

POEC 401
Contemporary Problems in Political Economy
Fall 2017

TF 1:10pm-2:25pm
Horn 130

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Zimmerman Mondays 2:00-3:00pm, Thursdays 2:00-3:00pm, & by appointment

Course Description

This course examines contemporary problems in political economy at and across diverse spatial scales. Using both Economics and Political Science methods of analysis, students will study the way societies respond to the myriad risks facing its citizens. The goal of this course is both to build upon theoretical debates encountered in POEC 250 as well as to prepare students for the public policy analysis they will do in POEC 402.

Readings

You should consider this course to be 'reading-intensive'. We will regularly read approximately 100 pages of text per class session. We will focus our efforts on several sustained arguments contained in the following assigned texts:

- Jacob S. Hacker, The Divided Welfare State: The Battle Over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States (2002)
- Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies (1999)

We will supplement these books with a course reader divided into parts. Part I of the reader is available now in the packet room (51 Park St.). We will notify you in class when later parts are available. The books may be purchased at The Williams Bookstore on Spring Street or through your favorite online retailer.

Course expectations

Our course will be conducted as a seminar. That means everyone is expected to participate in class discussion, which will occupy the bulk of our time together.

In order for all of us to get the most out of this course, all students are expected to faithfully keep up with the readings throughout the entire term. Readings assigned for a particular class session will be the topic for that day's discussion, and therefore should be completed prior to class. Please come to each class prepared to discuss and to learn from one another.

In addition, regular attendance and participation is valued, expected and essential for you to succeed both in this course and at Williams generally. Please notify both of us (preferably by email) if you will be missing class for any reason.

Course requirements

- **Three group presentations** — Over the course of the semester you and a partner will present the readings and offer questions for class discussion three times. Presentations are to be both concise summaries of the readings and robust critical reflections upon them. Presentations are to be not only verbal but visual as well, and thus must incorporate a visual element through which you outline your argument, present concepts, and analyze data (PowerPoint seems to work best; Prezi has a bad track record in this class). You will be given a 'road map' to follow which should guide your work. You are also required to meet with one or both of us prior to your presentation. This meeting should occur at least the day before your presentation and be based upon a draft slide presentation. Presentations will open each class session and last no longer than 20 minutes. Save for exceptional circumstances, each member of the group will receive the same grade. You may not have the same partner for more than one presentation. Sign-ups will occur via our course Glow page during the first week of class.

Please note: Papers should be formatted with 1-in. margins, double-spacing and 10-pt. font minimum.

Papers are due on the days listed in the syllabus by 11:59pm. These deadlines are firm. Please don't ask for extensions.

Early papers are always welcome. Late papers will be penalized one partial letter grade per day late. If you can write only a poor paper by the deadline, strongly consider taking the grade penalty and the extra days to write an excellent one.

- **Two course papers** — You will write two papers this semester, each due at the end of one of the two broad sections of the course. The first paper will be due on Monday, October 16 and the second paper will be due on Saturday, December 16. We will provide more information on the content and structure of these papers during the semester.
- **Class participation** — Regular attendance and contributions to discussion are important, valued and expected. You are allowed one free pass for missing class without an excuse. Excused absences include personal illness, family emergencies, religious holidays, job interviews, and the like. *The Tuesday before Thanksgiving is NOT an excused absence!* Two unexcused absences will result in a 50% reduction in your class participation grade. Three or more unexcused absences will result in a 100% reduction.

You are free to consult with other students during the semester, organize study groups, etc., but remember that written work must be the product of your own individual efforts. The Honor Code applies in this course!

Grades

Your course grade is a weighted average of the individual assignment grades. The weights are as follows:

Group presentations	45%	(15% each)
First course paper	20%	
Second course paper	20%	
Class participation	15%	

Course Calendar

Date **Topic**

INTRODUCTION

Friday
Sept. 8 **Introduction to the course**

- no readings

Tuesday
Sept. 12 **Public policy goals and tradeoffs**

- Deborah Stone, Policy Paradox (2012), chs. 2-6.

THE WELFARE STATE

Friday
Sept. 15 **Varieties of welfare capitalism**

- Gøsta Esping-Andersen, The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism (1990), chs. 1-3.
- Martin Schröder, Integrating Varieties of Capitalism and Welfare State Research (2013), pp. 63-90.

Tuesday
Sept. 19 **Varieties of welfare capitalism revisited**

- Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies, Introduction and Part I. *[book]*

Friday
Sept. 22 **Recasting welfare regimes**

- Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies, Parts II & III. *[book]*

Tuesday
Sept. 26 **The American welfare regime**

- Jacob Hacker, The Divided Welfare State, Part I. *[book]*
- Jens Alber, "What the European and American welfare states have in common and where they differ: Facts and fiction in comparisons of the European Social Model and the United States," Journal of European Social Policy 20 (2010), 102-125.

