

PLS 505 Policy Analysis

Fall 2012

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Classroom: LH 110

Class times: M 6:30 – 9:15

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http://people.uncw.edu/imperialm/UNCW/PLS_505/pls_505.htm

Course Objectives

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, theoretical, and technical perspective. Students will learn how to define and think critically about important policy problems. Students will learn basic concepts and apply various tools and techniques used by analysts in today's public and nonprofit organizations. Students will learn about different policy instruments and then systematically analyze alternatives. Students will learn how to think critically about data and use it to support their analyses and recommendations. Students will learn to recognize the ethical implications of policies and their impacts on society. Students will learn how to communicate their analyses in both written and oral forms. Finally, students will learn how to work effectively in diverse groups. Accordingly, this is an important required course within the MPA program because it focuses on developing a variety of student learning outcomes including:

- Demonstrating an ability to analyze policy alternatives and use policy instruments and management tools to address social problems;
- Demonstrating an ability to participate in the policy process, communicate policy alternatives, and work effectively with government and nonprofit institutions, and community stakeholders;
- Demonstrating an ability to define, frame, think critically about and analyze important problems;
- Demonstrating an ability to identify ethical dilemmas and to then systematically apply ethical principles to identify appropriate courses of action;
- Demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively and professionally to diverse audiences; and,
- Demonstrating an understanding of how to work effectively in diverse groups.

Students will develop these competencies in a variety of ways using a series of readings from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The readings are supplemented with a variety of handouts and web-based resources available on the course website. Students will learn how to apply the concepts through in-class exercises, discussion of video clips, simulations, and discussions. Students will practice the craft of policy analysis, learn how to work in diverse groups, and learn how to communicate (oral and written) and participate effectively in the policy process through a set of case memos and their final policy projects. Ultimately, the overall objective is to help you become a more effective policy analyst.

Readings

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

- Patton, Carl, David Sawicki, and Jennifer Clark. 2013. *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning*. Third Edition. Pearson Publishing. (Required - must be 3rd edition)
- Bardach, Eugene. 2011. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Fourth Edition. (New York, NY: Chatham House Publishers). (Required but previous editions are fine)
- Levitt, Steven D. and Stephen J. Dubner. 2010. *SuperFreakonomics, the Illustrated Edition* (Required)
- Mintrom, Michael. 2003. *People Skills for Policy Analysts*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 0-87840-900-9 (Recommended)

Additional required readings are placed in a series of folders online in Blackboard. You should read all of the readings for each topic prior to class. Copies of the lecture notes, handouts, and other resources can be found on the topics pages of the website.

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 policy analysts. 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

The topics, course schedule, topics, readings, and assignments are posted on the course website. Updates and changes to the schedule are possible and will be posted on the website. Students should check the website frequently for changes and postings of supplemental materials. 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. Students may also be asked to submit discussion questions or lead the discussion of a particular set of readings.

While attendance will not be taken on a regular basis, poor classroom attendance and showing up late to class may result in a failing participation grade since you cannot participate if you are not in class. 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. Your participation grade will also be lowered if students are not active contributors to discussions, the frequent inability to respond to the instructor's questions, poor class preparation, lack of enthusiastic participation in class exercises, inability to participate in discussing a case, or the failure to treat others in the classroom with respect (e.g., talking while others are talking, ridiculing other students, etc.). Similarly, while laptops, tablets, and smart phones are allowed in class, their use for non-class-related activities (e.g., texting friends, watching something on the internet, Facebook, etc.) will result in a lowered participation grade. 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 four cases contained in Patton, et al.'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.

All students will complete the first case memo assignment individually. At the beginning of the semester, each student will be assigned to a team. Each team is required to prepare 3 memos (see your group assignments and the required memos). Each team has the option of doing the fourth case memo (i.e., non-assigned case) and the three highest grades will count towards your final grade. Each team will also present their analysis of two of these cases. Students should consult the course website for their team, case, and presentation assignments. Students enrolled in this class should also understand that case analysis executed as a team is a key element of your course responsibility and you should be available outside of classroom time to meet with your group members. For the group memo assignments, your individual grade on the assignment will be the group grade. The group grade will reflect the quality of the presentation. Groups are free to allocate responsibilities in any way you want; however, groups are not expected to carry free riders. An individual grade may be adjusted lower if the team reports that one of its members did not contribute to the group memos. I also expect all group members to contribute to the development of the memos and presentations. Accordingly, if a group has four members, it should reflect the equivalent of 4 individuals work.

Students should disregard the directions contained in the cases in *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning*. Instead, the course website specifies the focus of each memo. Your memos should be formatted professionally and be well written. Be sure to use data and numbers from the case to support your arguments. All memos are limited to no longer than 3 single-spaced pages with 1 inch margins and 12 point font. This doesn't include any attachments or figures (e.g., a table comparing the alternatives, documentation for your calculations, etc.). Blackboard contains a variety of readings to provide guidance in terms of preparing memos.

Each team will present 2 cases to the class. Your presentation should be in the form of a briefing for decision makers and be professional in nature. It is limited to 10 minutes. Accordingly, your presentation should be brief, well organized, and professional. You should rehearse the presentation to ensure that you complete it in the time allowed. You should also use appropriate audiovisual aids (no more than 5 - 10 slides). Since everyone will have read the case, your presentations should focus on your analysis should focus on the alternatives, evaluative criteria, systematic comparison of the alternatives, and the presentation of a recommendation grounded in the data from the analysis. You may wish to provide a handout as you would if making a presentation to decision makers. See the set of readings on Blackboard that provide advice on making good presentations.

