COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course is a writing intensive seminar on dilemmas facing democracy and policy making in the United States. Therefore, we will spend our meetings discussing challenges to the democratic process posed by features of the U.S. political system. These challenges include the public’s willingness and capacity to participate effectively in democratic processes, the role of interest groups in shaping policy, the capacity of Congress as an institution to make policies that benefit the country as a whole given the need of individual members to meet their own goals, the capacity of the President to fulfill his duties under the “Take Care” and “Executive” clauses of the Constitution given political and managerial problems he faces, and the inevitable—and not altogether undesirable—intrusion of politics on policy-making. Do these challenges threaten to undermine the efficacy and/or legitimacy of American government? Have they already? Or are they merely annoying obstacles that can be overcome, albeit imperfectly, in a search for “a more perfect union” through the normal course of politics? Since this course is a seminar, you are required to participate in class discussions of the assigned readings. Additionally, since this course is a writing seminar, you will be required to complete a number of written assignments, which are discussed in more detail below.

REQUIRED READING:

The following books are available in the bookstore in the Kent State University Student Center:

- Fiorina, *Culture War?*
- Kernell, *Going Public*
- Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*
- Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*

Additionally, there is a course packet available under my name and/or the course number for this class at Wordsmith. The readings itemized in the schedule of reading assignments below are available either in the assigned books or in this packet. Finally, I will provide you with short handouts throughout the semester, often from journalistic sources, that highlight the concepts covered in the readings and our discussions.
STUDENTS REQUIRING ACCESSIBILITY

University policy 3342-3-18 requires that students requiring accessibility be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented accessibility limitation and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through the Office of Student Accessibility Services (Ground Floor, DeWeese Health Center, 330-672-3391, or visit www.registrars.kent.edu/disability/default.htm for more information on registration procedures).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) You are required to complete a 25-30 page research paper for this course. For this paper, you will choose one area of public policy—other than health care, which we will cover in class. In the paper, you will address how the dilemmas we probe in class affect the ability of the American political system to create policies that are effective, i.e., attain the outcomes that are desired by the policies’ creators. The purposes of this assignment are to foster a sense of how political circumstances influence public policy and build your research and writing skills.

To pursue these goals, you will turn your paper in in sections. See the schedule of classes and reading assignments below for due dates. For example, for the first “section paper” (Section IA), you will turn in a 5-6 page research paper examining the following question: How do dilemmas of public opinion influence the ability of government to make policy in your area effectively? Does the reality of public opinion hinder this ability? How does your research indicate that this is the case? Conversely, does the nature of public opinion help government to act effectively? Again, how does your research demonstrate this contention? Finally, perhaps public policy has no real influence on the government’s ability to make policy effectively? Of course, if this is so, you will have to support this position through your research. In writing this paper, you may want to make use of the concepts we covered in the section on public opinion. For example, we examine how much the public knows about politics and policy in one class on dilemmas of public opinion. Therefore, you might consider how the public’s knowledge, or lack thereof, of your policy area affects the government’s ability to craft effective policy solutions. Alternatively, if your research turns up another feature of public opinion—not covered in class—that undermines, or fosters, the government’s ability to solve policy problems, then you may want to build your paper around it.

Additionally, for sections IB, IIA and IIB you will complete 5-6 page “section papers” on how the dilemmas examined in each section influence the government’s capacity to engage in effective policy-making. For section IB, you will answer the question, How do dilemmas of interest group politics influence the government’s ability to make policy effectively? For Section IIA, you will answer the question, How do dilemmas of congressional politics and policy-making influence the government’s capacity to make policy effectively? For Section IIB, you will answer the question, How do dilemmas of presidential politics and policy-making influence the government’s capacity to make policy effectively. The product of this section by section process...
will be a substantial seminar paper in which you apply the concepts covered in the course to a policy problem confronted by the U.S. government.

In conducting your research, you should make use of scholarly and journalistic sources of information on public opinion, interest groups, Congress, the presidency, the policy process and your policy area. Such sources include articles in newspapers, such as The Washington Post and The New York Times, articles in periodicals, such as Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, The National Journal, scholarly books and edited volumes with chapters by scholars writing on the topics itemized above, and scholarly journal articles. What you should not use are inadequate online sources, such as Wikipedia entries. I’m actually a Wikipedia fan; however, its entries are inadequate for the research necessary for this project in that they do not have the depth or type of information that allow you to probe the questions asked above in a comprehensive manner. Such web resources often have a lot of descriptive information. For example, if you want to learn about the American Health Security Act proposed by President Clinton during his first term, you can learn a lot about the details of the plan there. However, if you want to learn about the reasons why Congress cannot, or will not, take measures to expand health insurance to Americans lacking it, such sources do not provide insight into the political, social, institutional and economic forces by which members of Congress, and Congress’s leadership, are influenced. If you rely on such poor sources in conducting research, you will receive poor grades on your “section papers” and your final paper.

