

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

School of Public Affairs

FOUNDATIONS OF POLICY ANALYSIS

PUAD 606

Spring 2012

Syllabus

<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Office Hours (first come, first served, no appointment needed)</i>	<i>Class Time and Venue</i>
Prof. Karen Baehler Ward 329 baehler@american.edu (202) 885-6072 (office)	Tuesdays, 8 – 9 pm Thursdays, 3 – 5 pm	Thursdays, 5:30 - 8 pm Ward 203

Course Description and Learning Objectives

“...speaking truth to power remains the ideal of analysts who hope they have truth, but realize they have not (and, in a democracy, should not have) power.”

Aaron Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power* (1987), p 13

Three fundamental questions face the student and practitioner of policy analysis: (1) What is good policy analysis and advice? (2) How is it produced? (3) If the quotation above is correct and policy analysts have no power, then why bother?

This course addresses all three questions through critical study of the eightfold path to problem-solving (according to Bardach 2005) and the methods associated with each step on the path (as elaborated by Weimer and Vining 2011) and by applying these methods to contemporary policy issues. In addition, students will examine flaws in these conventional approaches, which include insufficient interest in crafting new ideas, lack of specific tools for anticipating how recommended interventions would work in practice, neglect of cumulative learning about complex problems, and, occasionally, disdain for politics. Tools for filling these gaps will be presented. By the end of the course, the goal is to have shifted our paradigm of policy analysis from *choice* to *design*, from an *issues* focus to a *systems* focus, and from the task of *informing* to the vocation of *advising*.

Highly effective policy analysts and policy advisers combine sharp, incisive thinking with creative problem-solving and breathtakingly concise, crystal-clear communication. They know how to gather intelligence from the field as well as the internet and library. They display ingenuity, imagination, openness to competing perspectives, respect for evidence (but not blind acceptance of every statistic), healthy skepticism regarding commonly held assumptions, curiosity about how policies work in practice, care for the people directly affected by policies, capacity to learn from mistakes, high tolerance for delayed gratification, political dexterity, and willingness to make themselves unpopular when necessary. The best policy analysts recognize their own ideological biases and try not to be blinded by them. Most importantly, they never lose their common sense. Cultivating these dispositions and habits is a core goal of PUAD 606.

Learning Methods

Student-led learning is the basic method employed in this course, with the instructor playing a facilitating role. Class sessions will incorporate a blend of lectures, on-the-spot analysis of policy issues, informal student presentations, discussion of readings, formal team presentations, and summarization of lessons learned. Students will develop expertise in particular policy areas and share their insights through ongoing contributions to class discussion.

Books and Readings

Required texts:

*Bardach, Eugene (2011). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, 4th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

*Weimer, David L. and Aidan R. Vining (2011). *Policy Analysis*, 5th Edition. Longman.

*Winston, Clifford (2006). *Government Failure versus Market Failure: Microeconomics Policy Research and Government Performance*. Washington, DC: AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies. Pdf available online: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/papers/winston/20061003.pdf>

Any editions of these books are acceptable. But if you have an older edition, please take responsibility for knowing any differences in chapter and page numbers.

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 final exam.

Written Work

Most of the written assignments in this course are relatively short, which places a premium on succinctness and clarity. Every word should contribute directly to making a point. Do not bother reeling off facts or demonstrating random bits of knowledge if they do not contribute to the overall story being told. Avoid the temptation to spice things up with exaggerated language or excessive emotion. Keep your transitions short and sharp: They should tie your arguments together and ensure a coherent flow through the paper without wasting space. Be forthright and direct, even when you are expressing uncertainty, e.g., "The evidence remains divided

about whether the asteroid or volcano theory offers a better explanation for mass dinosaur extinction.” Most of you will probably find that your first drafts are at least twice the word limit; the challenge then is to cut words without cutting valuable content. This takes time and practice. Write the first draft as early as possible.

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

The writing style of a policy memo should be closer to a high-quality news analysis than an academic article, but with full academic referencing. (It is better to over-reference than under-reference.) State the purpose of the memo at the start, and develop your narrative using logical arguments, evidence where available, and illustrative details. The structure of your memo should fit the nature of the material being presented and make it easy for the reader to follow your train of thought. Headings and subheadings are encouraged, but bullet points should be used only when listing things, never to make substantive points. A memo’s conclusion should identify tensions, unresolved matters, and areas in need of further work. The conclusion of Memo 1 should refer to Memo 2. The introduction of Memo 2 should refer to Memo 1.

