Description

This is a survey course devoted to an in-depth examination of the field of policy sciences. Harold Lasswell, one of the founders of the policy sciences, defines the field as “knowledge in and of the policy process”. In this course we will primarily focus on knowledge in the policy process, that is the formation and execution of policy, as opposed to knowledge of the policy process -- the information and analysis necessary for making policy decisions. In focusing on the formation and execution of policy, we will examine the major research programs and subfields of the policy sciences.

Ideally, the development of the field of policy sciences would have occurred in an orderly manner. The “founders” would have defined the outlines of the field, the major concepts and issues. Later scholars would have done the heavy lifting of theory development and testing. In the end, a coherent, and relatively complete, well-developed, and closely related set of theories and models explaining the formation and execution of policy would have emerged.

Unfortunately, that is not what happened. The policy sciences are “lumpy”. Some sub-fields are more theoretically advanced than others. Some areas blossomed quickly, only to be neglected as scholars turned their attention to the next exciting approach. Scholars in other areas have toiled for years, systematically developing and refining theories. And, of course, this entire positivistic, technocratic enterprise has been called into question by scholars who prefer the search for meaning as opposed to generalizable laws.

This creates a conundrum for the lowly professor attempting to engage eager graduate students, imparting to them a body of knowledge. Having taught this seminar several times, and having reorganized it each time, there is simply no way of placing the different lumps of knowledge into a coherent framework for easy presentation and digestion. Instead, the best that can be accomplished is an in-depth examination of the major lumps. The approaches and research programs in the policy sciences that we will cover include the work of Harold Lasswell, the “founder” of the field; the research programs of Elinor Ostrom, Paul Sabatier, and Terry Moe; the sub-fields of agenda setting, implementation research, and comparative state policy; and post-positivist critiques and alternatives to the mainstream positivistic approaches.
Fortunately for us, the different lumps do have concepts and themes in common. Thus, in surveying the policy sciences field we will devote considerable attention to the following common issues: 1) frameworks, theories and models for explaining policy processes, 2) the conception and treatment of individual behavior; 3) the role of institutions in policy creation and implementation, and 4) institutional and policy change. Upon completing the course you should possess a working knowledge of the field of policy sciences, the major questions raised within the field, methods used to address the questions, and the major shortcomings of the field.

Requirements

Memos: You are required to write a total of seven memos. Memos focus on the course readings. They should consist of a critical evaluation of the authors’ arguments and methods. Memos should be 3-5 pages in length. They are due the Monday (by noon) before the class session that they cover. Memos are to be distributed to all class members through e-mail. Each memo is worth 5% of the course grade for a total of 35%.

Research paper: You are required to write a research paper. The paper should combine your dissertation research with the readings/themes of the course. It should be journal length. The paper is due at the end of the semester. It will be presented by one of your classmates at a class conference. The paper is worth 45% of the course grade.

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend and participate in class discussions and in the class conference. Attendance and participation is worth 20% of the course grade. I handle participation points in the following way. Just showing up is worth a D; occasionally participating in a way that demonstrates that you have read the material is worth a C/B; active participation in the class is worth an A.

Grading: I use a standard grading scale, 90-100=A, 80-89=B; 70-79=C; 60-69=D; 59 and lower=E

I do not accept late assignments. I do not grant incompletes unless a major catastrophe strikes you or a very close member of your family.

Required Readings

Available at the bookstore:


Available on-line
http://www.indiana.edu/~workshop/ui


In addition, numerous journal articles and book chapters are on reserve within the department or on e-reserves. The password for e-reserves is 595g. I have the location of these readings clearly marked in the syllabus.

Calendar

January 18 – Introduction to class. What is policy? What are policy making processes? What constitutes a satisfactory explanation? How should we evaluate theories? Moon explains and attempts a synthesis of the two broad methodologies for developing knowledge in the social sciences. King et al provide us with “rules” for constructing causal theories in the social sciences. Quaile-Hill and Sabatier bring the issues raised by the previous authors to bear on the policy sciences.

Readings


January 25 -- According to Ostrom, what are frameworks, theories and models? What should frameworks and theories of policy making processes consist of and what should they explain? How does the framework developed by Lasswell compare with the IAD framework? What do the stages consist of and how do they fit within Lasswell’s framework? How do they fit within the IAD framework? Do the stages adequately capture the policy making process?

Readings:

February 1 -- Models of human decision making. Most of the theories and models we will examine are based on assumptions about how humans make decisions or choices. We are going to spend a session examining different models of human choice and the debates around such models. We will begin with the strict rational choice model and then examine challenges and alternatives to it. What are the conditions that constitute the strict rational choice model? How do we regularly violate those conditions? Compare the critiques of strict rationality. In what ways do they differ? Do the authors converge on a model of decision making? What types of models do they propose? How do the psychologists (Markman and Medin) differ from the political scientists (Ostrom and Jones)? Does evolutionary psychology adequately capture our biological underpinnings? Is Ostrom avoiding the issue by suggesting a diversity of models?

Readings:


Elinor Ostrom (forthcoming) Understanding Institutional Diversity, Chapter 4.

Additional Readings: (not required)


February 8 -- Agenda Setting. Agenda setting encompasses the first stages of the policy making process. Over the past fifteen years, substantial work has emerged on agenda setting. We begin with the very early work in this area. Agenda setting focuses on the question of how issues achieve a government agenda in order to be acted upon. Cobb and Elder are widely recognized as the pioneers in the agenda setting subfield. What agendas do they identify? How do their agendas compare with that of Downs or Walker? What factors are most influential in vaulting an issue onto an agenda, and how do these factors vary across the different scholars? Do the authors present theories or models of agenda setting? Why? And, don’t forget to think about models of decision making that these authors use.

