

Department of Sociology  
Dartmouth College  
Fall 2014

Course: The Political Power of Ideas (Sociology 67 & Public Policy 82.2 )

Time: MWF 11:15-12:20  
Tues 12:00-12:50 (X-hour)

Instructor: John Campbell  
123 Silsby Hall  
Office phone: 646-2542

Office Hours: Monday 1:00-3:00 (and by appointment)

E-Mail: I will try to answer e-mail queries as soon as I can. However, given the rather large amount of e-mail that I receive, I can make no guarantees how fast that will be. For the same reason, my responses may be rather short. Please do not take offense.

Course Description: Politicians fight over ideas all the time—ideas about how to improve education, reform taxes, clean up the environment, generate economic prosperity, and much more. This course explores where these ideas come from and the power they have. It investigates how politicians and their operatives frame their ideas to convince us that they are right and everyone else is wrong. It considers the intellectual paradigms and assumptions that give rise to policy ideas in the first place. And it examines how people's values and attitudes influence which policy ideas they are likely to believe and accept or not, often regardless of the facts. Along the way the course also considers the role of experts in policy making, who the experts are, and whether we should believe them. Finally, the course analyzes how policy ideas change and what political, economic and other forces trigger these changes. Emphasis is largely but not entirely on the political power of ideas in the United States.

Required Texts: The required texts are available at the local bookstores and on reserve at Baker Library.

Will Bunch. 2009. Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future. New York: Free Press.

David Harvey. 2007. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jeffrey Henig. 2008. Spin Cycle: How Research is Used in Policy Debates—The Case of Charter Schools. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Tony Judt. 2010. Ill Fares The Land. New York: Penguin.

Thomas Medvetz. 2012. Think Tanks in America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism. New York: Oxford University Press.

Background Reading (not required):

John L. Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen. 2014. The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany and Denmark. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

John L. Campbell. 2002. "Ideas, Politics and Public Policy." Annual Review of Sociology 28:21-38.

John L. Campbell. 1998. "Institutional Analysis and the Role of Ideas in Political Economy." Theory and Society 27:377-409.

General Course Requirements: All students are expected to attend lectures, do the reading, participate in class discussions, write two take-home exams and write a 10-15 double-spaced page research paper. Students are also required to do a (non-graded) oral presentation in class based on their research papers.

Examinations: There are two take-home essay exams. They are open book. However, you may not discuss them with anyone else. The exam dates are listed below in the course outline. ***Exams must be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.***

Research Paper and Class Presentation: Each student is required to write a 10-15 double-spaced page research paper on a recent public policy reform initiative in the United States. These will be graded. You will make an oral presentation to the class based on what you learned from writing your individual research paper. Class presentations will not be graded. However, there will likely be an essay question on the second exam based on the presentations. A more detailed description of all of this follows at the end of this syllabus and is posted on the Blackboard site for this course. ***The individual research reports are due in class on November 3. Class presentations will take place in class on November 12 through 17. Individual reports should be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.***

Due Date Policy: Exams and research papers turned in after the due date will be graded down automatically according to how late they arrive. (Failure to turn in an assignment will result in failing the course. So it is better to turn it in late than not to turn it in at all.) Due dates are specified in the syllabus below. In extraordinary circumstances late exams and papers may be accepted without being graded down if (1) you know in advance that you will be unable for extraordinary reasons to turn the assignment in on time and you make arrangements with the instructor at least one week before the scheduled due date, or (2) you are suddenly hospitalized or become seriously ill, have documentation to that effect from a doctor or dean, and consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Away games, job interviews, etc. are generally not acceptable reasons for turning assignments in late. Computer crashes are not an acceptable reason for turning assignments in late because you should routinely back up everything on your computer to a flash drive or other memory device.

Class Participation and Discussion: Students are encouraged to raise questions during the lectures. At the end of each unit of the course we will have a discussion of the ideas raised in that unit. Discussion will be organized around (but not necessarily restricted to) the readings for that unit of the course. ***Each student in the class (probably with one or two others) will be responsible for leading one of these discussions during the term.*** Class discussion is an important component of the course and is graded. Generally speaking, discussions will begin by addressing these questions: What was the author's causal argument and main messages? Why did you like/dislike the book? Why did you agree/disagree with the book?

