PB AF 513B: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

Course Objectives

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 (mostly) exciting, policy analysis 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 about an organization’s external environment. Policy analysis also sharpens the capacity for rigorous, evidence-based but also practical thinking. Most importantly, public policy analysis is about the collective, societal decisions that shape the quality of all our lives. What could be more exciting and important?

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, evaluation, organizations and management, politics, and budgeting so that you learn to analyze public policy options and decisions in a rigorous, practical and broad-gauged way. We will read about, discuss, and work through the processes of identifying and defining policy problems; setting policy objectives; establishing operational criteria for decisions about options; assessing stakeholders and their stakes; devising alternative policy actions to address problems; projecting and assessing systematically the impacts of these actions; and attending to political, organizational, and democratic process considerations relevant to authoritative adoption and successful implementation of public policies. (Much of this also applies to policy analysis within organizations, such as nonprofits, regarding their own policies, although the course focus is on public policies—in which nonprofits often have a stake.) 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 teams of three, of an independent policy analysis encompassing all of the above elements and designed to be useful to an identified real-world client (i.e., user or user group, whether simulated or actual). 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. You will have an opportunity to do an individual written analysis of one of the cases.

Policy analysis requires several distinct sets of skills: the ability to frame a problem in a way that is 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 within 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 of these, but will give particular attention to the first and last elements mentioned since other core courses have built your skill sets on the other dimensions.
**Texts and Readings:**


4. Mintrom, M. (2012). *Contemporary policy analysis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. *(Required chapters will be available as a course pack at the University Bookstore; also on reserve at Odegaard.)*

5. Cases from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government will be used in two classes. These can be accessed at: [http://case.hks.harvard.edu/](http://case.hks.harvard.edu/). The syllabus indicates the identifying case number. A $7.90 fee is charged by HKS for one of the cases, which is in two parts.

6. Other required readings and cases will be made available electronically via the Canvas site for this class. The Canvas site can be accessed at: [https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1043082](https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1043082).

The readings provide a good summary of the policy process (especially Kingdon), and the theory, methods, and craft of policy analysis (especially Weimer & Vining and Bardach & Patashnik, with supplementary info from Mintrom). It is important to keep up with reading assignments if you are to make sense of and contribute to classes and complete assignments competently.

**Course Requirements:**

1. *Case analysis:* Each student will submit a 3-4-page (double spaced) individual written analysis of **one** of the assigned cases on the syllabus (which one is your choice except that Mayor Schell’s Zero Homeless Families Pledge is excluded from eligibility for the written assignment.) Your written analysis must be posted to the Canvas site by the beginning of class on the date the case will be discussed. A bonus of 0.2 grade points is offered for analyses of the first three cases and standards for any given grade will be elevated as the quarter (and presumably your knowledge and skill) progresses. Prior to turning in their case analysis for a grade, students have the option of turning in one on an earlier case for practice and (ungraded) feedback. If you do this, make sure you indicate at the top of the first page that you are submitting a practice case analysis. Questions to help focus your analysis of each of the assigned cases are available on the Canvas site. Everyone is expected to be prepared for class discussion of each case whether or not they have written it up.

2. *Readings and class engagement:* There is plenty of material to read for the course in preparation for classes, as well as to aid your efforts on the project and case analysis. Preparation for and active participation in classes are important for the course to be successful. Engagement in each class period will be measured as either zero, one, or two points. To get one point, you must both be present in lecture and offer some minimal participation in the discussion. Two points will be reserved for those who contribute especially effectively. Zero points will be awarded to those who are either absent or those who are present but do not participate.
Students may request an excused absence *well in advance* by emailing the professor with a sufficient explanation. Attendance in quiz section is also mandatory and will be recorded as part of the engagement score. Finally, the larger topic team members will offer feedback on their teammates’ participation and engagement at the end of the quarter.

