

Pb Af 513C: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

Making policy is, for many, the most exciting role in public service (or probably in any organizational setting). Managers aspire to this role after years of service. Policy analysts often get a chance to play an important part in policymaking much earlier in their careers. In addition to being exciting, this is excellent training for moving into senior management later because it forces one to think about “big” issues of purposes and how to achieve them, and, usually, about an organization’s external environment. Policy analysis also sharpens the capacity for rigorous thinking. Most important, public policy analysis is about the collective, societal decisions that shape the quality of all our lives. What could be more exciting?

The purpose of this course is to provide a conceptual framework and some practical experience in integrating the MPA core course work in economics, quantitative methods, organizations and management, politics, and budgeting so that you learn to analyze public policy options and decisions in a practical way. We will read about, discuss, and work through the processes of identifying and defining policy problems and policy objectives, assessing stakeholders and their stakes, devising alternative policy actions to address problems, projecting and assessing the impacts of these actions, and attending to political, organizational, and democratic process considerations regarding authoritative adoption and successful implementation. A major effort will be made to impart craft as well as conceptual knowledge. Thus, an important part of the course work will involve student execution (in small teams) of an independent policy analysis encompassing all the above elements and designed to be useful to an identified real-world *client* (user or user group whether simulated or real). To further impart concreteness to the course, we will examine together a number of cases designed to pose real policy problems where policy analysis played or could play a useful role.

Policy analysis requires several distinct sets of skills: the ability to frame a problem in a way amenable to analysis, technical understanding of data and analytical tools and their relevance, a comprehension of the analytics of resource allocation, understanding of politics and process norms within and outside the organization with which the analyst is working, and the ability to produce and present a useful analysis for one’s audience(s). The course will cover all these, but will give particular attention to the first and last elements mentioned.

Texts and Readings:

1. David L. Weimer and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, 4th edition. (Pearson-Prentice-Hall, 2004). **(Required, available at University Bookstore.)**
2. Eugene Bardach, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, 2nd edition. (CQ Press, 2005.) **(Required, available at University Bookstore.)**
3. John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2nd edition. (Harper Collins, 1994). **(On reserve at Odegaard Library.) Note: Only chapters 4, 5, and 8 from this book will be assigned. Chapter 8 will be made available electronically.**

4. Three cases from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, will be used in class. These can be accessed at: <http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu/index.asp>. A small fee is charged.
5. Other readings will be made available electronically via the class web site (<http://courses.washington.edu/pbaf513/>).

The texts and supplemental readings provide a good summary of the policy process (esp. Kingdon), and the theory, methods and craft of policy analysis (esp. Weimer and Vining, and Bardach). It is important to keep up with the reading assignments if you are to make sense of the classes and be able to complete the assignments competently.

Course Requirements:

Team project: A critical element of the course is the team policy analysis project. Policy analysis is a practical craft, the best way to learn about it is to try it as you are learning. Thus, students will choose as soon as practicable, with my help if need be, a policy analysis project topic as the basis for three written memos and an in-class oral briefing over the course of the term. You are to work in teams of two on your projects and submit joint memos, because team efforts are the way policy analysis is typically carried out in organizations. After all, two heads *are* usually better than one. Several classes will be devoted to workshops on aspects of the project work and, at the end of the term, to formal presentations of results.

Case analyses: Each student will also submit written analyses of two of the cases assigned to the class (your choice except that *Mayor Schell's Zero Homeless Families Pledge* is excluded.) Your written analysis must be turned in before class on the date the case will be discussed. Questions to help focus your analysis of the cases will be made available on the website. Everyone is to be prepared for class discussion of each case whether or not they have written it up.

Readings and class preparation: There is also plenty of other material to read for the course in preparation for classes. Clearly, preparation for all types of classes ("regular," case-based, and project workshops) and active participation are important for the course to be successful. Also, the readings and classes are designed to be complementary to your efforts on the project and case analyses. Thus, evident preparation and class participation will be rewarded in individual course grades.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

1. Policy analysis memos based on cases of student's choice (individual)- **10 + 15 = 25%**
2. Policy Analysis Project Memo #1 (project team): Defining the Policy Problem- **10%**
(**Due October 25**, 3-4 pages)
3. Policy Project Memo #2 (project team): Policy Objectives, Criteria and Options- **10%**

(Due November 13; 6-8 pages, incorporating refinement of problem definition)

4. Team Oral Briefing on policy analysis project- **20%**
(In class December 4 or 6)
5. Policy Analysis Final Report (Project Memo #3 by project team)- **25%**
(Due Friday, December 7; 12-15 pages + appendices, data displays, etc.)
6. Class contributions (individual)- **10%**.

