**GOVTS-1507 Introduction to Public Policy**  
7-week session — Harvard Summer School  
**Syllabus DRAFT: June 26th, 2018**

**Professor:** Viridiana Rios, Ph.D.  
**Email:** viririos@purdue.edu  
**Online sessions:** 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm (EST), see specific dates at syllabus & Canvas calendar.  
**Mandatory on-campus weekend:** July 28th-29th, 2018.  
**Office Hours:** By appointment.

**Course description**

With political polarization fast becoming the defining issue of our time, there is a pressing need to develop a more precise understanding of the actions of government and the intentions that determine such actions. In this class, we will develop an in-depth understanding of what public policy is and why we sometimes justify government involvement in solving social problems. We will learn how to identify the characteristics of effective and ineffective policies by examining the conditions under which government actions may stifle intergenerational mobility, equal opportunity, and better social and economic outcomes. We will also examine the environments in which poorly designed public policies may create unexpected consequences and negative outcomes, such as exclusion or political capture. This course will explore many of the paradoxes inherent in public policy research by focusing on the highly controversial topics that animate today’s most meaningful public debates, such as gun ownership, homelessness, education, healthcare, and welfare policies.

**Skills to be developed**

Students will be required to critically engage with qualitative and quantitative academic literature, identifying the implicit assumptions, veiled ideology, or measurement choices that drive different policies. By the end of this course, students will be able to elucidate the scholarly theories behind policy design, and know how to formulate, implement, and evaluate a policy. To put theory into practice, students will work in small teams to design and conduct their own policy analysis on a topic of their choosing. Policy analyses will be presented during the on-campus session and should stimulate a thoughtful and informed debate about the challenges of the policy area.

**Requirements & grading**

- **Policy Analysis Presentation (30%)**: Students will sort themselves into teams to conduct original research linking theoretical arguments explored in class with a policy area. Each team will prepare a 30-minute professional presentation that will inform the audience about the main policies that have been implemented in their chosen area, as well as the major challenges that remain to be solved. Late deliveries will only count up to 22.5%.

- **Policy Recommendation (20%)**: Each student will submit a separate policy recommendation intended to solve (or mitigate) the challenges presented by their team during their policy analysis. Creativity and feasibility will be rewarded. Policy recommendations may be delivered in the form of a memo (1,500 words max.), op-ed (800 words max.), or video/podcast (10 min. max.). Late deliveries will only count up to 15%.

- **Reading Quizzes (20%)**: Students will be given quizzes, dates won’t be provided in advance.

- **Participation (20%)**: Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to class, actively engage in discussions, and link assigned materials to relevant debates in the media and politics. Readings marked as “further readings” are not required.

- **Homework (10%)**: Students will be given assignments to reinforce concepts learned in class. Late

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1They will select among: (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) economics & the budget, (4) the environment and energy, or (6) foreign policy & homeland security.
deliveries will be penalized by subtracting 25% of homework’s grade.

**Special requirements for graduate students:** Participation (10%), policy recommendation (30%). The quality of the policy recommendation is expected to be significantly higher.

**Attendance and mandatory on-campus session**
Summer School policy requires attendance in all classes. Each missed class without medical excuse reduces grades by 9 points (9%). Visit [Summer School policies around Student Responsibilities](#) to learn more. The mandatory on-campus session meets on Saturday-Sunday, July 28th-29th, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm (EST) at 1 Brattle Square 201; Cambridge, MA. Attendance is required during the entire weekend to earn credit and pass the course. You cannot arrive late or leave early. If you are traveling, please plan accordingly to give yourself plenty of time to arrive by the start of class. No exceptions can be granted.

**Course materials**
All required reading materials will be provided in advance by the professor since they are available online, except for:


**General syllabus**
I. Basic definitions and concepts (sessions 1-3).
II. Tools for policy analysis (sessions 4-5).
III. The policy process (session 6-10).
IV. Wrapping up (session 11-12).

**Detailed syllabus**

**I. Basic definitions and concepts.**

June 28th, 2018.

**Session 1. Definitions of public policy & policy analysis.**

Explain the nature of public policy and identify the key concepts associated with it, define policy analysis and its components.

Required readings:


Further readings:


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2Some of the provided materials may not be the newest version but a slightly older version that was found online. Contents are not significantly different between versions.

Session 2. Actors and their resources.
Define policy actor and the different goals she may pursue; explore governmental and nongovernmental actors involved in the policy process. In this session, students will be required to sort themselves into one of six policy areas.

Required readings:

Further readings:

July 5th, 2018.

Session 3: Theories of public policy & types of public policy.
Identify typologies of public policies to understand how and why policies are implemented, and why some groups may benefit more than others.

Required readings:

Further readings:

II. Tools for policy analysis.

July 10th, 2018.

Session 4: Writing a policy memo and working with sources.

These are (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) economics & the budget, (4) the environment and energy, or (6) foreign policy & homeland security.
Explore strategies and mechanisms to make effective policy recommendations about real-world problems. Learn how to efficiently gather information about a policy area.

Required readings:


**July 12th, 2018.**

**Session 5: Roles & networks; op-ed.**
Understand the roles that actors may play during the decision-making process. Develop the ability to write an op-ed to bring attention to a relevant issue.

Required readings:

Further readings:

**III. The policy process.**

**July 17th, 2018.**

**Session 6: Problem definition.**
Become aware of how a problem is identified and defined as a policy issue. Learn basic concepts such as agenda-setting, elite theory, and the different market failures that justify government intervention.

Required readings:

Further readings:
Day 1: Decision making & policy tools.  
Identify how policy decisions are made and what factors can influence them. Learn the different instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals.

Required readings:

Further readings:

Day 2: Adoption, implementation & evaluation.  
Understand the process from policy proposal to actual policy adoption. Understand what happens to a policy after it has been formulated, and evaluate different criteria for judging the value of real-world policies.

Required readings:

Further readings:
IV. Wrapping up.

August 2nd, 2018.
Session 7: Limits of policymaking.
Classify government failures into four general categories and understand the factors that may inhibit a policy from being successful that are not controlled by policymakers.

Required readings:

Further readings:

August 7th, 2018.
Final Exam: Policy recommendation due before 8:00 pm (EST).

Academic integrity
This course follows the policies on academic integrity of the Harvard Summer School. Please carefully read the Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity. For help with citing your sources correctly, please also visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity. Summer School assumes that collaboration on assignments is prohibited unless permitted by the instructor. Please, take a look at Harvard Guide to Using Sources.

Accessibility
The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit here for more information.