Leadership and Intergenerational Policy Challenges

Ruscio and Palazzolo
Spring 2005
W: 2:45-5:20 (Jepson 102)

One of the enduring questions in political philosophy is whether current generations have obligations to future generations. In modern times the issue has become central to many policy debates—in fiscal policy, for example, when conferring benefits today means imposing debt on future citizens; or environmental policy when those who benefit from the current consumption of resources are not burdened by the resulting scarcity.

The ethical and moral dimensions of the problem are complicated enough. But they are complicated even more by the ways in which political and economic institutions shape the incentives, opportunities, and choices facing leaders and citizens. How do leaders advance the proposition that short term gains should be sacrificed in favor of long term benefits? When electoral time horizons are two, four, or six years, why would a rationally self-interested leader endorse a policy that imposes costs on those who vote and defers benefits to those not yet able to participate in the political process? How do political parties, interest groups, and the media influence the strategies and tactics of leaders who seek to address intergenerational challenges?

Our topic requires us to examine moral and ethical philosophy, economic analysis of costs and benefits separated by time, political analysis of institutional design, and theories of leadership that address the responsibilities and obligations of decision makers.

Readings:


Additional Required Sources:

Students are required to read one of three national newspapers (The New York Times, the Washington Post or The Wall Street Journal) in order to follow the debate over the President’s budget and other issues relevant to the course material.

Reserved material will also be used extensively throughout the semester.
In addition, the following reports, available on-line, will be used during the course:

Congressional Budget Office Report on Diamond-Orszag Plan to Save Social Security


http://pubs.wri.org/pubs_pdf.cfm?PubID=3764

*One additional book dealing with Medicare and long term care may be required.

Assignments (percentage of course grade)

Assignment 1: Essay on Leadership: Agree or disagree with the proposition that political leaders cannot adequately account for the needs and interests of future generations (2-3 double spaced pages). (10%)

Assignment 2: Write an editorial on President Bush’s inaugural and State of the Union addresses from the standpoint of leadership and intergenerational challenges; or rewrite his speech to reflect the need for leadership with respect to intergenerational responsibility (2-3 double spaced pages) (15%)

Assignment 3: Write a letter to your representative or senator, articulating the problem from the perspective of a college student and advising the representative on ways that he or she can deal with it (1-2 double spaced pages). (10%)

Assignment 4: Proposal for Research Project (2-3 pages) (10%)

Assignment 5: Final Research Paper (10-15 pages). Examples: Case studies of leaders who have attempted to act on intergenerational issues; legislation in Congress dealing with long-term issues; institutional structures and influence on leadership behavior; public opinion on entitlements; mass media coverage of the issues; analysis of policy proposals; analysis of other countries (e.g. Great Britain, or Chile); the role of commissions in addressing intergenerational problems; theoretical essay on intergenerational responsibility. (20%)

Final Exam: Essay exam (15%)

Group Projects: The class is divided into 4 groups that will work together on three project presentations (January 19, February 2, and February 9). Another set of four groups will be developed and will constitute a task force that will make recommendations for dealing with one of four long-term problems: social security, Medicare, long-term care, and environmental policy.
In class group projects (5%)
Task Force Report (15%)

In class group projects

Group I: Jessica Bennett, Brandon Boxler, Tully Brown, and Emily Cohen

Group II: Zachariah Dorey Stein, Lindsay Drake, Brent Engel, and Jill Fasching

Group III: Jaan Haus, Sherrone Hornbuckle, Allison Kirk, and Brian Neidig

Group IV: Bradley Oswald, Roger Revell, Boris Sharapan, and Alison Smith

Expectations and Policies

Students are expected to attend every class, complete the assigned reading, and come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

Assignments will be graded on the basis of content as well as writing (i.e. organization, clarity, precision, and technical presentation). Please consult the memo “How to Write an A Paper” on Blackboard for detailed guidelines of our expectations for written assignments. One might also refer to the Writing Center for additional assistance with writing assignments.

A ten point scale with letter grades from “A” to “F,” including pluses and minuses, will be applied for each assignment as well as the final course grade. A grade in the A range (100-90) is “excellent,” B (89-80) “good,” C (79-70) “average,” D (69-60) “below average,” and F (59 or below) “failing.” We are happy to discuss each student’s progress at any time during the semester, but there will be no additional assignments for extra credit.

Late Policy: Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates marked on the syllabus and assignment sheets. The vast majority of students submit their assignments on schedule, but a late policy is necessary to cover the few cases in which they are not. Any paper that arrives after the time and date specified on the assignment sheet will suffer a full grade deduction per day. Any project submitted 72 hours or more after the time specified on the assignment sheet will receive a failing grade; but it is advantageous to hand in a paper even if the grade will be an F because half credit is better than none in terms of the final course grade.