3. **Team policy analysis project:** A critical element of the course is the team policy analysis project. Since 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 TA and instructor help as needed, 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 three* on your projects and *submit jointly authored memos*, because team efforts are the way policy analysis is typically carried out in real organizations. After all, *three heads are usually better than one*. Some class time and much of the section meeting time will be devoted to workshops on aspects of the project work and, at the end of the term, formal presentations of project research and analysis results will occur in class. Project teams need to be formed among colleagues within the same quiz section, as section time will be used extensively to workshop the ongoing policy analysis project.

**Project Topics and Assignments:**

A few pointers on choosing a policy analysis project topic:

- *Pick a relatively narrow topic* with adequate information available for analysis. Students are prone to selecting topics that are too large in scope or not well timed to analyze adequately in one quarter;
- *Pick a topic that interests you* (this helps with motivation), but not one that you believe you “know the answer.” If your opinion or assessment of a solution can be swayed by evidence, you are on the right track.
- *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 motivate and help you gain access to information and focus on a client (i.e., sponsor or primary audience). If you don’t have such a topic, consider seeking out classmates who do. If you have such a topic, advertise it to your classmates.
- *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 teammates. It will be very problematic for you if you discover around the time that the first project memo is due (or later, god forbid) that your project is not feasible due to lack of data or client access.

In the first class meeting, each student will briefly introduce him- or herself. Based on your declared policy interests, Sarah will place each person into a six-person topic team. In the first quiz section meeting, these topic teams will meet and decide amongst themselves who will team up with whom. Small teams will then brainstorm topics for the project, which are due no later than April 14 (though you are encouraged to have your topic approved much sooner than this so you can begin work on Memo #1). Sarah can help with vetting topics but I must ultimately approve each project topic. I encourage all teams to come in during my office hours before the first project memo is due (or make an appointment for another time if necessary). Otherwise, my approval can be granted via email exchange (copy Sarah) but this is less likely to be satisfactory.

Experience shows that most MPA students have interests and contacts that lead rather readily to appropriate topics, or at least can find teammates who do. For those unable to find a topic, the Evans School’s Public Service Clinics web site may be a helpful source of ideas (i.e., unclaimed project topics). I can also provide suggestions upon request.
Project Memos:

You should address your project memos to a specific client with the most leverage to influence your policy problem. You may actually share your work with that person or group, if you want to work for a real client. (Please note: you will normally need to provide some explanatory background in a preface or footnotes in your memos for readers like the instructors and your student colleagues who will not be aware of everything the client would be.) This audience 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 (3-4 pages, double-spaced) you will present an initial description and definition of the problem that you will be analyzing and map the stakeholders involved. In the second project memo (6-8 pages), in addition to including a refined version of your problem definition based on instructor feedback, 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 seriously—together with some mention of others you considered that did not make the cut and why—for addressing the problem. You will not actually evaluate the options in this memo, however. We will read both these memos closely and will give you ample feedback to guide your subsequent work. You should read closely and discuss this feedback with your teammates (and with the TA and me if necessary) for the feedback is an important part of the teaching strategy of the course.

The final written report (project memo #3, at most 15 pages) 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 stakeholders), 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 marshal about the likely effects of each option. Remember that this evaluation is the heart of the analysis and needs to be substantive, well-supported by reasoning and evidence, and cogently written. You should also highlight the important differences in the effects of the options, i.e., the tradeoffs among them. Integrate considerations of political feasibility and implementation issues. It makes little sense to recommend an impractical alternative. The paper should conclude with a recommendation for the client’s consideration, i.e., you should offer a recommended choice from among your policy alternatives. Even though this is not always the expectation, it provides an opportunity for you to put yourself in the decision-maker’s shoes. You should also provide an outline of an adoption and implementation strategy for your recommended alternative. Your final report should include a 1-2 page Executive Summary (this does not count within the 15-page limit) covering the essential elements of your problem definition, analytic methodology, key findings and conclusions, and your recommendations and rationale. This is all some decision-makers will read, although staff and critics will look closely at the rest (as will the instructors)!

