Energy Policy & Human Behavior – Course Overview

PPHA 39925 This course will be held synchronously (in real time) on T/Th 9:40 – 11am Central (Chicago time). Recordings of each class will be available on Canvas afterward for those who are unable to attend during that time.

Instructor: Kim Wolske, PhD
Research Associate (Assistant Professor), Harris Public Policy
wolske@uchicago.edu

Virtual Office hours: TBD.
Or by appointment – email me.

TA: Michelle Brann, mbrann@uchicago.edu
Office hours by appointment.

NOTE: This is not the syllabus. It is a course outline to help you decide whether to take the course. I am actively updating the reading list with articles published in the last few months. As such, there may be some small changes to the list of topics. Typically, there are two articles to read for each class. Email me if you would like a copy of last year’s syllabus.

COURSE OVERVIEW
The success of many environmental and energy-related policies depends on the support and cooperation of the public. This course, drawing from multiple fields of behavioral science, will introduce students to the psychological and social aspects of different energy-related behaviors, ranging from household energy conservation and adoption of efficient and renewable energy goods, to public support and opposition for emergent energy technologies and climate mitigation policies. Through a mix of lecture and discussion, we will explore questions such as: what are potential motivations and barriers to the uptake of energy efficient and renewable energy technologies? Why is climate change such a divisive issue and what are the challenges of generating broad support for mitigation policies? Why do people support clean energy broadly but object to developments when proposed in their own communities? By taking a behavioral approach, the course aims to equip students with an enhanced framework for evaluating energy and environmental policies that goes beyond traditional economic and regulatory perspectives.

The course is organized into three sections:
1. Households as Energy Consumers
2. Public (Dis)engagement with Climate Change
3. Public Support for/Opposition to Large Scale Energy Technologies

In each section, we will follow a similar pattern of inquiry: How do people perceive the issue? How is this mental model different than, say, an energy policy expert’s (or, in the case of climate change, other members of the public)? What complications do these differing perspectives create for designing effective policies and programs? And what behavioral tools and strategies are available to help overcome those challenges? By the end of the course, students will gain an appreciation not only for the nuance of each of these three topics, but also the principles of human behavior that are common among them.

Fall 2020
PPHA 39925
COURSE GOALS & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of taking this class, students should be able to:

1. Describe how the public’s perceptions of energy issues often differ from experts and discuss potential implications for policy design.
2. Explain why traditional policy tools such as providing information and incentives may not always be sufficient to effect change.
3. Use their knowledge of behavioral science to critically examine the design of consumer-facing energy policies and offer recommendations for improvement.
4. Effectively communicate to non-expert audiences how a behavioral perspective can enhance the effectiveness of public-facing energy policies.

COURSE FORMAT:

Classes will be a mix of lecture and discussion focused on topics presented in the readings. You are highly encouraged to participate in class. You will get more out of the material the more you try to apply it to the topics of interest to you.

COURSE MATERIALS

All course materials are available on Canvas. See the Pages section for a dynamic version of the course syllabus, including occasional pre-reading activities, links to interesting websites and introductory text to orient you to the readings. (As a backup, all documents are also saved to the Files section, which organizes content by categories, e.g.: “assignments,” “readings,” etc.) See the Assignments section for assignment handouts and deadlines.

I will post an incomplete version of the lecture slides by 9:15am each class for anyone who wants to annotate on paper or tablet. This version may be missing answers to discussion questions I pose to the class. Complete lecture slides will be posted after class in the Files section of Canvas. Likewise, recordings of past lectures will be available in the Zoom section for the duration of the course.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication: Announcements to the class will be sent via Canvas. If you have substantive questions that will require more than a few sentences in response, please come to virtual office hours, set up an appointment, or post a question to one of the appropriate Canvas Discussion boards. If you need to e-mail me about other matters, please allow up to 24 hours for a response. I may be less responsive over the weekend.

Turning in Assignments: With the exception of the in-class presentation and debate, we grade all assignments anonymously. When submitting Word docs to Canvas, please include only your Student ID number in the header of the document. See individual assignment instructions for due dates and times. Deadlines are firm. Assignments will be docked 10% for each 24-hour period that they are late (Exception: Reading reflections are not accepted after the start of class). I will not accept assignments that are more than 72 hours late unless you have contacted me in advance about extenuating circumstances.

Grading: Each assignment handout includes a rubric to help direct your efforts. When determining final grades, I have generally not found it necessary to use a curve. I look for natural breaks in the distribution to help me decide e.g. what constitutes a B vs. B+ vs. A- etc. These breaks tend to fall close to the traditional cutoffs: A ≥ 94, A- = 90 to < 94, B+ = 87 to < 90, B = 84 to < 87, B- = 80 to <84, and so forth. I will never grade down (e.g., if you earn a 90, there is no risk of that becoming a
B+). If you choose to take the class pass/fail, you must complete all assignments and earn a final grade of C or higher.

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are serious forms of academic misconduct and will result in a failing grade. All written submissions must be your own original work. As described in the university student handbook, “Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes ‘use’ should be addressed to the instructor.” Be aware, plagiarism goes beyond copying text word-for-word and can include poor paraphrasing. See the examples here: https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/academic-writing/avoiding-plagiarism-paraphrasing.

