

PLS 304
Introduction to Public Policy Analysis

Summer II 2008

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http://people.uncw.edu/imperialm/UNCW/PLS_304_Summer/PLS_304_sum.htm	

Course Objectives

Public policy analysis is an important subject and all students considering a career in public service or who desire to participate in the political process should be well versed in the basic concepts and techniques of the discipline. The product of policy analysis is usable knowledge that informs decision makers and this advice can come in a variety of forms and is performed by a wide range of practitioners in the public, private, and nonprofit sector. This course exposes students to the art and science of policy analysis from both a philosophical and technical perspective. Students will also be exposed to the basic concepts, tools, and techniques used by analysts in today's public and nonprofit organizations. Students will also learn how to perform a policy analysis. Specifically, the course objectives are to:

- Develop your appreciation of the complexity of issues, problems and challenges associated with public policy analysis;
- Enhance your ability to analyze policy problems, find creative solutions, and implement policies and programs effectively; and,
- Learn how to communicate the results of your analysis to managers, decisionmakers, and the general public.

These objectives will be met by exposing you to a variety of theories and concepts as well as tools and techniques derived from these theories. The course will develop your critical thinking abilities by analyzing case studies. Your oral communication skills will be enhanced through class presentations. Writing assignments will be used to improve your ability to communicate your ideas and arguments in written form.

Readings

The following books are required for this course and can be purchased at local bookstores or through vendors on the Internet:

- Patton, Carl and David Sawicki. 1993. *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning*. Second Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN 0-13-060948-X.
- Levitt, Steven D. and Stephen J. Dubner. 2006. *Freakonomics [Revised and Expanded]: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* ISBN 0-06-073132-X. Harper Collins: New York, NY.

Additional required and recommended readings have been placed on reserve in the library or have links on the class web site. Copies of the lecture notes and overheads used in class can also be found on the class web site.

Expectations & Approach

This is not a lecture-dominated class where the instructor speaks and the students passively listen. This is a seminar class where students take an active part in their learning through class discussions, group work, and case analysis. Course readings are supplemented with videos, occasional guest speakers, and other information available on the class web site. Part of your learning will be cognitive or factual in nature. However, much of what you learn in this course will involve developing your analytical skills, enhancing your self-awareness of the organizations in which you work, and sharing your professional experiences with others in the class. I encourage you to prepare yourself for, and be open to, the variety of ways that you can learn from this course.

Another important part of your learning involves the analysis of case studies. Case studies are compilations of problem situations actually faced by public managers. A case places you into a real world situation and forces you to sort through and analyze various issues or courses of action. I encourage you to discuss the cases with others prior to class.

Course Requirements

Your grade in this class will be based on your ability to understand and apply the theories discussed in the course readings. More specifically, your grade will depend on your performance on the following course requirements:

Class Participation

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss all readings, handouts, and assignments that are due. To ensure that students are prepared to discuss the readings, I will randomly ask students to summarize a reading, describe a theory, or discuss a case. Each student should also be prepared to share with the class questions that the readings raised and be able to identify the most significant point or contribution that the author makes to the practice of public administration.

While attendance will not be taken on a regular basis, poor classroom attendance may result in a failing participation grade since you cannot participate if you are not in class. Moreover, since this is a compressed summer class, each missed class will cause you to miss additional class time. Therefore, you should notify the instructor when you are unable to attend class. If you should miss a session when a video is shown, it may be possible to make arrangements to view the film privately at the library or to borrow the video. In certain circumstances it may also be possible to make-up other in-class activities with a written assignment if frequent absences have become a problem. Your participation grade will also be lowered due to the frequent inability to respond to the instructor's questions, poor class preparation, lack of enthusiastic participation in class exercises, or the failure to treat others in the classroom with respect (e.g., talking while others are talking, ridiculing other students, etc.). Simply put, in order to receive an "A" in this class you must be a civil, active contributor to class and not merely score well on exams and assignments.

Case Memos

One of the ways we will examine and apply the concepts discussed in the readings is by analyzing cases contained in Part II of Patton and Sawicki's *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning*. Since case analysis is essentially self-learning through simulated experience, its success depends on the lively exchange of information, ideas, and opinions during case discussions. Students must come prepared to discuss all aspects of the case, apply the concepts in the readings to the case, and be able to answer the questions at the end of each case study or those posed on the class web site or it will adversely affect your class participation grade.

A separate set of directions is provided on the website for preparing your analysis of the cases and your writing assignment so disregard the directions provided in the text book. Each student will analyze one of the cases contained in Part II and present your analysis to the class near the end of the semester. In general, your presentation should discuss the policy problem, your evaluative criteria, identify alternatives, compare them, and provide your recommendations. You will have 10 minutes to present your analysis using appropriate audiovisual technology. You must also prepare a case memo that summarizes your analysis of the case (limited to 3 single-spaced pages plus any necessary attachments). A sample memo can be downloaded from the course web site and most word processing programs have templates that can be used.