Additional instructions and guidance for preparing the individual and group case memos and presentations is posted on the course web site.

Policy Project

Each student will be required to complete a thorough, competent, well-written policy analysis project with “real world” implications and grounding such as a briefing paper, white paper, or a cost-benefit analysis. Students should orient their project towards the needs of a specific client (real or hypothetical). While there is some room for flexibility in terms of the scope and substance of your policy projects, every project must clearly define a specific policy problem, identify the rationale for government intervention, and specify evaluative criteria used to generate your recommended course of action. Every policy project must identify and analyze more than one alternative for addressing the specified problem and then analyze the alternatives in a systematic fashion using data. You must then recommend a specific course of action.

You will be required to submit two preliminary written assignments. While ungraded, completion of the assignments is reflected in your participation grade. This will help prevent procrastination and force you to pick a topic early and perform elements of the analysis while we are discussing the corresponding readings. First, students will submit a problem memo. This memo will specify the problem to be addressed, the client (real or hypothetical), and the question(s) that the policy analysis will address. Students should attach a bibliography of at least 15 references associated with the topic. Second, students will prepare an alternatives memo. This 3-page memo should define the problem and frame it as a market or government failure (i.e., identifies the rationale for government intervention); identify the main factors affecting the problem (i.e., is there a causal model associated with the problem); identify 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 your data sources used in the analysis and any

necessary tables (e.g., summary of the alternatives or criteria) or figures (e.g., map of the causes of the problem). Essentially, it should be a summary of your final paper and indicate where you have work left to do.

The final report for the policy project is expected to be clear, concise, and professional. It should communicate your findings effectively to your client. Tables and figures should be included to display results. It should use headings and subheadings. Final reports will probably be around 25 double-spaced pages (or the equivalent) in length not including the tables, figures, bibliography, appendices, etc. However, the length will vary based on the problem and the type of analysis. They should have no more than 1" margins (unless you bind it and your left margin can be larger). It should use 11 or 12 point font depending on the font you choose. The policy report can be single-spaced or double-spaced and should include running headers and footers. You should use page breaks and section breaks to obtain the proper formatting of the report and you should be able to print out the entire report as a single file using Adobe Acrobat or Microsoft Word. All pages other than the cover should be numbered and the main report must begin on page 1. Be sure the cover has the title of your project and your name at a minimum. Students should also plan on presenting their final policy projects during the last class session. You will have a maximum of 10 minutes to present your findings. Since writing a policy report is a type of professional writing that will be new to many of you, there are readings on blackboard to provide additional guidance in the preparation of your final written report.

Exam

There will be one take home exam at the end of the course. The exam will be posted on the class web site approximately one week before the exam.

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 Memos (20%)	
Memo #1 (Individual)	5% (50 Points)
Memo #2 (Group)	5% (50 Points)
Memo #3 (Group)	5% (50 Points)
Memo #4 (Group)	5% (50 Points)
Policy Paper/Project (35%)	35% (350 points)
Exam (25%)	25% (250 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. 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.

All members of UNCW’s community are expected to follow the academic Honor Code. Please read the UNCW Honor Code carefully (as covered in the UNCW Student Handbook). Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this class. Be advised that I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating or plagiarism. Anyone caught cheating or plagiarizing an assignment will receive a failing grade for the course.

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. Students may bring forward requests for changing the dates of major assignments for class approval with a minimum of one-week advance notice to the class.

Unless I have agreed in advance, all assignments are due at the beginning of the class period listed on the course schedule. Informing the instructor of your intention to be absent does not waive your obligation to submit the work that is due on time. Late assignments lose one full letter grade per day they are late. The final exam and policy project lose a full letter grade at a minimum if they are submitted after the posted deadline. They lose an additional letter grade each day they are late. An incomplete will only be granted when there are serious extenuating circumstances that occur after the withdrawal period. Inability to complete the policy project and final exam by the posted deadline is not grounds for an incomplete and may result in a failing grade and dismissal from the MPA program.

Disabilities, Respect, and Harassment

Students with diagnosed disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services (962-7555). Please give me a copy of the letter you receive from Office of Disability Services detailing class accommodations you may need. If you require accommodation for test-taking please make sure I have the referral letter no less than three days before the test.

UNCW has recently instituted a Respect Compact to affirm our commitment to a civil community, characterized by mutual respect. That Compact will soon be affixed to the wall of each classroom and can be accessed at: <http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/pdc/documents/SeahawkRespectCompact.pdf>. Students are expected to treat others in this class in accordance with this campus policy.

UNCW practices a zero tolerance policy for any kind of violent or harassing behavior. If you are experiencing an emergency of this type contact the police at 911 or UNCW CARE at 962-2273. Resources for individuals concerned with a violent or harassing situation can be located at <http://www.uncw.edu/wsrc/crisis.html>.

Other Class Policies

Cell phone use and texting will not be tolerated in this class. Turn off the ringer on your cell phone prior to class. If your phone rings, the Professor reserves the right to answer the call and/or to confiscate the phone.

Laptops, tablets, and smart phones may be used in this class. Users should sit in the back row or at the edge of class to avoid distracting others. Laptops, tablets, and smart phones will be banned from the classroom for the rest of the semester the first time any user is seen engaging in non-classroom related activity (e.g., texting, surfing the web, checking Facebook, monitoring scores of ball games, etc.). The instructor reserves the right to randomly inspect the screen of any user during class.