

POLS*4290 F25 Why Public Policy Matters

Credit Weighting: 1.0**Pre-/Co-Requisites:** 12.50 credits and 0.50**Restrictions:** N/A**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION****Name:** Theresa Lee**Email:** tmlee@uoguelph.ca**Office Location:** MacKinnon 512credits in the Public
Policy, Governance and
Law stream or the
Political Thought stream
at the third-year level.**GENERAL DETAILS**

To answer the question "why public policy matters," the course adopts the analytical framework of applied ethics, which is a major area of study within the subfield of ethics in philosophy. Accordingly, the course focuses on the ethical issues involved in policymaking rather than on policymaking as a political and legislative process. Questions that the course aims to address include: Should every aspect of our lives be regulated? How does an issue become the subject of policymaking? How should we determine the goal of a policy in relation to the issue that generates such need? What are the respective roles and responsibilities of decision-makers and the citizenry? What are the factors that need to be taken into account in formulating a policy that is consistent with the basic values of a society?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course is guided by the following objectives:

1. Literacy

Readings in the course are drawn from a range of thinkers and scholars, mainly in political theory and ethics. The very nature of the subject matter, i.e. ethics and policymaking, means that their writings tend to be notably argumentative. Accordingly, you will learn from these readings how complex and effective arguments are constructed. Course assignments aim to provide you with the opportunity to become an effective communicator by way of more precise use of language, both in oral and written forms.

2. Numeracy

To make informed decision, policymakers in the contemporary world undoubtedly need to be proficient in interpreting and utilizing numerical data and statistics. Although the course is not about how numerical information is compiled, it provides the normative grounding for explaining why the interpretation and use of numbers matter.

3. Understanding Forms of Inquiry

The course introduces you to different ethical theories that are especially pertinent to policymaking. Such exposure enables you to consider policymaking from different ethical perspectives, which are often incompatible with each other. This in turn leads to a more nuanced analysis of issues that are at stake in any given policy focus.

4. Sense of Historical Development and Global Understanding

Policymaking often involves revisiting issues that were once considered settled and supported by social norms. Policymaking is also a tool for shaping the future. Both of these scenarios require an expansive sense of historical development and global understanding. The course aims to cultivate both through the rigorous study of selected policy issues.

5. Depth and Breadth of Understanding

This objective is closely tied to the objective above.

6. Moral Maturity

The course is an exercise on moral thinking. This critical capacity is important to all of us, irrespective of who we are and what we do. In exploring the complex connection between ethics and policymaking, the course raises the stakes involved in enhancing this critical capacity.

7. Independence of Thought

Policy issues are typically controversial because they often involve matters that affect people differently. Accordingly, the capacity to think independently is a much needed asset. By studying a number of highly contested policy issues, students in the course learn to develop what it means to be independent in the way they think.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

1. Seminar Participation (15%)
2. Seminar Presentation (10%)
3. Research Presentation (10%)
4. Research Paper (35%)
5. Take-home Final Examination (30%)

REQUIRED READING

Welch, Don. Guide to Ethics and Public Policy: Finding our way. New York: Routledge, 2014.
Cohen, A. and Wellman, C. H., eds. Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics. 2nd ed. Wiley Blackwell, 2013.

Department of Political Science

50 Stone Road East, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1
(519) 824-4120 x 52184
pols.undergrad@uoguelph.ca
uoguelph.ca/polisci