Grading: Your grade will be based on the total number of points earned on the exams, research paper, and class participation. At the end of the term everyone's point totals will be calculated, the distribution of these individual point totals will be calculated and initial cutting points for letter grades will be assigned. The overall class grade point average (GPA) will then be calculated. If the class GPA is too low (less than about 3.0), then cutting points will be adjusted as necessary to bring the class GPA up to an acceptable level. If the initial class GPA is higher than about 3.0, the cutting points will not be adjusted. Once the final cutting points have been determined, then each person will be assigned a final letter grade. If an individual's total point score falls just below a cutting point, they may be bumped up

to the next letter grade if they have shown significant improvement in the course.

Exam #1	60 points
Exam #2	60 points
Research paper	60 points
Class discussion	20 points

Honor Principle: All assignments will be conducted in accord with the principles of academic honor detailed in Dartmouth's Organization, Regulations and Courses and the Student Handbook.

Students with Disabilities: Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course that may need disability-related classroom or other accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see the instructor before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Disability Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested. Students who want to discuss this should provide the instructor with a copy of a disability registration form, which lists the accommodations recommended for them by the Student Disability Services within the Academic Skills Center. This will also verify that you are registered for disabilities services. If you do not have such a form, please see the Director of Student Disability Services to get one.

Reading Assignments: The reading assignments for the course are listed below in the course outline. It is expected that you will have done the reading by the time class meets on the date for which the assignment is listed in the syllabus. There is a lot of reading so you should keep up with it as we go along. Otherwise you will be faced with an extraordinary amount of reading before the exams.

Course Outline:

## **PART 1: BASIC CONCEPTS—THE NATURE OF IDEAS AND POLITICS**

Sep 15 Introduction to the Course: Why Should We Care About Ideas and Politics  
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Begin reading)

Sep 17 What are Ideas?  
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 19 Beware of the Experts: Sociology of Knowledge  
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 22 Guest speaker: Zakiya Smith, Strategy Director at the Lumina Foundation, and formerly Senior Advisor for Education at the White House Domestic Policy Council, where she was tasked with developing President Obama's higher education policy.

Sep 23 **X-HOUR**: Experts and Expertise: Who Are They? What Is It?  
Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Continue reading)

Sep 24 Discussion

Jeffrey Henig. Spin Cycle. (Finish reading)

## **PART 2: PARADIGMS: HOW DO POLICY ASSUMPTIONS EMERGE & OPERATE?**

Sep 26 **NO CLASS**

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Begin reading.)

Sep 29 The Power of Paradigms: Decline of Keynesianism and the Rise of Neoliberalism

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Continue reading.)

Oct 1 The Neoliberal Paradigm and the Financial Crisis of 2008

Movie: Frontline's The Warning.

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Continue reading.)

Oct 3 International Diffusion of the Neoliberal Paradigm

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Continue reading.)

Oct 6 Discussion

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. (Finish reading.)

## **PART 3: PROGRAMS: WHERE DO SPECIFIC POLICY PROPOSALS COME FROM?**

Oct 8 Policy Networks and Think Tanks in the United States

Tom Medvetz. Think Tanks in America. (Begin reading.)

Oct 10 Think Tanks Across Countries

Tom Medvetz. Think Tanks in America. (Continue reading.)

Oct 13 Do Think Tanks Influence Policy?

Tom Medvetz. Think Tanks in America. (Continue reading.)

Oct 15 Discussion

Tom Medvetz. Think Tanks in America. (Finish reading.)

**MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS**

## **PART 4: PUBLIC OPINION & FRAMES: HOW DO THEY AFFECT POLICYMAKING?**

Oct 17 Public Opinion: Does It Matter?

Will Bunch. Tear Down This Myth. (Begin reading)

Oct 20 What Shapes Public Opinion?

Will Bunch. Tear Down This Myth. (Continue reading)

Oct 22 What are Frames? Why Do They Matter?