Formatting expectations:
- Double spacing (you may use single spacing selectively for emphasis or bulleted lists)
- 12-point Times New Roman font
- Standard one-inch margins
- Submitted in Microsoft Word .doc or .docx format
- APA citation style, both for in-text citation and list of works cited
Project Oral Briefing:

Due to class size and time constraints, the oral presentation of your analysis (often called a briefing) will be strictly limited to about 12 minutes plus 2-3 minutes for questions from the audience, including the TA, me and any guests you or I may invite. (We’ll tell you the exact time allocations once we 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 rational basis for making a policy choice. Each member of the analysis team should participate nearly 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 individual performances.

Your 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 recommendations to the client. Because of the limited time, you will have to choose carefully what to present and what to omit and practice to ensure smooth delivery in the allotted time. The presentation should include slides or other visuals so 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, the essentials of your analytic methodology and sources, 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.

Each project team is to prepare and distribute to me, the TA, and the electronic class list these materials at least 24 hours prior to their presentation as well as a couple of paragraphs about the client and context of the problem. All students are expected to review these prior to the class where the presentations are made and to be prepared with good questions and comments.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case analysis</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Memo on one of the assigned cases (student’s choice)</td>
<td>beginning of that class</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project memo 1</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>Problem definition and stakeholder map</td>
<td>4/19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project memo 2</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>Revised memo 1 and policy objectives, criteria, and options</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral briefing</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>Team briefing to the class and guests; visual aids and handouts</td>
<td>5/24, 5/26, 5/31, 6/2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final report</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>Revised memo 2 and final analysis of policy options</td>
<td>6/3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>Class contributions, including in section meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
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Note: Late penalties will be assessed for overdue papers unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor (with a very good reason) well in advance!
**TA Quiz Sections:**

There are two TA sections for this course: Thursdays from 12:30-1:20 PM and Fridays from 10:30-11:20 PM. Both will be held in Parrington 108. While these sections may be used for further discussion of readings and cases, as well as other topics, the focus will be primarily on providing support for the team policy projects, including working on applying concepts from the readings and classes to the project. For this reason, your project teams will be formed based on the quiz section in which you are enrolled.

**Office hours:**

I will hold office hours from 4:30-5:30 PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays (i.e., right after class) in my office, Parrington 231. I’m also glad to make an appointment to meet with you at another time if these times are not workable for you. TA Sarah Williamson will hold office hours on 11:30-12:20 and 1:30-2:20 on Thursdays in Parrington 124E.

**Professionalism:**

The Evans School is a professional school, and this class is an opportunity to practice the skills that will help you succeed in the workplace. I expect all written communication (including email) to follow professional norms, including appropriate capitalization and punctuation. In general, you can expect me to respond to email within two business days.

**In-class expectations:**

I request that you do NOT use your laptop, tablet, or other electronic devices during class, since using these devices for note-taking is more likely to distract you and your classmates than it is to add to the learning experience. If you feel that laptop use is necessary for your in-class experience, please contact Sarah or me as soon as possible with your request, which will likely mean a seating assignment in the back of the classroom in order to minimize the distraction to others. I will give you advance notice if a laptop will be useful for a particular class session, and I will post all PowerPoint presentations to Canvas following class.

I recognize that some of you may have back-to-back classes with little time for a break. That said, I expect that you will come to class prepared to stay in the classroom for the entire session (1hr 20 min). This means taking care of any restroom or other needs before entering the classroom. You are welcome to bring drinks and food to class, but please refrain from noisy packaging, noisy foods, and fragrant foods. I will ask you to put away your food if it is negatively affecting the classroom experience.

I expect phones and other personal communications (email, text, etc.) to be put away during class sessions. Please let me know in advance if you have a situation for which you cannot wait 80 minutes to access your phone or email.
Evans School Community Conversation Norms:

Please note that everyone in our course is expected to behave ethically and professionally at all times. By registering for this course, you agree to abide by the ethical and civil discourse norms of the Evans School and the University of Washington. Specifically, you agree to: 1) not claim the work of others as your own; and 2) respect members of our Evans learning community.