Friday
Sept. 29

Creating the American pension system

- Jacob Hacker, The Divided Welfare State, Part II. [book]

Tuesday
Oct. 3

Creating the American health insurance system

- Jacob Hacker, The Divided Welfare State, Part III. [book]

Friday
Oct. 6

The Nordic dream

- Bernie Sanders, “What can we learn from Denmark?” Huffington Post, 26 July 2013.
- “A public address by Lars Lokke Rasmussen,” Kennedy School of Government, Institute of Politics, 29 October 2015 [see link on Glow]
- Nima Sanandaji, Scandinavian Unexceptionalism: Culture, Markets and the Failure of Third-Way Socialism. Institute of Economic Affairs, 2013.

Tuesday
Oct. 10

Fall reading period – no class

POLICY EVALUATION

Friday
Oct. 13

Cost-benefit analysis

- Jonathan Gruber, “Cost-benefit analysis,” in Gruber, Public Finance and Public Policy, Fourth edition (2012), pp. 207-225.
- Kenneth J. Arrow et al., “Benefit-cost analysis in environmental, health, and safety regulation,” American Enterprise Institute, 1996.
- Lisa Heinzerling and Frank Ackerman, “Pricing the priceless: Cost-benefit analysis of environmental protection,” Georgetown Environmental Law and Policy Institute, 2002.
- Austin Frakt and Aaron E. Carroll, “Can this treatment help me? There’s a statistic for that,” The Upshot [blog] New York Times, 26 January 2015.
- Aaron E. Carroll and Austin Frakt, “How to measure a medical treatment’s potential for harm,” The Upshot [blog] New York Times, 2 February 2015.

Tuesday
Oct. 17

Optimal philanthropy

- Michael Weinstein and Ralph Bradburd, The Robin Hood Rules for Smart Giving (2013), chs. 1-8.
- Phillip Levine and David Zimmerman, Targeting Investments in Children (2010), Introduction & ch. 13.

Friday
Oct. 20

Flex day

CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

PENSIONS AND HEALTH CARE

Tuesday
Oct. 24

Social Security

- Board of Trustees, 2017 OASDI Trustees Report, Introduction & Overview.
- R. Douglas Arnold, "Politics at the precipice: Fixing Social Security in 2033," The Forum 13 (April 2015).
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, "The Reformer: An interactive tool to fix Social Security" [*see link on Glow*]
- Office of the Chief Actuary, Social Security Administration, "Estimates of the Financial Effects on Social Security of H.R. 1902, the 'Social Security 2100 Act,' legislation introduced on April 5, 2017 by Representative John Larson," 5 April 2017.
- Andrew G. Biggs, "The Democrats' Social Security plan means much higher taxes," Wall Street Journal, 9 May 2017.

Friday
Oct. 27

Explaining the Affordable Care Act

- "Summary of the Affordable Care Act," Focus on Health Reform, Kaiser Family Foundation Publication 8061-02, 23 April 2013.
- "A guide to the Supreme Court's Affordable Care Act decision," Focus on Health Reform, Kaiser Family Foundation Publication 8332, July 2012.
- Jacob S. Hacker, "The road to somewhere: Why health reform happened," Perspectives on Politics 8 (2010), 861-876.
- Simon Haeder, "Beyond path dependence: Explaining healthcare reform and its consequences," Policy Studies Journal 40 (S1) (2012), 65-86.
- Jill Quadagno, "Right-wing conspiracy? Socialist plot? The origins of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act," Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law 39 (2014), 35-56.

Tuesday
Oct. 31

Single Payer

- TBA

EDUCATION

Friday
Nov. 3

Early education

- Sneha Elango et al., “Early childhood education,” NBER Working Paper 21766, November 2015.
- Mark W. Lipsey and Dale C. Farran, “Effects of a state prekindergarten program on children’s achievement and behavior through third grade,” Working Paper, Peabody Research Institute, Vanderbilt University, January 2016.

Tuesday
Nov. 7

K-12 education and the Finnish model

- OECD, Country Note: Key Findings from PISA 2015 for the United States (2016), chs. 1-2.
- OECD, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States (2011), ch. 5.
- OECD, “PISA 2015 key findings for Finland” *[see link on Glow]*
- Pasi Sahlberg, “Finnish lessons: What can the US learn from educational change in Finland?” Peabody Research Office brown bag lunch series, Vanderbilt University, 9 December 2011. *[see link on Glow]*
- Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, “Real Finnish lessons,” Centre for Policy Studies, April 2015.
- National Center for Education Statistics, “State results: Massachusetts” *[see link on Glow]*

