GOVT S-1507 Introduction to Public Policy
Harvard Summer School – 7-week session
Syllabus DRAFT: August 18, 2020

Professor: Viridiana Ríos, Ph.D.
Email: vrios@post.harvard.edu

Online sessions: T-Th, 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm (EST)
Office hours: By appointment

TAs: Vanessa Beltran vanessabeltran@hsph.harvard.edu
David Brown dbrown@jd21.law.harvard.edu

Course description
With political polarization fastly 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, health care, 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 course and should stimulate a thoughtful and informed debate about the challenges of the policy area.

Attendance and mandatory on-campus session.
Summer School policy requires attendance in all classes. Each missed class without medical excuse reduces grades by 8 points (out of 100). Visit Summer School policies around Student Responsibilities to learn more.

Structure
I. Basic definitions and concepts (sessions 1-3).
II. The policy process (session 4-10).
III. Wrapping up (session 11-12).

Required materials
To succeed in this course, you must read the required readings before class. In each class, I will generally tell you a bit about how to prepare for the next class. Expect to read an average of 65 pages per week and 30 minutes of audiovisual material.
All required materials have been uploaded to our website and will remain there for the length of the course. In addition, you will have a list of optional (not required) additional readings that provide you with further knowledge and alternative interpretations of the topics we study. You do not have to read the not required readings.

Grading
- Policy Analysis Presentation (30%): Students will sort themselves in one of seven groups. Each group will prepare a 30-minute professional presentation to inform the audience about the main policies that have been implemented in a policy area, as well as the major challenges that remain to be solved. The possible policy areas are: (1) welfare & social policy, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) economics & the budget, (5) the environment and energy, (6) foreign policy & homeland security, or (7) technology and personal data.
– **Policy Recommendation (20%)**: Each student will submit, individually, 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 should be delivered in the form of a memo (1,500 words max.). Due on August 7, before 8:00 pm (EST).
– **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.

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

**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](https://www.harvard.edu/summer/). For help with citing your sources correctly, please also visit the [Resources to Support Academic Integrity](https://www.harvard.edu/summer/). Summer School assumes that collaboration on assignments is prohibited unless permitted by the instructor. Please, take a look at [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](https://www.harvard.edu/summer/).

**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.

**Late policy**
Barring an extraordinary excuse, late papers will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., A to A-minus) per day.

**Detailed syllabus**

**I. Basic definitions and concepts.**

**Session 1. Definitions of public policy & policy analysis (June 23)**
Understand the nature of public policy and identify the key concepts associated with it, define policy analysis and its components.

**Required readings**

**Additional readings**
Session 2. Actors (June 25)
Define a 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 seven policy areas.

Required readings

Additional readings

Session 3: Theories & types of public policy (June 30)
Identify typologies of public policies to understand how and why policies are implemented, and why some groups may benefit more than others.

Required readings

Additional readings:

II. The policy process

Session 4: Roles & working with sources (July 2)
Understand the roles that actors may play during the decision-making process. Learn how to efficiently gather information about a policy area.

Required readings

Additional readings

No class (July 7-9)

Session 5: Rationales for public policy (July 14)
Become aware of how a problem is identified and defined as a policy issue.

Required readings

Additional readings

Session 6: Market policies (July 16)
Identify how policy decisions are made and what factors can influence them. Learn basic concepts such as agenda-setting, elite theory, and the different market failures that justify government intervention. Learn the different market instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals.

Required readings

Additional readings

Session 7: Non-market policies (July 21)
Learn the different non-market instruments that governments may use to satisfy policy goals. Write an effective policy memo.
Required readings

Additional readings

Session 8: Strategy (July 23)
Explore strategies and mechanisms to make effective policy recommendations about real-world problems.

Required readings

Additional readings

Session 9: Adoption (July 28)
Understand the process from policy proposal to actual policy adoption. Develop the ability to write an Op-Ed to bring attention to a relevant issue.

Required readings

Additional readings

Session 10: Implementation (July 30)
Understand what happens to a policy after it has been formulated.

Required readings
**Additional readings:**

### III. Wrapping up

**Session 11: Policy evaluation (August 4)**

Evaluate different criteria for judging the value of real-world policies.

**Required readings**

**Additional readings**

**Session 12: The limits of policymaking (August 6)**

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**

**Additional readings**