Note: Late penalties will be assessed for overdue papers unless prior arrangements have been made (with a very good reason) well in advance!

Project Topics and Assignments (Please refer to this in preparing the project assignments):

A few pointers on choosing a policy analysis project topic:

- Pick a relatively narrow topic (students are prone to selecting topics that are too large to analyze well in one quarter);
- Pick a topic that interests you (this helps with motivation);
- Consider using a work-related topic from your job, internship or volunteer work; the fact that someone out there really cares about the topic may also spur motivation and should help you in gaining access to information and focusing on a client (user).
- Get started early, long before the first project memo is due, so that you can contact potential users and resources, size up the project realistically, and begin developing a working relationship with your teammate.

You are encouraged to find a teammate with similar interests on your own and to begin this process right away (the class e-mail list should be a helpful device).

I will spend a bit of class time on matching people if I have to but would rather not. Experience shows that most second year students have interests and contacts that lead rather readily to appropriate topics, or at least can find a teammate who does. For those unable to find a topic, the Evans School's Public Service Clinics web site may be a helpful source of ideas. (Indeed, you should think about how this class assignment can help you get started on your degree project.) I can also provide customized suggestions upon request regarding finding topics.

Memos: You should address your project memos to a specific client (real or imaginary) and, ideally, will actually share your work with that person or group. (You will normally need to provide some explanatory background in a preface or footnotes in your memos for readers like me who will not be aware of everything the client would be.) This targeting will help a lot in focusing your work and simulates the real world of most policy analysts. Note that the first two memos are interim, partial efforts rather than complete analyses. In the first project memo you will present an initial description and *definition* of the problem you will be analyzing and the *stakeholders* involved. In the second project memo, in addition to including a refined version of your problem definition, you will set out and explain the *policy objectives and criteria for choice* you have established and will describe the *policy options* to be considered for addressing the problem. You

will not actually evaluate the options in this memo, however. I will read both these memos closely and will give you ample feedback to guide your subsequent work.

The final written report (project paper #3) should incorporate the basic information from the earlier memos and reflect feedback you have received on them. Assume that your client has read your earlier memos, but still wants everything pulled together in one paper. Also, assume the memo will be shared with a larger audience (e.g., the agency head, budget director, chief executive of the government, perhaps legislators, outside participants, etc.), so it must be intelligible to them and not too narrowly focused. Then, you should evaluate the policy options in light of the criteria you have established and the best information and relevant theory you can marshal about the likely effects of each option. **Remember that this is the heart of the analysis and needs to be substantive and well supported by reasoning and evidence**. You should also highlight the important differences in the effects of the options (i.e., the *tradeoffs* among them). Be sure to integrate considerations of *political feasibility and implementation issues*. It makes little sense to recommend an impractical alternative and does not make you look very smart. The paper should conclude with a recommendation for the client's consideration, i.e., you should offer a recommended choice among your policy alternatives. Even though this is not the style in all settings, it provides a good discipline for you to actually have to put yourself in the decisionmaker's shoes. You should also provide an outline of an adoption and implementation strategy for your recommended alternative. Your final report should include a short (1-2 page) **Executive Summary** covering the essential elements of your problem definition, analytic methodology, key findings and conclusions, and your recommendations. This is all some decisionmakers will read although staff and critics will look closely at the rest (as will I)!

Oral briefing: Due to time constraints, the oral presentation of your analysis (often called a *briefing*) will be **strictly** limited to a frustratingly few minutes with a few of these for questions from the audience, including me and any guests you or I may invite. (I'll tell you the exact time allocations once I see how many presentations there will be.) The time may be a bit shorter than you would have in a real situation but not as much so as you might think. Again, it provides good discipline for you in organizing your presentation to focus on the heart of the matter—the basis for making a policy choice. **Each member of the analysis team should participate approximately equally in the delivery of the briefing**. Normally, all team members receive the same grade on the briefing although I reserve the right to differentially reward unusually strong or weak performances.

