

PA 3350: Public Policy Process

Department of Political Science

Texas State University

Fall 2026

Online, Asynchronous

Dr. W. Scott Langford

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Course Description

In this course, we examine the theories, processes, and practices of public policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. We also examine a range of substantive public policy issues—from economic, tax, and health policy to education, energy and the environment, and social welfare—so that we can test the frameworks of the policy process against real domains. Above all, we build the skills we need to participate in the public policy process, especially the ability to write clearly and persuasively about policy for a decision-making audience.

The course follows the recurring stages of the policy process. After establishing what public policy is and how government structures policymaking, we work through agenda setting and the explanation of policy choices; the legitimation and implementation of those choices; and budgeting and evaluation. In the final third, we apply these tools to substantive policy areas we choose. Throughout the course, we emphasize reasoning from evidence, distinguishing analysis from advocacy, and communicating conclusions in the concise, professional forms that public and nonprofit work demands.

As a Writing-Intensive course delivered fully online, PA 3350 builds these skills primarily through regular writing. We write a brief, reading-based essay every module, and I return individualized written comments on each; we then carry that feedback forward into a capstone Policy Memo, which we draft, revise in response to my comments, and submit in final form. Weekly discussion and short quizzes reinforce the concepts, and a cumulative final exam confirms our command of the policy-process framework and the substantive areas we examine during the term.

Course Learning Objectives (CLOs)

By the end of the course, we will be able to:

- Explain the major theories and models of the public policy process, including agenda setting, formulation, legitimation, implementation, and evaluation.
- Analyze how public problems are defined and reach the policy agenda within institutional, political, and economic contexts.
- Identify and assess the policy instruments and budgetary tools available to address public problems.

- Evaluate policy implementation and outcomes using empirical evidence and established analytical criteria.
- Apply policy-process frameworks to substantive policy areas such as economic, tax, health, education, energy/environmental, and social-welfare policy.
- Communicate policy analysis clearly and professionally in writing, and strengthen that writing through feedback and revision.
- Uphold ethical standards and the responsible use of evidence—including the disclosure and verification of any AI assistance—in policy analysis.

Required Materials

- **Textbook (required):** B. Guy Peters & John A. Hoornbeek, *American Public Policy: Promise and Performance*, 13th ed. (CQ Press, 2025). ISBN 978-1-0719-4756-2. Read alongside the modules; chapter assignments appear in the course calendar below.
- **Supplemental readings:** Assigned articles, agency reports, and short cases posted on Canvas (no additional cost).
- **Technology & support:** Reliable internet access, a Texas State Canvas account, and word-processing software able to export PDF. For help with Canvas, logins, or other campus technology, contact the IT Assistance Center (ITAC) at itac.txst.edu.
- **Course materials access (BookSmart @ TXST):** You are automatically enrolled in BookSmart @ TXST, which provides required course materials by the first day of class, with access continuing through the census date (the 12th class day). If you opt out, you become responsible for obtaining the required text on your own from the publisher or The Bobcat Store. Questions: txstate@bkstr.com or 512-245-2273.
- **Electronic course fee:** As a fully online section, PA 3350 carries the university's \$150 electronic course fee, billed to your student account.

Instructor Contact Information

- **Name:** Dr. W. Scott Langford.
- **Email:** scottlangford@txstate.edu
- **Office:** Trauth Huffman Hall 355.
- **Office Hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00–4:00 p.m., by video (Zoom link in Canvas), and by appointment.
- **Communication:** Email responses within 24 hours (M–F).

Key Dates

(Texas State Fall 2026, Full Term)

Below are the registrar's term deadlines and this course's two graded due dates. *Weekly* assignment due dates (essays, quizzes, discussions, and Policy Memo milestones) appear in the Course Calendar on the following page.

