

**Drug Wars and Legalization:  
U.S. Drug Regulation In Perspective  
POLS #####  
Syllabus**

Date, Time  
Location

Instructor: Be Stone  
Email: estone@gradcenter.cuny.edu  
Office Hours: By Appointment

**Course Description and Learning Objectives**

This is an advanced seminar on the key debates, policies, and politics of regulating drug use in the United States. We begin by questioning what constitutes legal vs. illegal “drugs,” and how these substances have been regulated via public policy over time. We identify the role of “drug scares” in driving policy change, as well as how race, class, and gender have shaped perceptions of drug use, drug users, and the impacts of anti-drug law enforcement. In light of the waning “War on Drugs,” we consider new developments in the U.S. approach to regulating drugs, including alternatives to incarceration, harm reduction, and decriminalization. The course concludes with group presentations on policy areas of students’ choice, applying these concepts and approaches to contemporary examples. These group presentations will inform individual research proposals submitted as students’ final project.

Course Objectives:

- Develop an advanced understanding of the core concepts, principles, and politics of drug policymaking.
- Acquire an advanced knowledge of critical analyses of the drug policymaking process.
- Acquire an in-depth knowledge of several U.S. and/or international drug policy areas.
- Improve writing and critical thinking skills through regular writing assignments and class discussions.
- Improve oral communication skills through class discussions and group presentations.
- Develop the ability to conduct academic research and write a research proposal, including the ability to write persuasively and directly, and according to the conventions of academic writing in political science.

**Grading & Class Requirements**

Your grade is based on the five requirements for this course:

**1. Class Participation (10% of class grade)**

- Participation in class discussion is a critical part of the learning process. You are expected to come to every class having read all of the readings, prepared to contribute to class discussion and participate in class activities.
- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes and any assignments from a classmate.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of all the readings and your reading response paper to each class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

## **2. Weekly Reading Responses (20% of class grade)**

- To foster your thinking outside of class and to facilitate discussion in class you are required to submit weekly reading response papers. Response papers should be between 400–500 words in length and must include four parts. See the handout (available on Blackboard) for details.
- Unless otherwise noted, reading responses are due via Blackboard at TIME/DATE before class.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of your response paper to class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

## **3. Discussant (20% of class grade)**

- You will be asked to sign up for **TWO** readings for which you will serve as the discussant. The role of the discussant is to briefly present a reading, offer critique, and raise questions to facilitate discussion. You will be asked to submit the outline/notes of your presentation prior to class. Specific guidelines can be found on Blackboard.

## **4. Group Presentations (20% of class grade)**

- You will be asked to make a group presentation over the last several weeks of class. Each group of 3-5 students will choose a policy topic to research. The group will be responsible for choosing one reputable news source or academic article for the entire class to read before their presentation, in consultation with Prof. Stone. Each group will make a 15–20 minute presentation on the development and current status of that policy, and lead class discussion. Details and rubric for this assignment will be distributed separately.

## **5. Final Paper Proposal (30% of class grade)**

- Informed by research conducted for group presentations, each student will write a research paper proposal (approximately eight pages) as though you are pitching your paper to be selected by a committee or foundation to fund or otherwise support your work. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to begin exploring an issue area that interests you as well as to practice expressing your ideas in a concise and convincing way. A handout will be provided detailing the requirements of the assignment.

### **Classroom Philosophy and Conduct**

Discussing political topics can challenge deeply held or unexamined beliefs. Expect to be challenged in this classroom to think critically about the ideas presented in the readings and common assumptions made about historical and contemporary politics. Given the difficult, sensitive, and political nature of the material to be discussed in this course, students will be expected to conduct themselves in a mature and respectful manner. This requires both thoughtfully voicing your own opinion and respectfully listening and responding to the opinions of others. The ultimate goal of this course is to provide you with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to construct informed opinions on complex political issues.

A Note on Gender Pronouns: Please notify me of your gender pronouns and the name you'd like to be called prior to the start of class using the First Day Survey. I use she or they pronouns and

you may call me Professor Stone or Professor Be. You are expected to respect the pronouns and gender identities of me, your classmates, and the people we discuss in class.

