

**Global Risk Policy  
PPHA 41350  
Spring 2025  
Course Syllabus**

**Time: Wednesdays 1:30pm-4:20pm  
Room: Keller 2112  
Teaching Assistant: Stephanie Shekels**

Harris School of Public Policy  
University of Chicago

Instructor: Michele Wucker  
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**Office Hours:** By appointment via Zoom and Wednesdays before class

**Course Materials:** [canvas.uchicago.edu](https://canvas.uchicago.edu)

### **Course Background and Goals**

Global Risk Policy gives students the tools to analyze public policy formation through a risk lens, evaluate current examples, and propose risk-based policies. This is a broad survey class with modules on risk governance, taxes, externalities, regulation, risk pricing and transfer, social safety nets, global catastrophic risk, communications and education.

Students will engage with questions including:

- How do public policies encourage or discourage risk-taking, whether “good” (education, innovation, entrepreneurship) or “bad” (speculation, moral hazard, crime)?
- How might using a risk lens change the way governments design policies and how favorably (or not) citizens view those policies? What are the differences among how various disciplines pose risk questions?
- In which ways do countries, regions, and jurisdictions differ in their risk policy choices and risk policy formation processes? How do these choices compare?
- What governance structures do public policy makers use to prioritize and mitigate risks, and how are these enterprise risk strategies evolving?
- What safety nets do governments and private organizations provide in both typical and extraordinary circumstances?
- How do risk policies allocate the burdens and benefits of risk taking -both “good” and “bad”? How does risk policy protect from global catastrophic risk?
- What risk trade-offs are people willing to make? How should public policy reflect these?

Comparative analysis, case studies, class participation, individual and group projects, guest speakers, and readings from practitioners and academics will help students gain a new understanding of and ability to discuss key aspects of risk policy issues and ecosystems.

**Prerequisites:** There are no coursework prerequisites. However, students should have a strong interest in the material and have relevant questions they would like to explore in depth.

### **How This Class Will Work**

This class meets once weekly in person for a three-hour seminar. All students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss all the readings assigned for that week and engage actively in class conversations. Students will be assigned to debate teams from weeks Three through Nine.

Seminar participation will include making regular, thoughtful contributions to the course via Canvas and/or in class as well as introducing class discussion of the readings in one course session during the quarter. Students are expected to submit a minimum of one Canvas post per session and are encouraged to raise critical questions that are worth discussing in class.

- *Attendance.* Because discussion is an important part of the learning experience, students must attend all classes over the quarter. Because, well, life happens, if you miss one class you won't be graded down. Beyond that, however, you risk your final grade being reduced unless you have a documented medical or family emergency. Each class missed (apart from that first freebie) will reduce the final letter grade by one notch (ie A- to B+). If you miss class, you must watch the recorded lesson. If you are experiencing symptoms of illness, please participate via Zoom so as not to infect class participants.
- *Late Work:* All assignments are expected to be turned in on time. Late assignments will be downgraded one half-grade (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) per day late, including weekends. Exceptions may be made for serious medical or family problems with documentation.
- *Electronic Etiquette.* Cell phones must be put away and in silent mode or turned off during class. Class participants are encouraged to take notes by hand and to limit use of a laptop during class. However, if you feel that you need to take notes on your laptop rather than by hand then you may do so on the condition that you turn off WiFi and do not use your laptop for any other reasons (such as email or social media) during class. If you are found to be doing so the privilege to use the laptop will be revoked.
- *AI/LLM policy:* In this course, we will be developing knowledge, analytical and writing skills that are important to practice on your own. Using generative artificial intelligence/large language modules for these purposes violates the University's academic integrity policy. Generative AI has been known to "hallucinate" information and references and to generate text at a high school "C" grade level at best. **We encourage students to use AI tools appropriately for tasks such as data analysis; spelling and grammar checking; image/chart/graph generation; and translation assistance as long as they disclose any tools used in preparing their assignments and for what purpose.** If you are uncertain about whether your planned use of an AI tool is appropriate, check with the instructor or TA in advance.

