Public Bureaucracy in the Policy Process

Course Description

This course examines the role of public bureaucracy in the policymaking process. While the course will emphasize the role bureaucracy plays in the making of defense and foreign policy in the United States, the general theories and processes will be applicable to public bureaucracies involved in many other kinds of issue areas as well.

We will study five main subjects. The first subject involves the relationship of the national security bureaucracies with their external political environment. The impact of the president, Congress, interest groups, and the public on bureaucratic policymaking will be considered. The second subject involves a study of the influence of this external political environment on weapons procurement. The third subject involves the nature of policymaking inside the defense and foreign policy bureaucracies, involving what might be called the internal political environment. The impact of hierarchical command and communication structures and organizational culture will be considered here. The fourth subject organizes the previous material into general theories of why bureaucracies do what they do. The fifth subject involves a case study of how one large bureaucracy – the U.S. Army – performed in the Vietnam War.

Readings

Five books are assigned, and all should be available for purchase at the bookstores.


There will also be a small coursepack which is available at Ned's Bookstore, 135 E. Grand River (phone: 332-4200). It should be available by the first day of classes. It contains the following items:

Hammond and Knott, “Who Controls the Bureaucracy?”
Hammond, "Agenda Control, Organizational Structure, and Bureaucratic Politics."
Heimann, "Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems."
Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis."
Bendor and Hammond, “Rethinking Allison’s Models.”
DePuy, "Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It."

Class Format

Classroom sessions will be a mixture of lectures and discussions. Students should feel free at all times to ask questions in class and raise points for further discussion.

Course Requirements

There will be 100 total "points" available in the course:

1. First In-Class Midterm Exam – 30 points.
2. Second In-Class Midterm Exam – 30 points.
TOTAL: 100 points

Grading Scale

Given the 100 points available in the class, the grading scale will be:

4.0: 95-100 points  3.0: 85-89 points  2.0: 75-79+ points  1.0: 65-69+ points
3.5: 90-94+ points  2.5: 80-84+ points  1.5: 70-74+ points  0.0: Below 65 points

Midterm Exams

The instructor will hand out a list of six questions for each midterm approximately one week before the examination. When each midterm is administered, the instructor will place the six questions into two groups. Each student will have to answer one question from each group. While a student may work with other students to prepare his or her answers to these questions, on exam day each student will write the answers to the two questions individually and without reference to any prepared notes.

The instructor reserves the right to change the date of the midterms to fit the progress we have made. The exam may be held later, but it will not be held any earlier than listed in this syllabus.

Final Exam

A format similar to the midterm exams will be used for the final exam: the instructor will prepare and distribute a handout listing several possible questions for the final paper. These questions will distributed two or more weeks prior to the final examination.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Wednesdays from 3:00 to 5:30 p.m., and by special appointment. I will almost always be available for immediately after class as well. My office is Room 343, on the third floor of South Kedzie Hall. My office phone number is 353-3282; you may leave messages for me at the Political Science department office at 355-6590. My email is thammond@pilot.msu.edu.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 – Monday, January 6: Introduction to Course

Hand out syllabus, and discuss rationale and content of the course


– Wednesday, Jan. 8: The Political Environment of Public Bureaucracy – I

Survey of the legal and political environment of public bureaucracy:
– Constitutional provisions
– The President, Congress, courts, interest groups

Continue reading: Blechman, ch.1-7.

Week 2 – Monday, Jan. 13: The Political Environment of Public Bureaucracy – II

Finish survey of the legal and political environment of public bureaucracy:
– Wednesday, Jan. 15: The Congressional Role in National Security Policymaking

Three questions about the impact of Congress on foreign policy decision-making:
– Why does the president usually want to keep Congress out of most international negotiations?
– When does a legislator want to get involved in foreign policy decision-making?
– Does conflict with Congress weaken the president when negotiating with other countries?

Finish reading: Blechman, ch.1-7
Begin reading: Halperin, ch.1-17

Discussion Question #1: What do you think should be the balance between Congress and the president in the making of foreign and defense policy? Who should have the major influence, and why?

Week 3 – Monday, Jan. 20: NO CLASS – MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

– Wednesday, Jan. 22: Bureaucracy and Delegated Authority

Why do the president and Congress choose to delegate authority to the bureaucracy?

Continue reading: Halperin, ch.1-17

Week 4 – Monday, Jan. 27: Variations in Bureaucratic Autonomy

What are the sources of bureaucratic autonomy?:
– Hidden information
– Hidden action
– Multiple principals

Begin reading: Hammond and Knott, "Who Controls the Bureaucracy?" (in coursepack)

Continue reading: Halperin, ch.1-17

Discussion Question #2: What do you think is the most important reason why Congress and the president would want to delegate authority to the executive branch?

– Wednesday, Jan. 29: Variations in Bureaucratic Autonomy – II

Discuss the “multiple principals” cause of bureaucratic autonomy.

Finish reading: Hammond and Knott, "Who Controls the Bureaucracy?"

Continue reading: Halperin, ch.1-17

Week 5 – Monday, Feb. 3: Why Is There Politics Inside Bureaucracies?

What are the reasons for the existence of "politics" inside bureaucracies?
– Why can't decisions be made on a strictly "rational" basis?
Finish reading: Halperin, ch. 1-17

Discussion Question #3: When there are "multiple principals" with authority over a bureaucracy, are there likely to be "hidden information" and "hidden action" problems as well? Why or why not?