Excellent policy memos acknowledge both conflicting facts and disagreements over interpretation, and address these intelligently. A high-quality memo is lively and thought-provoking and makes the reader want to keep reading. The best ways to improve your writing are to write a lot, seek feedback from others, and read the work of excellent writers. *The Economist* and the *New York Review of Books* offer very different examples of excellent writing that is uniformly forthright, engaging, and dense with meaning.

Class Discussion

This is the difference between face-to-face and on-line education, and a valuable opportunity to learn from each other. To reinforce the importance of class engagement, your attentiveness in class and the quality of your contributions to discussion will determine how I round your final grade.

The purpose of classtime is not to hash over readings and theories, but to clarify ambiguities, make new connections among the various ideas and issues being explored in the class, and to connect those ideas with “live” policy issues and students’ experiences. Class participation hones the skills involved in thinking on your feet and articulating complex ideas clearly, as well as the important skill of active, engaged listening.

Students are expected to become resident PUAD 606 experts on their team’s policy issue and contribute insights to class discussions based on what they are learning about that issue. In addition, students are encouraged to offer perspectives informed by professional and personal experience and observation, topics covered in other courses, and items in the daily news. The best classes are those in which debates break out spontaneously. When this occurs, civility and mutual respect are expected at all times.

Assessment of Performance

General guidelines

- Submit all assignments through Turnitin.
- At top of paper, indicate total number of words contained in your paper, minus footnotes, references, and appendices
- Feel free to submit assignments early. Late assignments will incur penalties.

Teams and Policy Issues

A large chunk of your work in PUAD 606 involves applying frameworks and methods from class to a selected policy issue. You will work with three or four other students in a team setting to gather and share information about your assigned issue. The information assembled by the team is needed to write the policy memos, but the memos themselves must be written alone. Teams will make brief, ungraded presentations to the class in weeks 12-14. Students will be assigned to teams during the first class, at which time the whole class will vote on which policy issues should be tackled this semester.

Assignments

Assignment	Purpose / Intended Outcome	Due Date 11:59 pm	Word/Time Limit (max)	Graded ?	% Total Grade
Contribution to bright-ideas file	Stimulate creative policy thinking	Variable	5 minutes plus Q & A	No	Credit / No credit
Report to team on fact-finding	Hone search skills; practice filtering information	Monday, Feb. 6	None	No	Credit / No credit
Memo 1 – <i>Draft to professor</i> Problem Analysis	Apply policy analysis steps 1, 2, 4 & 8; practice policy writing	Monday, Feb. 20	2500 words	No	Credit / No credit
Memo 1 – <i>Final</i> Problem Analysis	Sharpen analytical thinking; polish writing; use track changes	Monday, March 5	2500 words	Yes	20
Memo 2 – <i>Draft to student peer reviewer</i> Solution Analysis	Apply policy analysis steps 3 and 5-8; demonstrate both creative and critical thinking; practice policy writing	Monday, March 26			Credit / No credit
Peer feedback on another student's 2 nd memo	Practice the art of giving and receiving constructive criticism	Monday, April 2	None	No	Credit / No credit
Memo 2 – <i>Final</i> Solution Analysis	Deepen analysis; polish writing; use track changes	Monday, April 9	3000 words	Yes	30
Executive summary of combined memos	Strengthen grasp of whole issue; polish writing	Monday, April 23	1000 words	Yes	20
Team presentations	Share findings; stimulate class debate; practice presentation and audience skills	Weeks 12-14	10 minutes plus Q&A	No	Credit / No credit
Class attentiveness and participation	Build habits of engagement; hone communication skills; create active learning environment for whole class	Through-out	None	At the margin	Affects rounding
Take-home final exam	Demonstrate integrated understanding of course themes	Thursday, May 3	TBA	Yes	30

All assignments must be submitted for credit, but only the shaded items will be graded. Detailed descriptions of each assignment follow.

