

COURSE GUIDE Workshop in Comparative Policy and Politics

Basic Information

- Course Code: S_WPP
- Period: Period 4 (Feb-Mar 2018)
- Credits: 12 ECTS
- Language: English
- Format: workshop
- Level: 600
- Assessment: 4,000 word research paper (70%); participation (15%); research design (15%)
- Faculty: Faculty of Social Sciences
- Coordinator: dr. Martijn Schoonvelde
- Contact: h.j.m.schoonvelde@vu.nl
- Office hours: by appointment

Content

The purpose of this workshop is to introduce students to the comparative study of public policy and to prepare them to write and present an empirical research paper on a topic of their choosing within this field. While other disciplines, such as economics and sociology, are also interested in public policy, this course investigates the role of political factors, like public opinion, political institutions, and interest groups, in explaining policy outcomes across countries or regions.

Each workshop session will start with a brief introduction by the instructor, after which we will discuss and evaluate as a group the assigned readings. The readings deal with various policy domains and help the students develop ideas for their own research paper.

Learning Objectives

The course aims to provide students with:

- Knowledge of various policy domains and their differences across countries
- Analytical skills to understand and assess research in the field of comparative policy analysis;
- Research skills to develop and conduct a theory-guided, empirical research project;
- Communication skills to give clear oral presentations of a research design and write a well-structured research paper, which can serve as a basis for their Master Thesis.

Required Text

There is one assigned text for this course:

- Dodds, A., *Comparative Public Policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

We will also read research papers which can be found online through, for example, Google Scholar: scholar.google.com. The readings are listed in the Course Schedule.

Assessment

The course is assessed on the basis of a research design (15%), which helps in developing a good topic for the final research paper (70%). In addition, students are required to actively participate in the workshop discussions (15%), which also includes giving presentations about their research design and their final paper.

The instructor will provide an overview of potential research questions and expectations in terms of structure and quality at the beginning of the course. Specific questions/topics will be chosen together with the instructor, taking into account student interests and background.

Course requirements

Research design (15% towards the final grade):

Each student will develop a research design which discusses in detail the student's empirical strategy – using data – to address a research question about a policy reform in the context of political developments. It includes a discussion of the substantive context, a research question, hypotheses and expectations, and data and measurement section. The Dodd textbook provides many examples of various policies in chapters 3–6, and the topic has to be discussed with and approved by the instructor. The research design will serve as an important first step towards the final research paper.

- Length: about 1000–1250 words, excluding references
- Grading 1–10 scale
- Deadline March 9: 17:00h (by email)

An exact grading rubric will be distributed at least one week before the research design is due.

Research paper (70% towards the final grade):

Based on careful empirical analysis, each student will develop a well-structured academic research paper, offering a comparative analysis of policy reforms in the context of political developments. The analysis should focus on the causes of certain policy reforms.

- Length: about 3500–4000 words, excluding references
- Grading 1–10 scale
- Deadline: March 30, 17:00h (by email)

An exact grading rubric will be distributed at least one week before the paper is due. **NB: Students are required to follow the guidelines of the FSW Schrijfwijzer in their written work.**

Class Participation (15% towards the final grade): Students are expected to attend every class. Students who miss class are responsible to catch up on all material missed. Beyond attendance, students are expected to have completed all of the assigned reading before class. Completing the reading before class also allows students to engage in thoughtful discussion and makes class more interesting. In addition, the students will give two presentations. These are graded as “pass/fail”.

Academic integrity

Students need to familiarize themselves with the rules concerning plagiarism and fraud: <https://vunet.login.vu.nl/services/pages/practicalinformation.aspx?cid=tcm%3a164-294019-16> If you are in doubt about any of this, ask the instructor.

Course Schedule

** This outline serves a general plan for the course; deviations (announced) may be necessary.*

Week 6 What is public policy?

February 6: 11:00 - 12:45: What is public policy? And why study it comparatively?

- Dodds, Chapters 1, 2 & 14

Week 7 Setting up a research study in comparative public policy

February 13: 11:00 - 12:45: How do we compare policies as social scientists? Measurement, research design and where to find data.

- Knill, C. (2005). Introduction: Cross-national policy convergence: concepts, approaches and explanatory factors. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12(5), 764-774.
- Bjørnskov, C., Dreher, A., & Fischer, J. A. (2008). Cross-country determinants of life satisfaction: Exploring different determinants across groups in society. *Social Choice and Welfare*, 30(1), 119-173.

Week 8 Public Opinion

February 20: 11:00 - 12:45: How does public opinion affect policy outcomes? And what explains the public's policy preferences?

- Gilens, M., & Page, B. I. (2014). Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens. *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), 564-581.
- Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. *Political Research Quarterly*, 56(1), 29-40.

- Margalit, Y. (2013). Explaining social policy preferences: Evidence from the Great Recession. *American Political Science Review*, 107(1), 80-103.

Week 9 Political Institutions

February 27: 11:00 - 12:45: What are institutions and how do they influence policy?

- Dodds, Chapter 10
- Iversen, T., & Soskice, D. (2006). Electoral institutions and the politics of coalitions: Why some democracies redistribute more than others. *American Political Science Review*, 100(2), 165-181.
- Keefer, P. (2007). Clientelism, credibility, and the policy choices of young democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 804-821.

Week 10 Presentations

March 6: 11:00 - 12:45: Research Design Presentations

March 9: 17:00 Deadline Research Design (by email)

Week 11 Policy transfer

March 13: 11:00 - 12:45: How do factors like policy learning, lesson-drawing and benchmarking shape policy outcomes?

- Dodd, Chapter 11
- Gilardi, F. (2010). Who learns from what in policy diffusion processes? *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(3), 650-666.
- Obinger, H., Schmitt, C., & Starke, P. (2013). Policy diffusion and policy transfer in comparative welfare state research. *Social Policy & Administration*, 47(1), 111-129.

Week 12 Globalization and new developments in comparative public policy

March 20: 11:00 - 12:45: The future of the public policy in times of austerity and globalization. What are new developments and challenges?

- Dodds, Chapter 12
- Kittel, B., & Obinger, H. (2003). Political parties, institutions, and the dynamics of social expenditure in times of austerity. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10(1), 20-45.
- Mosley, L., & Uno, S. (2007). Racing to the bottom or climbing to the top? Economic globalization and collective labor rights. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(8), 923-948.

Week 13 Final paper presentations

March 27: 11:00 - 12:45:

- **Final Paper Presentations**

March 30: 17:00: Final Paper Due (by email). Deadline re-sit: 18/05/2018.