

Introduction to Public Policy
PLSC 260 – Professor Rick Mayes
Fall 2005

Section One: 1:35-2:25 p.m. MWF (Weinstein 204)
office hours: Monday and Friday 3:45-5 p.m.
or by appointment if these times are not convenient

Section Two: 2:40-3:30 p.m. MWF (Weinstein 204)
office: Weinstein 202M, x6404
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Morality, in so many words, represents the ideal way that people want (usually *others*) to behave. Public policy—influenced by economics, psychology, philosophy, politics, and religion—reflects essentially the same aspiration, but is based on the way people *actually* behave. As the art of political decision-making, public policy reflects the reality that: (1) penalties and incentives (“sticks and carrots”) are what primarily drive modern life; (2) information, who has how much of it and when, is key to structuring effective penalties and incentives; and that (3) thinking empirically, knowing what to measure and how to measure it, is as important as thinking normatively.

Opinions are good, but they operate even better as starting points for developing testable theories and arguments about what the best policies are for, say: improving education, strengthening national security, lowering unemployment, increasing health, expanding employment, decreasing poverty, protecting the environment, preventing crime, expanding wealth, financing public investments, and consuming limited resources. In its purest form, the goal of any public policy is to make life better for as many people as possible. What makes public policy so challenging and interesting, though, is that people invariably disagree over what constitutes things such as equality, fairness, effectiveness, and causation. This course aims to teach you how problems are defined and goals are set, as well as how policy solutions are crafted and the ways in which we judge their effectiveness.

Course Readings

- Steven Levitt, Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics* (William Morrow/HarperCollins, 2005)
- Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice* (Ecco/HarperCollins, 2004)
- James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Doubleday, 2004)
- Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (Little, Brown & Company, 2005)
- Robert Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (Vintage Books/Random House, 1998)
- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (Henry Holt & Company, 2001)
- Rick Mayes, *Universal Coverage* (University of Michigan Press, 2005)
- National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004)
- Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005)
- Congressional Quarterly, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy* (CQ Press, 6th ed., 2005)

Class Attendance, Preparation and Participation

Class attendance is not technically mandatory *except for all Fridays beginning October 21*. Given the complexity and demands of the material, however, missing class greatly increases the likelihood that your grade will suffer (perhaps dramatically). There may be days when this risk may seem like a necessary one for you to take, but I urge you to always weigh the opportunity costs.

Honor Code: Every assignment and exam must be submitted with your signature next to the full written pledge:

“I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

Failure to do this will result in your work not being graded or accepted for credit.

Assignments and Grading

Class Participation/Discussion	10%
Mid-Term Exam	30%
Policy Research Paper	15%
Team Debates	15%
Final Exam	<u>30%</u>
Total	100%

Grades

"Abandon hope, all 'ye who have become accustomed to grade inflation."

This class is, by virtue of the subject matter and inherent learning curve, something of a grade-deflator. Keep your grade expectations modest and you are less likely to be disappointed. Everyone begins the class with zero (0) points. Through exams, class participation, debates, and the policy research paper you earn points over the course of the semester. The number of points you earn determines the grade you receive. You are entitled to what you earn: D/F reflects work that is poor/incomplete; C, adequate; B, excellent; and A, perfect or near-perfect (and rare).

Scoring	A= 100-96	A-= 95-91	B+= 90-88
	B= 87-83	B-= 82-81	C+= 80-78
	C= 77-73	C-= 72-71	D+= 70-68
	D= 67-63	D-= 62-61	F= 60-0

Please be aware that under no circumstances will extra credit be available EXCEPT for the documentary on December 1st. Consequently, it is imperative that you do your best on each and every assignment. I am available outside of class to help you.

Late Policy

My policy is firm but fair. I don't expect to use this policy, but if it has to go into effect it will. In brief, paper and lab projects will be automatically reduced one full grade for every day late. Any paper submitted more than 2 days late will receive an automatic "F." Those with genuine emergencies will be given extensions, but they must be cleared with me *in advance*.

Debates [15% of your final grade]

On all Fridays after fall break, we will have team debates over an issue of public policy. Look over the syllabus and volunteer for the issue that most interests you. Students will pair up into teams of two and make their presentations. Afterwards, the class will vote on: (1) the quality of their argument and (2) the quality of their presentation, which will constitute both who won the debate and each student's debate grade.

Research Paper [15% of your final grade]

Each of you will select a topic (e.g., health care, labor, taxes) and a specific policy (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Family & Medical Leave Act, Welfare Reform 1996). You will then write a 10-page research paper detailing the policy's: background, effectiveness (or lack thereof), and consequences both intended and unintended. Your paper needs to summarize the secondary literature (e.g., newspapers, magazines, books, reports), while also providing some measure of primary data and information (e.g., data, statistics). I will hand out a comprehensive guide to your paper later in the semester.