Will Bunch. Tear Down This Myth. (Continue reading)

**MID-TERM EXAM DUE IN CLASS**

Oct 24 Myths, Metaphors and Frames: How is Neoliberalism Framed?  
Will Bunch. Tear Down This Myth. (Continue reading)

Oct 27 Discussion  
Will Bunch. Tear Down This Myth. (Finish reading)

#### **PART 5: POLITICAL INTERESTS—WHAT RELATIONSHIP DO THEY HAVE TO IDEAS?**

Oct 28 **X-HOUR**: Ideas, Money and Politics  
Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism. (Begin reading)

Oct 29 Ideas, Voting and Political Parties  
Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism. (Continue reading)

Oct 31 Discussion  
Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism. (Finish reading)  
Note: *Short class period that will finish at 12:00 noon!*

Nov 3 Neoliberalism in Crisis: Institutional Roots of the U.S. Financial Meltdown  
Tony Judt. Ill Fares The Land. (Begin reading)  
**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN CLASS**

#### **PART 6: ARE NEW IDEAS ASCENDENT IN U.S. POLITICS?**

Nov 5 **NO CLASS**

Nov 7 Response to the Crisis: Have We Seen The Last of Neoliberalism?  
Movie: Frontline's Inside the Meltdown  
Tony Judt. Ill Fares The Land. (Continue reading)

Nov 10 Discussion  
Tony Judt. Ill Fares The Land. (Finish Reading)

#### **PART 7: EVALUATING HOW IDEAS AFFECTED PUBLIC POLICIES**

Nov 12 Class Presentations

Nov 14 Class Presentations

Nov 17 Class Presentations  
**FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS.**

Nov 24 **FINAL EXAMS DUE IN MY OFFICE, 123 Silsby Hall, by 11:30 am.**

Socy 67  
Fall 2014

**RESEARCH PROJECT:  
EVALUATING THE EFFECTS OF IDEAS ON PUBLIC POLICY**

Public policy in the United States has been heavily influenced since the late 1970s by neoliberal ideas—ideas favoring less government intervention into the economy. But since the Obama administration came into office some people thought that we might see a fundamental shift in the types of ideas that affected public policy. In order to shed some light on this, there is a two-step research requirement in this course. The first step requires that you write a research report about an important national public policy initiative. The second step requires that you make an oral presentation to the class based on your research report. The instructor will assign different policymaking cases to different students, but you will have a chance to express your preferences before the decisions are made. ***The individual research reports are due in class on November 3. Class presentations will take place in class on November 12 through 17. Individual reports should be typed, double-spaced, stapled in the upper left hand corner, and turned in as hard copy.***

**WARNING:** This project will take time if you do it right!! It will require both considerable research in order to determine how your particular policymaking episode unfolded. It will also require independent thinking on your part to figure out how ideas and other factors affected the outcome (i.e., whether the policy proposal was eventually adopted or not into law).

**STEP 1: WRITTEN RESEARCH REPORTS**

The first step of this assignment asks you to become an expert on a particular episode of public policy reform. You will select a case where the government tried to pass a major policy reform. Then you will collect data on the case to determine how and to what extent different types of ideas affected the outcome. Your case could be one where the proposed reform was either passed or defeated. ***Your report should be about 10-15 double-spaced pages long excluding the list of references.***

Case Selection: You will select your case from those policy reform attempts that have been associated with a major crisis—either as a factor contributing to the crisis or as a response to it. These crises include the financial crisis of 2008, the U.S. health care crisis, the U.S. welfare crisis and so on. Some reform attempts occurred during the neoliberal era and some occurred during what some people hoped would be a post-neoliberal era. Your choices follow:

*Pre-2008 Era*

- Health Security Act of 1993 (Clinton: major health care reform failure)
- Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act (Clinton: banking deregulation)
- Commodity Futures Modernization Act (Clinton: financial services industry deregulation)
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Clinton: major welfare reform)
- Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (Bush II: major tax reform)
- Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 (Bush II: economic stimulus prior to financial crisis)
- Another case of your choice (with instructor approval)

*Post-2008 Era*

- Troubled Asset Relief Program (Bush II/Obama: financial services industry bailout)
- Affordable Health Care Act 2010 (Obama: health care reform)
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 (Obama: economic stimulus)
- Helping Families Save Their Homes Act 2009 (Obama: mortgage assistance)
- Estate Tax Relief Act (Obama: estate tax reform)
- Dodd-Frank Financial Reform Act 2010 (Obama: financial services regulatory reform)
- Another case of your choice (with instructor approval).

