

PLCY 201: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2008

Room: Gardner 210

Time: Monday/Wednesday, 2:00 – 3:15

Instructor: *Gail Corrado*

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Office hours: and by arrangement

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Final Schedule: 2 PM December 6th (Saturday)

Course Objectives:

Should health care be universal? Should emissions be regulated? Should schools be held accountable? What should the various levels of government do, if anything, about access to health care?

This course is designed to help you learn how to prepare a report with recommendations on issues like these. Using a variety of policy problems, you will hone your ability to analyze complex issues and develop concise reports of your findings and recommendations. You will also sharpen your ability to develop team synergies in order to craft uniquely suitable policy alternatives.

The Policy Analysis Process

Standard policy analysis begins with a careful definition of the policy problem and proceeds through the set of steps listed below, culminating with the policy report. The course will spend time on each of these steps.

- Define and frame a policy problem,
- Identify the key stakeholders (individuals and groups) for an issue,
- Identify the relevant criteria needed to choose the “best” policy, including those related to political/power,
- Identify or create alternative solutions,
- Assess the outcome of each alternative in terms of each criterion,
- Assess the tradeoffs between alternatives,
- Identify barriers to implementation,
- Recommend the best alternative,
- Communicate your recommendation and the reasoning behind it to a client/decision-maker.

How this course will work:

This course will teach the skills and concepts you will need as you progress through the steps described above and it will give you the chance to test your learning on a real-world policy issue. Your grades will be determined as follows:

1 Individual Practice Memo in two parts (due on separate days) **10%**

3 Individual policy memos **30%**

20% draft memo

80% final memo

2 Homeworks **5%**

Mid-term exam **10%**

Group Policy Analysis (presentation + paper) **25%**

20% group paper,

10% group presentation

5% free-rider avoidance plan

Take-home Final exam **10%**

Discussion Questions **5%**

Class Participation **5%**

Final grades will follow a traditional **non-curved** scale (I will use +/- grading):

A 90+

B 80-89

C 70-79

D 60-69

F 59 or below

I want to stress that you are **NOT** in competition with others in this class to get a better grade. This is intentional to foster as much collaboration and cooperation as possible in this class as possible. Grading criteria for the writing assignments will be specific and point-based and will be distributed before the assignment is due.

***Late Assignments:* points will be subtracted from late assignments at a rate of 10% per day. Since assignments build on the previous one, it is in your interest to complete each one. If you think that you may not be able to finish an assignment on time, please come speak to me as soon as possible.**

General Memo Instructions: You will be given dates for both the draft and the final versions of all memos. In between the draft and the final version, you will be able to submit (electronically) as many revisions of your draft as we mutually can get done (I usually can turn around a draft in a day). The point of this course is to help you become a competent communicator of complex policy issues and ideas: that cannot happen (not now and not in “real life”) unless you get into the habit of doing lots of revisions of your work. In the unlikely event that you hit a home run

on the first draft, of course, you won't have to do any revisions. That is unlikely because I will be looking at your memo not only for style/composition/grammar as well as content, but I will also try to show you possible misinterpretations of what you are saying. One of the skills an analyst needs to have is communication skills that anticipate how what you are saying could be misunderstood so that you can add what you need to add to avoid problems. Since each of us comes to policy work with different backgrounds, it is very unlikely that you will have anticipated all other viewpoints. Rewriting is a necessary part of good policy communication. The bottom line is that to become adept at policy work, you should rewrite memos until you get an A or A-. That goes for group memos as well as individual memos.

Class Participation

Please be prepared to participate in class discussions. This means, of course, reading the assignments. The issues you will be discussing from the cases you read raise serious and far-reaching policy questions. This is an opportunity to get beyond the CNN-level discussions of ordinary life and into the realm of serious policy analysis. This cannot happen if you do not read the assignments. In addition to your class participation, you will be required to either attend a brown-bag lunch with a policy speaker or to do work that should take no more than 1 hour for the Public Policy Clinic under the direction of a member of a consulting team from PLCY 698. Your one page report will account for most of the class participation grade.

