PEPPERDINE
School of Public Policy

New Course Descriptions
Spring 2027

CAPSTONE NOTICE:

Students desiring to pursue an individual capstone who did NOT take MPP 619 must submit a research proposal by December 11 to the preferred capstone professor for approval*. 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 (on space available basis)
*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)
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, American Politics, or State and Local Policy
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: 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 627.03 Seminar in Economic Policies: Global Health Economics
Marlon Graf
Economics or International Relations
Online Only
Advocates of single payer health care systems across the U.S. frequently point to other countries such as Canada and various European countries to underline their arguments. Similarly, anti-smoking advocates in Asian countries applaud regulation and control policies applied in Western countries while pushing for their leaders to take comparable measures to curb smoking and tobacco consumption. Additionally, European governments look to the rise of precision medicine and digital, data-driven health in the U.S., wondering whether this new kind of innovation will be feasible under stringent European data protection laws and practices. Lastly, most countries around the world have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with lockdown and social distancing measures to limit the spread of the virus. Critics of this approach point to countries like Sweden that have taken a different approach focused on achieving herd immunity while maintaining economic activity. These and many other examples show that health policy is no longer designed and implemented in isolation. This course will look at various health policy issues through a cross-country lens and will aim to distill lessons learned and best practice approaches that can be shared internationally, while accounting for country-specific dynamics and challenges.

MPP 647.01 Seminar in Political Issues: Experts, Knowledge, and the Problem of Public Policy (3 units)
Steven Hayward
American Politics
In-Person, Malibu Campus
Expert knowledge is the fuel that drives the dynamism of the modern world, which is why we value it so greatly. But expertise has an uneasy status in a democratic society, because the two things—expertise and democracy—are in fundamental tension with one another. Expertise locates authority in specialized knowledge and professional certification, based on extensive education and exposure to rigorous standards of evidence operating in highly exclusive self-correcting communities of peer review. Democracy, on the other hand, is a principle that affirms the fundamental competence of every man or woman, simply as a function of their status as human beings and citizens, irrespective of education, social class, or material wealth. The two ideas are in opposition. How, then, are we to think about the relative claims of experts and democratic citizens, and the use of expert knowledge in the courtroom, in the family, in the making of social policy, in the life of the community? Should scientists and specialists enjoy a privileged status, relative to the political system? Or does democracy demand that expert knowledge always be subordinated to the public will? These are the kinds of questions that animate this course.

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. Understanding the Modern University and Higher Education (3 units)
Michael Shires
American Politics *(default)* ***or International Relations*** *(on request)*
In-Person Washington, DC, Campus
This course will explore the history and role of higher education, its mechanics today, and how technology, social media, and artificial (or super) intelligence have and continue to redefine and reshape it. It will explore the public interest and investment in higher education, explore how the history of different traditions has shaped the modern university. The course will use contemporary policy debates to unpack the tensions and tradeoffs that define the modern campus. Topics will include a survey of the public interests in higher education, the range of international models that nations and states use to pursue those interests, and how students and demographics interact with those models. Also, the role of government and markets in shaping the sector, the cost structure and economics of postsecondary systems, the impacts of postsecondary education on both students and the economy, and the ways self-regulation and conflicting actor incentives confound the system will be explored. By the end of the course, students will understand the why and how of university structure and operations, and the moral quandaries that underlie today's shifting political debates. The course's scope satisfies the requirements of both the International Relations and National Security and American Policy and Politics specializations.