You will turn the first three “section papers” in separately and will receive grades on these papers. After writing the fourth (5-6 page) paper on dilemmas of presidential politics and policy-making, you will combine this paper with the previous three papers and turn them in as a the final paper. It is my hope that you will take into consideration the comments I provide you on the first three “section papers” that you turn in to improve your final paper (and earn a higher grade). In addition to combining these four sections, your final paper must include a 3-4 page conclusion, based on your analysis throughout the paper, in which you evaluate the government’s prospects for solving the policy problems you have examined. How likely is it that the constraints you identify can be overcome? What will be necessary for this to occur? When turning your final paper in, you must turn in your three earlier “section papers,” so that I can assess the degree to which you improved them through revisions.

You must cite your sources appropriately both in the text and in a bibliography. Reference and title pages do not count toward meeting the page requirements for the section papers or the final paper. Additionally, please do not manipulate margins and/or fonts to make it appear that your paper is longer than it is; such tricks cannot be hidden well and communicate to your reader that you have not done the work necessary to produce a successful paper.

(2) There will be periodic quizzes on the readings throughout the semester. These quizzes will require you to respond to questions about the reading in short answer format. These quizzes are worth 12.5% of your final grade. When calculating the grade, I will take the mean grade you received on the quizzes. (So, if there are 4 quizzes and you received a 100, 80, 80 and 100, your quiz grade would be 90 and that would be 12.5% of your final grade).

(3) There will be a final exam on Part III of the course.
Grades will be determined as follows:

Section Paper 1:  10%
Section Paper 2:  10%
Section Paper 3:  10%
Final Paper:   30%
Reading Quizzes:  12.5%
Take Home Exam:  15%
Class Participation:  12.5%

A = 93-100%; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B = 83-86%; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72;
D+=67-69; D=63-66; D-=60-62; F=59 and below.

I reserve the right to curve assignments to help you.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS**

I reserve the right to modify this schedule.

Aug. 28  Introduction and Course Overview
Aug. 30  What is politics? How can we learn about it?
          Bacon, “The Plan of the Great Instauration”; Sagan, “Can We Know the Universe?”
Sept.  4  Majoritarian and Pluralist Views of Democracy

**Section I—Dilemmas of Communicating Popular Sentiment**

Section IA: Dilemmas of Public Opinion

Sept.  6  What Does the Public Know about Politics? Why Is It Important?
          Delli Carpini and Keeter, “The Public’s Knowledge of Politics”
Sept.  11 Can the Public Learn from the Media? What Does It Learn?
Sept. 13  The Dilemma of Political Trust
          Alford, “We’re All in This Together: The Decline of Trust in Government, 1958-1996”; Uslaner, “Trust and Consequences”

Sept. 20, 25  Political Polarization in America: Is America Polarized? Fironia, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, Ch. 1-4 (for 9/21); Ch. 5-8 (for 9/26)

Section IB: Dilemmas of Interest Group Politics


Section II—Dilemmas of Translating Popular Sentiment into Policy

Section IIA: Dilemmas of Congressional Politics and Policy-Making

Oct. 9, 11  Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in Congress Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, pp. 1-80 (10/10), pp. 81-180 (10/12)

*Section Paper 1, on the effect of public opinion on your policy area, is due at the beginning of class on 10/9.*


Oct. 23  Congress and the Common Good? The Role of Salience Arnold, “Policy Decisions”; Lawrence, “Message Politics”

Section IIB: Dilemmas of Presidential Politics and Policy-Making

Oct. 25  Causes and Consequences of President-Centered Government

Section Paper 2, on the effect of interest group politics on your policy area, is due at the beginning of class.

Oct. 30

Campaigning for Policy
Kernell, *Going Public* (Ch. 1-4); Kernell, *Going Public*, (Ch. 5-6, 8)

Nov. 6

Managerial Challenges
Pfiffner, “Can the President Manage the Government”; Edwards and Wayne, “Presidential Decision Making”

Nov. 8

The Institutional Dilemma of Nominating Presidential Candidates
Polsby and Wildavsky, “The Nomination Process” (pp. 89-117).

Section III—Dilemmas of the Policy Process: Politics Does not Go Away

The Policy-Making Process

Nov. 13

Who participates?

Nov. 15

How do issues arise?
Kingdon, Ch. 4-6

Section Paper 3, on the effect of congressional politics and policy-making, on your policy area is due at the beginning of class.

Nov. 20

Why are policy alternatives chosen?
Kingdon, Ch. 7-9

Nov. 22

NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK

Health Care Politics and Policy:

Nov. 27

Health Care Politics and Policy: History and Issues
Fernandez, “Health Insurance: A Primer”; Epstein, “Covering the Uninsured”; “Catastrophic Coverage Law is Repealed”

Nov. 29

The Failure of Health Care Reform I: Background and Is it the Public’s Fault?
CQ Almanac, “Clinton’s Health Care Plan Laid to Rest”; Brodie and Blendon, “The Public’s Contribution to Congressional Gridlock on Health Care Reform”; Jacobs and Shapiro, “Don’t Blame the Public for Failed Health Care Reform”

Dec. 4

The Failure of Health Care Reform II: Is it the fault of Political Institutions
Steinmo and Watts, “It’s the Institutions, Stupid”; Baumgartner and Talbert, “From Setting a National Agenda on Health Care to Making Decisions in Congress”

Dec. 6  Roads to Health Care Reform: Competing Assumptions and the Role of Social Science and Democracy

Final Paper, on the effect of presidential politics and policy-making combined with the earlier sections, on your policy area is due at the beginning of class.

Dec. 13  Final Exam