

## PLSC 260 “Introduction to Public Policy”

Fall 2007 – Professor Rick Mayes  
MWF’s, 2:40-3:30 p.m., Weinstein 204

office hours: Monday and Friday 3:40-5:00 p.m.  
or by appointment if these times are not convenient

office: Weinstein 202M, x6404  
homepage: <http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/>

Morality, in so many words, represents the ideal way that people want (usually *others*) to behave. Public policy—influenced by economics, psychology, philosophy, politics, and religion—reflects essentially the same aspiration, but is based on the way people *actually* behave. As the art of political decision-making, public policy reflects the reality that: (1) penalties and incentives (“sticks and carrots”) are what primarily drive modern life; (2) information, who has how much of it and when, is key to structuring effective penalties and incentives; and that (3) thinking empirically, knowing what to measure and how to measure it, is as important as thinking normatively.

In other words, opinions are good but they operate even better as starting points for developing testable theories and arguments about what the best policies are for, say: improving education, strengthening national security, lowering unemployment, increasing health, expanding employment, decreasing poverty, protecting the environment, preventing crime, expanding wealth, financing public investments, and consuming limited resources. In its purest form, the goal of any public policy is to make life better for as many people as possible. What makes public policy so challenging and interesting, though, is that people invariably disagree over what constitutes things such as equality, fairness, effectiveness, and causation. This course aims to teach you how problems are defined and goals are set, as well as how policy solutions are crafted and the ways in which we judge their effectiveness.

### Course Readings

- Steven Levitt, Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics* (William Morrow/HarperCollins, 2005)
- Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Little, Brown & Company, 2003)
- James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Doubleday, 2004)
- Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (Little, Brown & Company, 2005)
- Robert Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (Vintage Books/Random House, 1998)
- Robert Frank, *Falling Behind: How Rising Inequality Harms the Middle Class* (U.C. Press, 2007)
- David Kirp, *The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics* (Harvard Press, 2007)
- Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (Random House, 2004)

### Class Attendance, Preparation and Participation

Class attendance is critical. Given the complexity and demands of the material, missing class greatly increases the likelihood that your grade will suffer (perhaps dramatically). There may be days when this risk may seem like a necessary one for you to take, but I urge you to always weigh the opportunity costs.

**Honor Code:** Your research paper and exams must be submitted with your signature next to the full written pledge:

*“I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”*

Failure to do this will result in your work not being graded or accepted for credit.

### Late Policy

My policy is firm but fair. I don’t expect to use this policy, but if it has to go into effect it will. In brief, your research paper will be automatically reduced one full grade for every day late. Any paper submitted more than 2 days late will receive an automatic “F.” Those with genuine emergencies will be given extensions, but they must be cleared with me *in advance*.

## Assignments and Grading

Class Participation/Discussion	5%
Mid-Term Exam	35%
Policy Research Paper	15%
Team Debate	10%
Final Exam	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Grades

*"Abandon hope, all 'ye who have become accustomed to grade inflation."*

This class is, by virtue of the subject matter and inherent learning curve, something of a grade-deflator. Keep your grade expectations modest and you are less likely to be disappointed. Everyone begins the class with zero (0) points. Through exams, class participation, debates, and the policy research paper you **earn** points over the course of the semester. The number of points you earn determines the grade you receive. You are entitled to what you earn: D/F reflects work that is poor/incomplete; C, adequate; B, excellent; and A, perfect or near-perfect (and rare).

<b>Scoring</b>	A= 100-96	A-= 95-91	B+= 90-88
	B= 87-83	B-= 82-81	C+= 80-78
	C= 77-73	C-= 72-71	D+= 70-68
	D= 67-63	D-= 62-61	F= 60-0

Please be aware that under limited circumstances will extra credit be available. Consequently, it is imperative that you do your best on each and every assignment. I am always available outside of class to help you.

## Debates [10% of your final grade]

We will have team debates over an issue of public policy on most Fridays after fall break (and once before). Look over the syllabus and volunteer for the issue that most interests you. Students will pair up into teams of two and make their presentations. Afterwards, the class will vote on: (1) the quality of their argument and (2) the quality of their presentation, which will constitute who won the debate and each student's debate grade.

## Research Paper [15% of your final grade, respectively]

Each of you will select a topic (e.g., health care, labor, taxes, national security) and a specific policy (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Family & Medical Leave Act, Welfare Reform 1996, Patriot Act). You will then write a 9-10 page (or approximately 3,000-word) research paper detailing the policy's: background, effectiveness (or lack thereof), and consequences both intended and unintended. Your paper needs to summarize the secondary literature (e.g., newspaper articles, journal articles, magazine articles, books, reports), while also providing some measure of primary data and information (e.g., descriptive statistics).

