

SYLLABUS PUBLIC POLICY 625  
WINTER 2015

Public Policy 625 is a graduate level course dealing with various "Topics in Public Policy". The legislative branch, both Congress and State Legislatures, will receive a significant amount of attention.

Other issues, both in legislative and practical context, will be discussed: health care, education policy (K-12 and Higher Ed), agricultural policy (eg the Farm Bill), science and technology, the military, the federal budget (eg sequestration, et al), infrastructure replacement, immigration, diplomatic matters that might come before the Congress. Because state legislatures are where a great deal of policy which affects our lives each day is formulated, an appropriate amount of time will be devoted to specific issues before state legislative bodies, in Michigan and elsewhere. Class discussions and reading assignments will be relevant and timely. A lively polemic on the issues will be a sine qua non of Pub Pol 625.

The class will be spending at least several sessions on some critical and controversial issues that define the legislative process in 2015: Term limits, redistricting and the gerrymandering of both Congressional and State Legislative districts, campaign finance law, funding K-12 and higher education, the emphasis of some legislatures on so-called "conscience" issues, state taxation policy (eg sales tax or no sales tax, income tax or no income tax, property tax policy), the relative ease by which state constitutions can be amended by the initiatory process, how to fund local units of government, should the Governor have the ability to appoint emergency managers in failing local jurisdictions? We will discuss the Sales Tax Referendum in Michigan scheduled for May 2015. This proposal raises the Michigan Sales Tax to 7% from 6%, the proceeds to be used for road and infrastructure upgrades and repair. Finally, we will discuss, and I invite your candid opinions on, the extreme partisanship that has replaced rational discourse in Congress and in some State Legislatures. In all, the list of timely and pertinent issues is endless.

Attendance is important. A few absences are to be expected in a graduate course where a student's presence is required elsewhere on curricular matters or potential employment after graduation. More than a few, except in extraordinary circumstances, are not acceptable.

At least three, perhaps four, written assignments will be made. All will be papers, eg policy memos, op-eds, policy analyses, of 750 to 1000 words. I will read, comment upon, and grade each paper.

There will be four or five guest speakers. Each will have expertise in a different facet of policy formulation. They will come from government and from the private sector.

A Pub Pol 625 e mail address, with all of your URL's on it, will be set up, and readings will be assigned via that route.

The goal in this course is to familiarize the student with the environment and methods in public policy decision making, especially at the legislative level. The old adage that there are two things one does not want to see made, "law and sausage", is amusing, and, occasionally, even true.

John J. H. Schwarz, M.D., F.A.C.S.