Analysis: Once you have your case, then you need to begin collecting information that will enable you to write a case study of your policymaking episode. ***Your report must address the six issue areas listed below paying explicit attention to both those groups in favor of and opposed to the policy proposal.*** The questions following each issue area are intended to guide you. You are not required to answer each and every one of these questions, but the more you can address, the better your report will probably be. Be sure to use subheadings in your paper to clearly identify each part as follows:

1. *Program*: What were the basic elements of the policy being proposed? What problem was it intended to address? How was it supposed to fix the problem? How much was it supposed to cost? How long was it supposed to take to work? Who was supposed to be responsible for implementing the policy if it was adopted? Who's idea was this policy proposal in the first place? Where did the idea come from?
2. *Interest Groups*: What interest groups supported or opposed the policy proposal? How did groups like business and labor view it? Was it supported or opposed by Republicans and Democrats in Congress or the White House? Did state governors or others play important roles in supporting or opposing it? In other words, who were the important participants in this policymaking episode? Were some participants more influential than others?
3. *Frames*: How were frames used by proponents and opponents of the policy? What symbols, metaphors, analogies, data, anecdotes, etc. did each side use to try to sway others?
4. *Paradigms*: What paradigmatic assumptions did proponents and opponents hold? Did they assume that free markets were better than regulated markets? Did they assume that government was the problem or the cure? Did they assume that individuals were responsible for their own problems and their resolution or did they assume that individuals were not responsible for their problems and needed assistance in resolving them? Did they assume that there was one best way to fix the problem or that there might be appropriate alternatives?
5. *Public Opinion*: How did the general public view the proposed policy? According to public opinion polls, did the public favor it or oppose it? Did support or opposition vary significantly by things like political party affiliation, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, age or geographic region? Did public opinion change as debate over the policy unfolded? Did public policy conform to or diverge from public opinion?
6. *Outcome*: What was the outcome? Did the policy proposal pass or fail? Most important, given your answers to the previous questions, how would you explain the outcome?

Data Sources: You will have to be creative in collecting information for your report. You may have to rely primarily on the print media especially for the most recent policymaking episodes. Here are some sources you might consider. The first one is required:

*Print Media (required):* To begin with, you are required to look at the editorial and op-ed pages of both “liberal” and “conservative” print publications. For example, on the liberal side you might consider *The New York Times*, *The American Prospect*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, *Slate Magazine*, or *Rolling Stone Magazine*, among others. On the conservative side you might consider *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Washington Times*, *The National Review*, *The American Spectator*, *The Manchester (NH) Union Leader*, or *Business Week*, among others. Editorial and op-ed pages are especially good for identifying the frames and underlying paradigmatic assumptions of arguments both for and against policy initiatives. The idea here is to explicitly compare how your policy initiative is treated in both the liberal and conservative press. Of course, you can also use the print media more generally to identify the key aspects of a policy proposal and to trace the details of the political fights that determine the outcomes. It is important to consider sources from both liberal and conservative perspectives!

*Blogs:* You might also consider blogs written by people from liberal think tanks (e.g., Brookings Institution, Urban Institute, Economic Policy Institute, Center for American Progress, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities) or conservative think tanks (e.g., American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, Hudson Institute, National Center for Policy Analysis). This might be an especially good source of information about frames and underlying paradigmatic assumptions because many blogs are sensationalistic and filled with hyperbole. Here you will also be able to find clear arguments for or against a policy proposal.

