

**American Institutions**  
Shaping Public Policy  
Sherwood Boehlert  
Spring 2007

**Course Objective:**

The course on American institutions will examine the “who” and “how” in the formula for shaping public policy. While the theoretical will be reviewed, the emphasis will be on the practical - how does the government framework with which we are endowed work in practical terms.

A diverse mix of entities, public and private, will be reviewed during weekly lectures which will require preparatory readings and reflections designed to produce interactive and productive class discussions. The objective of the course is to increase understanding of the complexities and uncertainties endemic to policy making in the United States.

**Course Requirements:**

The course will meet on Wednesday evenings from 7-10 p.m. Each session will consist of an opening lecture (often with guests expert in the area under review) of approximately 90 minutes followed by a 20 minute break and a wrap-up open forum discussion.

Requirements consist of a 600 word op-ed advocacy piece, a three-page policy memo with recommendations and a final exam.

Assignments are expected to be turned in on time and will be lowered by one grade for each day they are turned in late and will receive an automatic failing grade one week after the due date.

**Attendance:**

Students are expected to attend classes - it's their money being spent. Only one unexcused absence will be tolerated.

**Texts:**

Readings will be taken primarily from: Politics and Public Policy, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. By Van Horn, Baumer and Gormley. (CQ Press).

Handouts will supplement the required text readings as appropriate and will be handed out in a timely manner.

## **Grading Distribution:**

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Class Participation | 15% A |
| Op-Ed Piece         | 15%   |
| Policy Memo         | 25%   |
| Final Exam          | 45%   |

### **(An automatic 5 point bonus on the course grade can be earned by reading and submitting a one page “lessons learned” report on:**

\* “The Framing Wars” by Matt Bei, New York Times Magazine, July 17, 2005

\* Broken Branch, by Thomas A. Mann and Norman Ornstein (Oxford Press)

## **The Plan:**

Week 1: Jan. 24. Introduction to the course

Readings: Politics and Public Policy, Ch. 1, pgs. 1-25

Week 2: Jan. 31. The Peoples’ House (U.S. House of Representatives).  
Charles W. Johnson, Parliamentarian, U.S. House, guest

Week 3: Feb. 7. The World’s Most Deliberative Body (The Senate);  
Richard A. Baker, Senate Historian, guest

Readings: Politics and Public Policy, Ch. 5, pgs 121-56

Week 4: Feb. 14. POTUS (The President of the United States)  
John Podesta, President, Center for American Progress  
Former Chief of Staff, President William J. Clinton, guest

Readings: Politics and Public Policy, Ch. 6 pgs. 157-192

Week 5: Feb. 21. The Judicial Branch  
Daniel Popeo, Chairman and General Counsel  
Washington Legal Foundation, guest  
Readings: Politics and Public Policy, Ch 7 pgs 193-230

Week 6: Feb. 28. The Regulatory Process  
Benjamin Grumbles, Assistant Administrator (Water)  
Environmental Protection Agency, guest  
Readings: To be provided

Week 7: March 7 The Executive Branch, Departments and Agencies  
Kris Balderson, former Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet and Deputy  
Assistant to the President (Clinton), current Deputy Chief of Staff  
To Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, guest

Week 8: March 14: Spring Break

Week 9: March 21. Foundations and Think Tanks  
Tim Roemer, President, Center for National Policy  
Member of 9/11 Commission, Former Member of the House, guest

Week 10: March 28. Special Interests Advocates 1

Subject: “Energy Dependence/National Security Implications-  
What are we to do?”  
Two Perspectives (Acceptances pending).

Week 11: April 4 Special Interests Advocates 2

Subject: “Global Climate Change-An Inconvenient Truth,  
Hogwash, or.....”  
Two Perspectives. (Acceptances are pending from experts  
who will come at the subject from different vantage points.)

**(Students will use this input, plus other sources and the knowledge  
Acquired through the course work to date in the preparation of a  
3 page Policy Advocacy Memo (pro or con, student’s choice) which  
is due prior to the convening of the next class.**

Week 12: April 11 The Media  
Albert Eisele, Editor-at-large, The Hill, guest

Week 13 April 18. Pollsters, Politics and Public Opinion  
“How does it all come together and what do we make of it?”  
Acceptance Pending.

Week 14 April 25 Final Exam

## **Opinion/Editorial Assignment**

Op-ed pieces are short, argumentative statements designed to persuade a general readership to accept the writer's point of view. Editorials, on the other hand, take strong positions on controversial issues of the day and often urge a specific course of action

A balanced input of readings (op-eds, columns, and editorials) add immensely to an individual's ability to make reasoned judgments in dealing with public policy issues.

The goal of this assignment is to force you to give serious thought to the topic of this course, American Institutions, The Shaping of Public Policy.

Our system of government, which Churchill once famously said "...is the worst form of government, except all those others..." is serving us well according to some, while others contend that changes are needed. This is not addressing specific policies (Iraq, health care, etc.) but rather a specific system.

In a 600 word op-ed piece, using the information acquired through this course, do your best to convince the readers that our system is strong and should be continued, citing why you think so and providing specific references to back up your case or you have the option of taking the position that our system has major deficiencies requiring change. Here, too, give examples of those perceived deficiencies and recommended changes to make the system better.