

Reforming the State Through Governance (7 ECTS)

1. Course Description

The course intends to provide the analytical tools for understanding the new modes of governance yielded by the reforms of the public sector undertaken in OECD countries in the last three decades. In particular, it intends to spell out the theoretical, empirical and normative questions that the passage 'from government to governance' raises in relation to three diverse aspects of the political process: (a) decision making, (b) policy making and (c) policy implementation. The goals of the course are: (i) to allow students to gain a critical perspective on public sector reforms since the late 1980s; (ii) to sharpen the understanding of crucial features of the political process in multilevel polities; (iii) to devise better and more effective policy tools and mechanisms of implementation.

The course will develop a theoretical perspective that views social problems and political change as the outcome of complex forms of interaction a plurality of variegated collective and individual agents having distinct values, beliefs and needs. To avoid the generation of perverse side-effects and lower the risk of policy failure, public intervention needs to pay attention to the material and symbolic elements that help shape social behavioral patterns. To promote effective change, public policy needs to involve and stimulate the voluntary compliance of all agents whose interests are affected by the process and favor the selective evolution of positive behavioral responses. Thus, public intervention has to combine monetary and non-monetary incentives and set the ground for the evolution of self-enforcing social conventions.

2. Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

Students will be expected to develop an interdisciplinary perspective on policy analysis; one that can combine concepts and methodologies derived from the main disciplines composing the social sciences: politics, sociology and economics. They will be required to develop the analytical skills needed to arrive at a full understanding of the problems public intervention is supposed to solve, as well as those affecting the political process itself, and think policy making and implementation as self-reflexive activities.

Students will be specifically asked to think about the various and complex factors contributing to the generation of specific social problems and the reactions that policy intervention could generate. They will also be asked to apply their interdisciplinary knowledge to choose policy tools and mechanisms of implementation that could minimize negative reactions and perverse side-effects.

To this end, they will be encouraged to anticipate the dilemmas, conflicts and trade-offs public intervention needs to tackle in practice, and to embed in it mechanisms and procedures that could help to improve the responsiveness of the political process.

Applying knowledge and understanding

Students will be encouraged to employ hypothetical and real life case-studies and develop their learning abilities by blending virtual simulations and specific empirical enquiries in distinct policy areas. In this regard, they will be asked to familiarize themselves with a number of recent techniques developed to consult, involve and motivate the social and institutional actors whose compliance is sought by policy makers: focus groups, deliberative survey, citizens juries, peer-review, etc..

Making judgements

Students should be able to reflect on the methods used by assessing the viability of distinct policy tools selected to promote empowerment, accountability, communication and learning, of organizations operating in a complex and dynamic environment. They also need to be able to appreciate the relevance that moral, symbolic and non-monetary values have for motivating institutions and individuals to comply willingly with the policy requirements set.

Communication

Students will be asked to present and discuss the relevant literature as well as the result of their case studies in dedicated seminars.

Learning skills

Students will need to acquire the ability to follow their research tasks competently and autonomously, to develop their own specific interests and to carry out fieldwork activity in policy areas of their own choice.

3. Course Content

The course is divided into three main parts:

d) Democratic decision making: values, principles, procedures, goals

- Models of democracy and forms of democratization
- Political authority and democratic legitimacy
- Theory and practice of representative democracy
- Democratic experimentation in OECD countries
- From big government to post-democracy?

e) New Modes of Governance and Policy Making

- From government to governance: reforms of big government and their unintended side-effects
- Governance as a regulatory system, form of organization and productive process
- The 'regulatory state' as epistemic black box and political black hole
- The 'networked state' as theoretical rationalization and as prescriptive theory of change

- Re-conceiving policy making and government intervention: Policy networks, Public-Private Partnerships and horizontal coordination in multilevel contexts
- From governance to meta-governance: coordination failures, democratic dilemmas, accountability gaps

f) New Modes of Governance and Policy Implementation

- Joined-up government and network management
- Policy Implementation: top-downers vs. bottom-uppers
- Individual motivation and compliance in post-command public administrations: monetary incentives vs. dialogical involvement
- Opening the implementation process: customers, prosumers and citizens
- Democratizing the implementation process: consultation, deliberation, participation
- Towards a principled public governance: combining administrative discretionality and political accountability

4. Course Design

The course is comprised of lectures, seminars, group discussions, students' presentations, modeling sessions and individual assignments/papers. An overall attendance rate of 80% in scheduled sessions is required, and attendance is mandatory in the group discussions, students' presentations, and seminars, and active participation is required in those sessions.

5. Student's Evaluation

Assessment is carried out by means of evaluation of individual and group assignments. For a passing grade the student must (a) have pass marks in all the assignments; (b) have participated in the mandatory sessions; (c) have an adequate overall attendance rate. In addition, the final grade is based on a project report and its presentation.

An ECTS grade is provided to the student at the end of the course according to the A–F scale. Students who fail to fulfill all course requirements within the regular time frame will have the opportunity of re-sitting in the following semester.