



PEPPERDINE
School of Public Policy

New Course Descriptions Spring 2026

CAPSTONE NOTICE:

Students desiring to pursue an individual capstone who did not take MPP 619 must submit a research proposal by December 12 to the preferred capstone professor. See registration website for instructions: [“Capstone Notice”](#) section.

MPP 607.01 Policy Seminar (Capstone): Major Issues in Public Policy (3 units) (see catalog for full description)*

[Robert Kaufman](#)

Capstone – Individual (proposal needed for those that did not take MPP 619)

Hybrid: In-Person Washington, DC, Campus with Zoom for Malibu Students

*Priority given to DC-track students

The Major Issues in Public Policy Capstone course will provide the student the opportunity to generate a rigorous, well-argued research paper, with policy implications. The subjects and methodologies are open. Students will develop a clear, cogent, research design, choosing a topic that is significant but manageable within the confines of a semester. The professor will review at least two drafts of the paper, which each student will have to defend publicly in the final week of class in a point-counterpoint format, paired with a fellow student. In this way, the course hopes to refine the student's capacity to write a worthy policy paper within at least a hailing distance of publishable quality.

MPP 607.02 Policy Seminar (Capstone): Empirical Policy Analysis (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Luisa Blanco](#) and [James Prieger](#)

Capstone – Group or Individual (proposal needed for those that did not take MPP 619)

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This capstone course is designed for the student interested in self- and group-motivated policy research using the tools of econometrics and other data-analytic techniques. Any student intending to perform econometric analysis should take this capstone. Other approaches to the capstone are allowed, such as projects that use qualitative methods, but every project is expected to involve significant analysis of data. Projects are encouraged to be completed in a group setting, although individual projects may also be allowed upon approval. Projects in this course have focused on a wide variety of policy issues, such as the environment, health, migration, labor issues, education, and national security. Students should already have a topic for policy research prior to registration. This course is for capstone projects that intend to use data—of any sort and analyzed by any method—in a serious way. This course would not be appropriate for someone interested in writing an essay with no empirical component or analysis of data.

MPP 607.03 Policy Seminar (Capstone): International Relations/National Security (3 units) (See catalog for full description)

[James Coyle](#)

Capstone – Group (no proposal needed, open to all students regardless of taking MPP 619)

Online Only

This course represents the capstone experience of the master's program here at Pepperdine. The expectation is that students will prepare a detailed, sophisticated regional U.S. national security strategy for the President and the National Security Council. The policy analysis will not only provide a detailed assessment of American foreign policy and the issues surrounding it, but also provide the

client with a detailed implementation analysis for the future. The details of the assignment and process will be provided under the “timeline” section of the syllabus.

MPP 627.01 Seminar in Economic Policies: How to Save Planet/Energy Policy (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Steven Hayward](#)

Economics or American Politics

In-Person, Malibu Campus

Energy should be regarded as the “master resource” that makes possible the development and use of all other resources. This course will equip students with the tools for advanced analysis of energy issues both nationally and globally. The course will emphasize four major aspects of energy: basic technical understanding of different sources and uses of energy; economic analysis of different kinds of energy and energy distribution systems; externalities, tradeoffs and limitations of various energy sources; and major energy policies both current and prospective.

The course will be *data* intensive but not *math* intensive. Students will acquire a strong foundation in primary data sources and energy measurements necessary for analyzing energy issues. The course will include short in-class “clinic” exercises in which individual students or teams will conduct real-time analysis of problem sets.

MPP 627.02 Seminar in Economic Policies: Current Issues in Applied Economics (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Dayea Oh](#)

Economics or State Local Policy

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This is a study of relevant issues in applied economics. The topics covered are based on the issues currently relevant to the political debate in the United States on which economists are doing research. Topics to be covered include education, minimum wage, climate change and environment, discrimination, healthcare, crime and policing, immigration, housing, neighborhoods, and urban economic development, among others. We will also cover statistical issues of endogeneity and the common methods for dealing with it, including randomized control trials, regression discontinuity, instrumental variables, matching, difference-in-difference, and synthetic controls. Familiarity with regression is not necessary, but encouraged for this course

MPP 627.03 Seminar in Economic Policies: Urban Economics (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Dayea Oh](#)

Economics or State and Local Policy

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This course provides theoretical foundations and empirical methods in urban economics, exploring the cause and consequences of regional and metropolitan growth. Topics include urbanization and urban growth, agglomeration economics, housing markets, location decisions of households and firms, transportation, urban labor markets, and the local public sector. We will emphasize the use of microeconomic concepts to interpret urban issues and learn how to apply quantitative tools to analyze policy questions that arise in urban settings.

