PPA 210: Political Environment of Policy Making
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. Nikki Crew

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Course Room & Meeting Details: Wednesdays 6-8:50pm, room 104/5

Communication Policy: I prefer inquiries come primarily through email/Canvas, as I am generally able to respond within a few hours (or the next day if a late inquiry), but for emergencies – please don't hesitate to shoot me a text. Note: I am an early bird, so please be aware that late evening messages in any form will likely receive a response the following morning. If you send me an inquiry and don't hear back within 36 hours, please feel free to ping again.

Course Description: Assists students in learning to identify the political factors impinging on the policy process and in learning to cope with them. With special emphasis on the California political environment and issues, employs case studies, structured role-playing, and including politically feasible policy alternatives and advice to hypothetical clients. The goal is to equip students to work effectively as politically aware policy analysts.

Prerequisite(s): PPA 200 or instructor permission

Student Expectations
This course will be conducted seminar style with frequent individual and group activities, related both to the readings and professional role play/development. I will lecture for a short period of time each class to weave together concepts and provide an overview of themes, etc. The rest of our time will be student engagement with the material via discussion and the aforementioned activities. To that end, students must attend class consistently and have completed all assigned readings. As you read each week, consider how the readings fit together (or not!) and what those similarities/differences might mean.

Required Texts
- Studying Public Policy: Principles and Processes; Michael Howlett, M. Ramesh, & Anthony Perl, isbn: 9780199026142, Oxford Press
- Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making, Deborah Stone, isbn: 9780393912722, W.W. Norton & Company
- Additional readings may be assigned some weeks. They will be available on Canvas.

Statement of Respect & 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. This is a course about politics, we will inevitably find points of disagreement and discomfort, however every member of this learning community must be treated with dignity and respect.

Land Acknowledgment
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.

Course Overview

Policy decisions are inherently political. Policy makers and other interested parties with a seat at the table often hold different values and interests about policy matters and attempt to advance them through a variety of means (e.g., deployment of resources, advantageous issue framing, appropriate choice of decision venue). Ultimately, politics heavily influences what public policy choices are possible and how decisions are implemented. Accordingly, it is crucial that MPPA students gain an understanding of the political arena.

This course is structured as a bridge between public policy theory and its application to real-world policy issues and developments, particularly for policy analysts. As such, we will be pursuing three goals over the course of the semester. In the first half, we will be examining the public policy canon, exploring both the intellectual foundations and current developments. The course's second broad aim is to enhance your understanding of the thorniness of the wicked problems policy analysts face, in addition to what people *should* do in the political arena. We will consider both individual ethical obligations and the ethics of policy choices. The third aim of the course, one that will be woven throughout, is to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on and articulate your own values, strengths, and role in the policy process.

PPA 210 focuses especially on the development stage of the policy process, and particularly efforts to secure enactment of legislation. However, we will also devote considerable attention to policy implementation and how political battles continue after laws are enacted.

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 60%

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 student with disabilities, and I would be glad to refer you to the appropriate campus unit.

Academic Honesty

I take issues of academic honesty (including avoiding plagiarism) seriously and you should as well. If you are unfamiliar with the specifics of University policy in this area I recommend you review the appropriate section of the on-line University Policy Manual: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/AcademicHonestyPolicyandProcedures.htm.

All of your submitted written work in this course is expected to be your own. For the purpose of this course, you may use AI resources for initial source queries and basic grammar support, but may not use AI to generate ideas, outlines, or initial content of your assignments.

Makeup Assignments and Missed Classes

As most of your grade is comprised of presentations + participation, whether or not a missed assignment can be made up, and whether a penalty will still be assessed, depends on the reason for missing a deadline (e.g., a family emergency constitutes a good reason; a competing requirement for another course does not).

You should inform me prior to the session if you must miss class on a specific day. Except under very unusual circumstances, a student who misses three classes will be penalized one entire grade (e.g., a B+ for the course will become a C+), and a student who misses more than three classes will receive a failing grade.

Learning Goals

The PPA faculty members 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**
Diagnose, map, and analyze decision making processes, actors, and context.	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.	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.	Learn the 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.	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.	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.	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.	Appreciate the obligations and limitations that follow from an understanding of role ethics.

CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to revisions)

All readings are available on Canvas or in your assigned text. All readings are to be completed before the class period for which they are scheduled.

Getting Started

Week 1: January 28

Readings:

- HRP Chapter 1
- Sabatier and Weible; Chapter 1 (canvas)
- Gormley; Public Policy Analysis: Ideas and Impacts (canvas)

Part 1: The Big Picture

Week 2: February 4

Readings:

- HRP Chapters 2 & 3
- Sabatier & Weible; Chapter 4 (canvas)
- Cooper et al; Social Construction and Perinatal Illicit Substance Screening (canvas)

Week 3: February 11

Readings:

- HRP Chapter 4
- Sabatier & Weible; Chapter 3 (canvas)
- Brock; Measuring the Stasis (canvas)

Week 4: February 18

Readings:

- HRP Chapter 5
- DeLeon; Policy Formulation: Where Ignorant Armies Clash by Night (canvas)
- Mukhtarov; Combining Behavioural and Reflective Policy Tools… (canvas)

Week 5: February 25

Readings:

- HRP Chapter 6
- Sabatier & Weible, Chapter 2 (canvas)
- Margonelli; Mud, Muddling, and Science Policy (canvas)
- Civic Pulse-Carnegie; Polarization of Local Governments (canvas)

March 4

Readings:

- HRP Chapter 7
- Maldonado et al; Science Translation During the COVID 19 Pandemic (canvas)
- Chater & Loewenstein; The i-frame and the s-frame (canvas)

March 11

Readings:

- HRP Chapters 8 & 9
- Additional reading(s) TBD

March 18

- Presentations

March 25

- No Class / Spring Recess

Part 2: The Why and the Should

April 1

Readings:

- Stone Chapters 1-3
- Weimer and Vining Chapter 2 (canvas)

April 8

Readings:

- Stone Chapters 4-6
- Smith and Chabria; California Spends Billions Rebuilding Burned Towns. The Case for Calling it Quits (canvas)

April 15

Readings:

- Stone Chapters 7-9
- Additional Readings TBD

April 22

Readings

- Stone Chapters 10-12
- Weimer and Vining Chapter 3 (canvas)

April 29

Readings:

- Stone Chapters 13-14
- Additional Readings TBD

May 6

Readings:

- Stone Chapters 15-16 + Conclusion

May 13

Group Presentations

Take home final examination due by 11:59pm on May 20.