Milestone	Date
First Day of Classes	Wednesday, August 19
Last Day to Add a Course	Wednesday, August 26
Census Date / Last Day to Drop (No Record)	Thursday, September 3
Labor Day Holiday (<i>no classes</i>)	Monday, September 7
Fall Break (<i>no classes</i>)	Thursday–Friday, October 8–9
Automatic “W” Deadline / Last Day to Drop	Thursday, October 22
Last Day to Withdraw from the University	Wednesday, November 18
Thanksgiving Break (<i>no classes</i>)	Wednesday–Sunday, November 25–29
Last Day of Classes	Wednesday, December 2
Reading Day	Thursday, December 3
Final Exam Period	December 3–10
Policy Memo (Revised Final) Due	Saturday, December 6
Final Exam (Take-Home) Due	Thursday, December 10

Course Calendar (subject to change)

	Week	Dates	Module / Topic	Reading	Writing Due (Sun 11:59 p.m.)
1		Aug 19–24	Module 1: Identifying a Public Policy Issue	—	Syllabus Acknowledgment; Intro Discussion; Quiz 1
2		Aug 25–31	Module 1 (cont.): Framing the Issue	—	Brief Essay 1 (our issue); Quiz 2
3		Sep 1–7	Module 2: Structure of Policymaking (<i>Labor Day Sep 7</i>)	Ch. 1–2	Discussion 2; Policy Memo Proposal ; Quiz 3
4		Sep 8–14	Module 2 (cont.): Institutions & Federalism	Ch. 1–2	Brief Essay 2 ; Quiz 4
5		Sep 15–21	Module 3: Explaining Policy Choices & Agenda Setting	Ch. 3–4	Discussion 3; Quiz 5
6		Sep 22–28	Module 3 (cont.): Agenda Setting in Practice	Ch. 3–4	Brief Essay 3 ; Quiz 6
7		Sep 29–Oct 5	Module 4: Legitimizing & Implementing Policy	Ch. 5–6	Quiz 7
8		Oct 6–12	Module 4 (cont.): Implementation (<i>Fall Break Oct 8–9</i>)	Ch. 5–6	Brief Essay 4 ; Quiz 8
9		Oct 13–19	Module 5: Budgeting & Evaluation	Ch. 7–8	Discussion 4; Quiz 9
10		Oct 20–26	Module 5 (cont.): Evaluation & Feedback (<i>Auto-W Oct 22</i>)	Ch. 7–8	Brief Essay 5 ; Quiz 10
11		Oct 27–Nov 2	Module 6: Substantive Areas I — choose two (Economic, Tax, Health, Welfare)	Ch. 9–12	Policy Memo Draft ; Quiz 11
12		Nov 3–9	Module 6 (cont.): Domain Analysis	Ch. 9–12	Brief Essay 6 ; Quiz 12
13		Nov 10–16	Module 7: Substantive Areas II — choose two (Education, Energy/Env., Defense, Social Values)	Ch. 13–16	Discussion 5; Quiz 13
14		Nov 17–23	Module 7 (cont.): Domain Analysis	Ch. 13–16	Brief Essay 7 ; Quiz 14
15		Nov 24–30	Module 8: Policy Memo & Review (<i>Thanksgiving Nov 25–29</i>)	Review	Independent revision of Policy Memo; Quiz 15
16		Dec 1–2	Module 8 (cont.): Synthesis & Exam Review (<i>Dec 2 last day</i>)	Review	Final materials preparation; Quiz 16
Final Exam Period (Dec 3–10): Final (Revised) Policy Memo due Sat Dec 6; take-home Final Exam due Thu Dec 10 (both 11:59 p.m. CT)					

Course Format

PA 3350 has **no prerequisite**. This is a fully **online, asynchronous** section: there are no set meeting times. The course organizes its content into eight Canvas modules, each combining assigned readings, a short recorded or written lecture, discussion, and writing. I participate in the discussion forums and give individualized written comments on every brief essay and on the Policy Memo. Unless a module notes otherwise, we submit our weekly work by **Sundays at 11:59 p.m. Central Time**. *Late policy*: late work is penalized 10% per calendar day; I do not accept work more than ten days late, or after graded work and feedback have been returned, without a university-approved reason. Because the course runs asynchronously, steady weekly effort is essential.

Assignments and Grading

Discussions	10%
Brief Essays	30%
Quizzes	10%
Policy Memo (Proposal, Draft & Revised Final)	20%
Final Exam	30%

Writing—the brief essays and the Policy Memo—accounts for half of the course grade, and we develop the Policy Memo through a required draft–feedback–revision cycle consistent with the Writing-Intensive designation.

