

PADP 8620: Policy Process

Summer 2026

*University of Georgia
School of Public and International Affairs
Department of Public Administration and Policy*

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Office: Baldwin Hall 276
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Class Schedule: Tuesdays, 5:30 PM to 9:15 PM
Class Location: Baldwin 301

Office Hours: available by appointment

Course Description

Key concepts in the study of public policy. Among the topics covered are description of policy process to include agenda setting, policy formulation, and policy adoption.

This course is designed to familiarize you with the policy process and how to communicate complex policy information to different audiences. Two competencies that students can expect to gain from this course are (1) understanding and communicating the policy cycle, and (2) an ability to critically analyze policy concepts and how these relate to your role as a professional. These skills will be valuable for careers in public administration and provide a foundation for students interested in policy-related research. These competencies will be developed through individual writing exercises and in-class discussion.

How will we approach these discussions and exercises? This course will be conducted in person once per week.

Student Learning Objectives

- Students will become familiarized with the roots of policy process studies and how the field has evolved over time.
- Students will develop and improve their command of theoretical concepts in order to conceptually frame and communicate policy information.
- Students will link concepts covered in the course to their own role in the policy process.
- Students will complete regular exercises and assignments to convey policy process information for different audiences.

Required Text

Birkland, Thomas A. *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making*. Routledge, 2019.

NOTE: this text is available as an eBook through the [UGA Library](#).

Martin, K., Lee Jr, K. E., & Hall, J. P. (2021). *Public policy: Origins, practice, and analysis*. University of North Georgia Press.

NOTE: this is available on eLC in our weekly readings.

Recommended Text

Sabatier, Paul A., ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*. Westview Press, 2014. (The 2018 edition has some of the most recent updates in theoretical advancement, but much of the same content).

eLearning Commons and Online Resources

In addition to the required textbooks, additional reading is posted in a folder in the eLearning Commons (eLC). Students can access online information about our class at <http://elc.uga.edu>. Graduate students should become familiar with searching for journal articles and books using the library's holdings and electronic databases. Many journals are free to you through your status as a student at the University of Georgia, and you should make use of these resources.

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Assignments will be evaluated using a point system, with 100 points possible for the class. Note, the grade "A" indicates "outstanding" achievement. The following scale will be used to assign letter grades in this class:

100 – 94 points A	86.9 – 83 points B	75.9 – 70 points C
93.9 – 90 points A-	82.9 – 80 points B-	69.9 – 60 points D
89.9 – 87 points B+	79.9 – 76 points C+	59.9 – 0 points F

Assignment	Due Date	Points
In-Class Discussion and Participation	Weeks 1-8	20
Exam	25	35
Policy Brief (MPA or PhD) or Proposal (PhD)	May 6	45

In-Class Discussion: A core feature of this class is to engage with the material to develop—and strengthen—a command of policy process concepts. This will entail discussion in class of the concepts throughout lecture, as well as during—and following—in-class exercises.

Take-Home Exam: There is one essay examination, comprises 35% of your final grade. The exam is designed to assess your command of the material and concepts we cover therein. Foundational knowledge about the policy process and how this relates to theory and practice is a critical for current and future public administrators seeking to understand the system in which they operate.

The exam will require responses on three of four questions presented. The exam will cover material covered throughout the entire class. The written response should be one-two pages double-spaced for each question (11pt font, Times New Roman). With note taking and class participation throughout the semester, students should need no more than 2.5 hours (i.e., class time) to complete.

- The exam will be available on eLC at **5:30pm EST on Tuesday, July 30**, and is due on eLC by **9:50pm pm EST on Tuesday, July 31**.

Policy Brief: A policy brief is a key resource for framing policy issues, discussing what is known about the issue, how this relates to policy goals, and recommending solutions to decision makers or other target audiences. This assignment will focus on your group's policy issue of choice. Instructions will be posted to eLC. The policy brief is due on **July 31 by 11:59pm EST** on eLC.

Class Expectations and Guidelines

Statement on AI and Classwork: AI is becoming a key tool in schools and in the workplace. While AI is not prohibited to guide your work, there are some rules about how to ethically use AI that we will follow.

- 1) AI produces well-written content. Because of this, my ability to assess the quality of your writing will depend on:
 - The validity of your sources
 - The quality of your ideas
- 2) When using verbatim text generated from AI, you are expected to include AI in your works cited. You are also expected to include a statement as to why and how you used AI chatbots.
- 3) We will complement take-home assignments with in-class written assignments for data collection, brainstorming, exploratory writing, and synthesis. For ongoing assignments (e.g., policy briefs), should you decide to build on this content with support from AI, you may do so.
- 4) I want you to succeed in your profession. To stand out from other potential employees, we will work on exercises that promote higher-order thinking. Through this approach, you will use AI tools to not only generate sophisticated responses, but to:
 - articulate when and how you know that the AI chatbot is using reliable sources
 - verify or refute claims made by the AI chatbots
 - reflect on AI chatbot feedback and further prompts to consider how well the material generated suits your needs

Assignment Submission and Grades:

Assignments—unless completed as part of an in-class exercise—will be submitted on eLC by the set deadline.