Having said that, keep in mind that we are quite flexible in cases of emergency or serious illness. Please contact one of the instructors if special circumstances prevent you from completing class work on time. Emergencies, however, do not include: weekend trips, social engagements, extracurricular activities, or the infamous “work overdose” syndrome. You have plenty of lead time to complete assignments, so plan ahead and set aside time in advance of the due dates.

NOTE: We reserve the right to extend the due date of a project if I feel it is in the best interest of the class to do so.
I: Theory

January 12: Introduction
Readings: Wessel, *How the U.S. Deficit is a Moral Issue* (WSJ, 11/04/04)
Friedman, *The 9/11 Bubble* (NYT, 12/02/04)
Rivlin, *Free Money* (Foreign Policy, Sept/Oct 2004)
Peterson, *A Letter to a Rising Generation*
Burke, *Letter to Constituents*
Madison, *Federalist Paper #10*

January 19: Intergenerational Justice and Leadership
Burke, excerpt from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
Gutmann and Thompson, Chp 4, “The Scope of Accountability” (pp. 129-164) in *Democracy and Disagreement* (Harvard University Press, 1996)
Laslett, Chp 1, “Is There a Generational Contract?” (pp. 25-47) in Laslett and Fishkin, *Justice Between Age Groups and Generations* (Yale Univ Press, 1992);
Peterson, Preface and Chapter 1

Assignment 1: 2-3 Page Essay on Leadership
Group Project 1: Profiles of leaders in Congress and the Executive.

January 20: Presidential Inauguration

II: Policy, Institutions, and Leadership

January 26: Macroeconomics and Micro-Decision: Why Deficits Matter
Readings: Peterson, Chapters 2-4
Rivlin and Sawhill, Executive Summary, Chapter 1, 2, 4, and 6

Discussion: President’s Inaugural
Assignment 2: Write an editorial on the president’s inaugural address from the standpoint of intergenerational challenges.
February 2: The Federal Budget and Party Politics
Readings: Peterson, Chapters 5-7
Budget Basics and CRS Briefing on the Budget Process at http://www.house.gov/budget/budgettutorial.htm

Group Project 2: Reports on party platforms and priorities: (1) Democratic party platform; (2) Republican party platform; (3) George Bush’s campaign; (4) John Kerry’s campaign

February 9: Group Politics and Solutions
Readings: Peterson, Chapters 8-10
Haskins, Rivlin, and Sawhill, Chapter 2, “Getting to Balance…” in Rivlin and Sawhill, Restoring Fiscal Sanity
Rauch, “Demosclerosis Returns,” (WSJ, 4/14/04)

Group Project 3: Reports on Interest Groups and Organizations: AARP, Concord Coalition, CATO, Americans for Tax Reform, National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

February 16: Exercise in Hard Choices
Readings: Review Chapters 3-6 in Rivlin and Sawhill, Restoring Fiscal Sanity
Assignment 4: Letter to Representative or Senator

February 23: The Politics of Social Security I
Readings: Light, Still Artful Work, Chapters 1-12

Assignment 4: Research Paper Proposal Due

March 2: The Politics of Social Security II and Options for Reform
Readings: Light, Still Artful Work, Chapters 13-20

March 9: Break

III. Policy Choices

March 16: The Environment
Readings: Hammond, Parts I, II, III, and V
Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” (Science, 12/03/68, pp. 1243-1248)
March 23: Social Security
Readings: Peter Diamond and Peter Orzag, Reforming Social Security: A Balanced Plan, Brookings Policy Brief #126 at:
https://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/comm/policybriefs/pb126.pdf

CBO Report on Diamond-Orszag Social Security Plan
President’s Commission to Strengthen Social Security,
http://www.csss.gov/

March 30: Health: Medicare and Long-term Care

Medicare Reform Faces Major Problems, (NPR, December 2004)

Long-term Care Report, Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate, 107th Congress, (June 2002), GPO Access at:

Alexis Ahlstrom, Emily Clements, Anne Tumlinson, and Jeanne Lambrew The Long-Term Care Partnership Program: Issues and Options, Retirement Security Project, Brookings December 2004
https://www.brookings.edu/views/papers/200412retirement.htm

*Further readings may be assigned for this week.

April 6: Task Force Presentations

April 13: Task Force Presentations

April 20: Conclusion

Assignment 5: Research Paper is Due

April 25: Final Exam (9-12)