For guidance on how to behave respectfully with other members of the Evans School community, please refer to the Evans School’s Community Conversation Norms, reproduced below:

At the Evans School, we value the richness of our differences and how they can greatly enhance our conversations and learning. As a professional school, we also have a responsibility to communicate with each other—inside and outside of the classroom—in a manner consistent with conduct in today’s increasingly diverse places of work. We hold ourselves individually and collectively responsible for our communication by:

- **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

Academic integrity:
I expect each student to act honestly and sincerely with respect to this course and its related activities. Any student suspected of academic misconduct will have the option of receiving a zero on the assignment in question or appealing the decision to the Dean’s Representative. In the case of repeated or large-scale suspected academic misconduct, the matter will be referred to the Dean’s Representative for resolution. This policy aligns with UW’s recommended policies for addressing academic misconduct.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating, and fabricating information. Plagiarism is using another person’s words, ideas, artistic creations, or other intellectual property without giving proper credit. The 2014-2015 MPA Student Handbook includes additional information about what constitutes plagiarism or other academic misconduct.

Policy regarding students with disabilities:
In partnership with UW’s Disability Resources for Students (DRS), I am committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability is required to register with Disability Resources for Students (DRS). If you are anticipating accommodation, please let me know by email within the first week of the quarter.

Syllabus disclaimer:
This syllabus is a guide for this course that is subject to change. I will notify students of any changes to the syllabus as early as possible during class or via Canvas.
Course Outline and Readings:

Tu Mar 29  Intro to the course and each other. What is policy analysis? (Part 1)

Th Mar 31  What is policy analysis? (Part 2)
The policymaking process and the place of policy analysis; ethical dilemmas in policy analysis.

Readings:

Recommended:

Tu Apr 5  How to do it: policy analysis in the real world

Readings:
2. Bardach, E. & Patashnik, E.M. (2016). Specimen of a real world policy analysis. *A practical guide for policy analysis: The eightfold path to more effective problem solving* (5th ed.) (pp. 141-154). London: Sage. (Note: This will be discussed in class on May 3 but it is useful to read it once now.)
3. Peruse the sample PbAf 513 project papers from past years and other policy analysis examples on the course site, including a report by the instructor.

Guest panel of professionals who use policy analysis in their work:
Alicia Kinne (MPA, Evans 2009)
Chris Reykdal, WA State Representative (MPA, University of North Carolina)
Hans Zeiger, WA State Representative (MPP, Pepperdine University)
Th Apr 7  Policy analysis and homelessness in Seattle: A case study

Readings:
1. Mayor Schell’s Zero Homeless Families Pledge. Access at course site. (Note: This case is not eligible for the individual written assignment. It is provided as historical background relevant to today’s topic.)

Guests:
Jason Johnson, Deputy Director, Seattle Human Services Department
Leslie Price, Mayor’s Office on Policy and Innovation

Tu Apr 12  Identifying, documenting and diagnosing policy problems, their symptoms, and stakeholders

Readings:

4. Case to prepare: Buying time: The Dollar-a-Day Program. Kennedy School of Government case #961.0. Access at: http://case.hks.harvard.edu/buying-time-the-dollar-a-day-program/ (Note: There is no charge for this “classic” case.)

Assignment due: If you choose this case for your written analysis, it is due at the class Canvas site by the beginning of class. The same applies to all subsequent cases.

Recommended:

**NOTE:** These last two chapters provide a good review of topics largely covered in PBAF 516-517 that are relevant here. They are useful references.

**Th Apr 14** Applying problem definition skills

**Readings** *(all short clippings from the Seattle Times)*:

5. **Case to prepare:** *A Heritage Worth Saving?: The Case of the Acheen Street Malay Mosque Village*. Evans School Electronic Hallway.

**Project topics and teams must be settled by this date! Topics must be approved by the instructor!** Contact Sarah Williamson (TA) as well with your final project title and team member names as she will be keeping the records.