## **Assignments**

Students are expected to:

- 1) Participate actively in class discussions;
- 2) Write a paper addressing their choice of the policy questions raised in this course –either through focus on an individual country or comparative analysis across countries;
- 3) Participate in one Oxford-style debate from Weeks Three through Nine.

Students will write a paper related to one of the class session topics.

Students must submit the central question their paper will address by Week Two.

An outline/early draft is due in Week Four.

The final paper is due in Week Nine.

Activities will contribute to the final grade as follows:

Proposed question (due before class Week Two): 5%

Paper Draft (due Week 4): 15%

Final Paper (~5000 words, due Week Nine): 40%

Debate (Weeks Three through Nine): 10%

Class participation and attendance: 20%

Online discussion in Canvas: 10%

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Successful papers and presentations will include the following elements:

- Pose and answer a question related to risk policy formation
- Be clearly written, argued, and presented
- Be free of grammatical and typographical errors
- Demonstrate a strong point of view
- Show thoughtful organization and structure
- Include references
- Include original and insightful analysis
- Include appropriate visual presentation of supporting data
- Have relevance and potential for impact
- Successfully incorporates feedback on the draft

In addition, debate teams will assess every member's role in the group assignment (including their own) via a confidential peer review form that considers each member's intellectual contribution, initiative, workload, and conduct. This peer assessment will represent half (5%) of your debate grade.

## Readings, Topics, and Schedule

### Week 1 (March 26): Introduction: What Is Risk Policy?

- What do we mean by “risk policy” and why does it matter?
- How do different disciplines view risk? How does that affect risk policy formation? Views from sociology, behavioral economics, psychology, finance, political science, anthropology, communications, and ethics.
- How does risk policy affect different issue areas? How explicitly do policymakers consider risk factors in the policy formation process? Compare financial markets, blended finance/access to credit, crisis response, insurance (health, flood, political risk, liability), workplace and unemployment, entrepreneurship and innovation, workplace, global catastrophic risk, governance, risk pricing, and social safety nets.
- What are the elements of a strong risk assessment, cost-benefit analysis, and determining of “acceptable risk”?
- What do we mean by **risk policy formation** versus *risk assessment*?

*Assignments to be completed by the first class:*

- Introduce yourself in this week’s Canvas discussion. Your introduction should include
  - Why did you sign up for this class?
  - What are your broader areas of policy interest?
  - Which of the questions to be debated throughout the quarter interests you most? We will use this answer to assign you to one of the debate teams in Weeks Three through Nine

*Assignments to be completed by the Sunday after the first class:*

- Read Jens O. Zinn and Peter Taylor-Gooby, “The Current Significance of Risk” and “Risk as an Interdisciplinary Research Area,” (Chapters One and Two, pp 1-53) in *Risk in Social Science*, Zinn and Taylor-Gooby, eds. New York: Oxford UP, 2006.
- Comment in the discussion section of Canvas:  
Which social science/policy disciplines will influence your research and the questions your final project will seek to answer?

### Week 2 (April 2) Comparative Risk Ecosystems: Everyone for Themselves or the Nanny Society?

- What is a risk ecosystem? How do its interacting elements encourage or discourage different types of risks (good and bad)?
- How do risk perceptions, norms, and policies vary across countries and cultures? What cultural, legal, political, economic, geographical, and societal factors account for these changes? How do they affect policy formation including weighting of trade-offs?
- How did the Covid-19 pandemic change risk policy norms?
- What is risk governance? How do private sector and public sector policymaking differ?
- How have agency, city, state, and national governments adapted the Chief Risk Officer role from corporations to public policy functions? Is there a role for a Global Chief Risk Officer?

