

Draft Syllabus

A final version of this syllabus will be available on the first day of class.

University of California - Los Angeles
Department of Political Science

Center for American Politics & Public Policy
UCDC - Washington DC Center

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P.S. 146E - The Politics of Water Policy

Draft Version

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As the title suggests, this course is about one of the trenchant policy problems of our time, policy regarding the availability, uses, and distribution of water, particularly in arid parts of the world. Though the focus of the class will be the American West (west of the 100th meridian), I will bring into discussion—and invite contributions—about water policy dynamics in other parts of the world, such as Africa and Australia, where there exists conflict or potential for conflict over riparian rights.

In the United States, the federal government and the states moved beyond thinking of water as primarily transportation, and started delving into the business of water in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not coincidentally as the American West was being settled and developed. The policies that evolved during this period were designed to pave the way for more complete and rapid development of a part of the country that averaged less than 20 inches of precipitation per year. Water policy mattered in the eastern part of the country, but it was almost entirely concerned with flood control issues in places like the Tennessee Valley.

The period of rapid industrialization in the US (and in other parts of the world) more than a century ago, presented different challenges for both agricultural interests and city dwellers. For one thing, the population of the planet was about one third of what it is today. This was the period when many of the institutions responsible for managing water in the US were created. We live with the consequences of past policies. Habits formed around those institutions and policies are hard to change.

This class will take 3 different cuts at water policy, organized around the frames of politics, institutions, and technology. We will learn about the history and logic behind the major policies in place for most of the past hundred years, what incentives were created under those policies, and how various interests with stakes in maintaining or changing aspects of water policy constraint or create openings for change. We will spend some time discussing some of the more significant actors involved in water policy, such as the Bureau of Reclamation and the US Army Corps of Engineers, that have shaped our current world. And no class on water policy would be complete without a discussion of the technological possibilities for helping us navigate our way out of crisis, through new methods of conservation, water desalinization, waste water recycling, etc. What is the potential for technology in this domain? And along the

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way, we'll discuss different ways of thinking about water, as the world's most important common pooled resource.

Requirements

There will be a brief short-answer midterm exam that will happen about two thirds of the way into the course. It will constitute 20% of your grade. This will take up no more than an hour of class time. 15% of the grade will be based on participation. Given the topic, of concern to all of us in major and minor ways, I anticipate that there will be active discussion and the class will be run as a seminar. The other two components making up the rest of the grading will be group presentations. Depending on the size of the class, it will be divided into a few groups that will undertake some research in some aspect of water policy. I encourage students to strike out and research a topic of their interest. For those students looking for guidance, I'm happy to make suggestions. The presentations will constitute 30% of your grade. Members of each grade will share the same grade, so there is incentive to work collaboratively. The final assignment is related to the group presentations. Each member of a group will take responsibility for a specific part of the presentation. Each of you will expand your contribution into a short paper of approximately 8-10 pages (but no longer than 10 pages). This will comprise the final 35% of your grade.

Readings

There are two required books, plus a selection of readings that I will send out to all students as pdf files each week, to save you money. These readings are indicated with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus. My hope is that students in the class will come from diverse backgrounds. Hence, the required tests are well written, lively, and even entertaining. They are also informative. Whether you are from California or Australia, water matters more than nearly anything else in our lives, though we probably don't think about it much.

Required Texts:

Marc Reisner. *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*. Penguin Books. 1993.
Charles Fishman. *The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water*. Free Press. 2012.

Both books are widely available. *Cadillac Desert* can be purchased new from amazon.com for \$12.66, and used copies are available for as little as \$2. *The Big Thirst* is on amazon.com for \$12.78 (new), and used copies are available from \$6. And, of course, both books come in Kindle versions.

Course Outline and Readings

Week I. **Introduction – The Politics of Water**

Reisner, Intro, Ch. 1.

Week II. **Agencies, Interests, and Water.**

Reisner, Ch. 6.

Arthur Maass. "The King's River Project."*

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Week III. **Water and the Commons**

Garrett Hardin. "The Tragedy of the Commons."*

Elinor Ostrom. "Reflections on the Commons." (Ch 1. From *Governing the Commons*.)*

Week IV. **Property Rights, Riparian Rights. Where Might Doesn't Make Right.**

Reisner. Ch. 4 – The Red Queen.

Juliet Christian-Smith and Lucy Allen, "Legal and Institutional Framework of Water Management." (from *A Twenty-First Century US Water Policy* (2012)).*

Week V. **Property Rights II: The City vs. the Farm.**

Reisner. Ch 8 – An American Nile (II); Ch 10 – Chinatown

Fishman. Ch. 9. – It's Water, Of Course It's Free

Heather Cooley, "Municipal Water Use" (Ch 7 from "A Twenty-First Century...")*

Juliet Christian Smith. "Water and Agriculture." (Ch. 8 from "A Twenty-First Century...")*

Week VI. **The Case of Bottled Water.**

Select chapters from Peter H. Gleick. *Bottled & Sold: The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water.***

Week VII. **Water and Waste – Turning #2 and #3 into #1.**

Fishman. Ch. 5 – The Money in the Pipes; Ch. 6 – The Yuck Factor.

David Sedlak. "The Toilet to Tap Solution." (from *Water 4.0: The Past, Present and Future of the World's Most Vital Resource*. (2014))*

Seth M. Siegel, "Turning Waste Into Water." (Ch. 5 from *Let There Be Water*. 2015)*

Week VIII. **Desalinization – Will the Oceans Save Us?**

Fishman. Ch. 7 – Who Stopped the Rain?

David Sedlak, "Turning to the Sea for Drinking Water." (from *Water 4.0*)*

Seth M. Siegel. "Desalinization: Science, Engineering, and Alchemy." (Ch. 6 from *Let There Be Water*)*

Week IX.. **Water Scarcity as a Way of Life.**

Readings: TBA

First Group Presentations.

Week X. **Final Class.**

Concluding Discussion.

Remainder of Group Presentations