*** You will turn in a 1-page proposal for your research paper at the latest by Monday, November 21. ***

ASSIGNMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION to THINKING SENSIBLY about HOW PEOPLE BEHAVE in the REAL WORLD

Monday, August 29	<p>Introduction and Overview</p> <p>The Hidden Side of Everything & Let's Go Shopping</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 3-15</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 1-22</p>
Wednesday, August 31	<p>Schoolteachers and Sumo Wrestlers & New Choices</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 19-51</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 23-44</p>
Friday, September 2	<p>The Ku Klux Klan and Real Estate Agents & Deciding and Choosing</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 55-85</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 47-75</p>
Monday, September 5	<p>Why Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms & When Only the Best Will Do</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 89-114</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 77-96</p>
Wednesday, September 7	<p>Abortion, Where Have All the Criminals Gone? & Choice and Happiness</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 117-144</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 99-116</p>
Friday, September 9	<p>What Makes a Perfect Parent? & Missed Opportunities</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 145-176</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 117-146</p>
Monday, September 12	<p>Perfect Parenting, Part II & "If Only..." The Problem of Regret</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 179-204</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 147-165</p>
Wednesday, September 14	<p>Why Decisions Disappoint: Adaptation & What to Do About Choice</p> <p>- Levitt & Dubner, <i>Freakonomics</i>, pp. 205-207</p> <p>- Schwartz, <i>The Paradox of Choice</i>, pp. 167-200, 221-236</p>
Friday, September 16	<p>The Statue That Didn't Look Right & The Wisdom of Crowds</p> <p>- Gladwell, <i>Blink</i>, pp. 3-17</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 3-22</p>
Monday, September 19	<p>The Theory of Thin Slices & The Difference Difference Makes</p> <p>- Gladwell, <i>Blink</i>, pp. 18-47</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 23-39</p>
Wednesday, September 21	<p>The Locked Door & Monkey See, Monkey Do</p> <p>- Gladwell, <i>Blink</i>, pp. 48-71</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 40-65</p>
Friday, September 23	<p>The Warren Harding Error & Putting the Pieces Together</p> <p>- Gladwell, <i>Blink</i>, pp. 72-98</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 66-83</p>
Monday, September 26	<p>Shall We Dance? Taxes, Tipping, Television and Trust</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 84-142</p>
Wednesday, September 28	<p>Pepsi's Challenge, Traffic, and a Revolution in Classical Music</p> <p>- Gladwell, <i>Blink</i>, pp. 153-167, 245-254</p> <p>- Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i>, pp. 145-172</p>

Friday, September 30	Democracy: Dreams of the Common Good - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 173-191, 259-274
Monday, October 3	no class (prepare for the mid-term exam)
Wednesday, October 5	** MID-TERM EXAM (Part I) **
Friday, October 7	** MID-TERM EXAM (Part II) **

II. PUBLIC POLICY AREAS and THE QUEST TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S RESPONSES to INCENTIVES and PENALTIES

Monday, October 10	Labor & Industrial Policy - Reich, <i>Locked in the Cabinet</i> , pp. 3-177
<i>Monday evening, October 10</i>	PBS Documentary with Bill Moyers, "Surviving the Good Times: Part 1" (9-10:30 pm, place TBA)
Wednesday, October 12	Labor & Industrial Policy - Reich, <i>Locked in the Cabinet</i> , pp. 177-348
<i>Wednesday evening, October 12</i>	PBS Documentary with Bill Moyers, "Surviving the Good Times: Part 2" (9-10:30 pm, place TBA)
Friday, October 14	no class (beginning of Fall Break)

FALL BREAK (* read Ehrenreich's book over break *)

Friday, October 21	Debate 1: Should Government Attempt to Slow the Outsourcing of Jobs? - S. Mehta, "A Passage from India," <i>New York Times</i> http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Passage_from_India_NYT.pdf - CQ Reader, <i>Issues for Debate in American Public Policy</i> , Chapters 12-13
Monday, October 24	Fiscal & Welfare Policy - Ehrenreich, <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> , pp. 1-119 - C. Flanagan, "The Mother's Dilemma: How Serfdom Saved the Women's Movement" http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Caitlin%20Flanagan_Serfdom.pdf
Wednesday, October 26	Fiscal & Welfare Policy - Ehrenreich, <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> , pp. 121-221 - P. McGeehan, "The Plastic Trap," <i>New York Times Magazine</i> , pp. 1-5 http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Credit%20Cards_The%20Plastic%20Trap.pdf - PBS Frontline, "The Secret History of the Credit Card" [* watch online *] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/credit/view/
Friday, October 28	Debate 2: Should the Minimum Wage be Increased or Kept at Its Current Level? - T. Samuel, "A Minimum Effort," <i>American Prospect</i> http://www.prospect.org/web/printfriendly-view.www?id=9310 - B. Bartlett, "Minimum Wage: Teen-Age Job Killer," National Center for Policy Analysis http://www.ncpa.org/ba/ba292.html - P. Kersey, "The Economic Effects of the Minimum Wage," Heritage Foundation http://www.heritage.org/Research/Labor/tst042904a.cfm?renderforprint=1

