

## PA 673: Public Policy Analysis

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Office Hours: Pretty much anytime by  
appointment

**Course Description:** The course is designed to introduce you to some analytical tools necessary for policy analysis, explore strategies for making policy analysis relevant to the policy debate, and develop some understanding of how policy analysis fits into the overall policymaking process. As you will see, this class will cover both theory and practical application. I don't teach theory to torture you (although that may be a side benefit): knowing theory makes us better practitioners.

Most class days will be divided into three sections. First, we will discuss people skills for policy analysis. It is difficult to imagine practicing policy analysis without some understanding of people skills. Second, we will talk about the policy tool for the day. At the beginning of the semester, this may be a tool to understand policy in a general sense. Later in the semester, this section of the class will introduce a new method of analyzing policy (frequently using Excel). Third, to learn more about specific policy areas and to better understand how to communicate about policy with the broader public, we will be part of the Wikimedia Public Policy Project (a nationwide project to improve the quality of policy entries in Wikipedia) and part of most class days will be devoted to this project.

By the end of the semester you should:

- 1) Understand what policy analysis is and how policy analysis can improve governance.
- 2) Understand the role of people skills in policy analysis and be able to identify how your people skills can be improved.
- 3) Be able to identify how policy is made.
- 4) Understand when forecasting and cost-benefit analysis are appropriate and apply the proper technique to analyze policy in the proper situation.
- 5) Be more adept at using statistics to analyze policy.
- 6) Understand and apply the steps to analyzing policy.
- 7) Understand the strengths and weaknesses of surveys and experiments in policy analysis.
- 8) Be a better consumer of policy analysis.
- 9) Understand the similarities and differences across different types of policies.
- 10) Understand how to communicate about policy with a variety of audiences.

### Required Books:

Ashworth, Kenneth. 2001. *Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Mintrom, Michael. 2003. *People Skills for Policy Analysts*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

We will also have a few reserve readings that you will be responsible for. And you will need to have access to a computer with Microsoft Excel.

**Academic Honesty:** Ethical behavior is central to the role of the policy analyst in the democratic process. Academic honesty in this class, therefore, is one component of your professional development as a policy analyst, and I regard this as an extremely important matter. The university has administrative procedures and rules regarding academic honesty, but there are three basic rules that should help you. First, do your own work. Second, if you borrowed an idea from someone else, make certain they receive proper attribution. Third, if you are in doubt, ask me.

**Disability Statement:** If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to perform in this class, please contact Student Support Services at 828-227-7127, located in room 248 of the Killian Annex

### **Grading:**

*Exams:* There will be a midterm and a final exam. Each is worth 20% of your grade

*Homework (HW):* Being a good policy analyst requires practice. As a result, you will complete at least ten homework assignments throughout the semester. Some of the more technical exercises have correct answers, and your grade will depend on the accuracy of the answer and how you tried to answer the question. Many of the questions, however, will not have a single right answer, and for these questions you will be graded for your effort, logic, and method of grappling with the problem presented. I anticipate having 10 homeworks, but I reserve the right to add more. These are marked on your syllabus with a (HW). 20% of your grade.

*Wikimedia Assignments:* We will be taking part in the Wikimedia Public Policy Initiative this semester. This project is meant to give you in-depth knowledge of a specific area of public policy, help you improve your ability to write about policy for a popular audience, and enable you to practice using new technologies to influence the policy debate. Your grade for this part of the course will be made up of:

- ☒ *Wikimedia Check-Ups (WCU):* These are fairly easy assignments that are spread throughout the semester. You'll be graded on whether you completed them or not. In a few cases, you may receive a check plus, check or check minus—rough indications of the quality of your work. No assignment will be accepted late. These are marked on your syllabus with a (WCU) (15% of your grade)
- ☒ *Wikimedia Substance (WS):* These are grades based on the content of your Wikipedia entry and the quality of your reflection (15% of your grade)
- ☒ *Wikimedia Final Presentation:* You are responsible for presenting details about your Wikipedia entry to class. I'd like you to shoot for a ten minute presentation—3/4 of it should focus on what you learned about the substance of your topic. The other 1/3 should focus on Wikipedia itself and what you learned by participating in the Wikimedia project (5% of your grade)

*Participation:* For this class to work properly both you and I must be in class each week and have full grasp of the material assigned for the week. As a result, 5% of your grade will be based on your attendance, evidence of reading comprehension and participation (5% of your grade).

**Schedule:** I reserve the right to change any part of this schedule with one week's notice.

Thursday, January 13- Introduction to Policy Analysis and to the course

- Policy Tool: Understanding policy analysis
- Wiki:
  - Introduction to Wikipedia part of the course
  - Handout "Welcome to Wikipedia" brochure
- Reading due next class
  - 5 pillars of Wikipedia
  - Mintrom, Chapter 1
  - Ashworth, Forward, Preface, and October
- Assignment due next class
  - Article summary (1-2 pages) (HW#1)

Thursday, January 20 Problem Definition

- People Skill: Understanding people skills
- Policy Tool: Problem Definition
- Wiki:
  - Basics of editing
  - Anatomy of Wikipedia articles, what makes a good article, how to distinguish between good & bad articles
  - Tips & recommendations for best articles to work on for the class
  - Handout: "Creating an account" how-to, "Evaluating Wikipedia article quality" brochure
- Readings due next week:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 2
  - Ashworth, November & December
- Writing Assignment: Problem Definition (Due next class) (HW #2)
- Wiki Assignments:
  - Create a Wikipedia user account, create a user page, and add your name to the course page's list of students (on the WikiProject) (WCU)
  - Contact an Online Ambassador (via his/her Wikipedia user talk page) as a mentor. Mentors will be available to offer advice and assistance as you start editing (WCU)
  - To practice the editing features of Wikipedia, leave a message for a few classmates on their user talk pages (WCU).

