PBAF 513A: Policy Analysis

Tuesdays, 10:30 am – 1:20 pm, Parrington 108

**Instructor**  
Stephen Kosack  
Office: Parrington 207B  
Office hours: Tuesdays 3:00 – 5:00  
(sign-up link on Evans faculty page)

**Teaching Assistant**  
Amy Beck Harris  
Email: abeck07@uw.edu  
Office hours: Wednesdays 1:00 – 3:00  
Parrington 124E

**Course Description**

The goal of this course is to equip students to rigorously assess policy responses to public problems. Policymakers regularly face public problems for which no policy response is obviously correct. Over the quarter, this course develops a framework you can use in your careers to be both better consumers and creators of policy advice. It also provides you with guidance and support as you apply this framework to the analysis of a real-world public policy problem or decision of your choosing. The framework offers a systematic way of thinking about the motivations, benefits, costs, trade-offs, and constraints inherent in public policy choices. It builds and integrates many of the skills from the first-year MPA core, including economics, politics, budgeting, organizational management, and methods of program evaluation and quantitative analysis. Rigorous policy analysis involves applying these skills and others systematically to identify and adjudicate among the various options that policymakers might select in addressing a public problem, with the goal of arriving at the policy response that is most likely to succeed.

In particular, you will learn to:

- Define a policy problem in a way that is amenable to analysis;
- Develop a set of policy options to respond to that problem;
- Develop a set of criteria for evaluating those options;
- Analyze the options using a variety of techniques to understand the costs, benefits, and feasibility of each, so as to understand the option most likely to address the problem efficiently and effectively; and
- Present the analysis cogently and compellingly to policy decision-makers.
Course Expectations and Readings

Expectations: This class combines lectures, discussions (both of specific cases and of conceptual issues suggested by the readings), and in-class exercises around a quarter-long team policy analysis project. In order for the class to work well, you must stay on top of the cases and readings, think about any discussion questions that appear at the end of the cases, and come to class ready to participate, ask questions, debate with your colleagues, and contribute to our collective enterprise of building a framework for thinking clearly and systematically about policy choices. Unlike some of your other Evans classes, there is often no right answer in this class; instead there are generally only more and less creative and feasible policy options, more and less rigorous methods of evaluating these options, more and less comprehensible and compelling written products and presentations, etc. The central goal of our class is to provide you with a supportive environment in which you can build the skills to combine the best analytical methods and evidence with your own intuitions and experience, all in the service of arriving at the policy approach that you can have confidence is most likely to succeed.

In order to nudge you in the right direction, attendance at all classes and section meetings is absolutely mandatory, and I will allocate 15 percent of your grade to class participation. All you need to do to receive a high class participation grade is to come to class regularly, contribute to the in-class exercises around your team project, and make a good faith effort to engage the readings, your classmates, and me. For my part, I will work hard to create an environment of mutual respect and professionalism that will allow you and your colleagues to think, pose creative questions, and take risks. I also expect all students in this course to abide by the Evans School’s Policy on Academic Integrity, as well as the School’s Conversation Norms and additional norms of professional and collegiate conduct that we will discuss and develop in the first class. Our School’s Conversation Norms include:

- **Listening** carefully and respectfully
- **Sharing** and teaching each other generously
- **Clarifying** the intent and impact of our comments
- **Giving and receiving** feedback in a “relationship-building” manner
- **Working** together to expand our knowledge by using high standards for evidence and analysis

I have included some relevant sections of the School’s Policy on Academic Integrity at the end of this Syllabus.
Readings: The class has readings of two kinds: readings on the art and craft of policy analysis, which come mostly from two textbooks; and cases of real-world policy choice. The two textbooks are:


Both textbooks are available in the University Bookstore.

The cases will serve to ground our discussion in the world of application. They are carefully chosen to illustrate the concepts from the readings or to provide a chance for us to apply them in a real-world scenario. Some of the cases are drawn from your two textbooks; the remaining three are from the Harvard Kennedy School’s Case Program. The link to this course’s cases is https://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cbmp/access/48713379. (This link will also be posted on the course website.) The Kennedy School charges a small fee of $3.95 for accessing each case.

