

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

School of Public Affairs

ETHICAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC POLICY

PUAD 619

Spring 2014

Syllabus

<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Office Hours</i>	<i>Class Time and Venue</i>
Prof. Karen Baehler Ward 323 baehler@american.edu (202) 885-6072 (office)	Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:15 – 9:15 pm (Or other times by appointment)	Thursdays, 5:30 - 8 pm Ward 305 (In case of university closure due to weather, etc., instructions will be sent by email regarding alternative arrangements for missed classes.)

Course Description

"We are all children of the Greeks. We intuitively grasp the need for a sense of moral direction: it is not necessary to be familiar with Socrates to feel that the unexamined life is not worth much. Natural Aristotelians, we assume that a just society is one in which justice is habitually practiced; a good society one in which people behave well. But in order for such an implicitly circular account to convince, we need to agree on the meaning of 'just' or 'well.'"

Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (2010), p 181

Ethics is the study of how to live well, and in the context of public policy, it may be defined as the study of how to live well *together*, since the need for public policy arises from the challenges posed by human society. Robinson Crusoe had little need for public policy, and even less need for an ethics of public policy.

Ethics often are expressed in basic principles designed to guide behavior, such as Kant's famous maxim to treat others always as ends and never as means or Rawls' "difference principle." In the language of public policy, such principles generally refer to basic "values" that people hold dear, such as tolerance or equal opportunity. Our job this semester is to explore the values-related (i.e., normative) dimensions of public policy formulation and implementation. Many policy and political disagreements boil down to disagreements over what values should be given priority and whose interpretations of those values should prevail.

In particular, we will examine selected ethical questions that arise from the multiple roles that MPP and MPA students are likely to play in the course of their lives and professional careers:

- Where do values come from? What are their conceptual and historical roots?
 - In our roles as citizens and policy advisors, do we recognize our own ideological leanings and philosophical assumptions? Have we chosen these basic beliefs consciously and deliberately, or picked them up along the way? Do they warrant testing and possible revision?

- To what extent can empirical methods of policy analysis be separated from the values dimensions of policy advising?
 - In our roles as professional analysts and managers, do we recognize the philosophical roots and implications of the basic methods and techniques that we use to practice our craft (e.g., cost-benefit analysis)?
- What are professional ethics, and how are they applied in public policy and public administration?
 - In our roles as members of organizations, how should we handle conflicts between our view of the truth and the organization's choices and commitments?

Learning Methods and Outcomes

Student-led learning is the basic method employed in this course, with the instructor playing a facilitating role. Class sessions will be run as seminars, with a blend of lectures, debates, informal student presentations, discussion of readings and related issues, and summarization of lessons learned.

The expected outcomes from this course include:

- Heightened awareness of the ethical dimensions of policy choices, analytical practices, and organizational behavior,
- Expanded conceptual vocabulary for discussing these ethical dimensions,
- Increased understanding of one's own ideological predispositions and deeper understanding of the sources and justifications for other ideologies,
- Keener grasp of a wide range of ethical issues from military drafts to progressive taxation,
- Strengthened ability to frame a question for ethical analysis
- Sharpened ethical reasoning; demonstrated skills at finding and filtering relevant evidence for ethical analysis, making arguments, and drawing conclusions.

Books and Readings

Required texts:

*Tony Judt (2010). *Ill Fares the Land*. Penguin. ISBN 978-0-143-11876-3

*Rosemary O'Leary (2006). *The Ethics of Dissent: Managing Guerilla Government*. CQ Press. ISBN 1-933116-60-9

*Michael Sandel (2009). *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar Strauss & Giroux. ISBN 978-0-374-53250-5

*Jonathan Wolff (2011). *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-66853-8

Additional readings are posted on Blackboard or instructions are given there for finding them on the internet.

Expectations

Overall

Serious learning only happens when you push yourself beyond your comfort zone. Therefore, expectations for performance in this course are high for both graded and ungraded tasks and roles.

Reading

It is essential to keep up with the readings, and students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the week's assigned readings. The trick to a successful graduate school career is learning to read fast and selectively. It is strongly recommended that you prepare a brief synopsis of each reading prior to attending the class. These will come in handy later when you prepare for the midterm and final exam.

Written Work

High standards of writing are expected. This means logical organization of the material, smooth narrative flow, and lucid and succinct prose. Each written submission should have a main point or a series of tightly connected main points. The arguments and evidence offered to support the main point should be carefully selected and the connections between levels of the argument should be crystal clear. In order to achieve all of this, you should write the first draft as early as possible.

All submitted assignments should be typo-free, written in full sentences, with proper grammar and correct punctuation. Points will be deducted for poor editing and proofreading. Assignments with very sloppy grammar and/or punctuation will not be accepted.

Attendance and Class Discussion

Many of the topics to be discussed in this course are "hot buttons." Please work hard to keep strong emotions at bay. Civility, mutual respect, and tolerance for differences of opinion will be the guiding principles for class discussion.

