The study of what we call public policy grew in the mid- to late 20th century into a formal subfield within the discipline of political science. It focuses on the behavior of various government institutions, and how those institutions interact among themselves and the broader political environment to produce laws and other manifestations of public policy.

Thus, the institutions and processes created in the Constitution of the United States are at the core of the study of public policy, but an understanding of how governmental institutions are influenced by the contemporary political environment is also crucial to understanding. An impressive body of work has evolved which attempts to explain not only how policy is created, but also why or why not, and to what effect. Much to the consternation of many in the current period, government’s purview seems virtually limitless, as policy deals with every aspect of American life, and indeed, all of your courses of study at Rutgers. The textbook for the course addresses both of these aspects of the study of public policy. We will learn some analytical concepts and tools, and will do a quick overview of the substance of major areas of public policy. It is my hope that at the end of the semester, you will have some appreciation for the policy consequences of constitutional design, and some understanding of how institutional behavior has changed over time.

One other aspect of the course requires some comment. The essence of the study of public policy emerged during a period in our nation’s history when there was a broad consensus as to what government should undertake as policy and how it should relate to the society. Extreme policy disagreement tended to be at the very periphery of this broad consensus. In recent decades, and particularly since 2009, that broad consensus has largely evaporated in our governing institutions. It has been displaced by politics of antagonism, hostility, and on the part of some, a deep distrust of the federal government. Because of this, many of the general principles of public policy formation are often strained in their application to the contemporary political environment. We will also examine these tensions in class, and I hope in your questions and observations about contemporary politics and policy.

Lectures will frequently go beyond the assigned reading, and you will be responsible for that content on exams. Formal attendance is not taken, but I do get a good impression of patterns attendance; quite consistently, those with poor attendance records do poorly with their grades. This class serves a diverse group of students; some are new to American government and political science, others are majors with considerable back round in the subject. The course can serve everyone’s needs if you read, attend, and ask questions and offer opinions. I urge
March 1      Review Wilson, Part I for Hourly Exam

MARCH 12    HOU RLY EXAM ON WILSON, PART I

March 17     SPRING RECESS

March 24     Read Part V of Wilson, Distributive Policy

March 31     Read chapters 1 – 4 of Gosling & Eisner

April 7      Read chapters 5 – 7 of Gosling & Eisner

April 14     Read chapters 8 – 10 of Gosling & Eisner

APRIL 16    2ND HOU RLY ON POLICY TYPES & GOSLING & EISNER

April 21     For the last two weeks, be reading America's Bitter Pill

April 28

April 30     Last Class

FRIDAY, MAY 8   TAKE HOME FINAL PAPER DUE 3:00
                HICKMAN HALL  5th FLOOR MAIL ROOM

               Late submissions will be penalized