

PLS 505 – Policy Analysis
Mark T. Imperial

Exercise: Policies & Problems

Background:

This is a course in public policy analysis. Public policies are formed, debated, adopted, and implemented in order to address social problems. But what constitutes a “policy”? How do we frame and define problems? What is government trying to accomplish by adopting and implementing these policies? This exercise will get you thinking about policies and problems and the politics that surrounds their formation. Our discussion will also provide a mechanism for introducing many of the concepts we will discuss this semester.

Hopefully, you are aware that there is a national debate concerning health care reform with a number of competing policy proposals being debated in Congress. The debate has also generated considerable activism on the part of the general public and various special interest groups. The debate also displays many of the concepts we will cover in the course this semester. Therefore, this exercise will provide a common set of examples that we will discuss over the course of the semester.

Directions:

If you have not been following the health care reform debate then you will need to review some news articles on various news websites, blogs, or talk radio to get a feel for some of the issues driving the political debate. The “talking head” news shows on Sunday morning or in the evening on MSNBC and Fox News will also give you a feel for various issues being debated. Even a casual review illustrates a number of controversial issues and claims (not all of which are true) that are at the center of the policy debate. I suspect that some of you will have strong views on either side of the debate as well but may not have taken the time to actually review the legislation that is at the heart of the debate.

The objective of this exercise is for you to begin thinking objectively about the issues at the center of the debate. You should come to class with the answers to the following questions on no more than 1 sheet of paper and be prepared to share the answers with your classmates:

- Review one of the legislative proposals being debated in Congress (e.g., H.R. 3200 America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009) and identify one policy that has been proposed. Provide the text of the policy.
- Define the problem the policy will address in no more than 3 sentences
- Find some data or facts that support the notion that the problem the policy addresses is important social problem (provide the citation).
- How will you know whether the policy works and has “solved” the problem?
- Think of an alternative way to address the same problem by writing an alternative policy
- Based on what you know about the health care debate, what is the goal or objective of health care reform? What do you think the goal or objective should be?