MPP 647.04 Seminar in Political Issues: Case Studies in Modern Leadership (3 units)
Dan Schnur
American Politics or State and Local Policy
In-Person, Malibu Campus
This course will explore the principles that are essential to successful leadership including the skills and approaches necessary to achieve success in the political, business, military, media, diplomatic, and athletic arenas. Students will explore a series of case studies of six modern leaders from the 20th and 21st centuries combined with an emphasis on six stages of the process of leadership development and application. Students will read biographies of each of the six leaders and participate in both lecture and discussion about those leaders' biographies, challenges, and accomplishments. The six stages of leadership examined throughout the semester are: 1) Getting Started/Early Influences, 2) Developing a System/Putting a Plan in Place, 3) Challenges of Leadership, 4) Building Support/Motivating Followers, 5) Adjusting to New Circumstances, and 6) Measuring Leadership. The course will be conducted in a participatory rather than traditional classroom atmosphere. While the first half of class is devoted to traditional lecture on the pre-assigned reading, students are expected to play an active and involved role in the form of questions, comments, or analysis on the topic at hand. The second half of each class requires even more involvement: it is devoted to a class discussion of the leader in which the students will be asked to prepare questions and analysis of the assigned reading and related materials. Small groups, presentations, and daily news developments will be all utilized.

MPP 668.01 Seminar in Int'l Relations: Sport, Policy, and the Public Good (3 units)
Luke Salas (see biography below)
American Politics or International Relations
Online (primary) & In Person (two or three sessions)
The course explores sport's ability to empower individuals, strengthen communities, create opportunity, and connect people across cultural, political, and national boundaries. Students will examine how governments, universities, businesses, sports organizations, and nonprofit institutions use sport to advance broader social, economic, and diplomatic objectives. A central focus is the practical application of sport as an instrument of public policy and international engagement. Through real-world case studies, discussions, and guest speakers from government, diplomacy, sport, and business, students will explore what makes these initiatives successful, where they fall short, and how their impact can be measured. The course will culminate in an applied policy project, anticipated to be developed in partnership with the Croatian Embassy in Washington, D.C., in which students will design and present a sports diplomacy initiative involving Croatia and the United States.

MPP 668.02 Seminar in Int'l Relations: Military and Public Leadership from the Greeks to the Twenty-First Century (3 units)
Barry Strauss
International Relations
Online (primary) & In Person (two or three sessions)
This course offers a historical survey of great commanders and public leaders. After a running start in the ancient world, the course focuses on the West, primarily the United States, from 1776 to the present. Topics include classical leadership, command in war; presidents, prime ministers, and dictators; rhetoric and communication, how leaders manage social change, twenty-first century transformations and challenges. Readings will include original sources as well as works by historians, soldiers, and social scientists.

MPP 668.03 Seminar in International Relations: America's Role in the World: The Enduring Debate (3 units) (see catalog for full description)
Kiron Skinner
International Relations
In-Person, Malibu Campus
Starting with Washington's Farewell Address, US presidents have carved out approaches to engaging with the world that are rooted in one or another philosophical tradition found in writings, speeches, political organizing, and legislation by American thinkers, politicians, and activists. Taken together this prodigious body of work has created a distinctive American way of thinking about international relations. An enduring debate has emerged: America must save the world versus America must save itself. What is quite remarkable is that the debate never stops. What is consistent is that each new generation refines and sharpens the questions at hand. What is reassuring is that for all of its faults and missteps at home and abroad, Americans never stop trying to shape the world and forge a common destiny for all. We will join that project in this course.

MPP 687.01 Seminar in Regional Policies: Ending Homelessness: The Public Policy Challenge of our Time (3 units)
Rick Cole
State and Local Policy
In-Person, Malibu Campus
"Homelessness" is the product of intersecting failures, including a broken housing market; inadequate mental health and addiction treatment services; mismatch between wages and housing costs; and reliance on law enforcement to address social breakdowns. This course will analyze the causes of homelessness; the competing political and ideological narratives around its nature and cure; as well as promising policy approaches that actually work. Using Los Angeles as the primary case study, adjunct professor Rick Cole draws on his first-hand experience as a former mayor and city manager along with guest speakers from government, law, nonprofits and those with lived experience of being unhoused.