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Post in the class Canvas discussion the question(s) about risk policy formation that you want to consider in class discussions and in your final paper.
- **Pick a risk assessment from the list in the materials for this week and come prepared to discuss in class.**
- Read Jens O. Zinn and Peter Taylor-Gooby, “The Challenge of (Managing) New Risks,” Chapter 3 (pp 54-75); and Bridget M. Hutter, “Risk, Regulation, and Management,” Chapter 10 (pp 202-227) in *Risk in Social Science*.
- Read Thomas Brandt. “Federal Enterprise Risk Management Turns Five.” IBM Center for the Business of Government. July 21, 2021.  
<https://www.businessofgovernment.org/blog/federal-enterprise-risk-management-turns-five>

### **Week 3 (April 9): Climate Risk and Negative Externalities**

- What are some examples of positive and negative externalities?
- How do policies differ in encouraging or discouraging externalities? (“sin” taxes, subsidies, etc.)
- How does tax policy affect risk choices? (ie, mortgage tax deductions, capital gains versus corporate taxes, margin interest tax deductions, tax shelters)
- What is the balance between positive and negative externalities created by current policies related to fossil fuels and renewables?

*Debate Topic: Climate Change Externalities (Yes or No):*  
“Governments should subsidize fossil fuels.”

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- **Submit proposed paper topic and sources: Be prepared to discuss in class**
- Read: Greg Ip. “The World Is Getting Riskier. Americans Don’t Want to Pay for It,” *The Wall Street Journal*. January 19, 2025.  
[https://www.wsj.com/economy/consumers/the-world-is-getting-riskier-americans-dont-want-to-pay-for-it-51901067?mod=wknd\\_pos1](https://www.wsj.com/economy/consumers/the-world-is-getting-riskier-americans-dont-want-to-pay-for-it-51901067?mod=wknd_pos1)
- Post in Canvas some of the risk ecosystem elements that are most relevant to your proposed paper topic.

### **Week 4 (April 16): Risk and Economic Development: Positive Externalities**

- Which risk policies catalyze or stifle innovation and economic growth?
- How do different countries share positive and negative risk externalities distributed or shared?
- How do risk ecosystems shape economic development, for better or worse?
- What role does insurance play in protecting from or encouraging risky behavior
- How do risk ecosystems encourage or discourage innovation?
- What is the role of values, like tolerance of failure and recognition of success, in encouraging or discouraging good and bad risks?
- Can governments or private sector actors change values and attitudes through policy choices?

*Debate Topic: Positive Externalities (Yes or No):*

“Policymakers should subsidize (or increase existing subsidies for) “good” risk taking in

developing communities and nations.”

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Post in Canvas discussion some of the positive and negative externalities related to your paper topic.
- Read Banerjee, Abhijit, V., and Esther Duflo. 2007. "The Economic Lives of the Poor." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21 (1): 141-168. DOI: 10.1257/jep.21.1.141
- Read Robert Cull, Tilman Ehrbeck, and Nina Holle, “Financial Inclusion and Development: Recent Impact Evidence,” World Bank and CGAP (Consultative Group to Assist the Poor), April 2014. <http://www.cgap.org/sites/default/files/FocusNote-Financial-Inclusion-and-Development-April-2014.pdf>
- Read Cyn-Young Park and Rogelio V. Mercado Jr., “Financial Inclusion, Poverty, and Income Inequality In Developing Asia,” ADB Economics Working Paper Series Number 426. Asian Development Bank, 2015. <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/153143/ewp-426.pdf>
- Read Devin Thorpe, “Using Biomimicry This Activist Is Turning Impact Investing Upside Down to Erase Racial Wealth Gaps,” Forbes, July 5, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/devinthorpe/2019/07/05/using-biomimicry-this-activist-is-turning-impact-investing-upside-down-to-erase-racial-wealth-gaps/#3d6e5c2742d4>
- Read Hans-Werner Sinn, “A Theory of the Welfare State,” National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 4856, 1994. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w4856.pdf>

### **Week 5 (April 23): Financial Risk, Pricing, and Moral Hazard**

- What are the trade-offs involved in financial bailouts?
- How can governments design policies that encourage constructive risk taking, address market failures involving access to credit, and discourage moral hazard?
- Community-based risk pooling
- Bank regulations and mark-to-market rules
- Risk pricing and resource allocation

*Debate Topic: Deposit Insurance (Yes or No):*

“Federal governments should insure all bank deposits.”

