Colloquium on Tax Policy and Public Finance
Spring 2018
Professors Batchelder and Shaviro
LAW-LW.10787.001

Syllabus

Class: Tuesdays, 9:00-10:50 in FH 218 and 4:00-5:50 in VH 208
Office Hours: Batchelder: Wednesdays, 10:00-12:00, or by appointment in VH 324
Shaviro: Thursdays, 10-12:00, or by appointment in VH 314-B
Email: lily.batchelder@nyu.edu and daniel.shaviro@nyu.edu
Phone: (212) 992-8156 (Batchelder) and 212-998-6187 (Shaviro)
Assistant: Kellene O’Hara, kellene.ohara@nyu.edu, 212-998-6183, VH 314

The Colloquium offers students the opportunity to pursue tax policy and theory, along with related issues of public economics, at an advanced level. Its primary focus is papers and works-in-progress by scholars from around the country, including NYU faculty. Each week the morning seminar examines the paper scheduled for presentation in the afternoon, including background issues that may help in understanding it. Students then attend the afternoon colloquium, at which the paper is discussed in depth at a public session attended by the author, other NYU faculty, and other interested academics and practitioners. Further details concerning the morning seminar class, the afternoon colloquium session, and course requirements follow.

MORNING SEMINAR CLASS

Starting with the second class, on January 23, each class will have either one or two student discussion leaders who will help to organize the discussion. Each student will be a discussion leader once during the semester. We will circulate a sign-up sheet at the first class, or feel free to email us in advance to request a particular day.

Typically the only assigned readings are the weekly papers, which we will send to all students in the class via NYU Classes at least a week in advance, and which will also be available at http://www.law.nyu.edu/academics/colloquia/taxpolicy. However, we will occasionally assign additional background readings, which we will discuss in the morning seminar. (Student discussion leaders will not be responsible for leading the discussion on these additional background readings.) We have posted some of these additional assigned readings on NYU Classes.

While no other readings are required, students who want suggestions for further background reading to help them understand particular papers can consult either of us, or look for articles cited in the assigned reading. Cited articles often can be found promptly, at least in their posted draft form, through a simple Google search. They are also typically available electronically through the NYU library catalog (http://julius.law.nyu.edu/).
AFTERNOON COLLOQUIUM SESSION

At the afternoon sessions, whichever of us is the week’s lead discussant will describe two or three basic subjects to organize the discussion. We start by offering comments just on the first subject, to which the author responds, and we then open the discussion to the audience (keeping a queue but generally asking that the comments be on-topic). When the time is right, we move on to the second subject. We strongly encourage you to participate in the afternoon session, and expect each student to ask at least three questions in the session over the course of the semester.

We have a no-laptop rule for the afternoon session, although laptops are allowed in the morning seminar.

Each afternoon session is followed by a small-group dinner, generally with no more than eight attendees (including the speaker), at a variety of nearby restaurants. We hope that you will sign up for dinners if your schedule permits. This is best done by contacting Ms. O’Hara and/or Professor Shaviro in advance. But we do solicit last-minute volunteers if there are still open slots at the start of an afternoon session.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

(a) Attendance

Attendance at both the AM and the PM sessions is required. If you cannot make a particular session, you should have a good reason and should let Professors Batchelder and Shaviro know about it before class. We also ask that you try to be on time!

(b) Comment Papers

There is no final exam. Course grades are principally based on five comment papers of about 6 to 8 pages each (if double-spaced), critiquing the reading assignment for a given week of your choosing. In addition, participation in the morning and afternoon classes, including as a discussion leader in one morning class, will marginally influence final grades.

The above page lengths are merely intended as a rough guide to indicate the expected scope of the commentary. Shorter papers that do the job are welcomed, and longer papers should justify their extra content. You can pick any five weeks that you like to submit these papers. It is entirely up to you whether, for the week when you are a discussion leader, you also submit a comment paper.

