

The Evergreen State College
Masters Program in Public Administration
Foundations of Public Policy Fall 2011 syllabus as of 8 2 11
Wednesdays 6p-10p Sem II A3109

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“Public Policy” is the sexy alter ego of public administration. The study of policy tantalizes us with the possibility that we may learn the secrets to how big policy decisions are made, and have an impact on those decisions. This is a particularly fascinating time to study this topic. The first half of the Obama Administration, when it was able to collaborate with a Democratic Congress, brought an explosion of new policy initiatives and considerable accomplishments, especially health care reform. Since the ascendance of the so-called “Tea Party” to power in the House of Representatives, ideological lines have sharpened and brought the most intense debates on policy and fiscal issues since the early days of the Reagan era.

This course will provide an overview of the concepts and issues in the field of public policy. As the first course in the TESC MPA program policy concentration, it is intended to provide an introduction to the study of public policy processes and to the practice of policy analysis. We will consider the economic and political rationales offered for public intervention in our society and economy, and critique the many models analysts have created to describe the policy process. The course will emphasize two contrasting approaches to policy analysis—a classic approach epitomized by rational, benefit cost analysis, and an interpretive model that features deliberative processes at the core of democratic systems of governance. Comparing and contrasting these models, we seek to provide guidance for future policy analysts in our representative democracy, in a system where marginalized groups still find it difficult to gain entrée to the policy process.

Course learning objectives. Students will gain:

1. Knowledge of a variety of models describing the policy process
2. An understanding of critical skills and concepts of policy analysis.
3. Improved understanding of the complex nature of public problems in several policy arenas
4. Improved analytical and writing skills.

We will read 4 texts plus a variety of shorter articles, governmental reports, and research studies, and discuss these in class. Lectures, films, guest presentations and workshops will be featured during our class sessions. Students will write several short papers, and prepare one longer paper, on which they will deliver a presentation the last day of class.

Credit and Evaluation: Students will receive 4 credits at the completion of the course if all course requirements have been successfully completed. Plagiarism (i.e., using other peoples’ work as your own), failing to complete one or more assignments, completing one or more assignments late (without having made arrangements before the due date), or multiple absences may be grounds for denial of credit. Partial credit will be awarded only under unusual circumstances. Consistent with MPA program requirements, a self evaluation will be required for credit.

Expectations: All students are expected to contribute to a well functioning MPA classroom learning community. Behavior that disrupts the learning community may be grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal from the MPA program. Evergreen e-mail will be used for communication about class work; course documents will be available on the course Moodle site. Faculty will be prepared for class, responsive to questions and promptly return assignments.

Texts

Jacobs, Lawrence and Theda Skocpol (2010). *Health Care Reform and American Politics*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. ISBN: 0199769125; ISBN-13: 978-0199769124. (paper)

Wu, Tim. (2010). *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires*. New York: Knopf. ISBN-13: 978-0307269935 (hardcover).

Sabatier, Paul (2007). *Theories of the Policy Process, Second Edition* (Paperback). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ISBN-10: 0813343593; # ISBN-13: 978-0813343594

Weimer, David, and Aidan R. Vining. (2010). *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (5th Edition) New York: Prentice Hall. Paperback. ISBN-10: 0205781306
ISBN-13: 978-0205781300

Articles . (Will be available at the course Moodle site unless otherwise noted).

Bogason, Peter (2004). "Postmodern Public Administration." Chapter of *Handbook of Public Management*. Oxford University Press, Ferlie, Lynn & Pollitt, eds. On ELMS or at <http://www.ruc.dk/upload/application/pdf/f51d6748/POMOADMfinal.pdf>

Bryson, John M. "What To Do When Stakeholders Matter...." *Public Management Review*. 2004 6(1), 21-53. Available at: <http://www.wagnerbriefing.com/briefing/index.html>. (scroll down; click on the first link under June 8, 2004). An earlier version of the paper: <http://www.pmrnet.org/conferences/georgetownpapers/Bryson.pdf>.

Geri, Laurance and D. McNabb (2011). "Making Public Policy in the U.S." Chapter 3 of *Energy Policy in the U.S.: Politics, Challenges, and Prospects for Change*.

