

POLS 6314
Policy Analysis
Professor Elizabeth Rigby
University of Houston
Spring 2009

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with the basic assumptions, concepts, and methods of policy analysis. For this course, policy analysis is defined broadly to include both the process of identifying, structuring, and analyzing information to design better policy proposals and the process of evaluating policies already in place to determine if they are fulfilling the goals and objectives that led to their creation. Further, as would be expected since this course is offered in a political science department, additional attention is paid to the ways politics interacts with policy analysis and the role of political science (and political scientists) in the field of policy analysis.

Course Readings

As with most graduate classes, careful reading and discussion of literature is the primary course activity. All readings are available online, within WebCT, or are from one of the following four required books:

- Eugene Bardach. 2004. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Henig, Jeffrey R. 2008. *Spin Cycle: How Research is used in Policy Debates: The Case of Charter Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and the Century Foundation.
- Rhodes, Stephen. 1985. *The Economist's View of the World: Governments, Markets, and Public Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sabato, Larry J. 2007. *A More Perfect Constitution: 23 Proposals to Revitalize our Constitution and Make America a Fairer Country*. New York: Walker Publishing Company Inc.

Assignments/Exam:

Students will complete four short papers. Three of these will focus on a particular contentious and ideological policy issue (e.g., drilling in ANWAR, raising the minimum wage, outlawing abortion, providing amnesty for illegal immigrants). Each student

should choose an issue in which they are particularly interested, but one in which they can objectively analyze the assumptions and evidence underlying the surrounding political discourse. In addition, students will take either an in-class or take-home exam.

Assignment due dates are as follows:

- February 2nd: **Choice of Policy Issue.** Each student should send me an email indicating the contentious and ideological issue in which he or she will be focusing, as well as a short list of the key organizations (e.g., governmental agencies, advocacy groups, professional organizations, think tanks) advocating (explicitly or implicitly) on each side of the issue.
- Between February 9th and March 9th: **Response Papers.** Students will be assigned to write two response papers – each applying the key concepts highlighted in the readings to the particular policy issue in which the student is focusing. In particular, response papers should (a) highlight policy examples illustrating the key concepts and (b) discuss implications of the concept for the development/debating of policy proposals. Each response paper should be 2-3 pages in length and emailed to the whole class at least 24 hours before our class meets. These response papers will each be worth 10 percent of your grade.
- March 23rd: **Case Study: Constitutional Design.** Students will write a 3-5 page paper analyzing Sabato's *A More Perfect Constitution* as an example of welfare economics informing design of policy proposals. Papers should address the ways in which Sabato embraces key concepts from welfare economics, the ways in which he illustrates key points of its critics, and how his perspective differs from those we have studied. This paper will be worth 25 percent of your final grade.
- April 20th: **Case Study: Policy Evidence.** Focusing on their policy issue, students will write a 5-8 page paper comparing the primary research studies cited by each side of the debate. Students should compare the methods and data used in each study, as well as illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. In particular, discuss how similar studies end up with different findings and/or how the same findings are interpreted differently by each side. This paper will be worth 25 percent of your final grade.
- May 4th: **Final Exam.** Students will complete a final exam parallel in content and format to the policy analysis section of the comprehensive exam in policy. This means that you will choose one (of three potential) questions for which to write a 8-10 page response. The exam will be open-book, open-note and can be completed one of two ways: (1) in the lab or on a laptop during the class period on May 4th or (2) as a take-home exam over a 24 hour period during the exam period. Students who take the exam in class will be graded more on their conceptual argument and less on citations/linkages with the literature, while students opting for a take-home exam will be graded equally on both components. This exam will be worth 30 percent of your final grade.

Course Schedule

Unit I. Politics of Policy Analysis

January 26. Case Study: Charter School Research and Politics

- Henig, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 & 8

February 2. Policy Analysis in a Politicized Context [Policy topics due]

- Weimer, David and Alan Vining. 2005. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, 4th Edition. Prentice Hall., Read Chapters 2 & 14
- Bardach, entire
- Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through" – Root vs. Branch
- Norman Beckman. 1977. "Policy Analysis in Government: Alternatives to Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review* 37:3 (May/June): 221-222.
- More recent paper on politics of policy analysis

Unit II. Developing Policy Proposals: Key Concepts from Welfare Economics and its Critics [Response papers for two of these five weeks]

February 9. Opportunity Costs, Marginalism and Incentives

- Rhodes, chapters 1-4
- How economists think: from MSSS or others
- Joseph E. Stiglitz. 2000. *Economics of the Public Sector* (3rd Edition), Chapter 3, "Market Efficiency." New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

February 16. Markets, Efficiency, Equity

- Rhodes, chapters 5-6
- Weimer and Vining, Chapter 4, 5 & 8
- Charles Wolfe, Jr. 1988. *Markets or Governments: Choosing between Imperfect Alternatives*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Maybe government and market failure book - brookings

February 23. Externalities, Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Rhodes, Chapters 7 & 8
- Weimer and Vining, Chapters 16 & 17
- Belfield, Clive R., Milagros Nores, Steve Barnett and Lawrence Schwinhart. 2006. "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: Cost-Benefit Analysis Using Data from the Age-40 Follow-up." *Journal of Human Resources*, *XLI*(1): 162-190.

March 2. Beyond Efficiency and Equity (e.g., Well-being and Rights)

- Rhodes, chapter 9-10

- Stone, TBD

March 9. Welfare Economics versus Representative Democracy

- Rhodes, chapter 11-12
- DeLeon, Peter. 1997. Democracy and the Policy Sciences.
- Shulock 1999. JPAM. The Paradox of Policy Analysis
- Walters, Lawrence C., James Aydelotte and Jessica Miller. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Jul. - Aug., 2000), pp. 349-359
- Ven den Doel, Hans and Ben Van Velthoven. Democracy and Welfare Economics.

March 23. Case Study: A *More Perfect Constitution* [Papers due]

- Sabato, entire

Unit III. Evaluating Policy Impacts

March 30. Causal Inference: Social and Natural Experiments

- AERA, Estimating Causal Effects, Chapter 2
- Angrist, Joshua D. (1989). "Lifetime Earnings and the Vietnam Era Draft Lottery." *American Economic Review*, 80(3):313-336.

April 6. Causal Inference: Quasi-Experimental Methods

- TBD

April 13. Causal Inference: Observational Designs

- AERA Estimating Causal Effects, chapter 3

April 20. Case Studies: Evaluating Evidence [Papers due]

Unit IV. Potential for Policy Analysis and Evaluation

April 27. Career Panel: Options for Policy Analysts

- Shalala, Donna E. 2002. "How to be a Public Policy Manager in Washington: The Pi Sigma Alpha Lecture to the APSA." In Howard A. Wiarda, ed. *Policy Passages, Career Options for Policy Wonks*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.
- Mann, Thomas E. 2002. "A Foot in Both Camps: Building a Career in Washington and Academia." In Howard A. Wiarda, ed. *Policy Passages, Career Options for Policy Wonks*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.
- Storrs, Larry K. 2002. "The Satisfaction of Non-Partisan Policy Analysis on Capitol Hill." In Howard A. Wiarda, ed. *Policy Passages, Career Options for Policy Wonks*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.

May 4. Linking Political Science and Policy Analysis [Final exam]

- Farr, James, Jacob S. Hacker and Nicole Kazez. "The Policy Scientist of Democracy: The Discipline of Harold D. Lasswell." APSR.

- Gormley, William T. 2007. Public Policy Analysis: Ideas and Impacts. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 297-313.