Politics, Morality, and Policy (GOVT437)

**Dates:** June 7 - July 30, 2021

**Location:** This course is conducted entirely online, which means students do not have to be on campus to complete any portion of it. Students will participate in the course using Georgetown University’s online learning management system called Canvas. To learn more about Canvas, please go through the [Canvas Guide for Students](#).

**Professor:** Mark Carl Rom, Associate Professor of Government and Public Policy, McCourt School of Public Policy and Department of Government

**Professor Contact Information:** romm@georgetown.edu or cell 202-213-8767 for text or call (please use phone only if message is pretty urgent)

**Virtual Office Hours:** Professor Rom will be on Zoom every Monday from 10-noon and Wednesday from 3-5 p.m. (Georgetown time zone) and also by request. All meetings will be on his office hour Zoom (on Canvas). [You can sign up for an appointment during my office hours here](#).
In “Politics, Morality, and Policy” we survey some of the most important and controversial topics in the United States: guns, immigration, economic inequality, climate change, and the Covid-19 pandemic. By the end of the course, you will be able to speak and write competently on the moral values these topics raise, the policy choices that face us, and the political struggles over these policy choices. The course is equal parts ethics, political science, and policy analysis.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES and SKILLS**

1. We seek to identify the problems underlying moral controversies in American politics.
2. We survey the evidence about these problems and controversies.
3. We strive to understand the moral values at stake in these controversies.
4. We aspire to propose policies to remedy the problems in light of our values.
5. We search for understanding of the politics that determine which policies we have and might have.
6. We hope to develop the tools that allow us to improve our policies in the future.

**Skills**

"[S]olid research has identified the personal qualities, practices, and approaches that underlie successful innovation and leadership (Kosslyn 2017: 25)" The core competencies ("skills") that lead to success include:

- Thinking critically
- Thinking creatively
- Communicating effectively
- Interacting effectively.

According to our Georgetown colleague Bill Gormley, "Some of the hallmarks of critical thinking are a willingness to challenge the conventional wisdom, an inclination to reconsider your own cherished beliefs, a relentless search for good evidence [and,
Rom adds, good logic], an ability to draw appropriate inferences from good evidence [and logic], respect for competing points of view, and persistence when answers to important questions seem elusive" (Gormley 2017: 3)

"Creative thinking may be defined as the production of a new idea or a new product through inspiration, concentrated thought, or both [Gormley 2017: 29]. In our context, we will seek to develop ideas for resolving thorny policy dilemmas.

Communicating effectively involves speaking or writing clearly and appropriately for a given audience; it also involves non-verbal expression. [Kosslyn 2017: 35] We will be attentive to verbal and non-verbal expressions in our debates, group activities, and class discussions.

Effective interactions "require anticipating the impact of a particular message, registering the actual responses, and adjusting communication accordingly." [Kosslyn 2017: 36]. They require us to play various roles, whether as leader, follower, or team member. In Kosslyn’s view, effective interaction also requires us to resolve ethical dilemmas and have a social consciousness (p. 36).

**Sources**


**Critical and Creative Thinking**

Each module will require you to think critically and creatively. Or so I hope. We will work on these skills repeatedly through our readings, videos, and other class activities. Most often, we will be introduced to a matter of great policy, moral, and political controversy and examine various approaches to resolving those controversies.
You will have the opportunity to practice critical and creative thinking skills through multiple class activities, and especially through your final Policy, Morality, and Politics (PMP) project.

**Effective Communication: Oral and Written**

Effective communication will carry you far toward professional success. Becoming an effective communicator is difficult, but rewarding.

To develop your written communications skills, you will write a substantial paper (the PMP project) in which identify and describe a policy problem, offer a policy solution, assess the moral aspects of the problem and the solution, and examine the political prospects of your solution. You will also write weekly reflections on topics as assigned.

Your oral communication skills will improve through practice. You will have two (formal) oral presentations in this class: both will be filmed. First, you will engage in a policy debate on an assigned topic. Second, you will give a filmed presentation of your PMP project.

You will have the opportunity (and the obligation) to provide comments to your peers on their written and oral presentations. Your comments will help them, and providing the comments will sharpen your critical and creative skills too.

**Effective Interaction**

Working with others is a key professional (and personal!) skill. It can be harder to work with others in the online environment -- it's more difficult to have the frequent, personal, meetings that are available when we have 'live' classes. Still, you will have multiple opportunities to work with your classmates during this class.