– Wednesday, Feb. 5: The Politics of Military Procurement – I

Lecture on uncertainty management in political systems
– Contract types and the management of uncertainty

Begin reading: McNaugher, ch.1-7

---

Week 6 – Monday, Feb. 10: The Politics of Military Procurement – II

Continue discussion of contract types and the management of uncertainty

Continue reading: McNaugher, ch.1-7

Discussion Question #4: Do you think there is one single "best" type of procurement contract? Why or why not?


Hand out midterm questions

Bring large (8 1/2" by 11") blue book, with your name on it, to class and give to instructor

Finish discussion of contract types and the management of uncertainty

Finish reading: McNaugher, ch.1-7

---

Week 7 – Monday, Feb.17: TAKE FIRST MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Write Midterm #1 in pre-stamped blue book

– Wednesday, Feb. 19: Organizational Structure and Bureaucratic Politics – I

How does the shape of the hierarchy affect learning, policymaking, and implementation?

Read: Hammond, "Agenda Control, Organizational Structure, and Bureaucratic Politics" (in coursepack).

---

Week 8 – Monday, Feb. 24: Organizational Structure and Bureaucratic Politics – II

Arguments about how the shape of the hierarchy affects the specific details of learning, policymaking, and implementation

Finish: Hammond, "Agenda Control, Organizational Structure, and Bureaucratic Politics" (in coursepack).

– Wednesday, Feb. 26: Organizational Reliability and Bureaucratic Politics – I
How should concerns for organizational reliability affect the design of bureaucratic hierarchies?

Begin reading: Heimann, “Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems” (in coursepack)

**Week 9 – Monday, March 3:** SPRING BREAK

- **Wednesday, Mar. 5:** SPRING BREAK

**Week 10 – Monday, Mar. 10:** Organizational Reliability and Bureaucratic Politics – II

Continue analysis of organizational reliability and organizational design

Continue reading: Heimann, "Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems"

Discussion Question #5: Heimann talked about some of the benefits of redundancy in organization; what do you think are some of the costs, and when do you think the costs might be greater than the benefits?

- **Wednesday, Mar. 12:** Organizational Reliability and Bureaucratic Politics – III

Finish analysis of organizational reliability and organizational design

Finish reading: Heimann, "Understanding the Challenger Disaster: Organizational Structure and the Design of Reliable Systems"

**Week 11 – Monday, Mar. 17:** Organizational Doctrines and Organizational Cultures – I

Two examples of organizational doctrine:
- the British and American Air Force's beliefs in strategic bombing in WWII.
- the Navy's belief in the supremacy of the battleship, 1890's-1940's.

Begin reading: Builder, ch.1-17

What does Builder seem to consider the explanation for the differences in "personalities" of the various armed services?

- **Wednesday, Mar. 19:** Organizational Doctrines and Organizational Cultures – II

Why do organizations develop distinctive doctrines and cultures?
- Cognitive explanations: decision-making in an uncertain world
- Coordination explanations: get everyone working together
- Political explanations: organizational "interests"

Finish reading: Builder, ch.1-17.

**Week 12 – Monday, Mar. 24:** Conceptual Models of the Policymaking Process – I

Discuss the essential role of theories in understanding the world

Discuss Model I: Allison's "rational actor" model
Discussion Question #6: Apply Allison's Model I to the procurement process, as described by McNaugher; do you think the behavior observed in the procurement process is primarily an example of "rational" choices by the U.S. government, given its concerns for national security?

– Wednesday, Mar. 26: Conceptual Models of the Policymaking Process – II

Hand out midterm questions

Bring large (8 1/2" by 11") blue book, with your name on it, to class and give to instructor

Discuss Model II: Allison's "organizational process" model
Discuss Model III: Allison's "governmental politics" model

Finish reading: Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis"
Finish reading: Bendor and Hammond, “Rethinking Allison’s Models” (in coursepack)

Week 13 – Monday, Mar. 31: TAKE SECOND MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Write Midterm #2 in pre-stamped blue book
Instructor will hand out list of possible topics for final examination.

– Wednesday, April 2: Military Organizations and the Vietnam War – I

Begin discussion of the Krepinevich arguments about the Army in Vietnam

Begin reading: Krepinevich, ch.1-10

Week 14 – Monday, Apr. 7: Military Organizations and the Vietnam War – II

Continue discussion of the Krepinevich arguments about the Army in Vietnam

Finish reading: Krepinevich, ch.1-10

Discussion Question #7: Using Allison's models, what kind of explanation – Model I, II, or III – does Krepenevich seem to be making?

– Wednesday, Apr. 9: Military Organizations and the Vietnam War – III

Critique of the Krepinevich arguments about the Army in Vietnam

Read: DePuy, "The Right Way and the Army Way" (a review of Krepinevich book in Army magazine; in the coursepack).

Read: DePuy, "Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn't Do It," Army (February 1986; in the coursepack).

Week 15 – Monday, Apr. 14: Explaining the Army's Behavior in Vietnam – I

Continue in-class discussion
Discussion Question #8: Using Allison's models, what kind of explanation – Model I, II, or III – does DePuy seem to be making?

– Wednesday, Apr. 16: Explaining the Army's Behavior in Vietnam – II

Finish in-class discussion

Week 16 – Monday, Apr. 21: Explaining the Army's Behavior in Vietnam – III

Continue in-class discussion

– Wednesday, Apr. 23 (Last day of class): Explaining the Army's Behavior in Vietnam – IV

Finish in-class discussion

FINAL EXAMINATION: Wednesday, April 30, 10:00-12:00 noon in our classroom, 137 IM Circle.