Of course, attendance is a prerequisite to class participation. Therefore, if you miss more than two classes, your grade may be lowered. Missing four or more classes forces me to issue a failing grade. Exceptions will be made for sickness, family emergencies, and religious holidays, but advance notice (where possible) and written documentation is appreciated.

Assessment of Performance

General guidelines for assignments

- Submit all assignments through Turnitin and Blackboard.
- Do not write your name anywhere on your papers (including in the file name). Use student id only.
- Feel free to submit assignments early. Late assignments will incur penalties.

If you do not have one already, please open a Turnitin account

It's all free, of course. Here are the instructions:

- Go to www.turnitin.com
- Click on "Create an Account" on right at top of screen
- Choose "Student" from drop-down menu
- Input class ID and enrollment password as follows:

Class ID	7528284
Password	argument

- Input your email address and create a password for your individual account
- Choose a secret security question and answer
- Enter your name and agree to the user agreement
- View the "Completed" screen and log in
- On the student welcome screen, click on the course to see the assignments
- To submit an assignment, just click on the assignment's "Submit" button and follow instructions

Assignments

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Purpose / Learning Outcome</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>% Total Grade</i>
Three reflections on readings	Spur deeper engagement with the readings; improve ability to spot connections between readings; increase understanding of one's own ethical predispositions; improve ability to write very succinctly	11:59 on the night before class; you choose which weeks; no late papers accepted	1 page	30% (10% each x 3)
Mid-term exam (take-home)	Sharpen ethical reasoning; deepen understanding of course themes to date; consolidate learning from 1 st 5 weeks	11:59 pm on Thursday, Feb. 20	5 pages	30%
Focused participation	Heighten awareness of ethical dimensions in policy issues and public administration; exercise argumentation skills	Sign up for ONE Week 2: Jan. 16 Week 5: Feb. 13 Week 9: March 20 Week 13: April 17	5 minutes	Not graded, but participation required
Take-home final exam	Sharpen ethical reasoning ; deepen understanding of course themes; consolidate learning from whole semester	11:59 pm on Thursday, May 1	6 pages	40%

All written assignments should demonstrate depth of critical and higher-order thinking, perceptiveness, comprehension of themes that cut across the readings, and quality of exposition. DO NOT summarize the readings! Interpret them and connect them. Use the readings to generate fresh insights.

Topics for the **THREE REFLECTIONS** are your choice, but must be grounded in the readings. These are meant to be very tightly composed mini-essays. Make every word count!

The **TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM** and **FINAL EXAM** will consist of 1-3 essay questions. Your answers to these questions should integrate course material, find points of convergence and divergence among authors, and deepen your understanding of the course's overarching themes.

Four of our class periods will be structured around student contributions in two forms: Students who sign up for week 2 or 13 will be assigned positions to defend in a debate. Students who sign up for week 5 or 9 will be asked to bring policy examples relevant to that week's topic. A sign-up sheet for this **FOCUSED PARTICIPATION** assignment will be circulated in Week 1. Each person only needs to sign up for one week.

Grading Scale

93 + = A (Excellent)

Reaches well beyond basic requirements; demonstrates excellence in both form and content; depth of insights is notable; critical thinking and integrative thinking are displayed; arguments are balanced and carefully reasoned; class themes and material are applied perceptively

90 - 92 = A- (Very Good)

87 - 89 = B+ (Good)

83 - 86 = B (Satisfactory)

All requirements of the assignment are met at the standard expected of graduate school work, including both form and content

80 - 82 = B- (Just barely satisfactory)

Minimal satisfaction of assignment requirements

77 - 79 = C+ (Below expectations)

Not what is expected from assignment, although some features may be fine

73 - 76 = C (Below expectations)

Assignment shows significant deficiencies

Academic integrity

By registering in this class, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to know your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Please familiarize yourself with all of American University's policies regarding academic integrity – log in to www.myamerican.edu, click on "Academics," then click on "Academic Integrity" under "General Links" to read the Academic Integrity Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course. Failure to comply with the requirements of the Academic Integrity Code can result in failure in the course, as well as more serious academic sanctions.

Please note that the Code applies equally to the content of oral presentations, presentation aids such as PowerPoint slides, and written assignments. Some students seem to be more relaxed about cutting and pasting (from an internet site, for example) into a PowerPoint presentation than they would be in an essay, but this is NOT acceptable. Any written material that you copy in any way in any assignment must be enclosed in quotation marks, whether it's in a policy memo, take-home exam, essay, term paper, or PowerPoint slide. Likewise for charts, tables, or graphs that you copy into a presentation or paper – the sources for these items must be identified in a caption. I do not require referencing of visual images such as photos, but other professors may.

The most common types of code violations seem to arise due to carelessness and deadline pressure; many are not premeditated. But penalties for violating the Code are steep either way, and therefore, students need to be scrupulous about avoiding both impulsive lapses and deliberate violations. The best way to avoid the

temptations of last-minute cutting and pasting is to start assignments early and give yourself enough time to put everything into your own words, to mark quotations appropriately, and to organize references.

In addition, please note the Academic Integrity Code's strictures against inappropriate collaboration with other students, submission of work already submitted in a previous course, and use of material obtained from "essay mills".