Policy Analysis Paper/Project

Each student will be assigned to a group on the second day of class. Since your peers will evaluate your contribution to the project team, failure to actively participate in the group assignment will adversely effect your grade. Students should carefully read through the peer evaluation form that is available on the course web site. It will be collected following the completion of your project.

Each group will be required to complete a thorough, competent, well-written policy analysis with “real world” implications and grounding such as a briefing paper, white paper, program evaluation, or a cost-benefit analysis. Each group of students is expected to find a client for their analysis (real or hypothetical) and employ the appropriate analytical technique(s) to address a policy problem. Your analysis must collect and analyze data of some sort to analyze a public policy problem, use the data to evaluate alternatives for addressing the problem, and present a recommended course of action. You may pick a topic that is consistent with your interests provided that it covers a real policy decision affecting the public or nonprofit sector. To get the most out of this class, students are encouraged to contact state and local politicians, managers, and political organizations to find a reasonable public problem or issue that needs analysis. A list of potential topics is also posted on the class website. Students should waste no time in identifying the subject for their analysis and a primary criterion should be that it can be completed within the timeframe of the course. You will soon discover that these analyses require research and information to support your analysis. Accordingly, do not invest your time in a large-scale analysis from which you cannot obtain the required social, political, and economic data.

You will also be required to periodically discuss the progress of your analysis with your classmates and any lessons you have learned to date. These short presentations will allow you to practice how to communicate your findings to decisionmakers. This can and should include asking your fellow classmates for ideas and opinions about how to overcome the obstacles you confront during your analysis.

In order to prevent procrastination, approximately half way through the class, each group of students will be required to submit a preliminary analysis memo of 2 - 3 pages in length that: defines the problem, client, and rationale for government intervention (e.g., market or government failure); identifies the main factors affecting the problem (i.e., is there a causal model associated with the problem); identifies alternatives; and, summarizes the criteria that will be used to evaluate the alternatives. It should also include as an attachment a list of bibliographic references and data sources.

Each group of students will also be graded on their final report and a class presentation of your findings. It should include a cover, table of contents, executive summary, the main body of the report (i.e., discussion of problem, discussion of evaluative criteria, discussion of each alternative, projected outcomes of each alternative, a comparison of the alternatives, a recommended alternative, and an implementation strategy for that alternative), supporting tables and figures, a bibliography, and any necessary appendices or supporting materials. The report is expected to be clear, concise, and professional in organization and appearance. It should also communicate your findings effectively to your client. Final reports will probably be at least 20 double-spaced pages, but many will be longer depending on the problem and nature of your analysis.

Exam

There will be one take home final exam that is comprehensive and designed to have students apply the theories and concepts discussed in class to real policy problems. The final exam will be distributed during the last week of class and will be due at the end of the regularly scheduled exam period.

Grading

All written work will be evaluated based on your analysis of the readings and cases, the organization of your ideas, the strength and substance of your arguments, your ability to properly apply the concepts discussed in class, and the quality of your writing (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.). Failure to complete an assignment or failing to follow directions will result in a 0 for the assignment. The final course grade will be calculated based upon the following weights:

Class Participation (20%)	20% (200 Points)
Case Memo & Presentation (10%)	10% (100 Points)
Policy Paper/Project (30%)	
Preliminary Analysis Memo, Report, & Presentation	30% (300 points)
Final Exam (40%)	40% (400 points)

Course grades will be calculated based on the following: A (920 – 1000), A- (900 – 919), B+ (880 – 899), B (820 – 879), B- (800 – 819), C+ (780 – 799), C (720 – 779), C- (700 – 719), D+ (680 – 699), D (620 – 679), D- (600 – 619), and F (0 – 599). There is no rounding up or down. Be advised that I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating. Anyone caught cheating will receive a failing grade for the course. In the event that an assignment is given a letter grade, points are allocated by using the midpoint of the grade range and multiplying it the number of possible points. For example, an A for a 5% memo would equal 95% of 50 points or 47.5 while a B+ would equal 89% of 50 points or 44.5. There is no rounding up or down.

Late Assignments/Incompletes

Tentative due dates for course assignments are listed on the attached course schedule and are subject to change based on class progress and student preferences. You should check the course schedule and announcements pages on the course web site periodically for changes in due dates.

Unless I have agreed in advance, all assignments are due at the end of the class period they are due. Informing the instructor of your intention to be absent does not waive your obligation to submit the work that is due. Late assignments lose one full letter grade per class they are late. An incomplete will only be granted when there are serious extenuating circumstances that occur after the withdrawal period.

Other Class Policies

All cell phones are to be turned off in class. If your phone rings, the Professor reserves the right to answer the call and/or to confiscate the phone.