Hajer, Maarten A. & Hendrik Wagenaar (2003). Introduction: *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*, Cambridge University Press. http://www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/standinggroups/perspectives/papers/hajer_wagenaar_editors_intro.pdf

Hofstadter, Richard (1964). "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" *Harper's Magazine*, November, pp. 77-86. Available at http://karws.gso.uri.edu/jfk/conspiracy_theory/the_paranoid_mentality/the_paranoid_style.html

Other articles TBD

Assignments. Please complete in 11 or 12 point font, double spaced. Include page numbers and STAPLE your papers.

1. **Final Paper proposal.** Draft a 1-2 page proposal for your final paper project. Define the problem, provide initial data on the extent of the problem, and explain why this is a public policy issue. **Due: October 5th.**
2. **Stakeholder analysis.** Use the approaches suggested by Bryson and others to analyze the stakeholders relevant to your final paper project. (The World Bank handbook on Moodle also has excellent frameworks to apply). What groups may have been excluded from the policy setting process? What are the race/class/gender implications? **Due : October 12th.**

3. US Health Care Policy. The Affordable Care Act was an epochal and highly controversial piece of social legislation. One of the major themes of the “story” of this bill was the interplay between policy design and politics: that is, the new policy should be designed to accomplish certain goals, and be a bill that can be supported by a majority of legislators. Write a short essay (3-5 pages, double-spaced) in which you critique the design of the policy in the Act from both a policy analysis and a political perspective. What does it do well? Where is it weak? What made it politically vulnerable? Were other, rejected, policy designs for this legislation politically viable? What design would you have preferred? **Due October 19th.**

4. Analyzing Politics and Policy. Using the rubric provided in class, write a concise memo of up to 3 double spaced pages in which you analyze the politics of a policy issue of your choice. (It should differ from the topic for your final paper). Has politics influenced what is perceived as the “problem” that reform is meant to solve? Has the “paranoid style” of politics in this country, as suggested by Hofstadter and others, had a demonstrable impact? Do you think these political considerations should be included in a “just the facts” policy analysis? **Due October 26th.**

4a. Washington’s ballot measures. Before class on November 2nd, spend about an hour researching one of the initiatives/referenda up for a vote on November 8th. (Start at http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/referenda_2011.aspx). Analyze the “problem” defined by the sponsor, project the likely effects of the new policy (including costs, benefits, and *who* will benefit). Consider how you’ll vote. Be prepared to discuss the measure in class.

5. Postmodern Policy Analysis: A Thought Experiment. After reading the week’s assigned articles, write a short (2 pages double spaced, max) paper in which you sketch out how a “postmodern” policy analyst would apply this approach to a policy issue, preferably the one that is the focus of your final paper. **Due: November 9th.**

6. Critique of *The Master Switch*. Write a 2-3 page critique (NOT a summary) of Wu’s *The Master Switch*. Specifically discuss the implications of his arguments for current policy makers. **Due: November 30th.**

7. Final paper: Research and write a 10 to 15 page policy brief. Explore an important issue in depth and provide recommendations to policy makers. Additional details on this assignment will be provided in class; also see page 5 of the syllabus below. **Due: December 7th.** Prepare a 5 minute presentation summarizing your findings; be prepared to deliver it in class **December 7th.**

Policy Studies and Policy Analysis Resources

Useful webpages:

Library of Congress/Thomas: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>;

Congressional Budget Office: <http://www.cbo.gov/>;

U.S. Government Accountability Office: <http://www.gao.gov>

Washington, JLARC: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/JLARC/>

Cato Institute: www.cato.org

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities: <http://www.cbpp.org/>.

Progressive Policy Institute: <http://www.ppionline.org/>

The Urban Institute: <http://www.urban.org/index.cfm>

Brookings: <http://www.brookings.edu/>;

The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/>

Washington Policy Institute: <http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/index.html>

Kaiser Foundation hc syllabus page: <http://www.kaiseredu.org/syllabus.asp?id=98> Ehlers report on technology: at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/house/science/cp105-b/toc.html>.