*Congressional Testimony:* Congressional committees typically convene hearings on major policy proposals. The committee will invite testimony from representatives of various points of view. These hearings are often public and published as verbatim transcripts by the U.S. government with lots of supporting documentation provided by people who testify. You can find these transcripts through Baker Library’s government documents section. A transcript will list in the front all of the people who testify and what their organizational affiliation is (e.g., whose interests they may represent). Both Democrats and Republicans invite people to testify so multiple points of view are often represented. These transcripts often run several hundred pages in length including supporting documents.

*Books by Non-Academics:* Books published by non-academics, especially journalists, high-profile pundits and public opinion makers from both liberal and conservative camps, may be a good source of information about both the details of a policy proposal but also clear statements of why one would want to support or oppose the policy.

*Academic Books and Articles:* Standard academic books and journal articles may provide a relatively balanced and informative discussion of policy proposals and why they succeeded or failed to be enacted.

Reporting Sources: Be sure to keep track of and document in your report the precise sources you used for all of the information you find. This includes web sites. In terms of style, you may use either parenthetical citations (e.g., see the *American Sociological Review* or *American Journal of Sociology*) or footnotes. But in either case you must also include a complete list of every reference that you cite in the paper (i.e., a bibliography), which does not count toward the page limit.

## STEP 2: CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Depending on how large the class enrollment is this term once your individual research report is finished one of two things will happen. (1) If the class is small enough, you will prepare an *individual* oral presentation based on your research report and present it to the class. (2) If the class is large, however, you will be grouped with some other students in class to prepare a *group* presentation for class. Either way your presentation will focus on how different types of ideas were used to affect policy outcomes. Class presentations will **not** be graded. Additional guidelines for the group presentations follow:

Time Limit: If an individual presentation, you will have 15 minutes maximum. If you are doing a group presentation you will have more time depending on how many groups there are. Please allow a few minutes for questions from the audience.

Presentations: Presentations are presented orally to class. You do **not** need to write up anything. However, you should prepare a PowerPoint presentation for the class and email it to the instructor, who will later post it on the course Blackboard site. PowerPoint presentations should be kept to a minimum (e.g., 10 slides). Slides should be clear and succinct. A few bullet points rather than long lines of text are the rule. Graphs and charts are fine. The idea is to create uncluttered, simple slides that can be read easily. Don't cram too much into each slide! Simplicity is crucial! The oral and PowerPoint presentations will **not** be graded. Their purpose is to provide an opportunity for all of us in the class to think about how ideas have affected various policymaking episodes in the United States.

Content of Presentation: The presentation should be based on evidence from the individual research reports. You do **not** need to collect any additional information. Pay attention to the big picture; leave the little details aside (they might be discussed if people have questions for you after the formal presentation). You do **not** have time to give all the fascinating details!

Examination: I will likely include a brief question on the final examination that involves information presented in the oral reports. So, for the sake of your classmates, please keep the presentations straightforward, simple, and clear. You don't have time for much more than that.

Name (print very clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Preference Sheet

Please specify your preferences as to which policy episode you would like to be assigned to study for the research component of this course. Select your 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> choices by placing a 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, in the space next to the following list of topics:

#### *Neoliberal Era*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Health Security Act of 1993 (Clinton: major health care reform failure)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gramm-Leach-Bliley Financial Services Modernization Act (Clinton: banking deregulation)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Commodity Futures Modernization Act (Clinton: financial services industry deregulation)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Clinton: major welfare reform)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (Bush II: major tax reform)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 (Bush II: economic stimulus prior to financial crisis)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Another case of your choice (with instructor approval) \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Post-Neoliberal Era*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Troubled Asset Relief Program (Bush II/Obama: financial services industry bailout)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Affordable Health Care Act 2010 (Obama: health care reform)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial Stability and Improvement Act (Obama: financial services industry regulation)
- \_\_\_\_\_ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Obama: economic stimulus)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Helping Families Save Their Homes Act (Obama: mortgage assistance)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Estate Tax Relief Act (Obama: estate tax reform)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dodd-Frank Financial Reform Act 2010 (Obama: financial services regulatory reform)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Another case of your choice (with instructor approval) \_\_\_\_\_