### COURSE READINGS

You should buy two books for this class. You can purchase them through any vendor. Used copies, and earlier editions, are acceptable. Other readings are posted online.
I have become persuaded, by theory and evidence, that grades do not serve well the purposes of either students or instructors, especially in highly subjective courses such as this one.

For instructors, the main (non-administrative) justifications for grading include: a) motivating students; b) distinguishing between higher and lower performers.

The evidence indicates that grading in general does not serve to motivate, and can often demotivate. I also believe, based on evidence, that most grading schemes only crudely rank student performance. Moreover, in a course examining moral controversies, it is inevitable that my own ethical biases (which may reflect my culture, sex, ethnicity, education, and personal idiosyncratic experiences) will affect my perceptions of your performance.

So: I will not assign you grades for your work in this class, except for the fact that I must submit a final grade for you to the registrar. Instead, I’ll seek to provide honest and thoughtful comments on your work as it develops.

Grading Considerations

I’m willing to work with you to develop assessments that respond to your individual needs and interests. Here, I’ll offer some suggestions regarding how you might assess yourself.

I recommend that you assign yourself a grade based on two main considerations
First, a self assessment. In your self assessment, you will write a one page reflection in which you address the following questions (which were derived from the standard course evaluation):

1. How much have you learned in the course?
2. To what degree did you achieve your objectives for the course?
3. Did you establish high standards, challenge yourself, and seek to do your best work?
4. Were you consistently well-prepared for class?
5. Did you contribute to an intellectually, professionally, and personally stimulating class?
6. How high was the quality of the work you prepared for the class assignments?
7. How do you compare your performance in this class to the other College classes you have taken?

Second, a self assessment of your peer’s assessments. Here, I ask you to consider how your colleagues in our class view your performance. This portion of your self-assessment will include a reflection regarding how your peers view your performance, as well as the grade you believe they would award you.

Based on these considerations, you will assign yourself a letter grade from the usual choices.

I will review your reflections as well as those of your teammates, discuss them with you as appropriate, and assign a final grade. Unless I have a compelling reason to overrule your judgment, and can articulate my reason to you directly, I will submit the grade you recommend.

Grading Options

Students will have the option to choose one of two grading frameworks for Summer 2021 courses, either

1. a letter grade, or
2. Satisfactory (S); Credit (CR); or No-credit (NC): (S=grades A through C; CR=C-, D+, D; NC=F)
Students can make this choice in MyAccess beginning up until the last day of classes. The choice to take a class S/CR/NC can apply to any course: Core, major, minor, certificate or free elective. The choice can be made without permission from the deans (per the usual process). The S/CR/NC options will not be counted toward the stated maximum of student’s degree programs (e.g., “six” as outlined in the Undergraduate Bulletin). The withdrawal date will also be extended to the last day of classes. A transcript notation will explain that S/CR/NC was instituted because of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

**Grading Scale**

- 95 - 100 % = A
- 90 - 94 % = A-
- 87 - 89 % = B+
- 83 - 86 % = B
- 80 - 82 % = B-
- 77 - 79 % = C+
- 73 - 76 % = C
- 70 - 72 % = C
- 67 - 69 % = D+
- 60 - 66 % = D
- Below 60 % = F

**Assignment**

In conducting your self assessments, it might be helpful to consider several dimensions. When I originally designed the course, I thought the way to apportion your scores would be:

- Written PMP Project: 35 percent of your final score
- Oral PMP Project: 15 percent
- Midterm Debates: 5 percent
- Weekly participation activities: 45 percent

You might also find these categories helpful.
Tasks

You will have the opportunity to assess your progress in four main ways.

**The Written PMP Project:** Over the final five weeks of the course you will write a paper in which you identify and describe a policy problem, offer a policy solution, assess the moral aspects of the problem and the solution, and examine the political prospects of your solution. This paper will be 3000 words or so. Further details are provided on the specific assignments. In your self assessment, your paper should count for perhaps 35 percent of your final grade.

**The Oral PMP Project:** You will also make a video (5-10 minutes) based on your written project. You should consider this video to be worth some 15 percent of your grade.

**Midterm debates:** You will participate in a video debate on a topic as assigned. This debate will have several components. First, you will write a ~5 minute presentation on the assigned topic. Next, you will share this video with members of your debate "team." The members of this team will critique your video, offering suggestions for improvement. You will then redo your video and post the revised version. These debates should count for about 5 percent of your final grade, as you consider your performance.