All grades will be posted in a timely manner in eLC. Students are encouraged to frequently check their progress during the semester. Students have two weeks after a grade is posted to meet with me regarding grading issues. **After two weeks, the grade WILL NOT be changed.**

Should you wish to discuss your grade, you must meet with me during office hours or by Zoom. I am not able to discuss grades by email.

Class Preparation and Discussion: Complete the reading assigned before each class meeting and be prepared for discussion. Make sure everyone has an opportunity for input. We are interested in each person's contribution, so please understand if I ask for brevity or a conclusion

to a chain of discussion. Your dedication each week will be necessary for gaining the knowledge and tools necessary for the writing assignments and presentation. Finally, you are expected to practice professional decorum and respect in the classroom.

Lecture Protocols: Recording or distribution of class sessions (video or audio) is prohibited. If a student wishes to record, they must first gain approval from the instructor and other students that may be included in the recording. Students that require recording for purposes of special accommodation must have relevant written accommodations from the UGA Disability Resource Center. Please see the DRC [guidelines](#) for more information.

Freedom of expression is welcome, but decorum must be professional and respectful. In accordance with UGA [here](#), expressive activities must not disrupt the class.

Preferred Name and Pronouns: Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I am eager to address you by your preferred name and/or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Academic Honesty: As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in "A Culture of Honesty" found at: <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Plagiarism: Our capacity to learn and synthesize knowledge within the public administration profession depends upon our ability to build on the foundation of existing knowledge and research. Recognizing and documenting the work of others is critical for all students. When writing, students must take great care in how they reference ideas and information sources. **Never use someone else's words or ideas in your writing without proper attribution.** Serious penalties exist for academic misconduct and plagiarism. Students should read and be familiar with the following resources:

- UGA Academic Honesty Policy: Plagiarism
https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/Prohibited_Conduct/
- UGA Libraries Research Guide: Writing and Citing
<http://www.libs.uga.edu/researchguide/writing/index.html>

Mental Health and Wellness Resources: If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) or crisis support (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies>).

- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Electronic Devices: Silence all phones and other electronic noise-making devices while you are in the classroom. Save text messages and emails for the break or after class. Laptop computers or tablets may be used for taking notes, but students must refrain from participating in any online activities during class. Before using electronic devices with online access in class, students should be aware of the learning distractions associated with these technologies in the classroom (e.g., <http://tinyurl.com/q7pdtgc>).

Late Assignments: Deadlines have been structured so that the instructor can provide regular and periodic feedback on your understanding and application of the course material. For late submissions, 1 point will be deducted from the final grade of the assignment for each day it is late. **No late material will be accepted after August 1, 2026.**

Communication with the Instructor: Throughout the semester, you can reach me by email, and can expect me to return correspondence in a timely manner (at most 48 hours, not including weekends). Please contact me by email so that we can identify a good meeting time.

UGA Well-being Resources: UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community. Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit sco.uga.edu. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the **Embark@UGA** program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity. UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Accessibility & Testing: accessibility.uga.edu

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting well-being.uga.edu.

Disabilities and Accommodations: If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Disability Resource Center. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting <http://drc.uga.edu>

Student Success Resources: The Office for Student Success and Achievement (OSSA) empowers students to achieve success throughout their academic journey. Through free peer tutoring, academic coaching, UNIV student success courses, Bulldog Basics, and first-generation student

support, we promote well-being, student learning, and community building. To connect with OSSA, email ossa@uga.edu, call (706) 542-0163, or visit Milledge Hall (near Reed Hall and Sanford Stadium).

Disclaimer for Syllabus and Schedule Changes: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The instructor will communicate changes in writing through your UGA email account.

Other Logistics:

- Please go to the following link to learn more information on the confidentiality of student records: <https://reg.uga.edu/general-information/ferpa/>
- Requests for incompletes (I) and withdrawal (W) must be made in accordance with university policies. For information on incompletes, please go here: <https://osfa.uga.edu/resources/policies/enrollment-financial-aid/grade-changes-incomplete-grades/>
- For withdrawals go here: <https://osfa.uga.edu/resources/policies/enrollment-financial-aid/dropping-courses-vs-withdrawing/>

Schedule

Our class meets twice per week on Tuesdays from 5:30pm to 9:15pm. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings *before* the class. We will then cover the lecture, and students will engage in discussion and exercises relating to weekly content. Any questions about the schedule can be directed to evbell@uga.edu.

