

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

The Fund for American Studies

Inside Washington, DC: Special Topics Seminar

General Information

Course: Public Policy Seminar, ECON 496
Dates: Mondays and Wednesdays, June 8 – July 27, 2020
Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm
Instructor: Professor Karen M. Czarnecki (Public Policy Unit)
Email: Primary: kczarnecki@mercatus.gmu.edu; Secondary: kmc3inva@yahoo.com
Phone: 703/993-9673
Instructor: Professor Richard Benedetto (Politics + the Press Unit)
Twitter: @benedettopress
Email: benedett@american.edu
Office hours: By Appointment

Professor Biography: Karen M. Czarnecki, Mercatus Center at George Mason University **PROFESSOR – PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

Karen M. Czarnecki has spent over two decades in politics and public policy. She is currently the Vice President of Outreach for the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. She previously served as director of education at the Law and Economics Center at the Scalia Law School at George Mason. She has also served as a Congressional Chief of Staff and as a senior advisor to U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao in several capacities: Director of the Office of the 21st Century Workforce; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs, and Acting Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment. Czarnecki received her BA and juris doctorate degrees from The Catholic University of America and is also an alumna of the Public Policy and Economics program.

Professor Biography: Richard Benedetto, American University **PROFESSOR – POLITICS AND THE PRESS**

Richard Benedetto is veteran political reporter with more than 40 years of experience covering local, state and national government and politics. He retired from his post as White House correspondent for USA Today and political columnist for Gannett News Service in 2006. He began teaching at American University in the Fall 2006 semester. Since then he has taught courses in the School of Communication and the School of Public Affairs. He also teaches in The Fund for American Studies Capital Semester and Summer IPJ programs at George Mason University. He began teaching for The Fund in 2005.

University Press of America published Benedetto's memoir of his long reporting career, *Politicians Are People, Too*, in April 2006. He also published a collection of columns, "Around And About" in 2019.

A native of Utica, N.Y., Benedetto began his journalism career with the Buffalo, (N.Y.) Evening News, and held government/politics reporting positions with the Utica (N.Y.) Daily Press and Observer-Dispatch. Benedetto is a founding member of USA Today joining the newspaper in 1982, prior to its debut. He wrote the newspaper's first Page One cover story. In Washington, he covered the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He also covered every congressional and presidential election campaign since 1984. He is now a contributor to Politico, RealClearPolitics, USA Today, The Hill, The Wall Street Journal and Fox News.

Benedetto holds B.A., M.A. and doctoral degrees from Syracuse University. Among his numerous journalism awards, Benedetto most values his 1998 Media Award presented by the National Italian American Foundation for projecting a positive image of Italian Americans.

Required Texts:

How Washington Really Works, by Charles Peters

Mass Media and American Politics, 10th Edition, Doris A. Graber & Johanna Dunaway, Sage Press

Politicians Are People, Too, Richard Benedetto, University Press of America, 2006

Supplemental Materials:

- The instructors regularly supplement textbook readings with journal articles, book chapters, essays, and other material. It is the student's responsibility to consult Blackboard weekly for updated materials for each class.

Course Goals:

- To further an understanding of how Washington, DC, public policy and how the press works
- To develop writing and presentation skills applicable to your future careers
- To highlight current events in the context of internship experiences

Format:

- Subject matter lectures
- Readings
- Active discussion regarding class topics, internships, assigned readings
- Student group presentations illustrating class work, assigned readings, and research
- Homework assignments

Expectations:

- The instructors and students will act with the highest level of professional ethics, demonstrate a genuine interest in the subject matter at hand, and come to every class fully prepared to engage in the learning process.
- Students will complete all of the readings in advance of each class, and come to class ready to discuss their own experiences and insights regarding the lessons at hand.
- Students will adhere to the George Mason University Honor Code. Copying, cheating, or plagiarism will not be tolerated.
- Students will attend all class sessions and participate in class discussions. Students who are unable to attend any particular class must, to the fullest extent practicable, inform the instructor of their pending absence in advance. The instructor will work to accommodate every student's situation, where appropriate, including unexpected family or personal challenges and unanticipated events (e.g. a death in the family, severe illness, etc.).
- Unless otherwise agreed upon by the instructor, students will submit all their assignments on time, at the beginning of each class. With rare exception, late assignments will be marked down a minimum of one full letter grade. Students are expected to proofread their written products for typos and grammatical errors, which if left unchecked, will result in a lower grade.
- The instructor will maintain an open-door policy and be available to field any questions, concerns, comments, etc. within a reasonable timeframe.
- Please note that in order to accommodate speaker schedules, some changes in class content may occur. The professors or TFAS staff will send out a note to students if there is a change in schedule.

Grading:

▪ Class Attendance & Participation, including:	25%
○ Knowledge of readings	
○ Class Participation	
▪ Homework Assignments	20%
▪ Quizzes, Papers + Exams	25%
▪ Group Presentations	20%
▪ Internship Grade	10%

Grading standards

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	86-89
B	83-85
B-	80-82
C+	75-79
C	72-74
C-	70-71
D	68-69
F	67 or below

George Mason University's Grading Table:

Letter Grade	Grade Points	Undergraduate Courses
A+	4.00	Satisfactory / Passing
A	4.00	Satisfactory / Passing
A-	3.67	Satisfactory / Passing
B+	3.33	Satisfactory / Passing
B	3.00	Satisfactory / Passing
B-	2.67	Satisfactory / Passing
C+	2.33	Satisfactory / Passing
C	2.00	Satisfactory / Passing
C-	1.67	Satisfactory* / Passing
D	1.00	Unsatisfactory / Passing
F	0.00	Unsatisfactory / Failing

SYLLABUS

Week 1

June 8 Part 1: Course Overview (Professors Bennedetto and Czarnecki)

- Introduction to Subject matter
- Class Introductions and brief descriptions of Internships

Part 2: Media Unit First Class (Professor Bennedetto)

- Advance readings for this Media class: Chapter 1 and 2 in Graber text and Chapter 1 - Politicians Are People, Too.

Homework Assignment for June 10 Public Policy class:

- Come prepared to discuss your view of the role of government in policy matters. Be prepared to give specific examples of your position/thoughts. There are several articles posted on Blackboard under “Course Content” that are helpful to review.
- Read *How Washington Works*, Chapter 7 (Congress)

June 10 Role of Government and the Congress (Czarnecki - Public Policy Unit)

- Group Presentation Topics Assigned
- Discussion on the Role of Government in Public Policy
- General Discussion on How Congress Works, Congress’ Relationship with other Branches

Homework Assignment for June 17 class:

- Work on Student Group Project assignments
- Write an Internship Interview Summary due on June 17 (See guidelines at the end of syllabus)
- Read *The Waxman Report*, Chapter 8 (*Fraud, Waste and Abuse*) by Henry Waxman

Week 2

June 15 Covering the Presidency and the Congress (Benedetto - Media Unit)

- Assigned readings: To be assigned
- Student Article Discussion
 - What is the big news of the week?
 - How do the media cover the presidency and Congress and how is it changing?
 - What is the tone of coverage of Congress by the media?
 - Why do the media cover the presidency more heavily than Congress?
 - Current issues and debates on Capitol Hill?

June 17 Congress: Part 2 (Czarnecki - Public Policy Unit)

- Submit “Internship Interview Summary” prior to start of class
- Group Presentation on Congress
- Discuss Congressional Oversight and potential reform
- Guest Speaker: TBD

Homework Assignment for June 24 class:

- Work on Student Group Project assignments
- Read Peters, *How Washington Works*, Chapter 2 (Lobbies)
- Read Vance, chapter posted from *The Influence Game*
- Read Abramoff, 2 chapters posted from *Capitol Punishment*

Week 3

June 22 How the White House and the Media Interact (Benedetto – Media Unit)

- Assigned readings: To be assigned
- Student Article Discussion

What is the role of media in coverage of government? Watchdogs or Opposition Party?

How does the White House manage or manipulate the media? Are media “enemy of the people?”

