



The School of Law and Government  
Master's Programme in Public Policy

# Political Theory and Public Policy

LG 5060

Fall 2021

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**Office hours:** Mondays btw 6-8 pm

## Module description

Public policies carry a promise of change in the existing social and economic structures and/or practices. While sound scientific evidence is often key to effective policy, we often disregard that evidence is only relevant when the public and/or policymakers agree on what the policy objectives are.

It is against this background that this module examines the normative foundations of public policies. Different from an empirically grounded investigation of public policies, the module invites you to engage with highly contentious questions regarding what values and principles should public policies be built upon.

The module aims to deliver this promise in two ways. First, it introduces the original classical texts of key social thinkers that are relevant to the study of public policy and focuses on their ideas of liberty, efficiency, equality and social welfare. Second, it juxtaposes these ideas to challenge you to recognise the potential trade-offs of these ideas.

Please note that public policies cover a wide range of activity domains. Objectives that we (as well as the public and policymakers) would find relevant and desirable might vary across different policies. In a democratic environment, our responses to these questions would naturally

(and fortunately) vary. Therefore, the module does not aim at resolving value conflicts among us or coming to definitive conclusions about these age-old questions. Instead, the objective of the module is to equip you to identify principles underlying public policies, to recognise trade-offs in setting policy objectives and to think critically about them and their real-world implications.

### **Learning outcomes**

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- LO1 Reflect upon the values and principles that underpin public policies,
- LO2 Explore the philosophical debates around key objectives for public policies,
- LO3 Identify value trade-offs in setting policy objectives,
- LO4 Compare analyse positions taken by political theorists and political philosophers on policy-related issues,
- LO5 Apply these insights to policy debates and public policy analysis.

### **Assessment overview**

There are two means of assessment in the course. Two short reflections (2 paragraphs) on core readings that you select to respond to (assignment 1), 2) and a final paper offering a normative analysis of public policy on the policy of your choice (assignment 2). All assessments will be made following the Postgraduate Marking Scheme of the School of Law and Government at the DCU.

#### **(1) Short reflections (40%, 20% each\*2)**

You are asked to summarise the main argument(s) and key concept(s) of the reading material (Paragraph 1) and write what you find most thought-provoking about them (including your criticisms and/or appraisals) (Paragraph 2). The average length of these reflections should be around 300 words only. You are expected to submit these short reflections two times during the semester. In other words, you will select two weeks (out of eight weeks with reading assignments) on which you will submit a short reflection. Short reflections should be submitted on Sundays (until 5 pm) before the class that the reading is assigned for. For example, if you choose to write a reflection on the second week's reading, then you must submit your reflection on 26 September (while the lecture and class discussion will take place on 28 September). Please submit your short reflections via Loop.

#### **(2) Final paper (60%) (Deadline: 15 December until midnight)**

Your final papers will provide a normative analysis of public policy on the policy of your choice. You are expected to choose a public policy that you would like to focus on, to identify the principle(s) underlying this policy, to present value trade-offs for this policy domain (either in the form of political contestation over the selected policy or in the form of existing alternatives to this policy in other contexts), discuss what you think would be the appropriate

principle(s) that this particular policy should be based upon and why you so. Your final paper should be between 4,000 and 5,000 words in length (excluding bibliography and footnotes). Please submit your final papers via Loop. Final papers are due on 15 December (until midnight).

You should familiarise yourself with the University's regulations on **plagiarism**, which are available here: <http://bit.ly/2dmicAf>. Please remember to **cite your sources**.

I expect you to:

- Read the assigned material before the class;
- Attend lectures and class discussions regularly;
- Write two short reflections;
- Write a final paper.

I am here to help in whatever way I can. However, I am not in a position to provide one-to-one (or one-to-small-group) catch-up lectures. You will have the recording of each week's live lecture available on the Loop page of this module. But if there are still things that are not clear to you, you can always send me an email or make an appointment with me. If you would like to talk to me in person, please do so during my office hours (Mondays btw. 4-6 pm). It would be great if you could please book in advance using the link below: <https://calendly.com/volkanyilmaz/lg5060> It is my policy not to answer student emails at weekends, and I make no guarantee to answer emails after 5:15 pm.

### **The organisation of the module**

The module will be delivered through **live sessions** that will take place **via Zoom**. If you have not used Zoom before the *Student's Zoom Guide* (see below) might be useful. We have been allocated two hours each week (**Tuesdays between 18:00 - 20:00**). My idea is to deliver the lecture in the first 40 minutes of our weekly sessions and receive any questions that you might have on the lecture. We will then give a 15-minute break. After the break, we will continue with a class discussion. Please make sure to **read the assigned material** for the respective week (see folders for each week) **before our live sessions** as this will substantially increase the quality of our classes.

Only lectures **will be recorded**. You will also find the presentation slides of the recorded lectures in each week's folder. **This means that Q&A sessions on lectures and our class discussions will not be recorded, thus will not be available to you later.** However, a great deal of learning takes place through the interactions of motivated participants. And I am happy to inform you that those who have been admitted to MSc in Public Policy (both full-time and part-time) and the Graduate Certificate in Public Policy at DCU this year (including yourself) is of very high calibre. You will have a lot to learn from other participants of this module, therefore, I will invite you to attend all sessions.

## **Outline of the module and core readings**

**Week 1** (Tue 21 September) *Introduction and overview*

**Week 2** (Tue 28 September) *Liberty*

Hayek, F.A. 2011. *The Constitution of Liberty*, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 57-72.

**Week 3** (Tue 5 October) *Equality*

Rawls, J., 1982. Social Unity and Primary Goods in (ed.) A. Sen, B. Williams. *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 159-173.

**Week 4** (Tue 12 October) *Equality (of Outcomes) or Equality of Opportunities?*

Arneson, R.J., 1989. Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare. *Philosophical Studies*, 56(1), pp.77-93.

**Week 5** (Tue 19 October) *Liberty-Equality Trade-Off?*

Nozick, R., 1974. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Blackwell Publishing, pp. 149-164.

**Week 6** (Tue 26 October) *Equality-Efficiency Trade-Off?*

Okun, A.M., 2015. Equality and efficiency: The big tradeoff. *Brookings Institution Press*, pp. 1-10; 86-93.

**Week 7** (Tue 2 November) *Universalism or Selectivism in Social Welfare?*

Titmuss, R., 2006. Universalism versus Selection. In *The Welfare State Reader*, pp.40-48.

**Week 8** (Tue 9 November) *Diversity-Universalism in Social Welfare Trade-Off?*

Fraser, N., 1995. From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age. *New Left Review*, (212), pp.68-93.

**Week 9** (Tue 16 November) *Satisfying Needs and/or Wants within the Planetary Limits?*

Gough, I., 2015. Climate Change and Sustainable Welfare: The Centrality of Human Needs. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 39(5), pp.1191-1214.

**Week 10** (Tue 23 November) *Wrap-up*