**Policies for a Perfect Country**

**FFYS197PUP197**

**Fall 2017**



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**Class Meeting Time:** Wed., 2:30-3:20

**Class Location:** Dubois 720

**Office Hours:** Whenever I am not teaching or in a meeting.

**Course Description**

This seminar will explore successful public policies from various countries around the world. Each week we will discuss a specific policy—how it works, its strengths and weaknesses, whether it is transferable to other countries, and whether we would include this policy in a utopian community we might create. The seminar is based on a BBC series, *My Perfect Country*. Before each class, all students will listen to a podcast and answer a discussion question about the podcast. Each week 2-3 students will also find articles about the topic of the week and comment on them. At the end of the semester, students will create and present their own podcasts detailing a successful public policy.

**Course Objectives:**

Students who complete this course will be able to:

* Understand that, despite the world’s problems, successful policies exist
* Appreciate the complexities and interconnectedness of the world’s problems and solutions
* Understand how their own values influence their analysis and decisions
* Use critical thinking skills to examine public policies by considering their positive and negative aspects and their potential unintended consequences
* Write and speak persuasively
* Feel confident about their ability to be successful students at UMass and successful change makers in the larger world

**Class Values:**

At one level, we will all be examining our personal values this semester, and we will respect each person’s decisions about your values and the way you prioritize them. At another level, the course assumes some enduring values—honesty, respect, empathy, humility, and equality. We expect that our discussions will be civil and respectful and that everyone will participate by balancing the jobs of listening and talking. We also expect that students will respect other students’ confidentiality if anyone reveals something personal in class.

**Class meetings and expectations**:

We will meet in Room 720 Dubois from 2:30 to 3:20 on Wednesday afternoons. This is a high-tech classroom, and we will try to take advantage of all it has to offer. Please arrive on time and prepared for an interesting class discussion. If you need to miss class, please let me know.

**Overview of Assignments:**

*Weekly homework*: Before class each week the homework will be to listen to a podcast from the BBC series *My Perfect Country* or do the reading/listening assignment posted for that week. You will also answer a discussion question about the topic and be prepared to discuss the public policy in class. (On the days you have been assigned the additional research and comment, you do not need to answer the general discussion question.) We may also have a discussion question or an assignment that helps orient you to the first year of college.

*Additional research and comments*: Twice during the semester, you will find another article on the topic we are discussing in the [SolutionsU Storytracker](https://solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/), summarize the article in the discussion forum, and discuss how that article affected your thinking about the topic of the week. One or two others will have the same assignment each week, and you can work together or separately. If possible, please do this assignment over the weekend so that your classmates and I have time to read and respond to what you have written.

There are two ways to find articles on *SolutionsU*. The first is on the [Discover](https://solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/topics) page where you can browse through stories and story collections by *topic* or by *success factor*, and the second is by searching for stories on the [Solutions Story Tracker](https://solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/search). When selecting articles on the relevant topic, remember that we are asking: 1) Is the policy (or the strategy for implementing a policy) we are discussing this week a good one? What are its strengths and weaknesses? 2) Is it transferable to another country? 3) Would you include it in your perfect country?

*An opportunity to publish a Collection on* [*SolutionsU*](https://solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/)*.*  When it is your week to identify additional articles on the topic under discussion, you will also have the option to take this assignment a step further and create a *SolutionsU* story Collection. *SolutionsU* solicits student-created Collections several times each year and selects the best Collections for publication on the *SolutionsU* website. If you want to participate in this challenge, you will need to select 4 to 5 stories and write a short summary of each. You can do this alone or with the other student(s) assigned to do additional research your week. You can also combine the stories once you see what the other researcher assigned to your topic has found. These Collections are published under the Discover page (described above). Here is a good example of one written by a student at Wake Forest University on [Migrant Farmworkers](https://solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/lists/xfqozkys0c).

*Your own podcast:* The final project is to create your own podcast about your perfect country and present it during our final class. In order to have time to do this, you will need to work in groups of 3-4 and create a 6-7 minute podcast. We will record it in class on Dec. 6.