I will hand out a comprehensive guide to your paper later in the semester. You will also have a Writing Fellow assigned to you as an editorial mentor to help you improve your writing.

*\*\*You will turn in a 1-page proposal for your research paper at the latest by Monday, November 12.\*\**

## ASSIGNMENTS

### I. INTRODUCTION to THINKING SENSIBLY about HOW PEOPLE BEHAVE in the REAL WORLD

- Monday, August 27                      Introduction and Overview
- The Hidden Side of Everything & The Paradox of Choice**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Introduction  
- C. Caldwell, "Can You Have Too Many Choices?" *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/040301crbo\\_books](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/040301crbo_books)
- Wednesday, August 29                      **Schoolteachers, Sumo Wrestlers & Choice and Happiness**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Chapter 1  
- J. Gertner, "The Futile Pursuit of Happiness," *New York Times Magazine*  
<http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Futile%20Pursuit%20of%20Happiness.pdf>
- Friday, August 31                      **Cool Hunting, Law of the Few & Teen Behavior**  
- M. Gladwell, "The Cool Hunt: Who Decides What's Cool?" *The New Yorker*  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/coolhunt.pdf>
- Monday, September 3                      **The Ku Klux Klan, Real Estate Agents & Predictive Validity**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Chapter 2  
- M. Gladwell, "Troublemakers: What Pit Bulls Can Teach Us about Profiling," *New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Gladwell\\_pitbulls\\_profiling.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Gladwell_pitbulls_profiling.pdf)
- Wednesday, September 5                      **Why Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms & Power-Law Distributions**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, pp. Chapter 3  
- M. Gladwell, "Million-Dollar Murray," *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Gladwell\\_MillionDollar.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Gladwell_MillionDollar.pdf)
- Friday, September 7                      **Abortion, Crime & the Bell Curve**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Chapter 4  
- A. Gawande, "The Bell Curve," *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Atul\\_Gawande\\_The%20Bell%20Curve.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Atul_Gawande_The%20Bell%20Curve.pdf)
- Monday, September 10                      **Predictive Validity & National Security**  
- M. Gladwell, "Connecting the Dots: The Paradoxes of Intelligence Reform," *The New Yorker*  
<http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/dots.pdf>  
- The 9/11 Commission, "Report: Executive Summary"  
[www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report\\_Exec.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report_Exec.pdf)
- \* Monday evening, September 10                      documentary, PBS Frontline's "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero"  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/>  
(9-11 pm, Whitehurst Living Room)
- Wednesday, September 12                      **What Makes a Perfect Spouse? & The Role of Incentives**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Chapters 5-6  
- A. Sutherland, "Modern Love: What Shamu Taught Me about a Happy Marriage," *New York Times*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Shamu\\_ModernLove\\_NYT.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Shamu_ModernLove_NYT.pdf)
- Friday, September 14                      **Bias, Puzzles & Mysteries**  
- Levitt & Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Epilogue  
- B. Gilbert, "I'm O.K., You're Biased," *New York Times*  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/ImOK\\_YoureBiased\\_NYT.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/ImOK_YoureBiased_NYT.pdf)  
- M. Gladwell, "Open Secrets," *The New Yorker*  
[http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/Open\\_Secrets\\_Gladwell\\_NYorker\\_2007.pdf](http://www.gladwell.com/pdf/Open_Secrets_Gladwell_NYorker_2007.pdf)

Monday, September 17	<b>Epidemics, the Statue That Didn't Look Right &amp; The Wisdom of Crowds</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 3-29 - Gladwell, <i>Blink</i> , pp. 3-17 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 3-22
Wednesday, September 19	<b>The Law of the Few, Thin Slicing &amp; The Difference Difference Makes</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 30-88 - Gladwell, <i>Blink</i> , pp. 18-47 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 23-39
Friday, September 21	<b>The Stickiness Factor, the Locked Door &amp; Monkey See, Monkey Do</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 89-132 - Gladwell, <i>Blink</i> , pp. 48-71 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 40-65
Monday, September 24	<b>The Power of Context, the Warren Harding Error &amp; Putting the Pieces Together</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 132-192 - Gladwell, <i>Blink</i> , pp. 72-111, 117-125, 145-146 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 66-83
Wednesday, September 26	<b>Case Studies, Taxes, Tipping &amp; Trust</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 193-252 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 84-142
Friday, September 28	<b>Isolation, Pepsi's Challenge, Democracy &amp; a Revolution in Classical Music</b> - Gladwell, <i>The Tipping Point</i> , pp. 253-280 - Gladwell, <i>Blink</i> , pp. 153-167, 245-254 - Surowiecki, <i>The Wisdom of Crowds</i> , pp. 145-191, 259-274