MPP 643.01 Immigration Policy (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Brian Goebel](#)

American Politics or International Relations

In-Person, Malibu Campus

The key pillars of US immigration policy have not been meaningfully updated or reformed since 1986. During this time, we have witnessed dramatic changes in the US economy and labor markets, migration patterns, the demographics and scale of refugee and asylee applicants, and global terrorism. Although we have corrected many of the national security weaknesses in our visa and travel systems that were exposed before and on 9/11, weaknesses remain, and our commitment to border security fluctuates with each Administration. We have also encountered many challenges in securing cooperation on

migration matters from countries in the Western Hemisphere. This policy paralysis has altered relations between the States and Federal Government, spurred questionable Presidential assertions of unilateral authority, triggered endless litigation, and become an issue in most Federal elections. Unfortunately, political discussions of immigration-related topics have become increasingly coarse and disconnected from facts and data, and reforms seem increasingly unlikely.

How did we get here? This course will cover the history of immigration policy in the US, with particular emphasis on the period from 1965 to the present. It will explore the myriad immigration challenges our country now faces, including the national security and diplomatic challenges created by our current system.

The US experience is hardly unusual. Across the West, nations struggle with the same set of immigration policy challenges. Indeed, many nations in Europe are dealing with increasing xenophobia as well as adversaries that seek to spur irregular migration to Europe to exacerbate political divisions and drain resources. To better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the US system, this course will also examine immigration policies and challenges in several G20 nations.

MPP 647.01 Seminar in Political Issues: Environmental Policy - A Fiscal Conservative Perspective (3 units)

David Schnare (see bio below)

American Politics (default) or International Relations (on request)

In-Person Washington, DC, Campus

This course examines U.S. environmental policy through the lens of fiscal conservatism—emphasizing limited government, market-based mechanisms, cost-benefit analysis, and the protection of property rights. Students will evaluate major environmental statutes, regulatory structures, and policy debates using tools from economics, political science, and public choice theory.

MPP 647.02 Seminar in Political Issues: The Cold War, Past and Present (3 units)

[Elizabeth Spalding](#)

American Politics (default) or International Relations (on request)

In-Person Washington, DC, Campus

This seminar examines the dominating geostrategic, political, economic, and moral conflict of the twentieth century and considers its lessons and relevance for today. Key questions will include: What is the Cold War? What was the U.S. role in this decades-long conflict, and how was the American president a central figure? What were the effects on grand strategy and U.S. foreign policy? Is the United States in a new cold war, and how might the Cold War help us approach this century's global challenges? Readings and discussion will both draw from and bring together American politics and policy, national security, and international relations.

MPP 647.03 Seminar in Political Issues: The Constitutional Presidency (3 units)

[Abbylin Sellers](#)

American Politics or International Relations

In-Person, Malibu Campus

The greatest political struggles have to do with the interpretation of the Constitution.

The unique character of the executive office provides an opportunity to explore important questions related to how the Constitution can both constrain presidential power and allow the president to rise to his full height of power. This course addresses the place and role of the presidency in the American constitutional order, with specific emphasis on executive energy and war powers. How much power does the Constitution provide to a president during wartime? The Constitution does not provide clear answers to this question. Instead, it has created what Edward Corwin wrote, “an invitation to struggle” over the direction of US foreign policy. As a consequence, members of the executive, legislative, and judicial branch have different answers to the question and the answers change based on the nature of the war. The American presidency has evolved significantly since its inception in 1787. The historical evolution of the presidency will be examined beginning with the American founding era, the constitutional convention, and *The Federalist* and Anti-Federalist papers. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the intended nature of Article II and how this has created this “invitation to struggle” and continual tension with other forces in American government, namely the legislature and the

judiciary. The simultaneous cooperative and competitive nature of the separation of powers established by the Constitution will be revealed by studying various international conflicts where the president has chosen to engage and act, court cases, and the executive-congressional relationship. This will seek to address the question of what is the proper role of Congress and the courts in regulating executive power. The executive used to ask the legislature for approval and the legislature used to restrain executive war making. Over time, executives have increasingly claimed their Article II powers allow for unilateral action. In turn, congressional members appeal to the judiciary rather than challenging the president directly. Students will look at executive power in the context of how international crises affect that power, and to what degree the president is able to go outside the bounds of the Constitution.