The podcast should emphasize a single policy, either one that we have discussed or one of your own choosing. It should include a description of this policy, statistics as to how it is working and why it is needed, what is not perfect about it, and why you would still include it in your perfect country. Ideally, you would also include a quick explanation of how this policy would fit with other policies that you would include in your perfect country.

Doing the podcast in groups of 3 or 4 will allow you to play off each other, as they do in the BBC podcast. You can pretend to be experts in the field and have fun!

If you are passionate about a policy you would include in a perfect country, and you cannot convince others to join you, come talk to me, and we’ll figure out a way for you to pursue the policy that interests you.

**Grading:**

* Class participation: 30%
* Weekly discussion forum comments: 25%
* Discussion forum comments for additional research: 20%
* Podcast (final presentation): 25%
* EXTRA CREDIT: Post to the forums at the top of Moodle that announce events on campus, suggest other policies for a perfect country, and provide quotations that can inspire us to keep working towards making a perfect country. Attend those events and share them in class!

**Policies and Resources for this course:**

* *Academic honesty*: All students should familiarize themselves with [UMass’s academic honesty policies.](https://www.umass.edu/honesty/)
* *Disabilities:* Please get in touch with me if you need an accommodation for this course.
* *Writing Center:* Free one-on-one assistance at any stage of writing. Make [appointment online.](http://umass.edu/writingcenter)
* *Learning Resource Center:* Students helping students reach academic success. Sunday through Thursday 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. [www.umass.edu/lrc](http://www.umass.edu/lrc)

**Other help:**

* ***Meet your academic advisor!***
* Center for Counseling and Psychological Help, <http://www.umass.edu/counseling/>
* Center for Multicultural Advancement & Student Success (CMASS), <http://umass.edu/multiculturalaffairs>
* Financial Aid Services, <http://umass.edu/umfa>.

**Calendar of Topics and Assignments** (See next page)

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **DATE** | **TOPIC** | **Listening/Reading/Watching**  **(Other homework on Moodle!)** |
| 9/01 | Introduction |  |
|  | **Unit 1:**  **Increasing Economic Prosperity** |  |
| 9/13 | A National Digital Platform (Estonia) | Either listen to the [BBC podcast](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03gscmv) about Estonia's digital policy or examine the [E-Estonia website](https://e-estonia.com/). |
| 9/20 | Cash Stipends (Peru) | Listen to the [BBC podcast](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04m7nqs) on cash stipends |
| 9/27 | Education (Shanghai, China or India) | Either listen to the [BBC podcast](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04p5zkw)on the Shanghai approach to math or watch |
| 10/04 | Access to Justice (Uganda) | Listen to the podcast about [Barefoot Law.](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03lb2gs) |
|  | **Unit 2: Environmental Policies** |  |
| 10/11 | Mitigating Climate Change (Holland) | Read [*The Dutch Have Solutions to Rising Seas. The World is Watching*](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/15/world/europe/climate-change-rotterdam.html?action=click&contentCollection=Times%20Insider&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article), in the NY Times.  Watch [*Room for the River, Floor Risk Management, the Netherlands*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ux1Vam2fAVs)  (4 minute video) |
| 10/18 | Green Energy | Listen to the [BBC podcast on Costa Rica's renewable energy policies](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03hjzjd). |
| 10/25 | Ensuring Water Supply | Listen to the [podcast on Bermuda's response to water scarcity](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04m747j). |
|  | **Unit 3: Ensuring Citizens’ Health** |  |
| 11/01 | Sanitation (India) | Listen to the [podcast about sanitation solutions in India](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03km099) |
| 11/08 | Decriminalizing Drug Use (Portugal) | Listen to the BBC podcast on [decriminalizing drug use in Portuga](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03j5jfl)l. |
| 11/15 | Eliminating Suicide (Michigan, USA) | Listen to the BBC [podcast on Michigan's suicide prevention policies](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03jxdq2). |
| 11/29 | Gun Control (Japan) | Listen to the[podcast on Japan's gun control policies](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04ms0dw) |
| 12/06 | Creating podcasts in class |  |

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