### **Weekly Course Schedule**

*All dates, readings, and assignments are subject to change.*

\*\* Indicates a response paper is due at TIME this day

### **Part I: Introduction to U.S. Drug Policy**

Class Meeting 1: Welcome and introduction

- The Media Bias Chart (in-class viewing).
- PBS News Hour. 2022. “America Addicted.”

Class Meeting 2: Thinking About Drugs and Drug Policy \*\*

- Alison Ritter. 2021. “An Introduction,” in *Drug Policy*.
- Eva Bertram et al. 1996. “The Drug War Syndrome” and “Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs” in *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial*.

Class Meeting 3: A Brief History of U.S. Drug Policy \*\*

- David Musto. 1987. “The Dynamics of Narcotic Control” in *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control*.
- Katharine Neill. 2015. “Tough on Drugs: Law and Order Dominance and the Neglect of Public Health in U.S. Drug Policy.”
- In-class viewing: excerpts from *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*.

Class Meeting 4: A Brief History of U.S. Drug Policy II \*\*

- Craig Reinerman. 1994. “The Social Construction of Drug Scares,” in *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context, and Interaction*.
- Edward Armstrong. 2007. “Moral Panic over Meth”

Class Meeting 5: U.S. Drug Policy Now \*\*

- Jason Cherkis. 2015. “Dying To Be Free” series in *The Huffington Post*.
- Gabriel Lévesque. 2022. “Making Sense of *Pot*: Conceptual Tools for Analyzing Cannabis Policy Discourse.”

### **Part II: Frameworks for Understanding Drug Policy**

Class Meeting 6: Governing the “Addict”

- Caroline Acker. 2001. “Introduction” in *Creating the American Junkie*.
- Be Stone. 2018. “Is There ‘Hope for Every Addicted American?’ The New U.S. War on Drugs.”

Class Meeting 7: Racialization of Drugs and Drug Use(rs) \*\*

- Timothy Hickman. 2000. “Drugs and Race in American Culture: Orientalism in the Turn-of-the-Century Discourse of Narcotic Addiction.”

- Helena Hansen and Samuel Roberts. 2012. “Two Tiers of Biomedicalization: Methadone, Buprenorphine, and the Racial Politics of Addiction Treatment” in *Critical Perspectives on Addiction*.

Class Meeting 8: Policing Gender via Drug Policy \*\*

- Nancy Campbell. 2000. “Drug Policy, Social Reproduction, and Social Justice” in *Using Women: Gender, Drug Policy, and Social Justice*.
- Assata Zerai and Rae Banks. 2002. “Introduction” in *Dehumanizing Discourse, Anti-Drug Law, and Policy in America: A “Crack Mother’s” Nightmare*.

### **Part III: Approaches to Regulating Drugs**

Class Meeting 9: The War on Drugs and Alternatives to Incarceration \*\*

- Michelle Alexander. 2010. “The Color of Justice” in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.
- Rebecca Tiger. 2015. “Drug Courts and the Logic of Coerced Treatment.”

Class Meeting 10: Harm Reduction \*\*

- Gabor Maté. 2008. “Toward an Enlightened Social Policy on Drugs” and “Reducing Harm,” *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*.
- National Harm Reduction Coalition. 2020. “Principles of Harm Reduction.”
- In-class viewing: “What is harm reduction—and how can it help prevent overdose deaths?” *NBC Nightly News*.
- Choose groups for policy presentations and review final research paper proposal.

Class Meeting 11: Decriminalization and Legalization \*\*

- Caitlin Hughes and Alex Stevens. 2010. “What Can We Learn from the Portuguese Decriminalization of Illicit Drugs?”
- Angela Dills et al. 2021. “The Effect of State Marijuana Legalizations: 2021 Update,” The CATO Institute.

### **Part IV: Policy Presentations**

Presentation Group Consultations

- In-class group consultations with Prof. Stone to prepare for group presentations
- **Outline for final paper proposal due**

Class Meeting 12: Policy presentations

- Group 1
- Group 2
- Group 3

Class Meeting 13: Policy presentations

- Group 4
- Group 5
- Group 6

Class Meeting 14: Policy presentations

- Group 7
- Group 8
- Group 9

Class Meeting 15: Policy presentations

- Group 10
- Group 11
- Group 12

**DATE: Final Paper Proposals Due**



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).