Assignments

This course has assignments of two types: a case analysis and a team policy analysis project.

Case analysis

Over the quarter, each of you will individually submit a written analysis of one of the assigned cases. Weeks 2–7 have cases: most weeks have one case, but May 10 has two: a cost-benefit analysis from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy and the case of Michele Rhee and the D.C. schools.

Your analysis of the case should be a short but complete policy analysis in which you briefly define the problem and objectives, develop a set of options and criteria for evaluating them, and analyze them with your matrix of criteria. Your analysis should be 3–4 double-spaced pages with 12-point font and 1 inch margins. Because your space is limited, you should concentrate on the matrix of options and evaluative criteria; the matrix is an extremely efficient way to communicate your analysis of options.

Other than the case we discuss on the first day of class, you can analyze any case you choose. To encourage you to get started early, you will receive a bonus of 1 points (out of 10) if you analyze one of the first two cases (weeks 2–3), and grading standards will increase over the quarter as your knowledge and skills in policy analysis improve. We will use some of the points you make in your analyses in class; thus to count, your case analysis must be submitted on the course website by 3pm the day before it is discussed in class. Submissions uploaded after 3pm will not be eligible for a grade. This assignment will constitute 20 percent of your course grade.
Prior to turning in your case analysis for a grade, you have the option of turning in one on an earlier case for practice and ungraded feedback. If you choose this option, note clearly on the top of the first page that it is a practice analysis.

Note that although you only have to submit one written analysis, you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss all the cases, not only the one for which you submit a written analysis.

Team policy analysis project

The bulk of your work over the quarter will be spent on a team policy analysis of a real world, real time policy problem. Policy analysis is a practical, applied skill, and the best way to learn it is to do it and then critically reflect on what you have done. Your team project will allow you to apply the skills you are learning in class to a policy problem in an area you know and care about and to offer a recommendation for a real person who is engaged with that problem, taking into account their authority, resources, and limitations (though you will not be expected to actually make contact with that client or to send them your analysis). We will devote some class time and much of your section meeting time to workshops on aspects of the project, and at the end of the term your team will make a formal presentation of project results and recommendation in class.

More detail on the project and how we will form teams will be distributed early in the course. But in brief, the project will involve three written memos and an in-class oral briefing, all addressed to your client (though with some additional explanation for readers like your classmates and me who are not familiar with everything your client is). All memos should be double-spaced and use 12-point font and 1-inch margins. The three memos build on each other, so that the second is an extension of the first and the third, final product is an extension of the second.

Memo 1 (3–4 pages) defines the problem and maps the stakeholders.

Memo 2 (6–8 pages) incorporates a revised version of Memo 1 and sets out policy objectives for addressing it, a set of policy options for consideration, and a set of criteria for evaluating those options.

Memo 3 (no more than 15 pages) incorporates a revised version of Memo 2, along with your analysis of the policy options, a recommendation for which your client should choose, and an outline of an adoption and implementation strategy for that option. This memo will begin with a one-page executive summary (which does not count against the 15-page limit).

An Oral Briefing in which you summarize the problem, your policy objective, the options you considered, the criteria by which you evaluated them, your analysis of the options, and your recommendation. Oral briefings will be in-class during the last two weeks of the quarter. The format will be determined toward the end of the quarter, but they will likely be limited (very strictly) to approximately 10 minutes, followed by 4-5 minutes of Q&A from your classmates and me.
A final note: your team policy analysis is a large project, and although we will spend some time on it in class, the majority of your work on it will occur outside the classroom. Amy and I will do our best to make sure that the schedule and expectations are clear in the early part of the class and will work throughout the class to help you stay on track. But ultimately it is your responsibility, rather than ours, to decide how best to spend your time and to make sure you are making adequate progress so that you can deliver a superb policy analysis memo and briefing by the end of the quarter.