Contribution to the Bright-Ideas File

A goal of this course is to stimulate policy design creativity. Toward that end, we will collect examples of creative policy solutions being developed around the world. Each student will identify at least one creative policy solution from sources outside of this course and present it informally to the whole class at a specified time (schedule TBA), including an explanation of why you think it qualifies as a bright idea. For an example, see the article filed under “Biofuel from poppies” in the “Readings” section of Blackboard. Students are asked to upload a summary of their bright idea (could be an article written by someone else or your own summary) to a forum thread within the “Discussion Board” section of Blackboard.

Report to Team on Fact-Finding

Each member of your team will be assigned to gather information around one of these sets of questions:

1. **Nature of problem:** Is this a real problem? If so, who or what is most affected? What does the evidence show regarding scale, scope, and distribution of the problem? Is the problem getting worse? What are the main causes of the problem?
2. **Policy history:** What policies, if any, have been used over time to address the stated problem? Discuss local, state, and/or national levels, as appropriate. What policies are currently in place? Do we know how these policies are working?
3. **Policy alternatives:** What other options are being discussed, and by whom? Is there any evidence regarding the likely effectiveness of the other options?
4. **International comparison:** How do other countries handle this area of policy? Do they know if their approaches are working?

The information should be obtained from a diversity of reputable sources, including academic publications and mainstream media outlets. Think tanks are a legitimate source of information, but if they are known to have ideological leanings, these should be noted. Findings should be summarized in writing (with references), shared with the team, and submitted for credit.

Policy Memos

Each student will write two policy memos based on the material gathered by all members of his/her team. Although information gathering and interpretation is a group project, the memos are strictly individual projects.

Memo 1 – Problem Analysis

This memo should:

1. Analyze the policy problem using the market, government, and/or distributive failure frameworks. Explain which of the frameworks best apply to your issue and why. Are other frameworks also needed to understand your issue?
2. Sketch a map of the system that holds the policy problem in place and discuss the factors included in the map.

Because this is the first graded assignment for this course, students are invited to submit a draft of their memos for feedback from the professor before submitting the final version. See deadlines above.

Memo 2 – Solution Analysis

This memo should:

1. Present 4-6 promising policy options (including the status quo) for addressing the problem described in memo 1. Describe each option in as much detail as possible and explain why it fits your policy issue.
2. Establish criteria for assessing outcomes. Explain your choices.

3. Project the outcomes for at least two options against each criterion, using at least two different techniques drawn from the “menu” of outcomes projection methods presented in class and discussed in various readings.
4. Summarize the results of the matrix exercise, including trade-offs among criteria and relative attractiveness of selected options. Some matrices will produce clear recommendations. Some will not have enough solid projections to yield a conclusion. Some will look like a “tie.”

In this memo especially, please beware of lapsing into raw opinion. All evaluative comments need to be supported by strong logic and as much evidence as possible.

A first draft of this assignment will be submitted to a designated fellow student, who will provide detailed feedback about the memo’s strengths and weakness and suggest revisions. The final version will be submitted to the professor for grading and credit.

Peer Feedback on Another Student’s 2nd Memo

Each student will be given a fellow student’s 2nd memo to read and critique (from a different team). The reviewer’s feedback should be in written form and should include discussion of strengths, weaknesses, and recommended changes to be made. The tone of the critiques should be constructive and respectful at all times.

Executive Summary of Combined Memos

You will condense your two memos into one tightly written executive summary that touches on the key points. This is an exercise in sharp, concise writing.

Team Presentations

Each policy team should present policy recommendations related to their issue with a persuasive rationale for each recommendation. These presentations can be largely informal and should waste no time getting to the main points. If the members of your team disagree about what should be recommended, the team can present multiple points of view.

Class Attentiveness and Participation

See “Class Discussion” above on p. 3.

Take-Home Final Exam

This will consist of three or four essay questions that provide students with an opportunity to integrate main themes from the course and demonstrate both depth and breadth of understanding of the semester’s material.

Grading Scale

93 + = A (Excellent)

Reaches well beyond basic requirements; demonstrates excellence in both form and content; depth of insights is notable

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; good on both form and content

80 - 82 = B-

Most requirements of the assignment are met at an adequate standard, but not all

77 - 79 = C+

Some satisfactory features, but not what is expected from assignment

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, "good practice" guide, 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".