Basically, the presentation should briefly summarize the problem, the policy objectives and criteria for choice, the options you considered, *how* you assessed their likely impacts (essentials of methodology, evidence, etc.), the results of your assessment, the major tradeoffs among the options, and your recommendation to the client. Because of the limited time, you will have to choose carefully what to present and what to leave out **and practice to ensure smooth delivery**. The presentation should include slides or other visuals so that the audience can follow you. Types of visuals that are often particularly helpful are a brief outline of the presentation as a “road map” for the audience, charts or graphs depicting the nature and extent of the problem under study, a diagrammatic **summary** (not overly detailed) of your evaluation of the policy options, and a pithy depiction of your recommendations and their analytic basis. Of course, it is up to you to decide what is most appropriate based upon the nature of the problem and your analysis.

University of Washington
Evans School of Public Affairs
Pb Aff 513C; Tu/Th 12:30-1:50 PM
Smith 211

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Fall 2007; Phone: 543-0743
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Each project team is to prepare and distribute at least 24 hours prior to their briefing a short (1-2 paragraph) background summary of their problem and client, as well as their presentation outline.

This can be distributed electronically. This material in total should not exceed both sides of a single sheet of paper. The rest of us will read this as preparation for the class where the briefings are done and it should reduce the amount of presentation time you have to spend on explaining the problem and basic background. Then I can play the role of the client and the class that of other interested parties in each presentation. You may also invite real stakeholders to witness your presentation and offer comments.

Office hours

I will normally hold an office hour from 2-3 PM on class days but am glad to make an appointment to meet with you at another time if need be.

Course Outline and Readings:

- Th Sept 27** **Introduction to the course; what is policy analysis? (Part 1)**
- Reading (in-class handout):**
"A Review of Gun Buy-Back Program," *Seattle P-I*, May 28, 1993.
- Tu Oct 2** **What is policy analysis? (Part 2)**
**The policymaking process and the place of policy analysis;
ethical dilemmas in policy analysis.**
- Reading:**
1. Bardach (text), "Introduction" (pp. xiii-xviii).
2. Weimer and Vining (text), chapters 2 & 3.
- Recommended:**
John Kingdon, "Processes: Origins, Rationality, Incrementalism, and
Garbage Cans." Ch. 4 in his *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*.
(Book is on reserve at Odegaard Library.)
- Th Oct 4** **NO CLASS or office hour on this date.** Use the time to find a partner for
team project assignment and get ahead on reading for next week,
which is substantial.
- Tu Oct 9** **How to do it: policy analysis in the real world**
- Guest: Rep. Jim McIntire, MPP, Ph.D. Member of the Washington
State House of Representatives.**
- Reading:**
1. Bardach, Appendix A (pp. 107-121), "Specimen of a Real-World Policy
Analysis."
2. W&V, ch. 1, "The Canadian Salmon Fishery."
- Recommended:**
H. Broekemeier and J. Thacker, "Toward a Healthier School Food
Environment: A Policy Analysis." Evans School Pb Af 513 paper,
December 2006. Access at class website.
- Th Oct 11** **Problem diagnosis: theoretical concepts**
- Reading:**
W&V, chapters 5, 7, & 8. On market and government failure and
distributional and other policy purposes.
- Recommended:**
W&V, chapters 4, 6, & 9. (Note: chapter 4 is a useful review of the basic

economics underlying the above chapters so you may want to review it first. Ch. 9 is a nice example of the application of theory-based diagnostic thinking in policy analysis.)

Tu Oct 16

**Identifying policy problems and stakeholders;
More on problem diagnosis and definition**

Reading:

1. Bardach, pp. 1-10, "Define the problem."
2. W&V, pp. 324-332 (in ch. 14).
3. Zumeta and Frankle, *California Community Colleges: Making Them Stronger and More Affordable*. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2007, pp. 1-6. Access at class web site. (You may also be interested in the "Summary of Major Conclusions and Recommendations," pp. 46-52.)
4. **Case to prepare:** *A Heritage Worth Saving?: The Case of the Acheen Street Malay Mosque Village*. Evans School Electronic Hallway. Access at class website.

Assignment due:

Note: If you choose this case for your written analysis, it is **due at the beginning of class**. (The same applies to later cases.)

Recommended:

Kingdon, chapter 5, "Problems." (Book is on reserve at Odegaard.)

Th Oct 18

Gathering evidence and documenting policy problems

Reading:

1. W&V, chapter 13, "Gathering Information for Policy Analysis."
2. Bardach, pp. 10-15 and 61-89 (on assembling evidence).
3. **Case to prepare:** *Mayor Schell's Zero Homeless Families Pledge*. Access at course website. **Note:** This case is **not** eligible for the written assignment.