Tentative class schedule: Subject to change

Week/Date	Topics	Readings and Assignments
1 9/28	Policy: what it is and why it matters Competing concepts of the public; Frames for the policy arena. Rationales for public action	Sabatier, Part I Weimer and Vining, Parts I and II
2 10/5	Models of the policy process, Pt. I Policy options and tools for public action Systems and Institutions: Is Congress broken? Does money control politics? Case study: The Debt Ceiling Debacle.	Sabatier, Part II; Geri and McNabb chapter 3; articles on U.S. debt ceiling. DUE: Assignment 1, Final paper proposal.
3 10/12	Policy analysis: Conceptual foundations Intro to stakeholder analysis On policy design and policy analysis Case: Sources of future growth	Weimer and Vining, Part III; Bryson, stakeholder articles on ELMS DUE: Assignment 2, Stakeholder analysis paper.
4 10/19	Models of the policy process, Pt. II The Return of the “Paranoid Style” and the Struggle to Frame Public Problems. Case study: health care reform.	Sabatier, Part III; Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics”; Jacobs and Skocpol, <i>Health Care Reform and American Politics</i> DUE: Assignment 3
5 10/26	Policy Analysis II Policy and predictions: the uses and abuses of forecasts	Weimer and Vining, Part IV DUE: Assignment 4.
6 11/2	Is a “nudge” enough? The decline and rise of the regulatory state; intro to prospect theory; Developing policy arguments Do the “mainstream media” matter? Discussion of WA ballot measures	Review of <i>Nudge</i> (handout); article on prospect theory, TBD article on the media in US politics, TBD Prepare for discussion on a ballot measure
7 11/9	New visions for the policy process Postmodern policy analysis	Bogason, Hajer and Wagenaar articles on ELMS. DUE: Assignment 5.
8 11/16	Comparative public policy: states, countries, time. Case study: Will Social Security Survive?	Sabatier, Part IV; Articles on national pensions, TBD.
9 11/30	Case Study: Technology Policy	Wu, <i>The Master Switch</i> DUE: Assignment 6.
12/7	Class Presentations	DUE: Assignment 7 (Final Paper)

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How to Write a Policy Brief: Format for Final Assignment Due December 7th

In the public policy arena, it is critical to quickly gain a decision-maker's attention and make a convincing argument. The usual academic format fails at this task; a more focused approach is needed that zeros in on the problem and possible solutions. A comprehensive policy analysis will often include these sections:

- Problem Identification -- finding the public interests and issues involved
- Criteria Selection -- determining the criteria to use to evaluate policy options
- System Assessment -- analysis of boundaries, feedback, and power dynamics
- Strategies and Tactics -- examining decision-making and delivery mechanisms
- Feasibility Assessment -- formulation and implementation analysis

Generally the tone of a policy brief depends on the audience. A neutral tone that communicates an unbiased approach to the issue is often best. If prepared for an advocacy group, a stronger tone that actively pokes holes in the opposition is ok, within limits.

Preferred Format for Policy Brief final paper (Note: It isn't essential to have a separate section on each issue)

I. Executive Summary: one or two paragraphs

II. What is the problem? For whom, how & why is this problem?

III. Describe the extent of the problem. What quantitative trends help explain the problem? What do they suggest for the future?

IV. What makes this a *public* policy issue? Critique the current approach to the problem.

V. How did the issue emerge historically? Describe the background of the issue; provide a chronology of key events, including government actions.

VI. Who are the key stakeholders? What are their positions? What resources do they have? What did they do to get government attention to the issue? What groups have been traditionally left out of the debate? Are there race/class/gender implications?

VII. What are the main policy options? Provide at least three (one is usually the status quo ante). Identify the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Cover all sides of an argument. If the figures are easily available, estimate the costs and benefits.

VIII. Provide a recommended option and explain your rationale for the choice. This may include practical steps to take; often close the paper with a reminder why action is needed.

IX. Citations & Bibliography. Books, articles, websites, personal interviews

Other Sources: <http://www.policy.hu/ipf/fel-pubs/samples/PolicyBrief-described.pdf>
http://www.courses.psu.edu/hpa/hpa301_fre1/IBInstructions_fa02.PDF. Online examples: a few will be posted on Moodle. The policy articles in the *New York Review* are often excellent examples of policy analysis. See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/62/34537360.pdf>; an OECD analysis of nuclear power.