Thursday, January 27: Policy Process and Policy Agendas

- Policy tool: Models of the policy process
- People skill: Managing your resources
- Excel Exercise #1&2 (HW #3)
- Wiki:
  - Introduce students to IRC (online chat system) where student can get live support and show students how to contact online ambassador mentors
- Readings due next week:
  - Ashworth, January and February 1, February 2
- Wiki Assignments

- Critically evaluate an existing Wikipedia article related to the class and leave suggestions for improving it on the article's discussion page (WCU)
- Research and list 3 articles on your Wikipedia user page that you will consider working on as your main project. Ask your online ambassador for comments (WCU).

Thursday, February 3: Ethics of Policy Analysis; economic rationality and its impact on policy

- People skill: Building expert knowledge, interviewing informants
- Policy tool: Ethics; understanding the implications of the market for democracy
- Wiki
  - Discuss referencing on Wikipedia
- Excel Exercise #3 & #4 (HW #4)
- Reading due next week:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 3, 4
  - Ashworth, March, April
- Wiki Assignments:
  - Decide which article you will work on and list it on the course page (WCU)
  - Compile a bibliography of relevant sources, and begin researching the topic (WCU)

Thursday, February 10: Policy and Criteria Beyond Efficiency

- People skill: Building Expert Knowledge, interviewing informants
- Policy tool: Understanding societal values other than efficiency
- Wiki:
  - Talk about Wikipedia sandboxes and culture/etiquette
- Reading due next week:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 5
  - Ashworth, May, September
- Wiki Assignments
  - Write 3-4 paragraph summary version of your article (with citations) in your Wikipedia sandbox (WCU)
  - Begin working with your online ambassador mentor to polish your short starter article and fix any major transgressions of Wikipedia norms
  - Continue research in preparation for expanding your article.

Thursday, February 17: Critical Thinking, Research Design and Measurement

- People Skill: Giving Presentations
- Policy Tool: Applying proper research design
- Wiki
  - Handout: Moving article from sandbox into main space, handout "did you know nominations"
- Wiki assignments
  - Move your sandbox article into Wikipedia's main space (live articles) (WCU)
  - Nominate your article for "Did you know" status, and monitor the nomination for any issues identified by other editors (WCU)
  - Begin expanding your article into a comprehensive treatment of the topic.

Thursday, February 24: Midterm Exam

- Reading due March 10:

- Mintrom, Chapter 6
- Ashworth, October

Thursday March 3: Spring Break. No Class

Thursday, March 10: Making Sense of Numbers

- People Skill: Working in teams
- Policy Tool: Presenting data
- Wiki
  - Article ratings on Wikipedia and how to get there
  - Adding images to Wikipedia articles
- Homework Assignment: Presenting data homework (HW#5)
- Wiki assignment: expand your article into an initial draft of a comprehensive treatment of the topic (WCU)
- Reading due next week:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 7
  - Ashworth, November

Thursday, March 17: A little bit of stats, regression

- Policy tool: regression
- People skill: Facilitating Meetings
- Reading due next week:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 8
  - Ashworth, December
- Homework Assignment: regression (HW#6)
- Wiki Assignment:
  - Peer review two classmates' articles
    - Leave suggestions and comments on those classmates' article discussion pages (WCU)
    - Copy-edit peers' articles (WCU)

Thursday, March 24: Forecasting continued

- Policy tool: Forecasting
- People Skill: Writing for multiple audiences
- Reading due this week:
  - Ashworth, January
- Homework Assignment: forecasting (HW#7)
- Wiki Assignment:
  - Revise your article based on peers' feedback (WCU)
  - Nominate your article for "good article" status (WCU)
  - Prepare for in-class presentation about your Wikipedia-editing experiences

Thursday, March 31: More Forecasting

- Policy Tool: Forecasting, forecasting, and more forecasting practice
- Homework Assignment: forecasting (HW#8)
- Reading due next week
  - Mintrom, Chapter 9
  - Ashworth, March

Thursday, April 7: Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Policy tool: Cost Benefit Analysis
- People Skill: Conflict Management
- Reading due next week:
  - Ashworth, April
- Homework Assignment: CBA (HW#9)

Thursday, April 14: Cost Benefit Analysis

- Policy Tool: More CBA, more CBA and a bit more CBA
- Writing Assignment: Written Public Comment (due next class)
- Reading due April 28:
  - Mintrom, Chapter 11
- Homework Assignment: CBA (HW#10)
- Wiki Assignment:
  - Add final touches to your Wikipedia article
  - Write a reflective essay on your Wikipedia contributions and editing experiences (WS)

Thursday, April 21: Break That Quite Frankly, I Don't Understand: No Class

Thursday, April 28: Qualitative Tools for policy analysis

- Policy tools: focus groups, and DELPHI
- Wrapping up People Skills for Policy Analysts
- Wiki
  - Presentation on your Wiki experience:  $\frac{3}{4}$  substance,  $\frac{1}{4}$  on Wikipedia editing experience. (WP)
  - Final Wikipedia entry graded (WS)

Thursday, May 5: Final Exam