Trump’s use of Twitter, good or bad?

How fair are the media on this administration? How does coverage compare to Obama?

What is “fake news?” Suggestions for improvement?

June 24 Lobbying (Czarnecki – Public Policy Unit)

- Presentations from Lobbying Student Group
- General Discussion on How Lobbying Affects Policy Development, Lobbying Tactics/Strategy
- Guest Speaker: TBD

Homework Assignment for July 1 class:

- Work on Student Group Project assignments
- Read Peters, Chapters 3 (Bureaucracy) and 6 (Regulators)
- Under Regulation, read “The Problems with Regulation;” Getting More Bang for the Regulatory Buck;” and “Look Before You Leap: A Key Principle for Regulation”
- Optional: Under Bureaucracy, read Why the Bureaucracy Fails (CATO)

Week 4

June 29 How Polls are Used in Covering Government (Benedetto – Media Unit)

- Midterm Exam Assigned – take-home - due next class meeting – April 10
- Assigned readings: To be assigned
- Student Article Discussion

Political Polls are everywhere. Some are good, and some are bad. How can we tell the difference?

Which polls can we trust? How can polls be manipulated? How interpretation of polls can be misleading. What went wrong with polls in 2016 presidential election? How accurate were the 2017 midterm election polls?

July 1 Regulation/Bureaucracy (Czarnecki – Public Policy Unit)

- Presentation from Bureaucracy/Regulator Group
- Discussion of Agencies and Regulation generally

Homework Assignment for July 8 class:

- Read “Devaluing the Think Tank” in *National Affairs* by Tevi Troy

- Read Chapter 4, “Competing in the Marketplace of Ideas: The Strategies of Think Tanks,” from *Do Think Tanks Matter?*
- Prepare think tank essay assignment-see guidelines at end of syllabus

Week 5

July 6

How New and Social Media have Changed Politics (Benedetto – Media Unit)

- How have they changed our political discourse and our perceptions of government, politics and politicians - For better and for worse?
- We will discuss the problems and perils of reporting in the Digital Age with its emphasis on speed and opinion, often blurring what is really happening. Moreover, speed is sometimes often sacrificing accuracy and in-depth analysis. How have social media affected us as political observers and partisans.? Are we better informed than those who get their news from traditional sources?
- Midterm Due in Class
- Student Article Discussion
- Assigned Readings: To be assigned.

July 8

Think Tanks (Czarnecki – Public Policy Unit)

- Submit Think Tank Assignment prior to class
- Discussion on how think tanks influence public policy
- Guest Speaker: TBD

Homework Assignment for July 15 class:

- Read 2 white papers on Trade by Irwin and Boudreaux (see Blackboard)
- View 2 short videos posted on tariffs and subsidies

Week 6

July 13

Coverage of the Government’s Response to the Pandemic (Bennedetto – Media Unit)

- We will update ourselves on the government’s responses to the virus, how they are covered by the news media and makes some assessments.
- Student Article Discussion
- Assigned Readings: Readings to be assigned.

July 15

Trade Policy (Czarnecki – Public Policy Unit)

- Trade Group Presentation
- General discussion of trade policy; different audiences affected by government decision making; trade wars

Homework Assignment for July 22 class:

- Read Chapter 8 (White House) and “A Way Out”
- Watch *Frontline* video on “*Inside the Obama White House*” (link on Blackboard)
- Prepare Policy Persuasion Paper (instructions at end of syllabus)

Week 7

July 20

2020 Presidential Election (Benedetto – Media Unit)

- We will look at the candidates out there so far, where they stand in the polls, and how they might match up in an election with President Trump.
- What are the key issues emerging, in addition to the record of Trump himself. What is Trump's re-election strategy?
- Student Article Discussion
- Assigned Readings: To be assigned
- FINAL PAPER DUE

July 22

The White House (Czarnecki – Public Policy Unit)

- FINAL PAPER DUE -Policy Persuasion Paper - Prior to Class
- Presentation from White House Group Project
- General Discussion on White House Operations, How Administrations Control the Agenda