MPP 665.01 Region Specific Studies: Eastern Europe (3 units)

[Alexei Shevchenko](#)

International Relations

Hybrid (In-Person, Malibu Campus and on Zoom)

This course focuses on major security, political and economic challenges confronting post-communist Eurasia with a particular emphasis on the crucial case study of Russia. The main themes are the problems of democratizing authoritarian regimes, improving the quality of governance and responding to new security threats. In addition, American post-Cold War foreign policy in the region will be examined. The course emphasizes conceptual analysis by drawing on key theoretical debates in international relations and comparative politics.

MPP 668.01 Seminar in International Relations: European Union Economic and Policy Framework (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Marlon Graf](#)

International Relations or Economics

Online Only

In this course, students will receive an in-depth introduction to the political and historical development of the European Union. In the beginning of the Semester, we will review the history of Europe and its expansion to a major world player. We will then proceed to cover the various institutions and roles in the complex European policy system. After the initial focus on European processes and institutions, we will turn our attention to various case studies on key topics on the European and international policy agenda. Specifically, we will spend at least one week discussing the following issues: EU expansion, Brexit and separatist movements, immigration, common agricultural policy, single market and common monetary policy, common defense and foreign policy, as well as data security and privacy. Moreover, there might be room for students to choose additional case studies of interest. Throughout the semester, students will be exposed to a variety of methods and analysis techniques commonly used in policy and will gain further experience in working with both quantitative and qualitative data. The deliverables for this course will include a detailed, step-by-step analysis of a policy problem in an area of each student's choice in the form of a final memo and presentation, as well as several problem sets that will test their knowledge of the methods and concepts covered in class.

MPP 668.02 Seminar in International Relations: Past is Prologue: US International Politics (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Kiron Skinner](#)

International Relations

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This course investigates the proposition that past policy decisions are among the most important factors influencing contemporary US foreign policy. Through readings, documentaries, guest speakers, and class discussion, this course examines key foreign policy decisions and international engagements in the past 70 years to gain clarity about America's role in the world in the 21st century.

MPP 687.01 Seminar in Regional Policies: Planning California (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

M. Nolan Gray (see bio below)

State and Local Policy or American Politics

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This course will survey major California planning institutions, including policies that are common across the US (zoning, subdivision regulations, metropolitan planning organizations) and unique to California (California Environmental Quality Act, Regional Housing Needs Assessment, Sustainable Communities Strategy). This course will cover topics such as housing affordability, transportation planning, and environmental policy, with a special focus on recent reforms. The engaged student will come away understanding how a range of planning policies at the city, county, metropolitan, state, and federal level shape our state. As many of these policies are actively in flux, students will be expected to seriously engage with ongoing debates.

MPP 687.02 Seminar in Regional Policies: Budgeting for Local Government and Nonprofits (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

Bob Bland (see bio below)

State and Local Policy

In-Person, Malibu Campus

This course introduces participants to the theories and practices of budgeting in government and nonprofit organizations, with particular emphasis on city government. The course equips participants with competence in the use of budgeting terminology, the alternative approaches to budget preparation, the linkage of the budget with other aspects of financial management, and the economic repercussions of local budgets.

The course is divided into four topical areas. After an introduction, the first unit considers the budget cycle in local governments with particular emphasis on California. The second section considers the theories of budgeting and their role in allocation, management, and financial control in local governments. The third unit explores extensions of budgeting to improve performance and for capital improvements. The final section addresses the economics of local budgets. A guest speaker(s) familiar with the policy and administrative intricacies of budgeting in local governments may be added depending on their availability.

MPP 687.03 Seminar in Regional Policies: Leading Cities (3 units) (see catalog for full description)

[Rick Cole](#)

State and Local Policy

In-Person, Malibu Campus

We live at an inflection point in human history: the first time a majority of the world's population live in cities and American cities are the epicenter for economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities. Taught by a former mayor and senior local government executive, this course deals with the practical realities of power, politics and policy in cities and regions. Grounded in the history and evolution of how cities work and how they are governed, the focus is on how to make lasting change to create a more equitable and sustainable future for American cities. Emphasizing the role of civic, political and management leadership, the class combines theory and practice, using greater Los Angeles as the primary case study. The course includes varied writing assignments with the goal of imparting useful skills for future leaders.