Key Dates

*m ost assignments are due on the Canvas website by 3pm of the day before class*

- **April 1** *(due the Friday before class)*
  - A news article about either 1) a policy problem or 2) a policy solution that you’re not sure you agree with and that could benefit from some more rigorous policy analysis
  - Initial thoughts about a policy problem that you would like to study for your policy analysis project
- **April 11**
  - Your team’s final policy problem for your policy analysis project
- **April 18**
  - First draft of Memo 1
- **April 25**
  - Final Memo 1
- **May 2**
  - First draft of Memo 2
- **May 9**
  - Final Memo 2
- **May 16**
  - First draft of Final Memo
- **May 23**
  - Presentation materials for your Oral Briefing
- **June 3** *(due on the Friday after the final class)*
  - Final Memo, including executive summary (due by 5pm)

Note: Requests for extensions will only be granted in exceptional, unavoidable circumstances, and only when accompanied by a note from a doctor, dean, or other suitably authoritative source. Unexcused late assignments will be penalized 2 points (out of 10) for each day they are overdue. Please understand that there can be absolutely no exceptions to this policy.
Course Evaluation

You will be evaluated in three areas:

1. Class Participation (15 percent)
2. Case Analysis (20 percent)
3. Policy Analysis Project (65 percent)
   a. Memo 1 (15 percent)
   b. Memo 2 (15 percent)
   c. Oral Briefing (10 percent)
   d. Final Memo (25 percent)

Class participation will be assessed on a 15-point scale covering three areas: 1) Care and effort of peer reviews of your colleagues’ products and memos. 2) Your professionalism and citizenship in class (attendance in class and section, engagement with the readings, and contributions to discussions and in-class exercises). At the end of the quarter, I will also ask each of you which of your fellow students were most helpful to your learning in the course. 3) Effort on draft memos and other class products, assessed on a two-point scale:
   - 2 points: the product demonstrates reasonable effort and is turned in on time;
   - 1 point: the product shows little effort or is turned in late but up to 24 hours before class;
   - 0 points: the product is not turned in or turned in less than 24 hours before class.

The Case Analysis and Policy Analysis Project will be assessed on a six-point scale of professionalism, designed to provide you a scale for standards of professional practice.

- 6 (11 points): Distinction even by the standards expected of a professional practitioner (rarely given: less than 1 percent)
- 5 (10 points): Fully meets the standards expected of a professional practitioner
- 4 (8 points): Distinction by the standards expected of a professional school graduate student
- 3 (6 points): Average by the standards expected of a professional school graduate student
- 2 (4 points): Below average by the standards expected of a professional school graduate student
- 1 (2 points): Unacceptable by the standards expected of a professional school graduate student
Your final course grade will be determined by the weighted total number of points you receive on course participation and on all assignments, translated into a grade point as follows:

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<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; 100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fail</td>
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Course Schedule

March 29    Introduction

_Aim:_ To introduce you to policy analysis and to the structure of the class.

_Assignments for next class (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Friday, April 1):_

1. Find a news article about either 1) a policy problem or 2) a policy solution that you’re not sure you agree with and that could benefit from some policy analysis
2. Start thinking about a policy problem that you would like to study for your policy analysis project
April 5  How to do Policy Analysis

_Aim:_ To give you an overview of the process of policy analysis and introduce the first step: defining the problem. We will focus on how to identify and diagnose policy problems, their symptoms, and their stakeholders.

_Required Reading (prior to class):_
2. Weimer and Vining:
   a. chapter 2 “What is Policy Analysis?”
   b. SKIM chapter 5, “Rationales for Public Policy: Market Failures,” and chapter 7, “Rationales for Public Policy: Distributional Considerations.” _When reading these chapters, pay more attention to the concepts than the technical discussion._
3. _Case:_ Bardach, pp. 125-139 (Appendix A “Specimen of a Real-World Policy Analysis”)

_Assignments for next class (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, April 11):_
1. Your team’s final policy problem for your policy analysis project.