Friday
Nov. 10

Higher education

- Catharine Hill et al., "Affordability of highly selective private colleges and universities II." Williams Project on the Economics of Higher Education, Discussion Paper 73, January 2011.
- Caroline Hoxby and Sarah Turner, "Expanding college opportunity for high-achieving, low income students," Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, Discussion Paper #12-014, 2012.
- Raj Chetty et al., "Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in intergenerational mobility," NBER Working Paper 23618, July 2017.
- "Economic diversity and student outcomes at America's colleges and universities: Find your college," [The Upshot](#) [blog], [New York Times](#) (2017). [see link on Glow]

INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

Tuesday
Nov. 14

Basic income

- Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, [Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy](#) (2017), ch. 1.
- Davide Tondani, "Universal basic income and negative income tax: Two different ways of thinking redistribution," [Journal of Socio-Economics](#) 38 (2009), 246-255.
- Karl Widerquist, "A failure to communicate: What (if anything) can we learn from the negative income tax experiments?" [Journal of Socio-Economics](#) 34 (2005), 49-81.
- Alyssa Battistoni, "The false promise of universal basic income," [Dissent](#), Spring 2017.
- Yuval Noah Harari, "Universal basic income is neither universal nor basic," [BloombergView](#), 4 June 2017.

Friday
Nov. 17

(Un)employment since the Great Recession

- Nicholas Eberstadt, "Our miserable 21st century," [Commentary](#), 15 February 2017.
- Nicholas Eberstadt and David Wessel, "Men without work: America's invisible crisis," American Enterprise Institute, 25 October 2016. [see link on Glow]
- Anne Case and Angus Deaton, "Mortality and morbidity in the 21st century," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, conference draft, March 2017.
- Alan B. Krueger, "Where have all the workers gone? An inquiry into the decline of the US labor force participation rate," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, conference draft, August 2017.

CRIME

Tuesday
Nov. 21

Race and policing

- Cody T. Ross, "A multi-level Bayesian analysis of racial bias in police shootings at the county-level in the United States, 2011-2014," [PLoS One](#) 10 (11) (2015).
- Roland J. Fryer, Jr., "An empirical analysis of racial differences in police use of force," NBER Working Paper no. 22399, July 2016.
- Amanda Cox, "Roland Fryer answers reader questions about his police force study," [The Upshot](#) [blog], [New York Times](#), 12 July 2016.
- Jon M. Shane, Brian Lawton, and Zoë Swenson, "The prevalence of fatal police shootings by U.S. police, 2015-2016: Patterns and answers from a new data set," [Journal of Criminal Justice](#), forthcoming.

Thanksgiving break

Tuesday
Nov. 28

The Ferguson effect

- Brennan Center for Justice, "Crime in 2016: Final year-end data" & "Crime in 2017: A preliminary analysis"
- Jeff Asher, "Murder is up again in 2017, but not as much as last year," [FiveThirtyEight](#) [online], 13 July 2017.
- Heather MacDonald, [The War on Cops](#) (2016), excerpts.
- Richard Rosenfeld, "Documenting and explaining the 2015 homicide rise," National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice, June 2016.
- John A. Sjarback et al., "De-policing and crime in the wake of Ferguson," [Journal of Criminal Justice](#) 50 (2017), 42-52.
- Rich Morin et al., "Behind the badge," Pew Research Center, 11 January 2017, pp. 4-22.
- University of Chicago Crime Lab, "Gun violence in Chicago, 2016," January 2017, pp. 18-26.
- Jeff Asher, "Inside the algorithm that tries to predict gun violence in Chicago," [The Upshot](#) [blog], [New York Times](#), 13 June 2017.
- Heather MacDonald, "The Ferguson effect lives on," [City Journal](#), 23 December 2016.

IMMIGRATION

Friday
Dec. 1

Immigration policy

- OECD, Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015, “Introduction and Overview”.
- CBO, Immigration Policy in the United States: An Update, December 2010.
- CBO, A Description of the Immigrant Population – 2013 Update, May 2013.
- Ruth Ellen Wasem and Chad C. Haddal, Point Systems for Immigrant Selection: Options and Issues, Congressional Research Service CRS Report for Congress, 5 June 2007.
- Tom Cotton and David Perdue, “Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy Act (RAISE Act): Section-by-section summary” & RAISE Act, Section 5.
- New Zealand Immigration, “Skilled migrant resident visa points indicator” [*see link on Glow*]
- Masha Gessen, “Immigrants shouldn’t have to be ‘talented’ to be welcome,” New York Times, 6 September 2017.

Tuesday
Dec. 5

Immigration and the welfare state

- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration, September 2016, ch. 8.
- George J. Borjas, “A user’s guide to the 2016 National Academy Report on ‘The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration’,” 22 September 2016.

Friday
Dec. 8

Course wrap-up

- No readings