**Participation in weekly activities:** The other 45 percent of your grade will be based on participation in the weekly activities. I will record your effort in these activities in the following way: if they show substantial effort and submit your work on time, I will post a score of two points on Canvas. If your participation shows only minimal effort or is late, I will post one point. If you do not submit work, I’ll post a zero. These scores are for you to use in your self assessment.

All assignments should be completed by the due dates given, which is 6 p.m. on Monday after the end of the relevant module. I do understand that we are all working in ‘unusual’ circumstances this summer, so these deadlines are for your benefit. (Assertion: there is clear evidence that individuals are more likely to complete tasks when they are given deadlines). If you have trouble making them, we can work out alternative arrangements.
Why Monday? So you do not (necessarily) have to spend the last hours on what might be a day of rest scampering to complete your work.

Why 6 p.m., and not the default of 11.59 p.m.? Because evidence suggests that, if the deadline is at midnight, you’re more likely to submit then. With a 6 p.m. deadline, you can spend the rest of Monday evening relaxing, spending time with friends, or attending to other vital tasks.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

This course begins with an Orientation and is divided into 8 modules. Below is an outline for the Orientation and each module. Each Module will be released on a weekly basis every Sunday at 11:59 pm (ET). Students are required to move through each module in sequential order.

**ORIENTATION: Opens June 1**

The orientation provides an overview of the course and introduces you to your instructor and peers. You will also learn about the technology requirements and where to get support.

**MODULE 1: June 7 - June 14 Justice Part 1**

In this first module, we will focus on the multiple dimensions of moral choice, using Michael Sandel's Justice (and, if you wish, his videos which parallel that book). In Justice, Sandel explores moral dilemmas through the perspectives of some of the most important moral theories. You will have the opportunity to weigh in with your views on some of these controversies, and to begin learning with and from your peers.
In Module 2, we will continue exploring different moral theories through Sandel’s Justice. You'll again have the chance to read from Sandel’s Justice, watch my videos, and then engage in some discussions with your peers. As you read, be sure to reflect on what the text tells us about public policies. Your primary learning goal, for each chapter and every case, is to grasp the complexity of moral debates, to appreciate how differing philosophies shape those debates, and to come to your own conclusions on how you would resolve them.

In this module we will explore the Policy Paradox. What is a paradox? “A statement that seems to contradict itself but may nonetheless be true.” If we try to make a situation more equitable, at the same time we will make it less equitable. When we increase liberty, we might also decrease it. And so forth. Because although we might generally agree that certain values (such as equity, efficiency, welfare, liberty, and justice) are important, differing political actors define those terms differently -- seeking to satisfy one set of demands almost inevitable frustrates other demands.

Although highly controversial, gun policy is much simpler than, say, climate change or pandemic policy (the final policy controversies we examine) because all discussions focus on a single element: guns. In Modules 1-3, we focused primarily on thinking about the kinds of values that inform policy deliberations, ignoring political considerations. In this and the coming modules, we’ll focus more on the political realities.
MODULE 5: July 5 - July 12 Immigration Policy

Immigration policy contains complex moral judgments regarding the consequences of immigration as well as the rights and duties pertaining to it. In this module we will examine some of these complex moral judgments, investigate the politics of immigration policy, and consider the kinds of policies that might reflect these moral concerns and political realities.

MODULE 6: July 12 - July 19 Economic Inequality Policy

Economic inequality is massive in the United States, and in most other countries. The 'rich' own most of the assets; the 'poor' have few. The 'wealthy' receive most of the income, while those in 'poverty' earn little. I put the terms rich, poor, wealthy, and poverty in quotes because they have differing definitions, and various interpretations, for those with diverse political perspectives. To understand these perspectives, we will need to have a solid empirical grounding in the distribution of wealth and income. In this module, we examine economic inequality, consider whether it is a moral problem, and explore the policies and politics that could lead to change.

MODULE 7: July 19 - July 26 Climate Change Policy

Climate change poses an existential threat to humanity. As our climate gets hotter -- and there is no doubt that it is -- it is likely that there will be massive disruptions in societies around the globe. Agricultural productivity will be threatened. Water resources will shift, with some places dramatically drier and others vastly more wet. Some societies will be much harder hit, but every society will be vulnerable. In this module, we examine the moral implications of climate change, assess policies to prevent, remedy, or mitigate it before turning to the exceptionally difficult political environment.
Every module gets more challenging. In this final module, we consider one of the deepest moral stains in American history: racial injustice. To understand the issues we must, of course, understand the evidence. Then we will confront difficult issues regarding responsibility and reformation: what should we do, and how should we do it.