Your comment papers should offer a critique or response of some kind, and you have considerable flexibility in deciding how to respond to a given paper. Please do not include general summaries or overviews of the papers to which you respond. The aim is to engage with the arguments or analysis in the paper that you are critiquing, rather than
simply to confirm that you have read it. You may focus on just one aspect of the paper, or several arguments. You may also offer suggestions for how to extend the analysis.

We will email you responses to your comments, including a grade, before the following week’s class. Sample response papers from past years are posted on our NYU Classes website, to give you an idea of potential formats and our expectations.

On the five occasions when you submit a comment paper, it is due at the beginning of the Tuesday morning class. Papers should be e-mailed to daniel.shaviro@nyu.edu and lily.batchelder@nyu.edu.

(c) Leading the Discussion at One Morning Session

As noted above, from Week 2 on, each student will be a lead discussant at one morning class, possibly with another student. A sign-up sheet will be available at the first class or feel free to email us in advance to request a particular day.

Discussion leaders should meet or otherwise discuss the AM plan with us several days in advance, if possible. You should then send us a proposed outline at least one day before the class (i.e., by 9am Monday morning), and we will offer feedback. While these outlines will not be explicitly graded, your final course grade may be slightly raised if you do a very good job (or if you generally make good contributions in the morning and afternoon sessions), or slightly lowered if you fail to make a serious effort.

Your outline for the discussion should start with a short (two to five sentence) summary of what you see as the question posed by the paper and its thesis. It should then include one to three pages of bullet points, divided into two to four topics. These bullet points should focus on substantive questions and concerns, and ways the author could present their argument more persuasively. They should not cover typos and nits, although the author may appreciate knowing about such issues separately.

(d) Discussion Questions When You Are Not Presenting or Submitting a Comment Paper

Starting in Week 2, on any occasion when you are neither submitting a comment paper nor serving as an AM discussion leader, please instead submit a question that you would like to hear the author address during the afternoon session. Sample questions from past years are available on our NYU Classes website.

While we will look at the questions and take them under advisement for our own use, we also encourage you to ask them yourselves if they are not otherwise being raised. The questions are due at the start of the AM class, and should either be e-mailed to us or handed in at the start of the AM class, although we greatly prefer the former. While they will not be explicitly graded, your final course grade may be slightly raised if you ask very good questions, or lowered if you fail to submit questions that reflect serious effort. By the start of the PM class if possible, we will send the entire class a list of all the questions submitted, by name. (This list will not be shared outside the class, however.)
(e) Asking Questions in the Afternoon Session

We strongly encourage you to participate in the afternoon session as much as you are comfortable. We expect each student to ask at least three questions during the afternoon session over the course of the semester, but more regular participation would also be welcomed.

OFFICE HOURS

Our office hours are listed above. For Professor Batchelder, please sign up in advance, either using the sign-up sheet on her door or by contacting her assistant, Cory Conley, who will sign you up (cory.conley@nyu.edu, 212-998-6174, VH 500). For Professor Shaviro, email is best (daniel.shaviro@nyu.edu, or through Kellene O’Hara at kellene.ohara@nyu.edu). We each encourage you to come by at least once during the semester.

We are happy to talk to you about the course, law school, career choices, or anything else.

ACCOMODATIONS

We are committed to making our classroom a safe and accessible space for all members of our community. If you need a reasonable accommodation for this course, the Law School provides an array of services for students. To respect student privacy, faculty members are asked not to entertain those requests individually. Instead, please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, which is located at 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212) 998-4980, or the Office of Academic Services at (212) 998-6020. Services are also available for students who encounter unexpected trauma (e.g., health issues of oneself or a loved one). The Office of Student Affairs addresses needs that arise in those circumstances through Dean Jason Belk, whose office is on the 4th floor of Furman Hall. The NYU Wellness Exchange at (212) 443-9999 also staffs a 24 hour crisis hotline.