Week 1 (June 9): Course Overview + Introducing the Policy Process

- [Paul Cairney: Politics and Public Policy](#)
- Birkland Ch. 1: Introducing the Policy Process, pp. 1-27.
- Birkland Ch. 2: Elements of the Policy-Making System, pp. 33-37.
- Martin et al. *Public Policy: Origins, Practice, and Analysis*, pp. 45-49

Week 2 (June 16): Process and System Structure in Policymaking + Official and Unofficial Actors in the Policy

- Birkland Ch. 2: Elements of the Policy-Making System, pp. 37-69.
- Birkland, Ch. 4: Official Actors and their Role in Public Policy, pp. 113-150.
- Birkland, Ch. 5: Unofficial Actors and their Role in Public Policy, pp. 184-226.
- Martin et al., Chapter 2

Week 3 (June 23): Belief Systems + Science in the Policy Process

- Jenkins-Smith, Hank, Daniel Nohrstedt, Chris Weible, and Karin Ingold. 2018. "Chapter 4: The Advocacy Coalition Framework." In *Theories of the Policy Process*. pp. 140-141.
- Sabatier, P., Hunter, S., & McLaughlin, S. 1987. "The devil shift: Perceptions and misperceptions of opponents." *Western Political Quarterly*, 40 (3), 449-476.
- Paul Cairney: "People engage in politics to further their beliefs—but what do they believe?" <https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/people-engage-in-politics-to-further-their-beliefs-but-what-do-they-believe/>
- Karl, H. A., Susskind, L. E., & Wallace, K. H. (2007). A dialogue, not a diatribe: effective integration of science and policy through joint fact finding. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 49(1), 20-34.
- Straf, M. L., Schwandt, T. A., & Prewitt, K. (Eds.). (2012). *Using science as evidence in public policy*. National Academies Press. Chapter 4.

Week 4 (June 30): Problem Definition, Agenda Setting, and Politics of Attention

- Birkland, Ch. 6
- Kingdon Ch. 8, pp. 168-179
- Crow, D., & Jones, M. (2018). Narratives as tools for influencing policy change. *Policy & Politics*, 46(2), 217-234. (posted on eLC)
- Conduit or contributor? The role of media in policy change theory (Shanahan et al. 2008) (posted on eLC)
- Policy in 500 Words: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (Cairney 2019)

Week 5 (July 7): Policy Design, Tools, and Types

- Birkland, Ch. 7 and Ch. 9
- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1990). Behavioral assumptions of policy tools. *The journal of politics*, 52(2), 510-529.
- Stone, D. A. (1989). Causal stories and the formation of policy agendas. *Political science quarterly*, 104(2), 281-300.
- Oliver, A. (2012). "Public Health Policy: Issues, Theories, and Controversies"

Week 6 (July 14): Policy Analysis + the Use of Theory

- Birkland, Ch. 8

- Cairney, Paul and Heikkila, Tanya. (2014). "A Comparison of Theories of the Policy Process." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, 3rd edition. Edited by Paul Sabatier. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (posted on eLC). Read pp. 363-372.
- "Policy Analysis in the Policy Process" by Dunn (2012), pp. 31-41 and 54-57 (posted on eLC)
- Blanchard, S. (2007). Policy analysts: Shaping society through research and problem-solving. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, 51(1), 20. (posted on eLC)

Week 7 (July 21): Policy Diffusion

Reading (complete before July 21):

- Berry, Frances Stokes and William Berry. (2014). "Innovation and Diffusion Models in Policy Research." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, 3rd edition, 307-338. Edited by Paul Sabatier. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (posted on eLC)
- Mintrom, M. 1997. "Policy entrepreneurs and the diffusion of innovation." *American Journal of Political Science*, 738-770. (posted on eLC)
- Volden, C., Ting, M.C., and Carpenter, D. P. (2008). A Formal Model of Learning and Policy Diffusion. *American Political Science Review*, 102 (3), 391-332. (posted on eLC)
- Pp. 840 – 845 of Shipan, C. R., & Volden, C. (2008). The mechanisms of policy diffusion. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 840-857. (posted on eLC)

Week 8 (July 28): Policy Implementation and Failure

Reading (complete before July 28):

- Birkland, Ch. 10, pp. 343 – 354.
- O'Toole Jr, L. J. (2000). Research on policy implementation: Assessment and prospects. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 10(2), 263-288.
- Moulton, S., & Sandfort, J. R. (2017). The strategic action field framework for policy implementation research. *Policy Studies Journal*, 45(1), 144-169.
- Riccucci, N. M. (2005). Street-level bureaucrats and intrastate variation in the implementation of temporary assistance for needy families policies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(1), 89-111. (posted on eLC)