**Tu Apr 19** Objectives, goals and decision criteria.

**Readings:**
5. **Case to prepare:** Washington State debates the future of residential habilitation centers for People with Developmental Disabilities. Evans School Electronic Hallway.

**Recommended:**


**Assignment due:** Project problem definition memos (Project Memo #1) due from each team due on Canvas site by the beginning of class.

**Th Apr 21**

**Design of policy options: theory**

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**


**Tu Apr 26**

**Policy options: theory (continued)**

**Readings:**


**Recommended:**

**Policy options: practice I**

6. **Case to prepare:** Selecting communal lands in Zimbabwe. Evans School Electronic Hallway.

**Th Apr 28**  
**Policy options: practice II**

**Readings** (all short newspaper items):
4. Thompson, L. (2016, Feb 9). King County steps up effort to ease rise in homelessness. *The Seattle Times*.

6. **Case to prepare:** Portland Urban Growth Boundary (AND http://case.hks.harvard.edu/portlands-urban-growth-boundary-and-housing-prices-note-on-measuring-housing-prices-b/)

**NOTE:** This case is fairly short while the next class has a number of important assigned readings. It would be wise to start reading ahead. Many of you should find those upcoming readings helpful in thinking about how to proceed with the third, crucial phase of your policy analysis – assessing the impacts of policy alternatives.

**Tu May 3**  
**Evaluation of policy impacts: theory**

**Readings:**
**Recommended:**

**Th May 5**

**Institutionalizing Evidence-Based Policy Analysis**

**Readings:**

**Recommended:**

**Guest:**
Annie Pennucci, WSIPP interim director

**Assignment due:** Policy Project Memo #2, "Goals, Criteria and Policy Options" due on Canvas site by start of class. *(Note: This memo should also incorporate a revised version of your problem definition memo reflecting the feedback you received.)*

**Tu May 10**

**Building political and implementation thinking into policy analysis**

**Readings:**
3. **Case to prepare:** Implementing a new drug and alcohol program in Sacramento County, A & B. Evans School Electronic Hallway.
Recommended:

Th May 12  Policy choice processes and communicating analysis

Readings:

Recommended:

Tu May 17  Structured Collaborative Decision Making Processes as an Approach to Addressing Challenging, Multi-Stakeholder Public Policy Problems

Readings:
[Ruckelshaus Center materials TBA]

Guests:
Michael Kern (Evans MPA, 1995), Director, and Darren Nichols, Associate Director, William D. Ruckelshaus Center of the Evans School and Washington State University Extension

Th May 19  Policy project workshop

Assignment due: Each policy analysis project team should come to class prepared with 8 copies of a draft matrix of policy alternatives and criteria for evaluation that apply to its policy problem, *with the cells filled in*. The matrix should be accompanied by a paragraph or two summarizing for your colleagues the problem and client and the basic logic of your analysis and matrix entries. These documents 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 assessing clarity of presentation. It is strongly recommended that you share your matrix a day or more before class with the other teams that you will be working with! In section meetings you will extend your network of peer critics to more teams.
Tu May 24  Policy analysis team oral briefings on analysis results. Slides should be distributed by each team to the instructor, TA, and class members at least 24 hours prior to their presentation! Presentations will be mounted on the classroom equipment ahead, so ready to run when it is your turn. Presentation time will be strictly limited to fit in everyone equitably, but there will be a brief period for questions and reactions from the class, TA, and me. Exact time allocations will depend on the number of presentations but figure on roughly 12 minutes, with 2-3 minutes for questions.

Each team member should be “on stage” for approximately the same amount of time. **For the sake of the group enterprise and in fairness to your colleagues, you are obligated to attend these classes even when you are not presenting!** They provide an excellent opportunity to broaden your learning from the course.

Th June 2  FINAL WRITTEN POLICY ANALYSIS REPORT FROM EACH TEAM IS DUE to the class Canvas site. A penalty will be assessed for late papers.