As I write this syllabus (on January 14) our country has been in the grip of civil turmoil -- with a President who has incited a violent insurrection, and whose supporters are many times linked to white nationalism and supremacy. The violence of their approach does not guarantee that all policies that seek to move toward racial justice are warranted. This module will require that we all think carefully and act deliberately.

**INFORMATION ABOUT TOOLS AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

As an online student your "classroom" experience will be very different than a traditional student. As part of your online experience, you can expect to:

1. Communicate with your professor and classmates regularly via email, discussion boards, and other platforms.
2. Navigate the internet using a web browser (note that certain tools may require a specific browser).
3. Use office applications such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs to create documents.
4. Submit assignments in Canvas.
5. Upload and download saved files (including text, audio, and video).
6. Use a microphone to record audio.
7. Use an internal or external camera to record video.

In this course we will use the following tools:
● Zoom enables users to conduct synchronous ("real-time") conferences, presentations, lectures, meetings, office hours and group chats via audio, video, text chat and content sharing.
● Panopto is a cloud-based lecture capture service available to Georgetown University faculty, staff and students.
● PollEverywhere is an interactive polling tool that is used to engage audiences.

**Computer Requirements**

- You will need access to a computer (Windows or Mac) and adequate Internet service to complete this course
- You will also need an internal or external microphone and camera to complete this course. While you can use any browser to access Canvas please note that some tools only work with certain browsers, so if something doesn’t seem to work right you might try another browser. [For privacy/security reasons -- and for supporting the ‘little guy’ -- Brave is my main browser. If something glitches there, I try doing it through Chrome or Safari. Go figure.]

The minimum requirements needed to use Canvas can be found in this Canvas guide.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

**Student Expectations**

This course consists of 8 modules. You are expected to complete all readings, assignments, and activities on time. Participation is essential to your success in this class. Students are expected to actively participate in discussions with your peers, and contribute to the group assignments. It is important to subscribe to the course discussion boards and announcements so that you receive notifications when new messages are posted.

**Time Expectations**
Our online classes are designed to meet the same academic standards as our place-based (face-to-face) courses. You can think of each module equal to the same level of participation, commitment, and academic rigor as a face-to-face class. Students should plan on spending approximately 10-12 hours per week on the work for each online module.

**Communication with Peers**

You will be expected to engage with your peers via the discussion board and other required tools on a regular basis. And, well, however else you want to communicate, so long as you do so respectfully.

**Communication with Professor**

Please feel free to email me with your questions, concerns, and/or to schedule a time to meet over Zoom. When sending emails please remember to follow the guidelines outlined below. If you have general questions about assignments and course materials please post these questions in the General Question Discussion Board, which you can access by clicking here. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other.

In this course we will use Canvas to send email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages; you are responsible for content/updates/notices that I distribute. When submitting messages, please do the following:

- Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content. For example, whenever I write to you my subject line will be something like "Morality: Important Updates on Module 3."
- If you are replying to a note I have sent you, but on a different topic, please change the subject line to indicate the topic you are addressing! This really helps me respond to you when you need it.
- Check the syllabus and announcements to be sure that your question has not already been addressed there.
• Be patient. If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response within 24 hours. Please allow 48 hours for assessment submission feedback.
• Greet & Close. Emails should begin with a “Hello Professor” and end with a “Thanks, Your Name”.
• Proofread (e.g., grammar, spelling and, most importantly, clarity) your message before sending.

Netiquette Guidelines

To promote the highest degree of education possible, we ask each student to respect the opinions and thoughts of other students and be courteous in the way that you choose to express yourself. Students should be respectful and considerate of all opinions.

In order for us to have meaningful discussions, we must learn to genuinely try to understand what others are saying and be open-minded about others’ opinions. If you want to persuade someone to see things differently, it is much more effective to do so in a polite, non-threatening way rather than to do so antagonistically. Everyone has insights to offer based on his/her experiences, and we can all learn from each other. Civility is essential.

Absences

This is likely to be a tough summer for all of us. You will receive the maximum amount of flexibility from me, especially if you talk to me.