Reading:


February 15 -- Agenda Setting. Kingdon’s book is probably the most read and widely cited on agenda setting. How does his explanation of agenda setting contrast with the work of Cobb and Elder and Downs? Kingdon states that he based his theory of agenda setting on the article by Cohen, March, and Olsen. In what ways has Kingdon developed a “garbage can” explanation of agenda setting? Does Kingdon’s explanation constitute a theory? How would one operationalize and test Kindgon’s explanation?
March 1 -- Punctuated Equilibrium Theory. Baumgartner and Jones base their explanation of policy change and agenda setting on that of Kingdon. Contrast their explanation of agenda setting with that of Kingdon. Have they more completely developed Kingdon’s explanation or have they developed an alternative explanation? What factors most explain agenda setting and policy change according to Baumgartner and Jones? What roles do individual actors and institutional arrangements play in their explanation? How have they operationalized and tested their explanation? Do they present us with a theory of agenda setting?

March 8 -- New Institutionalism. For the most part, the policy sciences have ignored the decision stage, leaving Congressional and presidential activity for political science to unravel. That is beginning to change, in part because of the work of Terry Moe. Moe, in the 1984 piece, outlines for political scientists the important concepts of an institutional approach to the study of public organizations and public policy. Those concepts consist of a rational actor model of the individual, agency problems, transaction costs, and rules. Moe sketches an institutional approach for explaining the politics surrounding the creation of public agencies and policies, which he further develops in the 1990 and 1994 pieces. Horn uses an institutional approach to explain the structure of public agencies and policy change. Take note of the differences between the model of decision making used by the new institutionalism scholars versus Kingdon, Baumgartner and Jones.

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March 22 -- Game Theory and the Policy Sciences. Game theory explores strategic interactions among players in different settings. Those different settings are games, many of which you have probably heard of before, such as the prisoners’ dilemma, chicken, the battle of the sexes, etc. In his book, Scharpf takes game theory out of economics and places it within the policy sciences. In so doing he strips game theory of its technical language and mathematical underpinnings, making it accessible to us. In the first chapter, he examines the value of using game theory to understand policy processes. He then turns to a careful examination of the parts of games – actors, actor constellations, and so forth. Finally, he applies the approach to a variety of institutional settings of considerable interest to policy scholars, such as negotiation, voting, and hierarchies. You know the program by now – what is Scharpf’s approach to decision making? How is it similar to other authors that we have read? How does he define institutions? What are the differences between actors and actor constellations? What difference does the larger institutional setting make for the types of outcomes actors are likely to realize?

Reading:

March 29 -- Institutional Analysis and Development Framework and a Theory of Common Pool Resources. This is one of the major research programs in the policy sciences. It focuses on the central issue of the social sciences – collective action – in a compelling context – common pool resources. What are common pool resources? What challenges do they present for good governance? What are institutional arrangements? Why are they important? What are the conditions under which resource users are likely to cooperate to address shared problems? What are the conditions under which self-governing institutions are likely to be durable? Note the variety of methods that Ostrom has brought to bear to engage in theory development and testing. Will a full blown theory of the commons ever be realized? How is Ostrom’s approach similar to Scharpf’s?

Reading:
April 5 -- A Final Look at Institutions. One last opportunity for us to look back over the past three weeks and reflect on an important and related set of institutional approaches for understanding and explaining policy processes.

Reading:
Elinor Ostrom (forthcoming) Understanding Institutional Diversity. ALL

April 12 -- Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Learning, and Policy Perceptions. The Advocacy Coalitions framework and theory exhibit a variety of influences. The framework and theory are similar to the agenda setting theories in that major policy change occurs only through a shock to the system. However, considerable attention is devoted to identifying coalitions (because of assumptions made concerning decision making) and what coalitions do during relatively stable periods. The ACF also appears similar to the IAD. What are the assumptions concerning decision making and how have those assumptions driven the research program? What is meant by policy learning and how is it measured? How does the argument of Schneider and Ingram fit within the ACF? How is the ACF like the IAD? Does the ACF encompass all of the policy stages or only a few?

Reading:


April 19 -- Post-positive Policy Approaches. Yes, we are still on the same planet, and in the same scholarly field. You know the routine by now – how do these authors treat all of the issues that we are interested in? How do they relate to Lasswell? Are their critiques of standard mainstream approaches insightful and compelling? What do they add to our understanding of the policy sciences? This is not the first time we have encountered an effort to reconceptualize the policy sciences. Ostrom appears to be engaged in a similar undertaking. Compare Ostrom and the post-positive policy approaches, you may want to go back to Donald Moon for assistance in this endeavor.

Reading:


April 26  Implementation. In the 1970s, Pressman and Wildavsky argued that simply because policies are adopted by legislatures does not mean that policy goals are achieved, thereby launching the subfield of implementation studies. What is implementation? Is it worthy of study? Why? Could one make the argument that Ostrom’s work encompasses implementation? What are the dependent and independent variables used and how do they differ among studies? What roles do individual actors and institutions play in the explanations? Is there a theory or theories of implementation?

Readings:


May 3 – Comparative state policy making and policy innovation. What stage, or stages, of the policy making process do comparative state studies focus on? What are the dependent and independent variables of the studies? What role does individual decision making play in these studies? How do the studies conceive of institutional arrangements? How adequately do the variables capture policy making activities? Is this body of work grounded in a framework? Has this body of work contributed to theory development? If so, what are the theories? If not, why not? What types of models, if any, have been developed in this work? Identify them. How do the contemporary comparative state studies improve on the older studies? For instance, besides using
the language of population ecology, how different is the piece by Lowery and Gray versus the work of Hofferbert?

Readings:


May 10, Final Exam – Present and discuss our research papers