## **II. PUBLIC POLICY AREAS and THE QUEST TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S RESPONSES to INCENTIVES and PENALTIES**

Monday, October 1	<b>Labor &amp; Fiscal Policy</b> - Reich, <i>Locked in the Cabinet</i> , Introduction-pp. 120
Wednesday, October 3	<b>Labor &amp; Fiscal Policy</b> - Reich, <i>Locked in the Cabinet</i> , pp. 121-223
Friday, October 5	<b>Labor &amp; Fiscal Policy</b> - Reich, <i>Locked in the Cabinet</i> , pp. 227-348  <b>Debate 1: Should the Minimum Wage be Increased or Kept at Its Current Level?</b>
Monday, October 8	documentary, "30 Days on Minimum Wage" <a href="http://www.tv.com/30-days/minimum-wage/episode/425972/summary.html">http://www.tv.com/30-days/minimum-wage/episode/425972/summary.html</a>
Wednesday, October 10	<b>** MID-TERM EXAM (Part I) **</b>
Friday, October 12	<b>** MID-TERM EXAM (Part II) **</b>

## **FALL BREAK**

Wednesday, October 17	<b>"Surviving the Good Times" Part I</b>
Friday, October 19	<b>"Surviving the Good Times" Part II</b>
Sunday, October 21:	documentary, "Super Size Me" (9-10:45 p.m., location TBA) <a href="http://www.supersizeme.com/home.aspx?page=movietrailer_super">http://www.supersizeme.com/home.aspx?page=movietrailer_super</a>



Wednesday, November 14

### **National Defense & Security Policy**

- M. Lilla, "The Politics of God," *New York Times Magazine*, 2007  
<http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/The%20Politics%20of%20God.pdf>
- PBS Frontline, "Rumsfeld's War, 2004" [\* watch online \*]  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pentagon/view/>

Friday, November 16

### **Debate 5: Which Direction Should We Take in Iraq: Withdrawal or Escalation?**

- PBS Frontline, "The Insurgency, 2006" [\* watch online \*]  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/insurgency/view/>
- PBS Frontline, "The Gangs of Iraq, 2007" [\* watch online \*]  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gangsofiraq/view/>

Monday, November 19

### **The Consequences of War**

- F. Kaplan, "Challenging the Generals," *New York Times Magazine*, 2007  
[http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Challenging\\_the\\_Generals.pdf](http://www.richmond.edu/~bmayes/pdf/Challenging_the_Generals.pdf)
- PBS Frontline, "The Endgame, 2007" [\* watch online \*]  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/endgame/view/>

\* Monday evening, November 19

documentary, "No End in Sight"  
(9:00-11 pm, Whitehurst Living Room)

**THANKSGIVING BREAK** (\* read at least the first half of Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains* over break \*)

Monday, November 26

### **Public Health & Human Rights Policy**

- Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, pp. 3-177
- Partners in Health, Paul Farmer, and Zanmi Lasante [\* watch online \*]  
<http://rehost.sju.edu/ramgen/Fox/Partnersinhealth1.rm>

Wednesday, November 28

### **Public Health & Human Rights Policy**

- Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, pp. 181-301

Friday, November 30

### **Debate 6: Should the U.S. Adopt a Mandatory HIV/AIDS Testing Policy like Cuba's?**

- Paul Farmer, "Global Health & Human Rights," at Columbia Univ. [\* watch online \*]  
[http://media.cc.columbia.edu:8080/ramgen/acis/research/ci/ghss/ghss\\_farmer.smil?mode=compact](http://media.cc.columbia.edu:8080/ramgen/acis/research/ci/ghss/ghss_farmer.smil?mode=compact)

Monday, December 3

\*\* first rough draft of your research paper is due to your Writing Fellow \*\*

Wednesday, December 5

office appointments with Prof. Mayes and your Writing Fellow to discuss your paper

Friday, December 7

Research Papers due in class

### **Conclusion and Review**

- Francis Collins: Director, National Human Genome Research Institute,  
"Seek A Balanced Life," Commencement Address  
<http://www.virginia.edu/majorevents/speeches/01speech.html>

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**FINAL EXAM** Monday, December 10th, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.