- Monday, October 31 **Health Care & Social Security Policy**
 - Mayes, *Universal Coverage*, pp.139-175, 1-11
 - CQ Reader, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*, Chapter 6
- Wednesday, November 2 **Health Care & Social Security Policy**
 - Mayes, *Universal Coverage*, pp.17-145
- Friday, November 4 **Debate 3: Create Private Retirement Accounts or Keep Social Security “As Is”?**
 - R. Lowenstein, “Social Security: A Question of Numbers,” *New York Times Magazine*
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayeres/pdf/SocialSecurity_NYT.pdf
- Monday, November 7 **Education & Environmental Policy**
 - CQ Reader, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*, Chapters 10-11
 - M. Shellenberger, T. Nordhaus, “The Death of Environmentalism”
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayeres/pdf/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf
- Wednesday, November 9 **Education & Environmental Policy**
 - P. McGuinn, “Massive Resistance Redux? The Politics & Future of NCLB,” *Publius*
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayeres/pdf/McGuinn_Publius.pdf
 - D. Leonhardt, “The College Dropout Boom,” *New York Times*
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayeres/pdf/SocialClass_college_UVa.pdf
 - CQ Reader, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*, Chapters 1-2
- Thursday evening, November 10 PBS Frontline Documentary, “Testing Our Schools”
 (9-10 pm, place TBA)
- Friday, November 11 **Debate 4: Should Outcome-Based Testing in Schools Be Expanded or Reduced?**
 - The No Child Left Behind Act, “New Rules”
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/nochild/nclb.html>
 - J. Merrow, “Testing, Assessment and Excellence,” from *Choosing Excellence* (2001)
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/testing/merrow.html>
- Monday, November 14 **National Defense & Security Policy**
 - National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 1-214
- Wednesday, November 16 **National Defense & Security Policy**
 - National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 215-428
- Friday, November 18 **Debate 5: Has the War in Iraq Been Justified and Necessary?**
 - J. Fallows, “Success Without Victory,” *Atlantic Monthly*
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayeres/pdf/Fallows_NationalSecurity_AtlanticMonthly.pdf
 - CQ Reader, *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*, Chapters 15-16
 - PBS Frontline, “The War Behind Closed Doors, 2003” [* watch online *]
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq/view/>
 - PBS Frontline, “Al-Qaeda’s New Front, 2005” [* watch online *]
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/front/view/>
- Sunday, November 20 PBS Frontline Documentary, “Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero”
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/>
 (9-11 pm, place TBA)

Monday, November 21

The Consequences of War

- PBS Frontline, "Rumsfeld's War, 2004" [* watch online *]
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pentagon/view/>
 - PBS Frontline, "A Company of Soldiers, 2005" [* watch online *]
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/company/view/>
- "The Soldier's Heart"

** turn in your 1-page Research Paper proposal **

THANKSGIVING BREAK (* read Friedman's book over break *)

Monday, November 28

Economic Development & International Trade Policy

- Friedman, *The World is Flat*, pp. 3-236

Wednesday, November 30

Economic Development & International Trade Policy

- Friedman, *The World is Flat*, pp. 237-473

Thursday, December 1

PBS Documentary "Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy"

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/lo/index.html>

(6-midnight, place TBA)

* *extra credit* * attend the showing and write a 1-page summary critique of the film

Friday, December 2

Debate 6: On Balance, Is Wal-Mart Good for America?

- S. Cohen, J. DeLong, "Shaken & Stirred" *Atlantic Monthly*
http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayer/pdf/Shaken_Stirred.pdf
- PBS Frontline, "Is Wal-Mart Good for America?" [* watch online *]
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/walmart/view/>

Monday, December 5

office appointments to discuss the completion of your research paper

Wednesday, December 7

office appointments to discuss the completion of your research paper

Friday, December 9

Research Papers due in class

Conclusion and Review

- Francis Collins: Director, National Human Genome Research Institute,
"Seek A Balanced Life," University of Virginia Commencement Address (2001)
<http://www.virginia.edu/majorevents/speeches/01speech.html>

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**FINAL EXAM**

Section 1 (MWF 1:35-2:25 p.m.).....Tuesday, December 13, 2-5 p.m.

Section 2 (MWF 2:40-3:30 p.m.).....Thursday, December 15, 2-5 p.m.