Discussions: Asynchronous discussion is the online equivalent of class participation. Each module’s prompt asks us to apply a concept or reading to a current or historical policy example, share a source, and respond substantively to one another. I monitor and join the forums and post additional resources. I grade discussion on the quality of reasoning and use of evidence, and I drop the lowest discussion score. Discussions account for 10% of the final grade.

Brief Essays: Brief essays are the core writing of the course. For most modules we write short responses—one to two well-developed paragraphs (roughly 150–300 words) per prompt—based directly on the assigned readings. The number of questions varies by module, so we read each prompt carefully. I return individualized written comments to improve both our understanding of the policy process and our writing, and we carry that feedback forward into later essays and into the Policy Memo. Brief essays account for 30% of the final grade.

Quizzes: A short quiz follows **every lecture**—sixteen in all, two per module. Each is five multiple-choice questions drawn directly from that lecture, so keeping up with the lectures is all the preparation they require. We complete them individually through Canvas, and I **drop the two lowest** quiz scores. Quizzes reinforce the key concepts and account for 10% of the final grade.

Policy Memo (WI capstone): The Policy Memo is the culminating applied assignment, and we build it from the public policy issue we identify in Module 1. In it we define the problem, analyze it with the frameworks we develop across the term, weigh alternative courses of action, and recommend a defensible option supported by evidence—all in the concise, professional form of a memo to a decision maker. We complete the memo in stages: a **proposal** (Week 3) that establishes our issue and question, a **full draft** (Week 11) on which I give written feedback, and a **revised final memo** due Saturday, December 6 (in the final-exam window). This write–feedback–revise sequence anchors the Writing-Intensive designation. The Policy Memo accounts for 20% of the final grade.

Final Exam: A cumulative, **open-materials take-home** final exam confirms our command of the policy-process framework—structure of policymaking, agenda setting, legitimization, implementation, budgeting, and evaluation—and how we apply it to the substantive policy areas we examine during the term. It is released at the start of the final-exam window and due **Thursday, December 10 at 11:59 p.m. CT**. We complete it individually and in our own words; we may consult the assigned readings and our own notes, but not other people or AI tools. The final exam accounts for 30% of the final grade.

Writing-Intensive (WI) Designation

PA 3350 is a designated Writing-Intensive course. We use writing throughout the semester both to learn the material and to demonstrate mastery of it. Consistent with the WI designation:

- Written assignments (brief essays and the Policy Memo) make up a substantial share of the course grade.
- We receive individualized feedback on our writing throughout the term and revise the Policy Memo before I assign its final grade.
- The assignments build cumulatively, from short reading-based essays to a full policy memo.
- We must satisfactorily complete the writing assignments—especially the Policy Memo and its revision cycle—to pass the course.

University Statements and Required Policies

Class Instruction Modes and Substantive Interaction. This class is fully implemented in the instruction mode that appears on the Fall 2026 Schedule of Classes in Catsweb (online, asynchronous). In all courses, faculty members provide regular and substantive interaction with students that is instructor-driven, content-oriented, frequent, and consistent throughout the semester. In this section, that interaction includes recorded or written module lectures, my participation in the discussion forums, individualized written feedback on every brief essay and on the Policy Memo, weekly announcements, and availability during office hours.

Attendance, Participation, and Record-Keeping. Because this is an online, asynchronous course, attendance is measured by participation rather than seat time. You should log in and make progress in each module several times per week and submit all work by the posted deadlines; I keep attendance and participation records through Canvas activity and submission logs. Contact me as soon as possible if circumstances will keep you from completing work on time. For absences related to university-sponsored events or religious holy days, see [UPPS 02.06.03](#) and [02.06.01](#); if I request documentation, complete the form on the [Absence Notifications](#) page.

