

SYLLABUS

PSCI 7108-001: Public Policy and Behavioral Science

Spring 2021

T 1:15 PM-3:45 PM, Remote

Zoom Room: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/99563959984>

Prof. Krister Andersson

Office Hours: Email to set up
appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Public policy is usually designed with the assumption that we make optimal choices based on our own best interests. Findings from the behavioral sciences, however, challenge this traditional view and reveal that a wide array of factors influence our decisions. In this course, we will explore the gaps between how we assume individuals to behave and how people actually behave. With better knowledge of what motivates human behavior, we will examine and discuss how policy might be better designed and executed to improve outcomes in society.

In this interdisciplinary course, we will hear firsthand from several behavioral scientists and learn about their ongoing research programs at the University of Colorado. In conversations with these invited scholars, we will examine common assumptions behind a variety of existing public policies related to environmental protection, public health, criminal justice, natural hazards, and substance addition among others. The main learning objective of the course is two-fold:

1. Expose you to a broad array of behavioral science research related to public policy, and
2. Connect these ideas to the development of your own research agendas.

One of the expected outcomes of the course is the ability to assess and discuss the potential contribution of behavioral science to the analysis of public policy in an area of particular interest identified by each individual student. I will ask you to apply the lessons learned from readings and discussions to weekly memos, class discussions and exercises, as well as a written term project.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

There are no formal prerequisites for the course. A more important, but informal prerequisite, is your willingness to work hard, show up for class, and participate actively in class activities.

The success of this course depends almost entirely on the extent to which you come prepared to each class session. For almost all sessions, there are normally several required reading assignments. I will rarely lecture in this course. Instead, we will engage with the material through discussion, debate, and hands-on experimentation.

I will evaluate your performance in the class based on your originality, creativity, presentation, and timeliness associated with five different activities of the course, which are as follows:

1. Weekly One-Page Memos

Every week you are expected to turn in a one-page essay. The essay will be due by noon the day before class. Please post these in the discussion thread for the week on CANVAS. In your memo, you should address the following items:

1. The most important thing I learned from the class discussion or readings was . . .
2. An empirical case that illustrates the main points in the readings is...
3. The thing I still don't understand is . . .

In your submission, you are free to discuss any topic related to the class beyond these two issues. The purpose of this exercise is to allow you an opportunity to discuss aspects of the readings, integrate other material with the week's focus, or to raise questions about what was unclear or unanswered by the readings. It would be particularly useful if you use these memos as a way of raising issues and questions based on the readings that are directly related to your individual experience and research interests. If the readings are not at all related to your own experience or knowledge of examples, you should look for empirical examples that help illustrate the main points in the readings. These cases will be used for discussion in class. A secondary purpose of these memos is to ensure that you have an opportunity to provide me with feedback on the readings and your progress/satisfaction in the course.

2. Co-Leading Seminar Discussions

Each student will co-lead a total of three class periods during the semester. For at least one of these, each student should be the sole author of a one-page **Discussion Guide document** (so that all students will submit one solo-authored Discussion Guide). For all other sessions, these guides will be co-authored by all co-leaders. I will leave it to you to coordinate who will author the discussion guide each week.

The purpose of the discussion guide is to structure and orient the conversation during class. Ideally, the “Guide” that discussion leaders will prepare will be a document that provides a synopsis of the readings, discusses main themes, and, if desired, introduces other, relevant literature not in the required-reading list for the week. Suggested structure:

1. Introduction (what is the question? what is its relevance?)
2. Key concepts and ideas from readings defined
3. Empirical cases as illustrations (list 2-3 cases with references)
4. Questions for discussion (at least 5)

3. In-class experiments:

Every week, we will play a decision-making game in class. The team of discussion leaders is responsible for organizing this in-class activity. The game should be a behavioral experiment of sort, which is somewhat relevant to the theme of the week. The team is free, but not required, to come up with their own decision game. Existing resources include games4sustainability.org (Poland) and gamesforsustainability.org (ASU, USA). The activity should take a maximum of 45-50 min.

4. In-depth case study:

Each week, we will have a discussion about how behavioral science can inform better policy responses to a variety of societal problems. These discussions will be linked to a specific case study. Using a PowerPoint presentation, the team leading the discussion will present the essential background information for the specific policy problem as well as a menu of options for plausible policy responses. The team will facilitate a 10-15 minute discussion of these options and the class will identify which of these options are likely to produce the greatest societal benefits. Finally, the discussion leaders will present what actually happened in the real-world case.

5. Term project:

This is a written version of one of the in-depth case studies that you led the development of during the semester. It should follow a predetermined format, which will be shared during the 4th week of class.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Class participation	20%
Weekly Memos	20%
Discussion leads	20%
In-class experiment	20%
<u>Case study</u>	<u>20%</u>
TOTAL	100%

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

There are **two** required texts for the class:

Thaler, R. H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Penguin Books

Shafir, E. (Ed.). (2013). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press.

