The most basic question of public policy is: What should government do? Should it provide for the common defense, enforce the laws and perhaps offer a few other services, but leave most activities to individuals, acting alone or in groups? Or should it try to ensure a certain quality of life for everyone, providing the services necessary for them to achieve it? Should it give as much room as possible for citizens to pursue their own interests, economic or otherwise? Or should it restrict what they do in the name of the public interest? Should it be indifferent to the advantages – natural or acquired -- some people have? Or should it seek to offset them in order to promote justice? Should it protect private property? Or should it own or control it to protect the environment, or other public goods?

Although they may not always have acknowledged them, these and similar questions have long preoccupied both thinkers about and participants in public policy. They also continue to figure prominently in today’s debates. The controversies over the Affordable Care Act, to take one example, have their roots in disputes about what the proper role of government in health care should be, whether or not people should be allowed to decide how much health insurance they want, how much people who are healthy should subsidize those who are not, and to what degree should health care be considered a public matter rather than a private one.

Furthermore, thinking about these questions inevitably affects – and is affected by -- thinking other aspects of public policy: Who decides? Who does what? How much freedom? What is just? What is the public interest? What is the most effective way to achieve it?

The aim of this course is to engage students, early in their study of public policy, with the fundamental issue of what should government do. They will read and discuss how this question has been addressed by past and contemporary thinkers, look at
applications of the question to areas of domestic policy in the United States, and reflect
on how their own answer to the question – and the arguments and evidence they would
use in its behalf.

There is no expectation that students will end this course convinced that public
policy should – or should not – be used for particular purposes, or in particular ways.
One semester is hardly enough to settle disputes that have been raging for millennia! But
the students should expect to understand the contours of these debates, be familiar with
important arguments on various sides of them, and be prepared to apply the insights they
have gained – and developed – to their own careers, as both students of public policy and
practitioners.

This course is the first in a four-part sequence for students in the Program on
Applied Research and Inquiry, a SPEA program that is open to students throughout
Indiana University who are seeking courses that bring together the liberal arts and
professional education.

Course Requirements

In addition to doing the reading for each topic and participating actively in the
discussions, students will be expected to write at least three papers of 1000 to 1500 words
each, based on questions provided by the instructor. These questions will be keyed to
class readings and are due on the day the readings are to be discussed.

Students will also be required to submit a term paper, ten to fifteen pages in
length, in which they will be expected to apply the ideas examined in this course to a
contemporary issue of public policy. The paper will explore the history of and earlier
debates over government’s role in this issue, the current division of responsibilities (and
their consequences), and proposals for change (and what they are supposed to
accomplish). At least one counter-factual will be developed: that is, a description of
how public policy toward this issue might have evolved if a different decision about the
role of government had been made.

Students will also be expected to participate in a class blog in which they will
identify and post (with explanations) clippings from newspapers, magazines or other
publications that deal with the question asked by this course: What is public policy for?
Clipping may be about debates over this question occurring in the United States or in
other countries. Students will have to post at least ten clippings.

Course Outline

The bulk of these readings are primary sources. There are far more of them than will
actually be covered (and in some areas, perhaps too few). What follows is meant to give
a sense of the structure of the course and a rough idea of what kinds of writings will be
assigned.
I. Introduction: *Animal Farm* (film followed by discussion) (1 week)

II. The Ancients: The role of public policy and government from Greece to “the Glorious Revolution” (2-3 weeks)

   Selections from the following will be read and discussed: The Bible, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides (Pericles), Cicero, Aquinas, Machiavelli (*Discourses*), Hobbes, Locke, Bacon, Montesquieu, ibn Khaldun

III. The Enlightenment and Its Critics: The role of public policy and government in the 18th and 19th centuries (3-4 weeks)

   Selections from the following will be read and discussed: Adam Smith, Rousseau, Tocqueville, Kant, Hume, Hegel, Marx, *Federalist Papers*, *Anti-Federalist* papers, Jefferson, Hamilton, Burke, Paine, Mill, J. F. Stephens, Lincoln, Douglass, Wollstonecraft

IV. The Modern Age: The role of public policy and government in the 20th century and beyond (3-4 weeks)


V. Topics: The Role of Government in Economic and Social Policy (2 weeks)

   Selections from the following will be read: Galbraith, Moynihan, Glazer, Polanyi, Friedman, J.Q. Wilson, Drucker, Himmelfarb, Hirschmann, Olson, Buchanan, Ostrom, Okun, Stiglitz, Reich, Rothbard, Solow, Gilder, Hardin, Putnam, Jacobs, Carsons

VI. Conclusion: An End to Government? The role of public policy and government in the digital age (1 week)

   Selections from the following will be read: Morozov, Eric Schmidt (Google), Turkle, Postman, Huxley, Orwell

**Books**

The bulk of the readings in the course are meant to be primary source materials, as indicated above. However, to help articulate key themes and tie the course together, I am considering adopting 3-4 texts from the following list:

Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*

William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice*

F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom.*

Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*

Kenneth Minogue, *The Liberal Mind*

George Will, *Statecraft as Soulcraft*

Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*