Public Policy 601:
The Political Environment of Policymaking

The goal of this class is to understand the institutions that make public policies at the national level in the United States and the influences on them. In a sense this class is similar to an introduction to American politics class; I hope to distinguish this from such a class by making it more in-depth and technically oriented. We will pay particular attention to policymaking tools within the executive branch, especially executive orders and regulations.

Two books are required for the class:

FIORINA, *Culture War? 2nd ed.*
Gormley and Balla, Bureaucracy and Democracy

Assignments for the class include:
1) Final exam (take home, open book)
2) A quiz on September 29, in class.
3) A group project to evaluate the feasibility of a particular policy proposal. A written report and a class presentation are required. A very rough draft, outlining what you will do and a division of responsibility, is due October 20. A “pretty good” draft is due November 15. The final draft is due December 3. Class reports will be November 29 and December 1. If members of the class are in agreement, we could cancel the class on November 29 and substitute Friday December 3. A few suggested proposals include:

a. Should governments subsidize wind energy?
b. National education standards for testing?
c. Privatize Virginia’s ABC stores?
d. Abolish Fannie Mae

Grades will be based on the final exam (35%), quiz (15%), group project (40%), and class participation (10%).

August 25: Introduction to class

August 30, September 1: *American public policy in a comparative perspective.* Why is it so different than Europe’s?
Kingdon, *America the Unusual* (1st half for Monday; rest for Wednesday)
September Sept. 6, 8, 13: *Public opinion*. Polarization of public attitudes in America. 
(9/6, Fiorina pp. 1-77; 9/8, Fiorina pp. 79-126; 9/13, Fiorina, rest of book)

September 15: *The logic of interest group representation.*
Olson, except from *The Logic of Collective Action* (BlackBoard)
Wikipedia article on “regulatory capture”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulatory_capture

September 20: Interest group tactics: contributions, letters, rallies, and astro-turf.
Astro-turf lobbying: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astroturfing
Public Citizen, “The Journey from Congress to K Street” (BB)
Steven Brill on lobbying and financial reform:
http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,2000880,00.html

September 22: *Government failure*
Economics of Public Issues, chapters 2, 19, 25 (BlackBoard)

September 27: *Government failure*
Economics of Public Issues, chapters 21, 23, 31 (BlackBoard)

September 29: *Congressional basics*
Jacobson & Kernell, chapter on Congress (BB)

October 4 & 6: Special rules in the House; House procedure
Saturno, Special Rules and Options for Regulating the Amending Process”
Oleszek, “Self-Executing Rules in the House”

Fall break

October 18: *Senate procedure – the filibuster*
Beth, “Entrenchment of Senate Procedure” (BB)

October 20: *Can the Senate be saved from itself?*
Packer, “The Hollow Chamber” New Yorker
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/08/09/100809fa_fact_packer

Oct. 25: *Presidential basics*
Jacobson & Kernell, chapter on Presidency (BB)

October 27: *Unilateral presidential power.*
Moe & Howell, “The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action”
http://jleq.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/15/1/132
Chronology of Truman’s effort to desegregate the armed forces:
November 1: To be announced

November 3: *Arsenic and snowmobile rulemaking cases* (BB).

November 8: Executive orders on civil rights 
Mayer, *With the Stroke of a Pen*, ch. 6 (BlackBoard)

November 10: *The federal budget.*  
Coven and Cogan, “Introduction to the Federal Budget Process”  

November 15: *Bureaucracy*  
Max Weber:  
http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/~fejwell/TheoryWeb/readings/WeberBureform.html#Weber  
Gormley and Balla, chapters, 1 & 2

November 17: *Controlling bureaucracy; networks*  
Gormley and Balla, chapters, 3, 4 & 5

Nov. 22: *Bureaucracy and crisis*  
Gormley and Balla, chapters 6 & 7

November 29 & December 1: *Reports on group projects.*

**More about the group projects.** In this project I want each group to evaluate the political feasibility of a policy proposal. Imagine that you are working for a senator or senior administrator in a government agency; he or she has expressed interest in the proposal and has asked your group to report to him on (1) the desirability of the proposal (is it a good idea?), and (2) the potential for getting it through the political process. In assessing political feasibility, consider who the likely supporters and opponents of the proposal will be, and why they take the positions they do. Consider the position of the political parties. Consider regional or other kinds of conflict the proposal is likely to engender. Think about what might be done to overcome objections to the proposal. These are just some suggestions on how to proceed with this project. Use your own judgment in devising and structuring the report and its contents. The projects will culminate in a paper and a report to the class.