NOTE: The only readings that must be purchased for the course are Harvard Kennedy School case studies (see page 2). The remaining readings are articles or reports that are available online or on the Moodle course page. While the assigned readings may change (there are always new articles and reports that may prove more enlightening than those that have been listed in the syllabus), the assigned case studies will not.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Public policy is best defined as a pattern of purposive public action. This course provides a broad overview of several important public policies and explores the underlying dynamics of the policy process with the goal of addressing several enduring problems. For example, we will examine criminal justice to better understand how competing models of human behavior impact on policy design. We will explore educational policy to better appreciate the potential role of institutional design (e.g., the debates over vouchers). Macroeconomic policy will provide a context for understanding what happens when models or the underlying policy problems change dramatically in response to policy failure. Social welfare will allow us a window into the problems of perverse incentives and unintended consequences. Social security and Medicare will provide an opportunity for appreciating the impact of large demographic trends. Environmental policy will allow us to consider how policies can be “reinvented” as a means of allowing for new approaches to vexing problems like acid rain. Finally, we will turn to emerging regulatory issues—with a focus on nanotechnology—to reflect on what happens when policy problems are highly complex and dynamic and thus difficult to address with standard policy instruments.

During the semester, we will examine a number of cases in greater detail. Some of these cases (e.g., assertive policing in New York, prison mentoring, school vouchers, Medicare modernization, the regulation of acid rain, and decisions regarding arsenic standards) will draw on Harvard Kennedy School case studies. Others (e.g., Progressive Era eugenics, welfare reform, and the sub-prime crisis) will be developed using a combination of scholarly research and government reports. In each instance, the case studies will provide a means of deepening our understanding of the problems and tensions inherent in making and implementing public policy.

Course Readings:

The following Harvard Kennedy School Case Studies are assigned:

1509.0 The Cleveland School Voucher Program
1510.0 The Cleveland School Voucher Program
1514.0 Cleaning up the "Big Dirties"
1518.0 Prison Fellowship Ministries (B)
1530.0 Assertive Policing, Plummeting Crime
1680.0 Arsenic in Drinking Water
1870.0 Keeping a Campaign Promise

They can be ordered directly online as downloads (academic rate: http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu/Index.asp)

Course Grade

Case Analyses (3 worth 20% each)  60%
Participation  10%
Final essay  20%

Case Analyses: The course makes use of the case method. On several occasions during the semester, we will devote a session to the analysis of a case study on a public policy. On three occasions of your choice, you will be required to respond to a written question involving a specific case. The questions will be posted on Moodle following class. Solving cases can be time consuming because a critical piece of information may be buried in the case or missing altogether, forcing students to make plausible assumptions. The maximum length of a case analysis will be two pages (single-spaced, 12-point font). In order to produce a quality analysis, you will need to come to class prepared to discuss the case. The case analyses will be due at the end of the day, one week after the assigned discussion date. You will not be permitted to submit a case analysis if you were absent from the class on the day it was discussed. All members of the class must complete case study 1 and/or case study 2.

Participation: On one occasion, each member of the class will introduce the readings for the week. This presentation, not to exceed ten minutes, will involve identifying the core arguments and posing some questions for discussion. The presentation should be supported by a one-page handout listing questions. Additionally, the participation component of the grade will be based on exhibited mastery of course readings in seminar discussions and responses to weekly questions posted on the forum on the Moodle course page. Note that credit will be given for responses posted within one week of the session in question.
Final Essay: The final essay for the course (10 pages, double spaced) will provide an opportunity for participants to develop an argument regarding the factors that facilitate and impede successful public policy. A detailed question will be distributed in class.

SOCS 635W: Students enrolling in SOCS 635W will be required, in addition, to write three brief analytical essays (5 pages) in response to questions that will be distributed in advance via Moodle.

Note: This is a paper-free course. All written work must be submitted via email as a Microsoft Word attachment (or in rich text format if using another word processing program).

Students with Disabilities: It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

Course Policies: Incompletes and extensions will be allowed only in cases of serious emergencies (e.g., serious illness, family emergency, verified through communication by GLSP).

It is assumed that all students will familiarize themselves with what constitutes plagiarism under University policy and will abide by the provisions of the Honor Code.

Contacts: My normal office hours (317 PAC) are 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Tuesday. However, I am pleased to meet with you before or after class by appointment.

Email is my preferred mode of communication (meisner@wesleyan.edu).
Course Schedule

Session 1 (9/15)  Introduction: What is Public Policy?

Session 2 (9/22)  A Primer on Public Policy and the Policy Process

2.1 Understanding the Policy Process
Reading:


2.2 Critical Perspectives
Reading:


Session 3 (9/29)  Public Policy in Historical Context

3.1 The Rise of the Interventionist State
Reading:


### 3.2 The Pause of the Interventionist State

**Reading**:


### Session 4 (10/6) Criminal Justice, Human Nature, and the Environment

#### 4.1 Competing Perspectives on Criminality

**Reading**:


#### 4.2 Eugenics and the Prevention of Criminality

**Reading**:


Edwin Black, “Hitler Made Eugenics Famous, But He Took It From the United States.” Moodle
Session 5 (10/13) Alternative Approaches to Criminality

5.1 Case Study of New York and Compstat
Reading:
1530.0 Assertive Policing, Plummeting Crime

5.2 Case Study of Prison Fellowship Ministries
Reading:
1518.0 Prison Fellowship Ministries (B)

Session 6 (10/20) Education and Institutional Design

6.1 From School Choice to No Child Left Behind
Reading:


6.2 Case Study of School Choice
Reading:
1509.0 and 1510.0 “The Cleveland School Voucher Program” (A) and (B)

Session 7 (10/27) Markets, Models and Macroeconomic Management

7.1 The Rise and Fall of the Keynesian Consensus
Reading:


### 7.2 The Sub-Prime Crisis and the Costs of Neoliberalism

**Reading:**


### Session 8 (11/3) Welfare, Perverse Incentives, and Unintended Consequences

#### 8.1 The American Welfare State

**Reading:**


#### 8.2 Reforming Poor People

**Reading:**


Session 9 (11/10) Entitlements, Demographics, and Debt

9.1 Program Design and Demographics

**Reading:**


Congressional Budget Office, *Long-Term Budget Outlook, 2011*. [Download](#)

9.2 Case Study of Medicare Modernization

**Reading:**
1870.0 “Keeping a Campaign Promise: George W. Bush and Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage.”

Session 10 (11/17) Reinventing the Regulation of the Environment

10.1 Environmental Policy and Politics in Transition

**Reading:**


10.2 Case Study of Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990
Reading:
1514.0 “Cleaning up the "Big Dirties": The Problem of Acid Rain.”

Session 11 (12/1) Regulating Complexity

12.1 Case Study of George W. Bush and Arsenic Regulation
Reading:
1680.0 “Arsenic in Drinking Water.”

12.2 Emerging Challenges: Nanotechnology
Reading:


Session 12 (12/8) Course Conclusion