Project topics and teams should be settled by this date! Contact me with project title and team member names.

Tu Oct 23

Problem definition workshop

Reading:

J. Musso, R. Biller, and R. Myrtle, "Tradecraft: Professional Writing as Problem Solving," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19(4) (Fall 2000), 635-646. Access at class website.

Assignment due:

Each project team to bring 5 copies of a draft of your problem definition memo to class for peer critique in small groups.

Th Oct 25

Goals, objectives and decision criteria.

Reading:

1. Bardach, "Select the Criteria," pp. 25-34. You may want to read pp. 15-25 here too (although assigned later) for the sake of continuity in reading the book.
2. W & V, pp. 332-338.
3. **Case to prepare:** *Buying Time: the Dollar-a-Day Program*. Kennedy School of Government case #961.0.
Access at: <http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu/index.asp>

Assignment due: Project problem definition memos due from each project team at the beginning of class.

Tu Oct 30

Policy options: theory

Reading:

1. Bardach, "Construct the Alternatives" (pp. 15-25), "Smart (Best) Practices Research" (91-105), & "Things Governments Do" (123-131).
2. W & V, chapter 10, "Correcting Market and Government Failure: Generic Policies."

Recommended:

W&V, chapter 12, "Government Supply: Drawing Organizational Boundaries."

Th Nov 1

Policy options: practice I

Case to prepare:

Selecting Communal Lands in Zimbabwe. Evans Electronic Hallway. Access at class website.

Tu Nov 6

Policy options: practice II

Case to prepare:

Portland's Urban Growth Boundary. KSG cases #1703.0 & 1704.0 (see KSG URL above).

Th Nov 8

No class. Work on Policy Project memo #2.

Tu Nov 13

Evaluation of policy impacts: theory

Reading:

1. Bardach, 35-47, "Project the Outcomes."

2. C. P. Rydell and S. Everingham, "Controlling Cocaine: Supply Versus Demand Programs, Summary" (RAND, 1994).
3. W&V, pp. 338-357. (Chapters 15 and 18 and another look at chapter 1 are also recommended.)
4. H. Hatry et al, "Estimating Program Costs," in *Program Analysis for State and Local Governments* (Urban Institute, 1987), pp. 49-62.

Policy Project Memo #2, "Goals, Criteria and Policy Options," due!

Note: This memo should also incorporate a revised version of your problem definition memo reflecting the feedback received.

Th Nov 15

Evaluation of policy impacts via benefit-cost analysis

Guest: Professor Richard Zerbe, author of several texts and articles on benefit-cost analysis.

Reading: TBA

Tu Nov 20

Policy choice processes and communicating analysis

Reading:

1. Weimer & Vining, pp. 357-362.
2. Bardach, pp. 52-59 ("Decide" and "Tell Your Story").
3. **Case to prepare:** *Managing Environmental Risks: The Case of Asarco*. KSG case #847.0. (See URL above.)
4. Kingdon, ch. 8, "The Policy Window and Joining the Streams." Available on the class website.

Th Nov 22

Thanksgiving holiday

Tu Nov 27

Building implementation thinking into policy analysis

Reading:

1. W&V, chapter 11.
2. Richard Elmore, "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions." *Political Science Quarterly* (Winter 1979-80), 601-616.
3. **Case to prepare:** "Implementing a New Drug and Alcohol Program in Sacramento County," A & B. Electronic Hallway case. Access at class website.

Th Nov 29

Policy project workshop

Assignment:

Each policy analysis project team should come prepared with 5 copies of a draft matrix of policy alternatives and criteria for evaluation that apply to its policy problem. These will be exchanged among teams in the class workshop as a device for testing each team's ideas and for

bringing fresh insights to bear as well as for testing clarity of presentation.

Tu Dec 4
Th Dec 6

Policy analysis team oral briefings on analysis results. A 1-2 page outline and background statement should be distributed by each team to the instructor and class members at least 24 hours prior to their presentation. You may invite client(s) or stakeholders to join us for your presentation. Presentation time will be strictly limited to fit in everyone equitably, but there will be a brief period for questions and reactions from the audience and me. Exact time allocations will depend on the number of presentations. **For the sake of the group enterprise and in fairness to your colleagues, you are obligated to attend these sessions even when you are not presenting!** They should be an excellent learning experience.

Fri Dec 7

**FINAL WRITTEN POLICY ANALYSIS REPORT FROM EACH TEAM
DUE BY 5 PM! A penalty will be assessed for late papers.**