April 12   Defining the Problem

_Aim:_ To finish our discussion of how to define policy problems. We will focus on gathering evidence of and documenting public problems. We will also discuss the “problem definition memo” for your policy analysis project, which is due next Tuesday.

_Required Reading (prior to class):_
3. _Case:_ HKS Case 1906.0 “The Challenge of Adapting to Climate Change: King County Brings Local Action to a Global Threat.”

_Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, April 18):_
1. Draft problem definition memo (Memo 1)
April 19  From Problem Definition to Policy Options

Aim: To offer you feedback from your colleagues on your draft problem definition memo; to consider the ethics of policy analysis; and to begin to consider how to develop options for a policy response.

Required Reading (prior to class):
1. A group of draft problem definition memos for others in the class.

Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, April 25):
1. Final problem definition memo (Memo 1)

April 26  Developing Policy Options

Aim: To consider the theory behind policy responses to public problems, including what governments do and market and government failures.

Required Reading (prior to class):

Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, May 2):
1. Draft of Memo 2 (which combines the first memo with policy objectives and options; we will add criteria for evaluation during the next class)
May 3  Criteria for Evaluating Policy Options

_Aim:_ To begin to understand the methods for evaluating policy options—the step that constitutes the bulk of the research that goes into most policy analysis—and to offer you feedback from your colleagues on your draft Memo 2.

_Required Reading (prior to class):_
1. A group of Memo 2 drafts for others in the class.
4. _Case:_ Weimer and Vining: pp. 1-22, Chapter 1 “the Canadian Salmon Fishery.”

_Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, May 9):_
1. Memo 2 Final

May 10  Methods for Evaluating Policy Options

_Aim:_ To explore more fully the methods for evaluating policy options, which draw heavily on the methods that you explored more deeply in your other Evans classes. These methods include cost-benefit analysis and sensitivity analysis, political analysis, and implementation analysis.

_Guest lecture: Professor Mark Long_

_Required Reading (prior to class):_
4. _Case 2:_ HKS Case 1957.0 “Michelle Rhee and the Washington D.C. Public Schools”

_Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, May 16):_
1. Draft of final memo (Memo 3, which incorporates a revised version of Memo 2 along with your analysis of the policy options, a recommendation for which your client should choose, and an outline of an adoption and implementation strategy for that option). At this point you do not need to include an executive summary.
May 17  Presenting Your Policy Analysis

Aim: To offer you feedback from your colleagues on your draft Final Memo, and to explore how to effectively communicate your analysis and recommendation.

Required Reading (prior to class):
2. Weimer and Vining: pp. 376-381, chapter 15, the section on “Communicating Analysis.”
3. Review the cases we have used in this class, paying attention this time to their structure and method of presenting content.

Assignments (submit on the Canvas website by 3pm on Monday, May 23):
1. Presentation materials for your Oral Briefing

May 24  Oral Briefings

May 31  Oral Briefings

Your Final Memo, including an executive summary, is due on the Canvas website by 5pm on June 3
You are joining a learning community in the Evans School of Public Affairs that is committed to the highest academic standards. As a member of this community, you agree to uphold the fundamental standards of honesty, respect and integrity, and you accept the responsibility to encourage others to adhere to these standards. You also have a responsibility to conduct yourself in adherence to the University’s Student Conduct Code, and to maintain good academic standing in the program. In addition to these expectations of responsibilities, you also have rights and recourses to address grievances. This section describes these rights and responsibilities. It is your responsibility to understand these expectations now.

Student Conduct Code

The first expectation is that Evans students adhere to the University’s Student Conduct Code. The following is an abbreviated version. The complete code is available in Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 478-120.

“Admission to the University carries with it the presumption that students will conduct themselves as responsible members of the academic community. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and the welfare of the academic community. That responsibility includes, but is not limited to:

- academic and professional honesty and integrity,
- refraining from actions which would interfere with University functions or endanger the health, safety, or welfare of others, and
- complying with the rules and regulations of the University and its units.

Violations of these standards may result in a variety of disciplinary actions, including suspension or permanent dismissal from the University.”

