collective Action Problem
- Deciding Social Aid

February 9

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 2. Equity
- Stone, Chapter 3. Efficiency

Exercise: Pursuing Equity

February 16

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 4. Welfare
- Schulte, et al. Incorporating “Well-Being” in Public Policy for Workers and Workplaces

Exercise: Identifying Needs

February 23

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 5. Liberty
- Stone, Chapter 6. Security

Exercise: Which Liberty?

Part Two: Problem Perceptions and Knowledge Production

March 2

Readings

- Stone, Chapter 8. Numbers
- Manheim, Building Less-Flawed Metrics

Exercises:

- Framing Homelessness
- Responding to and Creating Numbers

March 9

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 7. Symbols
- Kolas, et al., From Towers to Walls: Trump's Border Wall as Entrepreneurial Performance

Exercise: Symbolize Your Agenda

March 16

Readings:

- Stone, Chapter 9. Causes
- Stone, Chapter 10. Interests

Exercise: Gains and Losses

March 23

- No Class / Spring Recess

March 30

- Student Presentations

April 6

- Student Presentations

Part Three: Mobilizing Solutions and Creating New Politics

April 13

Readings:

- Disch, Introduction. Responsiveness in Reverse
- Disch, Chapter 1. In Defense of *Mobilization*

Listen: Do We Need to Redefine Democracy? *Politics in Question*:
<https://www.politicsinquestion.com/episodes/redefinedemocracy>

April 20

Readings:

- Disch, Chapter 2. From the Bedrock Norm to the Constituency Paradox
- Abrego, Legitimacy, Social Identity, and Mobilization of Law: The Effects of Assembly Bill 540 on Undocumented Students in California

Exercise: Group-Making

April 27

Readings:

- Disch, Chapter 3. Can the Realist Remain a Democrat?
- Nicholson-Crotty, Bureaucratic Competition in the Policy Process

Exercise: Anticipating Constituency Effects

May 4

Reading: Disch, Chapter 4. Realism for Democrats

Exercise: Revisiting Definitions

May 11

Group Presentations

Take home final examination due at 5:00 p.m. on May 18.