Discussion Questions

There will be discussion questions for several reading assignments. You can choose not to hand in 2 of the assignments given. Otherwise, you will be required to hand these in before we discuss a particular reading to help you focus on the relevant parts of the reading and be more prepared for discussion. They will be given one of three grades (1,2 or 3 – 3 is high), depending upon the level of thought evident in your discussion.

Homework Assignments

There will be two short homework assignments in addition to the policy analysis projects to help you make sense of the concepts and practice the tools introduced in class.

Policy Analysis Project

You will learn a variety of tools and concepts in this course. All of them are designed to help produce well-reasoned and thorough policy reports. In order to cement your learning, you will use your skills in producing just such a report. Part of the report will be done individually and part of the report will be done as a team. Each individual will begin the process of defining the policy problem and working out the beginnings of the policy analysis. In the real world, groups of experts from relevant fields are brought together to develop a comprehensive policy solution to the problems that face us. We will reflect this reality by having groups work together once individuals have set the foundation.

You will have a choice of one of 5 issues to focus on for this project:

- Is equality of educational opportunity a public issue and if so, what policies should we use to achieve it? [Education]
- Health care reform: what, if anything, should we do to make sure that all residents have access to affordable health care? [Health Care]
- Schools in many areas are thinking of going to 4 day weeks because they cannot afford their energy needs. Many areas are experiencing severe droughts. What can or should we do about making sure we have enough affordable resources to function as a society? [Resources]
- Immigration Reform: Immigration policies include resident/worker policies (concerning rules for those who want to live or work in this country) and policies concerning how to enforce the resident/worker policies. What kind of policies should we have and why? How should we deal with those who are in the country now illegally? [Immigration]
- Infrastructure: Our bridges and highways, schools and government buildings are deteriorating. What should we do about it? [Infrastructure]
- Public Safety: Our food supply and our drugs have recently been shown to be less safe than we might have thought. Our ports and our borders also have security issues. How safe can and should we be and what methods can we use to achieve our goals? [Public Safety]

Each of these will be described in more detail with some background material. After two weeks, I will ask you for your preferences and will attempt to create groups that meet everyone's interests. Part of your final project grade will be determined by how well you can come up with a plan to avoid the free rider problem in your group work. I will be asking for the free-rider avoidance plan and an assessment of how well it worked from each group.

Exams:

There will be one in-class mid-term exam and one take-home final. Your grade on the mid-term will be helped by paying careful attention to the discussion questions and homework.

Course materials (required):

- 1) Text: Munger, Bardach
- 3) Additional online readings available as PDF files
- 4) Kennedy School Cases: Access through www.xanedu.com Price: \$29 – instructions for access will be supplied in class.

Detailed Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

- 20-Aug **Topic: Introduction**
Reading: None
Assignments Due: Read a national paper, listen to BBC/NPR News
Objective: Begin to get behind the rhetoric
- 25-Aug **Topic: Problem Definition**
Reading: Bardach, Part I (skim), KSG: Regional Transit (read carefully)
Assignments Due:
Objective: Learn how to find the problem in the issue noise
- 27-Aug **Topic: More Problem Definition**
Reading: KSG: Regional Transit followup (explained in class)
Assignments Due: Draft Seattle Problem Definition Paper
Objective: Practice finding potential policy problems
- 3-Sep **Topic: Alternatives, Criteria, Matrix, Conclusion**
Reading: Munger, Chapter 1
Assignments Due:
Objective: Understand all parts of the policy memo
- 8-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 1a: Economics**
Reading: Munger, Chapter 3 including appendix, and Chapter 7
Assignments Due: Final Seattle Problem Definition Paper
Objective: Learn Basics of Economic Answer to Question
- 10-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 1b: Economics**
Reading: KSG London Congestion Pricing both parts
Assignments Due
Objective: Learn how talk about problems using economic tools.
- 15-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 1c: Economics**
Reading: Munger, Chapter 4
Assignments Due: Draft Seattle Alternatives/Criteria/Matrix/Conclusion
Objective: Learn to talk about market failures and public problems.
- 17-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 1d: Economics**
Reading: Worksheet, KSG Case: Immigration
Assignments Due
Objective: Learn to identify market failures.
- 22-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 1e: Economics**
Reading: Munger, Chapter 9
Assignments Due: Final Seattle Alternatives/Criteria/Matrix/Conclusion
Objective: Learn about discounting and how it is used in economic reasoning.