Academic Integrity and Student Conduct. You are responsible for upholding the university's Academic Honor Code. Plagiarism—including submitting another's work, or uncited or improperly cited AI-generated text—will be reported to the Honor Code Council. To support integrity, quizzes are completed individually through Canvas, and the take-home final exam is completed individually and in your own words—open-materials, but without collaboration or AI assistance; the writing assignments are built around drafting, individualized feedback, and revision so that the work reflects your own thinking. See the [Code of Student Conduct](#) and [The Honor Code](#).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use. *Definition.* For this class, “AI” has a broad definition and refers to any program or browser extension that can edit your writing or create new content, including text, images, and code—for example, ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Grammarly. *Level of use (limited).* Because this is a Writing-Intensive course whose purpose is to develop your own policy analysis and writing, AI use is limited. You **may** use AI to brainstorm topics, explore explanations of concepts, and check basic spelling and grammar. You **may not** use AI to generate analysis, arguments, or draft prose for the graded writing (the brief essays and the Policy Memo), and you **may not** use any AI tool on the quizzes or the final exam. *Disclosure and citation.* If you use AI in a permitted way, you must disclose it: include a brief note listing the tool’s name, the date(s) used, and the prompts you entered, and verify the accuracy of every fact and citation it produced. Missing or improper disclosure is a form of academic misconduct, subject to the same penalties as any other Honor Code violation and reported to the Honor Code Council. If you are unsure whether a use is permitted, ask me first.

Statement on Civility in the Classroom and Instructional Settings. Civility in instructional settings is fundamental to an effective educational process and is everyone’s responsibility. The university’s shared values, sense of community, and collective commitment to respect, civil dialogue, and the free exchange of ideas are the cornerstones of successful teaching and learning. If you have questions about appropriate behavior in this class, address them with me first. Although rare, disciplinary procedures may be implemented for refusing to follow an instructor’s directive, disrupting course activities, or disregarding university policies. See AA/PPS 02.03.01, Section 03: Courteous and Civil Learning Environment, and the Code of Student Conduct, number II, Section 2.02: Conduct Prohibited.

Disability Services and Accommodations. If you are managing ADHD, a learning difference, a health condition, or any disability, Disability Services (DS) can work with you to set up accommodations that support your learning. Reach out early—both DS staff and I are here to support your success. You can contact DS at 512-245-3451 or via email at ods@txstate.edu.

Health and Well-being Support. If you feel overwhelmed, are worried about a friend, or just need someone to talk to, several resources are available: the **CARE Team** (submit a [Here to Help](#) form for 1-on-1 support); the **Counseling Center** (short-term individual, group, and crisis counseling, in person and virtual); the **Student Health Center** (medical, mental-health, and wellness care); and **TimelyCare** (free 24/7 virtual mental-health support, including immediate TalkNow chats and scheduled sessions).

Instructor Absences. If I am absent, I coordinate with my department chair to ensure continuity of instruction, which in a brief absence may include delivering content remotely via Zoom, Teams, or Canvas. For an extended absence, another faculty member may be asked to assume responsibility for the course.

Emergency Management. In the event of an emergency, monitor the [Safety and Emergency Communications](#) web page, which is updated with the latest information and links to safety resources and emergency procedures. I encourage you to sign up for the [TXState Alert](#) system.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (SB 17). During the 88th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature, Senate Bill 17 was passed and signed into law, effective January 1, 2024. SB 17 addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at public higher education institutions. For an explanation of SB 17's provisions along with questions and answers, please visit the [Texas State University System's General Counsel Guidance on Implementation of Senate Bill 17](#).

Sexual Misconduct Reporting (SB 212). Effective January 2, 2020, state law (SB 212) requires all university employees, acting in the course and scope of employment, who witness or receive information concerning an incident of sexual misconduct involving an enrolled student or employee to report all relevant information known about the incident to the university's Title IX office. This means I cannot keep such information confidential. Employees who knowingly fail to report, or who knowingly file a false report, shall be terminated in accordance with university and system policy. See the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#) for more information.

Additional Student Support. Support is also available for first-generation students and for those facing food or housing insecurity (e.g., Bobcat Bounty and the Dean of Students Office). If you are unsure where to start, undergraduates can use the Hand Raise feature in [NavigateTXST](#), and any student may contact me and I will help connect you to the right resource.