MPP 687.02 Seminar in Regional Policies: Public Trust and Professional Leadership (3 units)
Peter Pirnejad
American Politics or State and Local Policy
In-Person, Malibu Campus
How do public leaders earn trust, sustain it through difficult decisions, and rebuild it when relationships or institutions fail? This graduate course bridges academic scholarship and professional practice to examine trust as a foundation of effective leadership and democratic governance. Students explore the reciprocal relationships among communities, elected officials, and public servants, examining how competence, integrity, fairness, transparency, and responsiveness shape institutional trustworthiness. Through research, case studies, guided discussion, and applied exercises, students investigate the tensions between professional expertise and lived experience, the value of healthy skepticism, and the leadership practices that support meaningful public engagement. Particular attention is given to listening, acknowledging differing perspectives, navigating conflict, and repairing trust after a breach. Students develop practical approaches to diagnosing trust problems, designing more trustworthy decision processes, and assessing whether their efforts strengthen relationships and institutional credibility. Throughout the course, the central question is how leaders can make public institutions more deserving of the trust they seek.

New Faculty/Lecturer Biographies



Nathan Peterson

Nathan Peterson is a graduate of Pepperdine's School of Public Policy where he specialized in American Policy and Politics. Previously, he attended the United States Military Academy where he received a BS in Military History before commissioning in the US Army as an Infantry Officer. Peterson, long being a peacemaker at heart, chose to pursue that more formally by obtaining his Master in Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution. He then led the Conflict Resolution Institute in Ventura County as the Executive Director prior to pursuing his Master of Public Policy. Peterson developed a micro-certificate curriculum in "Conflict Resolution in Local Government: Turning Challenges into Opportunities" for the Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership teaching government leaders how to manage disagreements constructively, foster trust, and create a more productive workplace and community environment. He joined Pepperdine as the Assistant Director for Student Services for the Master of Middle Eastern Policy Studies program in Washington, DC, where he focuses on recruiting and program relations.

Peterson's desire is to see conflict done in a healthy way at all levels of government, allowing for peace to increase in our nation. He believes this will look like more effective and balanced policy making with practical, bipartisan solutions identified and implemented for the most difficult problems facing our cities, states and nation.



Luke Salas

Luke Salas is an international sports executive, entrepreneur, and public policy practitioner whose work spans sports diplomacy, international development, and private enterprise. He is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Baseball for Good, a nonprofit organization that uses baseball to create opportunities for young people, strengthen communities, and build relationships across borders. He also serves as Head Coach and Manager of the Croatian National Baseball Team.

A former professional baseball player in the Texas Rangers organization, Salas made history as the first foreign player to compete professionally in Cuba since 1962. His experience in international baseball helped shape his commitment to using sport as a means of connecting people across political, cultural, and national boundaries.

Through Baseball for Good, Salas has led initiatives across Central and Eastern Europe, including youth development programs in Ukraine and partnerships with national baseball federations,

professional sports organizations, and diplomatic institutions. His work has brought together stakeholders from government, sport, and the private sector to expand opportunities for young athletes and advance international cooperation.

Outside of sport, Salas has held executive and advisory positions in technology, cybersecurity, healthcare, and venture capital, bringing extensive experience in entrepreneurship, organizational leadership, and international business.

Salas earned his Master of Public Policy from Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy along with his Bachelors from Pepperdine University's Seaver College.



Barry Strauss

Barry Strauss is a military and naval historian with a focus on ancient Greece and Rome and their lessons for today. “No one presents the military history of the ancient world with greater insight and panache than Strauss,” wrote *Publishers Weekly*. His books have been translated into twenty languages and include several bestsellers. His *The Battle of Salamis* (2004), *Masters of Command* (2012), *Ten Caesars* (2019), and *The War that Made the Roman Empire* (2022), all appeared on best books of the year lists. His latest book, *Jews vs. Rome: Two Centuries of Rebellion Against the World’s Mightiest Empire*, was published by Simon & Schuster in August 2025. He is Series Editor of Princeton’s *Turning Points in Ancient History*. He also served as Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School. He holds a Ph.D. from Yale and a B.A. from Cornell.

Strauss is a winner of the 2025 Bradley Prize, honoring his lifelong dedication to the study and teaching of Western civilization and classical and military history. In recognition of his scholarship, Strauss was elected to membership of the American Academy of Sciences and Letters. He received Italy's Lucio Colletti Journalism Prize for Literature in 2015 and was named an Honorary Citizen of Salamis, Greece in 2012. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Korea Foundation, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and the American Academy in Rome.