ASPA Code of Ethics

In addition, the American Society for Public Administration has its own Code of Ethics, including “(6) Demonstrate personal integrity: Adhere to the highest standards of conduct to inspire public confidence and trust in public service.” Your time at the Evans School will give you an opportunity to practice these codes.
Student Academic Conduct

Students at the Evans School are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic conduct, and of course most do. Cheating harms the person cheating, as it deprives them of the opportunity to learn the material. It also harms honest students who are frustrated by the unfairness of cheating that goes undetected and therefore unpunished.

Academic misconduct occurs if you present as your own work something that you did not do. It is also considered academic misconduct if you help someone else present work that is not his or her own.

Plagiarism

One of the most common forms of cheating is plagiarism, using another's words or ideas without proper citation. When students plagiarize, they usually do so in one of the following six ways:

1. Using another writer's words without proper citation. If you use another writer's words, you must place quotation marks around the quoted material and identify the source of the quotation.

2. Using another writer's ideas without proper citation. When you use another author's ideas, you must indicate with an in-text citation, note, or other means where this information can be found. Your instructors want to know which ideas and judgments are yours and which you arrived at by consulting other sources. Even if you arrived at the same judgment on your own, you need to acknowledge that the writer you consulted also came up with the idea.

3. Citing your source but reproducing the exact words of a printed source without quotation marks. This makes it appear that you have paraphrased rather than borrowed the author's exact words.

4. Borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting the author from whom it came. This kind of plagiarism usually occurs out of laziness: it is easier to replicate another writer's style than to think about what you have read and then put it in your own words.

5. Borrowing all or part of another student's paper or using someone else's outline to write your own paper.

6. Using a paper writing "service" or having a friend write the paper for you. Regardless of whether you pay a stranger or have a friend (inside or outside the School) do it, it is a breach of academic honesty to hand in work that is not your own or to use parts of another student's paper. This includes internet paper-writing resources. Note that it is also considered

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1 This section is drawn primarily from the Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences.
academic misconduct if you are the friend who willingly wrote a paper for someone else or shared your work for copying.

**Multiple submissions**

Multiple submission is the practice of submitting a single paper for credit in two different classes (in the same quarter or in different quarters). The UW does not have a general policy prohibiting this practice. However, because an individual professor may not permit the practice in their class, a student wishing to make a multiple submission must clear it with both professors involved. Non-compliance will result in a violation of the University’s standard of conduct.

**Exams**

Another common form of cheating involves exams. The following will all be considered violations of the student conduct code:

- Copying from someone else’s exam, or allowing another student to copy from your exam;
- Aiding another student during an exam where collaboration is prohibited, including talking, signs, gestures, or sharing notes;
- Using notes (unless expressly allowed by the teacher, in which case notes must follow their specifications);
- Using any electronic device such as a tablet, laptop or mobile phone unless expressly permitted by the instructor;
- Altering an exam for re-grading;
- Getting an advance copy of the examination;
- Using a surrogate test-taker;
- Working together on a take-home exam when an instructor forbids collaboration;
- Deliberately delaying turning in a timed class exam; such a delay would unfairly give that student extra time and will be considered a form of cheating.

**Lying**

Lying encompasses the following: the willful and knowledgeable telling of an untruth, as well as any form of deceit, attempted deceit, or fraud in an oral or written statement relating to academic work. This includes but is not limited to the lying to administration and faculty members, and falsifying any university document by mutilation, addition, or deletion.

**What happens if there is a suspected violation?**

It is the responsibility of the entire Evans School community to uphold its academic standards and integrity.

It is the Evans School’s policy that instructors maintain discretion over whether and how any suspected academic misconduct should be reflected in the grade for that assignment, exam, or for the course. This may include a zero grade. Students who disagree with the instructors’ assessment
should follow the University’s normal grade appeal process (see below). Proven academic misconduct as outlined above could also result in disciplinary action from the Graduate School, including probation or dismissal from the University.

In addition, instructors who suspect misconduct will report the misconduct to the Graduate Program Coordinator.