Syllabus

Course description

Course title | Introduction to public policy
Course code | 27168
Scientific sector | SPS/04
Degree | L33 – Economics and Social Sciences
Semester and academic year | 1st semester, 2018/2019
Year | Free choice course
Credits | 6
Modular | No

Total lecturing hours | 36
Total lab hours | -
Total exercise hours | -
Attendance | Suggested, but not required

Prerequisites
The study of the public policy process is part of the wider area of political studies. For this reason, successful completion of ‘Political Science 1’ is recommended in order to take full advantage of the lectures.


Specific educational objectives
The course focuses on the exploration of the public policy process in modern democracies, providing first an overview of the main theoretical approaches developed to study policy making and then applying these theories to the study of the policy process. Upon successful completion of this course, a student should be able to:

- develop a strong foundation of knowledge concerning major theories developed to study the public policy process;
- apply these theories to study different aspects of how policy decisions are made and how policy is shaped in action;
- understand the central components of the policy making process, from the emergence of policies in the agenda, to policy formulation and policy implementation;
- identify the role of key political actors and organized interests in driving policy making;
- recognize the role of institutions in enabling and constraining policy making;
- Understand and critically analyse public policies.

Lecturer
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This course provides an introduction to the public policy process in modern democracies. Studies of the public policy process focus on how policy decisions are made and how policy is shaped in action. In its simplest description, making policy implies three stages: the emergence of some priorities in the agenda, the formulation of a policy and its implementation. However, policies do not always follow this logical sequence. Most of the time the policy process resembles a tortuous path, with many feedback loops, carried out by diverse actors – politicians, pressure groups, civil servants, publicly employed professionals, academic experts and journalists. Thus, trying to understand how policy is made means to explore a complex, dynamic and multi-layered political process characterised by several actors with nested levels of interactions and uncertain inputs and outputs.

To approach this complex phenomenon, the first part of the course will introduce a range of theories that have been developed to explain key aspects of the policy process. Since its study is essentially related to the exercise of power in making policy, most of these theoretical approaches investigate how power is distributed in society and embedded in political institutions. In particular, the course will explore the contribution made by structuralism, rational choice theory, network theory and institutionalism to the understanding of the policy process. The second part of the course will explore key aspects of the policy process – agenda setting, policy formulation and policy implementation – applying and assessing the theoretical frameworks introduced in the first part. More specifically, this part of the course will focus on the policy process as a political process, discussing topics such as the way in which public problems emerge, what instruments are chosen to achieve policy goals, and how policies are actually developed. Finally, the course will analyse some case studies of policy making within key policy areas, such as social, tax and environmental policies, where the tools provided during the previous lectures are used in order to understand specific policy processes and changes.
• Comprehend the key theoretical concepts and methodological issues underlying the study of the public process.

**Applying knowledge and understanding**
• Understand the relationship between theoretical and practical aspects of policy making;
• Apply the different theoretical approaches developed to study policy making to various aspects of the policy process.

**Making judgments**
• Develop the ability to critically analyse the public policy process by identifying the connections between political actors and institutions and by comparing and contrasting different policy issues.

**Communication skills**
• Acquire the ability to discuss and critically evaluate the dynamics of policy making and assess the role played by different actors and institutions, using the appropriate lexicon.

**Learning skills**
• Exhibit knowledge and ability to comprehend and synthesize academic and professional research in the field of public policy.

### Assessment

For **attending students**, the assessment of the course will consist in two written exams:

- a mid-term written exam, scheduled at the end of the first half of the course, that will cover the theoretical approaches to policy process analysis;
- a final written exam, scheduled at the end of the course, that will focus on the key aspects of the public policy process – from agenda setting, to policy formulation and implementation – and on case studies referring to specific policy areas.

Both the exams will include a number of multiple-choice questions and up to three open-ended questions.

For **non-attending students**, the evaluation will be based on a written exam covering the textbook and an additional reading (see below). Non-attending students are invited to get in contact with the lecturer in good time before the exam.

### Assessment language

**Evaluation criteria and criteria for awarding marks**

English

For attending students, the final grade will be the arithmetic mean of the two grades of the mid-term and final exams. Attending students who collect too many absences and/or fail to pass the mid-term exam will be considered as non-attending for evaluation. For non-attending students, the evaluation will be entirely based on a written exam.

The written exams will be evaluated using the following criteria: clarity and preciseness of the answers, correctness of terms and definitions,
ability to apply theoretical models, construction of valid arguments, analytical ability to evaluate.

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<th>Required readings</th>
<th>Attending students:</th>
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<th>Non-attending students:</th>
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| Supplementary readings | Further readings on specific case studies will be provided during the course. |