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Robert Hockett. “Opinion: Capped deposit insurance is destroying banks.” CNN, May 5, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/05/opinions/banking-crisis-deposit-insurance-hockett>
- Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve Bank. “[Review of the Federal Reserve’s Supervision and Regulation of Silicon Valley Bank](#),” April 2023.
- Read Dennis Kelleher and Phillip Basil. “Federal Reserve Policies and Systemic Instability: Decoupling Asset Pricing from Underlying Risks.” Better Markets, January 2023. <https://bettermarkets.org/analysis/federal-reserve-policies-and-systemic-instability-decoupling-asset-pricing-from-underlying-risks/>

## **Week 6 (April 30): Risk Umbrellas and the Workplace**

- What is the appropriate mix of responsibilities for building and maintaining risk umbrellas that protect societies and economies?
- How should employers and employees share the benefits and potential burdens in various risk scenarios? A few examples: intellectual property creation, initially promising but ultimately failed initiatives, unethical behavior encouraged or required by superiors, safety violations, health care, or legal liability.
- How do the rise of the freelance economy, solopreneurs, and gig work affect the balance of risk burden sharing among employers, employees, and clients?
- How does government risk policy affect the choices citizens make in deciding if they will invest in college or continuing education?
- How do the health and life insurance policies that many companies provide affect people's work and career choices?

*Debate Topic: Health Insurance (Yes or No):*

“Companies should be the biggest providers of health insurance and be allowed tax deductions for it. “

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- **Draft of Final Paper Due**

- Read Dara Khosrowshahi, “I Am the C.E.O. of Uber. Gig Workers Deserve Better,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/10/opinion/uber-ceo-dara-khosrowshahi-gig-workers-deserve-better.html>
- Read Andy Alaszewski, “Health and Risk,” Chapter 8, and Sarah Vickerstaff, “Life Course, Youth, and Old Age,” Chapter 9, (pp 160-201) in *Risk in Social Science*.
- Post in Canvas discussion analyzing the risk umbrellas related to your paper topic.

## **Week 7 (May 7): Risk Transfer: Sharers and Bearers**

- How should policy makers and stakeholders balance the responsibility for protecting from risk? What roles should government, the private sector, and individuals play in sharing the costs and benefits of risk protection?
- Who benefits, respectively, from privatization or socialization of risk rewards and burdens? What are the arguments for and against policy ecosystems that emphasize one or the other?
- Are risk pooling and diversification approaches used widely enough?
- What steps can policy makers take to close the protection gap?
- Examples: African Risk Capacity, UK National Flood Insurance with payouts indexed to taxable income and including resilience measures, NYC Mayors Office of Climate Resiliency Program

*Debate Topic: Climate Risk Insurance [Yes or No]:*

Insurance companies should be required to insure homes and businesses in areas that are vulnerable to extreme weather events like drought, wildfires, hurricanes and floods.

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Post in Canvas an analysis of how risk burdens are shared in your main paper topic.

- Read Mariana Mazzucatto. “We Socialize Bailouts. We Should Socialize Successes, Too.” *The New York Times*. July 1, 2020.
- Read David Abbott, Anwen Jones, and Deborah Quilgars, “Social Inequality and Risk,” Chapter 11 (pp 228-249); and Peter Taylor-Gooby, “Social and Public Policy: Reflexive Individualization and Regulatory Governance,” Chapter 13 (pp 271-287), in *Risk in Social Science*.
- Read Marina Krakovsky, “The Risk Bearer.” Chapter in *The Middleman Economy: How Brokers, Agents, Dealers, and Everyday Matchmakers Create Value and Profit*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-137-53020-2\\_5](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-137-53020-2_5)
- Read David Hume Institute, “The Great Risk Transfer: Campaign Recommendations Institute and Faculty of Actuaries,” April 2021. [[paper](#)] [[video](#)] Summary: Susan Murray, “[The Great Risk Transfer: How government has heaped risk onto individuals in one of the biggest changes to modern society.](#)” *The Scotsman*, May 17, 2021
- Read Carolyn Kousky and Lori Medders. “The Evolution of Florida’s Public-Private Approach to Property Insurance.” Appalachian State University, Environmental Defense Fund, and Florida Policy Project. April, 2024  
<https://library.edf.org/AssetLink/454ne07j8k514mtj1tm6tqdqa0yuphrn.pdf>

### **Week 8 (May 8): Global Catastrophic Risk**

What are the best mechanisms for nations, organizations, and citizens to cooperate with their global peers in addressing global catastrophic risks that transcend borders?