- 24-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 2a: Politics**
 Reading: Munger, Chapter 6, Blackboard, The Poor
Assignments Due: Homework 1: Discounting
 Objective: Understand what is meant by the term "government failure."
- 29-Sep **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 2b: Politics**
 Reading: KSG: Clinton Health Care, both parts
Assignments Due: Draft Individual Take on Group Topic Problem Definition
 Objective: Learn how institutions, and democratic processes have market impacts.
- 1-Oct **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 3a: Behav. Econ**
 Reading: Blackboard: Behavioral Economics
Assignments Due: Homework 2 - Market Failures
 Objective: The way we really discount and what that means.
- 6-Oct **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 3b: Behav. Econ**
 Reading: None
Assignments Due: Final Individual Take on Group Topic Problem Definition
 Objective:
- 8-Oct **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 4a: New Frames**
 Reading: Blackboard: Networks 1 and 2
 Assignments Due
 Objective: Learn why some say "most adaptable" instead of "optimal" policy is best.
- 13-Oct **Topic: What counts as a public problem? Part 4b: New Frames**
 Reading: Blackboard: Networks 3 and 4
Assignments Due: Draft Individual Take on Group Topic Alternatives and Criteria
 Objective: Learn what additional analyses we need to do to develop robust policies.
- 15-Oct **Topic: Mid-term review**
 Reading
 Assignments Due
 Objective: Learn to use matrix to include aspects of all of the theories.
- 20-Oct **Topic: Mid-term**
 Reading
 Assignments Due
 Objective: Learn to use matrix to include aspects of all of the theories.
- 22-Oct **Topic: Cost/Benefit Analysis**
 Reading: Munger, Chapter 11
 Assignments Due
 Objective: Learn to use matrix to include aspects of all of the theories.
- 27-Oct **Topic: Tools**
 Reading: Blackboard Worksheet
Assignments Due: Final Individual Take on Group Topic Alternatives and Criteria

Objective: Learn meaning of common financial terms and relationships

29-Oct **Topic: Decision Rules 1**

Reading: KSG Pakistan Case

Assignments Due

Objective: Learn why you need decision rules.

3-Nov **Topic: Decision Rules 2**

Reading: Blackboard: Decisions

Assignments Due: Draft Individual Take on Matrix and Decision Rules

Objective: Learn a variety of Decision Rules

5-Nov **Topic: Research**

Reading: Bardach, Part 2 and Appendix

Assignments Due

Objective: Learn to recognize cherry picking

10-Nov **Topic: Practice**

Reading: In Class

Assignments Due: Final Individual Take on Matrix and Decision Rules

Objective: Be able to develop a quick position paper as a team

12-Nov **Topic: Communicating your results, Finding Flaws**

Reading: Blackboard: Logic

Assignments Due: Draft Individual Full Memo

Objective

17-Nov **Topic: Dry Run Meetings**

Reading

Assignments Due: Final Individual Full Memo

Objective: Understand the more formal aspects of a policy argument

19-Nov **Topic: Dry Run Meetings**

Reading

Assignments Due: Draft Group Memo

Objective: Be able to recognize flawed policy arguments

24-Nov **Topic: Presentations**

Reading

Assignments Due

Objective

1-Dec **Topic: Presentations**

Reading

Assignments Due

Objective

3-Dec **Topic: Presentations**

Reading

Assignments Due: Final Group Memo
Objective