Note: I am excellent at detecting plagiarized and sloppily paraphrased text, and I am obligated to report all instances of suspected academic dishonesty to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. Please see the Harris Student Handbook for more details of that process.

Visual/Auditory Distractions: Please try to be fully present during our scheduled meeting times. This includes silencing and putting away your cell phone, resisting the urge to browse elsewhere on the Internet – and being mindful of the image you are portraying via video. Dress for class as if you were attending in person and, to the extent that you are able to, find a location that is minimally distracting (e.g., please don’t attend class while lying under the covers!). COVID-19 has greatly disrupted much of our lives, but we can still try to bring a level of professionalism to our meetings. (Occasional cameos from charming pets and family members will be forgiven 😊. Please turn off your video if things get too distracting.)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
I am committed to creating a learning environment that welcomes diverse viewpoints and where each of you feels seen, heard, and respected no matter your race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, socio-economic background, or social and political beliefs.

As I will note on the first day of class, there is a known problem in energy social science research that many of the populations studied are WEIRD (i.e., from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and/or democratic countries). I am doing my best to incorporate more representative examples and readings as I learn of them. I may not always be able to source a study that speaks to the specific population or geographic region of interest to you, but I encourage you to share your experiences and perspectives. We all stand to learn from trying to understand how course concepts may or may not apply in different contexts.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES
If you require any disability accommodations for this course, please inform the Harris Dean of Students Office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will coordinate with me to implement your accommodations.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES
Students must inform me in writing of their need to observe a religious holiday reasonably well in advance of the absence, preferably at the beginning of the quarter. As with any absence, it is your responsibility to catch up on any material discussed and assignments given during the missed class period.
STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING
If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, remote counseling services are available. UChicago Student Wellness urges you to attend to your mental wellbeing and to reach out to them for support during these challenging times. All services are covered by the Student Services Fee (i.e., there is no additional cost to you). See https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/. Students seeking new services/resources can call 773.702.9800 during business hours (Monday–Friday 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.) to set up a virtual appointment. Students needing urgent mental health care can speak with clinicians over the phone 24/7 by calling 773.702.3625.

IF YOU OR YOUR FAMILY COME DOWN WITH COVID-19, please reach out as soon as you are reasonably able to do so. Your health and your family are more important than any course. We’ll work it out.

Course topics at a glance

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<th>Topic</th>
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<td><strong>Part 1: HOUSEHOLDS AS ENERGY CONSUMERS</strong></td>
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<td>Course Overview &amp; Introduction: Why take a behavioral approach to energy policy?</td>
<td>Perceptions of Energy &amp; Implications</td>
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<td>Limits of Providing Information I: Bounded Rationality &amp; Cognitive Biases</td>
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<td>Climate Change as culture war II: Cultural cognition, morals &amp; other worldviews</td>
<td>Reframing Climate Change</td>
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<td>“NIMBYism” &amp; Local Opposition</td>
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<td>Case Study: Wind farms</td>
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Overview of Course Assignments

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**  3%
You are encouraged to participate in the course by offering insights, asking questions, and sharing relevant examples from your own experiences. Participation can happen in many forms, including in-class lectures (by “raising your hand” in Zoom or entering comments/questions in the chat box), responding to others’ comments and questions on Canvas discussion boards, or coming to office hours. The more you make an effort to engage, the more enjoyable the course will be. If you are unable to attend live class sessions, I will look at video-viewing statistics to determine attendance.

**READING REFLECTIONS**  9%
To help ensure quality class discussions, you are expected to post 6 reflections on the readings (300 words max.) over the quarter. Each reading reflection is due by 10:00 pm Central the night before class. A handout with more details will be provided.

**ARTICLE PRESENTATION – Done with a partner**  15%
Once during the quarter, you along with a partner, will present an empirical article (from a list I provide) that relates to the day’s assigned readings. Since your classmates are not expected to read this article, your task will be to concisely and effectively communicate the main ideas in a way that your peers can easily understand. You and your partner will have eight minutes (total) to present the paper, explain how it relates to the day’s topic, and extract policy-relevant insights. A handout with more details will be provided.

**TAKE-HOME MIDTERM**  25%
A take-home midterm exam comprised of short essay questions will be assigned during week 4. Your responses will be due the following week by the start of class.

**CLASS MINI-DEBATES – Done with assigned team**  15%
On November 12, we will have two in-class team policy debates. Your grade will be based on the quality of your team’s arguments and counter-arguments, as they draw from material discussed in the class. You will also submit (on an individual basis) a written document summarizing and justifying your main arguments. The debate part of this assignment and the accompanying written assignment will be weighted equally in determining your grade. Additional details will be provided later in the term.

**POLICY ISSUE BRIEF**  33%
Using what you have learned in the course, you will write a policy issue brief on an energy or climate change-related topic of your choice. Issue briefs are common tools used to influence the design or evaluation of policies. Compared to policy memos, they go in more depth about the background on an issue and the evidence-base for different recommendations. The purpose of your brief will be to inform decision-makers about relevant dimensions of human behavior that could enhance policy effectiveness for your chosen topic. This assignment is broken into three steps: Topic Selection, Annotated Bibliography, and Final Brief.