- What mechanisms exist to enable nations, organizations, and citizens to cooperate with their global peers in addressing global catastrophic risks that transcend borders?
- Which of these existing mechanisms are the most effective? What new mechanisms might be put in place?
- How do local and global risk governance regimes interact?
- How might global risk pooling policies be improved?

*Debate topic: Polluter Tax [Yes or No]:*

Rich countries should pay developing nations for their cumulative carbon emissions

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Post in Canvas discussion board about which aspects of your paper are local, national, or global and how governance at each of these levels applies.
- Read Nick Pidgeon, Peter Simmons, and Karen Henwood, “Risk, Environment, and Technology,” Chapter 5 (pp 94-116) in *Risk in Social Science*.
- Read Elke Weber, “[Heads in the Sand: Why We Fail to See and Contain Catastrophe.](#)” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2020.
- Read Arunabha Ghosh, “Multilateralism for Chronic Risks,” UN75 Global Governance Innovation Perspectives, June 2020, Washington, D.C.; Stimson Center; Doha Forum; Council on Energy, Environment and Water,  
<https://www.stimson.org/2020/multilateralism-for-chronic-risks/>



## **Week 9 (May 15): Risk Staging and Communications**

How do communications by and among governments, organizations (including media), and citizens shape the way we perceive and respond to various risks?

- How do legacy media, social media, and government communications affect risk perceptions?
- How do risk perceptions shape the available risk policy options?
- How do risk literacy rates compare around the world? What policy frameworks might improve them?
- How and when should risk
- How do risk perceptions and priorities shape global policy negotiations and agreements?
- Wrap-up Discussion/Takeaways

*Debate topic: Risk Staging:*

*Governments should play the primary role in shaping citizens' risk perceptions and priorities.*

*Assignments to be completed ahead of class:*

- Post in Canvas discussion analyzing the role of communications in shaping public and policy maker opinions and responses as related to your central paper topic.
- Read Emma Hughes, Jenny Kitzinger, and Graham Murdock, “The Media and Risk,” Chapter 12 (271-286) in *Risk in Social Science*.
- Egner, Heike. “Enforced Cosmopolitanization and the Staging of Risks.” *RCC Perspectives*, no. 6 (2011): 19–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26240337>.
- Read Michael B. Cerny and Rory Truex, “Under Pressure: Attitudes Towards China Among American Foreign Policy Professionals, December 9, 2024”  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61362c444f878116b514ec49/t/675727341f3f295563cd8a47/1733764917153/Cerny+%26+Truex+%282024%29+-+Working+Paper+-+Under+Pressure.pdf>

- **Final paper due**

- **Think about key takeaways from the semester and come prepared to share them with the class**

### ***Core/Required Reading:***

Jens O. Zinn and Peter Taylor-Gooby, eds. *Risk in Social Science*. New York: Oxford UP: 2006.

Along with the short articles indicated for each class session, additional short readings from current news and public debate on related topics will be shared as the quarter progresses.

### ***Recommended (but not required) additional reading:***

Michele Wucker. *You Are What You Risk: The New Art and Science of Navigating an Uncertain World*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2021.

## **Additional Information and Policies**

### **Grading policies and procedures**

*Grading Rubric:*

A: 94% and above:

A-minus: 90-93.9

B-plus: 87-89.9%

B: 83-86.9%

B-minus: 80-82.9%:

C-plus: 77-79.9%:

C: 73-76.9%

C-minus: 70-72.9%

D-plus: 67-69.9%

D: 63-66.9%

D- 60-62.9

F: 59.9% and below

### **General Resources Available to Students**

- [Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook](#)
- [Student Wellness](#)
- [UChicagoGRAD](#)

### **Harris School and University of Chicago Policies**

- [Harris School Policies](#)
- [University General Policies](#)
- [University Academic Policies](#)
- Policy on audio and video [recordings](#)