Students with Disabilities

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services.
among others. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center, the office that oversees disability support services,(202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability/) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

Accessibility and Inclusion

One of the central tenets of Georgetown’s educational mission is cura personalis, a Latin phrase meaning “care of the whole person.” Georgetown is committed to showing care and concern for each student by creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment that follows universal design principles to meet the needs of its diverse student body.

I am committed to creating a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). If your name or pronoun needs to be corrected, please let me know early in the semester so that I can make the appropriate changes to my records.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at Georgetown University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity. Although most Georgetown students conduct themselves in accordance with these standards, occasionally, there are students who violate the code of conduct. Cheating harms the University community in many ways. For example, honest students are frustrated by the unfairness of cheating that goes
undetected and students who cheat can skew the grading curve in a class, resulting in lower grades for students who worked hard and did their own work.

Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are expected to fully adhere to the policies and procedures of Georgetown’s Honor System and to take the Honor Code Pledge.

**Honor Code Pledge**

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system; to live out a commitment to integrity in all my words and actions; to be honest in every academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together; to live out the ideals of Georgetown University I commit myself to be a person for others in my daily life, respectful of difference and disagreement; To care for this venerable campus and all of those with whom I share it; and to fulfill in all ways the trust placed in me to carry on the Georgetown tradition.

**Plagiarism**

Stealing someone else’s work is a terminal offense in the workplace, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as “the act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another.” More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing, and the need to credit, check out Plagiarism.org.

All submissions must be your original work. Any submission suspected of plagiarism will be immediately referred to the Honor Council for investigation and possible adjudication. All students are expected to follow Georgetown’s honor code unconditionally. If you have not done so, please read the honor code material located online at the Honor Council website.
Georgetown recognizes that COVID-19 has a significant impact on everyone in the Georgetown community. Georgetown offers a variety of support services for students that can be accessed online and has put together this newsletter which aims to provide you with information about well-being resources and virtual meetings that can connect you with mental health professionals on and off campus during this time. Below are some resources available to you:

- **Academic Resource Center**
  202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu

- **Counseling and Psychiatric Services**
  202-687-6985

- **Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA)**
  (202) 687-4798

**Sexual Misconduct**

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator, will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. [Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator.]. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website.
Title IX Pregnancy Modifications and Adjustments
Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. SCS students must complete the Pregnancy Adjustment Request Form and submit it to the SCS Deputy Title IX Coordinator at titleixscs@georgetown.edu. Upon receiving the completed form, the Deputy Title IX Coordinator will schedule a meeting with the student to discuss the requested adjustments and implementation process. More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the Title IX at Georgetown University Website.

Georgetown Library
If you have a question for a librarian you can go to their “Ask Us” page where you will have the option to chat online, send an email, or schedule a Zoom appointment to discuss a research topic, develop a search strategy, or examine resources for projects and papers. Librarians offer an overview of and in-depth assistance with important resources for senior or master’s theses, dissertations, papers and other types of research. This service is available to currently enrolled students who need assistance with Georgetown-assigned projects and papers. Please review the Services & Resources Guide for Online Students for additional information.

eResources
Students enrolled in courses have access to the University Library System’s eResources, including 500+ research databases, 1.5+ million ebooks, and thousands of periodicals and other multimedia files (films, webinars, music, and images). You can access these resources through the Library’s Homepage by using your NetID and password.

Learning Resources
Georgetown offers a host of learning resources to its students. Two that you might find particularly helpful in this course are the Writing Center and Refworks.
• **The Writing Center** offers peer tutoring by trained graduate and undergraduate students who can assist you at any point in the writing process. They help at any stage of your writing process, from brainstorming to revision. Tutors can offer advice on thesis development, use of evidence, organization, flow, sentence structure, grammar, and more. The Writing Center will not proofread or edit papers; rather, they will help to improve your proofreading and editing skills to become a better writer. Appointments can be booked online through their website.

• **Refworks** is an online research management tool that aids in organizing, storing, and presenting citation sources for papers and projects. I strongly encourage you to use RefWorks to compile any resources you collect. [You can find a guide for using RefWorks here.](#)

**Technical Support**

All students have 24/7 access to Canvas technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including live chat and a support hotline at 855-338-2770. Use the 'Help' icon in the lower left of your Canvas window to view all available support and feedback options. If you’re looking for help on a specific feature, check out the [Canvas Student Guide](#).

For technical assistance with other tools used in this course, click on links below:

• [Zoom](#)
• [Panopto](#)
• [Poll Everywhere](#)