New Faculty/Lecturer Biographies



Bob Bland

Prior to his retirement from the University of North Texas in August 2024, Bob Bland held the alumni-funded Endowed Professorship in Local Government in the Department of Public Administration. He has authored five books, all published by ICMA including *A Budgeting Guide for Local Government* now in its 4th edition. He writes and lectures on issues in local government finance. In 2023, he received UNT Foundation's Eminent Faculty Award, the university's highest faculty award. He was selected twice for TCMA's Terrell Blodgett Award. He is an Honorary Lifetime member of ICMA, an elected fellow in National Academy of Public Administration, and currently serves on GASB's Advisory Council.

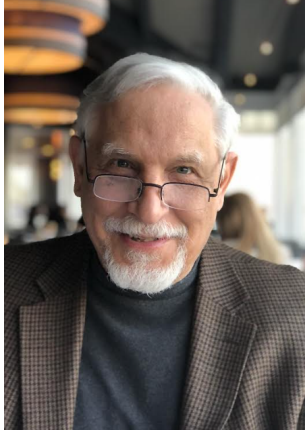
Bland holds a PhD from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, MPA and MBA degrees from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and bachelor's degree in biology from Pepperdine University. An earlier book, *Financing City Government in Texas*, received the "Excellence in Research Award" from the Government Finance Officers Association. On two occasions he conducted USAID-sponsored workshops in Poland on establishing a system of finance for local governments. In 2019, he was the guest of the Chinese government as a visiting scholar at Beijing's Renmin University. In 2020, he was elected Vice Chair of the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management and served as its chair in 2022. He continues to teach periodically for UNT. Next spring, he has been invited to teach in the MPP program at Pepperdine University.



M. Nolan Gray

M. Nolan Gray is the senior director of legislation and research for California YIMBY, an expert in urban land-use regulation, and a professional city planner. He is the author of *Arbitrary Lines: How Zoning Broke the American City and How To Fix It*. Gray previously worked as a planner in New York City, where he worked on the front lines of zoning. Gray is a contributor to Market Urbanism, and a widely published author, with work appearing in outlets such as *The Atlantic*, *Bloomberg Citylab*, and *The Guardian*. He lives in California and is originally from Lexington, Kentucky.

Gray earned a PhD in Urban Planning at University of California, Los Angeles, a Master of City and Regional Planning degree at Rutgers University, and received BAs in philosophy and political science from the University of Kentucky. He was a Research Fellow in the Urbanity Project at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. His research focuses on land-use regulation, housing affordability, and urban design. Nolan was a Mercatus Frédéric Bastiat Fellow during the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2020-2021 academic years and a Mercatus Visiting Dissertation Fellow during the 2021-2022 academic year.



David Schnare

David Schnare is an attorney, scientist, professor and author/editor of books, chapters and articles on environmental management, policy, and law. He was the main drafter of the 2016 Trump Transition Plan for the Environmental Protection Agency, was Counsel to the Senior White House Advisor at USEPA and was slated to be Assistant Deputy Administrator at EPA with the primary role of protecting the new administration from entrenched (deep state) personnel and policies. His most recent book (*Road of the Steward*, in press) addresses how to return to traditional environmental management while demoting the overreliance on climate change policies. During his 37-year federal career at United States Environmental Protection (USEPA), Schnare initiated use of benefit-cost analysis as the organizing principle for regulatory development while serving as a science and management professional, air enforcement counsel and policy director of the drinking water program.

Schnare previously served as a Fellow of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy and as a member of the Fairfax County Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance Exception Review Committee and the County's Environmental Quality Advisory Committee. He is emeritus with two 501(c)(3) non-profit law and policy centers, the Free-Market Environmental Law Clinic (Member-Manager) and the Energy Environment Legal Institute (Emeritus Board Member). Formerly the nation's Chief Regulatory Analyst for small business, (Small Business Office of Advocacy), Schnare has both research science and legal experience, has been on Congressional Staff, served as a trial lawyer at the Department of Justice and in the Office of the Virginia Attorney General, and as a scientist and an enforcement counsel at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He is a member of the Bars of the United States Supreme Court, U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Second, Fourth and Tenth Circuits, the Supreme Court of Virginia and the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia, as well as multiple U.S. District Courts and state courts (pro hac vice). He is an Administrative Law specialist with a federal, state and local practice and active in academic research and professional education, he has regulatory experience with EPA, OSHA, IRS, NMFS, NOAA, FDA, HRSA, ATSDR, CDC, FAA, Bu. Rec., BLM, MMS, FWS, and the Corps of Engineers. He is an Adjunct Professor of Law at Antonin Scalia School of Law at George Mason University.

All other faculty bios available at: <http://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/academics/faculty/>.