I will post all other course readings on CANVAS

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Accommodation for Disabilities: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I

may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Honor Code: All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation:

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#). Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please let me know at least seven days in advance if you need to miss any class or particular activities due to a religious holiday. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Personal introductions
Course Overview, Syllabus
Definitions

Lead: Andersson

Week 2: Interventions to Improve Environmental Behavior

Readings:

Shafir, 2013. Introduction. In Shafir, E. (Ed.): *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (p1-12).

Andersson, K.P., Cook, N.J., Grillos, T., Lopez, M.C., Salk, C.F., Wright, G.D., Mwangi, E. 2018. [Experimental Evidence on Payments for Forest Commons Conservation](#). *Nature Sustainability* 1(3): 128–135

Cook, N. J., Grillos, T., & Andersson, K. P. (2019). Gender quotas increase the equality and effectiveness of climate policy interventions. *Nature Climate Change*, 9(4), 330-334.

Lead: Andersson

Week 3: The basics about human choices

Readings:

Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: p 1-72

Lead: Benedum & Sours

Week 4: Influences on Economic Choices

Readings:

Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: p 74-158

Lead: Bennett & Skipper

Week 5: Nudges for Health and Education Choices

Readings:

Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: p 162-268

Lead: Blundell & Kaur

Week 6: COVID 19 responses and behavioral insights

Readings:

Redelmeier, 2013: Behavioral Decision Science Applied to Health-Care Policy. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). (2013). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (p475-480).

Van Bavel, J. J., Baicker, K., Boggio, P. S., Capraro, V., Cichocka, A., Cikara, M., ... & Willer, R. (2020). [Using social and behavioural science to support COVID-19 pandemic response](#). *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1-12.

JPAL (2020). [Increasing Adherence to Covid-19 Guidelines: Lessons From Existing Evidence](#).

Lead: Gorti & O'Neal

Week 7: Self-determination theory (March 2)

Readings:

Pink, D. 2009. *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates us*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Lead: Kaur & McLeer

Week 8: Public policy responses to environmental degradation (March 9)

Readings:

Weber, 2013. Doing the right thing willingly: Using the insights of Behavioral Decision Research for better environmental decisions. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). (2013). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (p380-397).

Brest, P. 2013. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodiet*. . In Shafir, E. (Ed.). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (pp 481-493).

Lead: McLeer & Gorti

Week 9: Political Polarization (March 16)

Readings:

- Van Boven, L., Ehret, P. J., & Sherman, D. K. (2018). Psychological barriers to bipartisan public support for climate policy. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(4), 492-507.
- Shi, F., Teplitskiy, M., Duede, E., & Evans, J. A. (2019). The wisdom of polarized crowds. *Nature human behaviour*, 3(4), 329-336.
- Hoffarth, M. R., & Hodson, G. (2016). Green on the outside, red on the inside: Perceived environmentalist threat as a factor explaining political polarization of climate change. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 45, 40-49.

Lead: O'Neal & Blundell

Week 10: Case Study on (surprising) Public Policy Interventions (March 23)

Lead: Christina Boyes (no memos today)

Week 11: Disaster Risk Reduction Research (March 30)

Readings:

- Kunreuther, H., Meyer, R., & Michel-Kerjan, E. (2013). Overcoming decision biases to reduce losses from natural catastrophes. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (pp 398-413).
- Howell, J., & Elliott, J. R. (2019). Damages done: The longitudinal impacts of natural hazards on wealth inequality in the United States. *Social Problems*, 66(3), 448-467.

Lead: Skipper & Benedum

Week 12: Behavioral Change (April 6)

Readings:

- Miller, D.T. and Prentice, D.D. 2013. Psychological Levers of Behavioral Change. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (pp 301-10).

Wansink, B. 2013. Turning Mindless Eating into Healthy Eating. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (pp 310-329).

Gracia, J., and Cohen, G.L. 2013. A Social Psychological Approach to Educational Intervention. In Shafir, E. (Ed.). *The behavioral foundations of public policy*. Princeton University Press (pp 329-50).

Lead: Benedum, Bennett, and Blundell

Week 13: Environmental Behavior and Intervention Spillovers (April 13)

Readings:

Maki, A., Carrico, A. R., Raimi, K. T., Truelove, H. B., Araujo, B., & Yeung, K. L. (2019). Meta-analysis of pro-environmental behaviour spillover. *Nature Sustainability*, 2(4), 307-315.

Truelove, H. B., Carrico, A. R., Weber, E. U., Raimi, K. T. & Vandenberg, M. P. Positive and negative spillover of pro-environmental behavior: an integrated review and theoretical framework. *Glob. Environ. Change* 29, 127-138 (2014).

Lead: O'Neal, Skipper, and Sours

Week 14: Recent Innovations in Public Policy (April 20)

Lead: Bennet, Gorti, Kaur, and McLeer

Week 15: Student Conference (April 27)

Students present and discuss their term projects (15 minutes per paper) with the goal of receiving inputs for final revisions. **The final version of document is due on Friday April 30 at 5PM.**