

Pol 535: Public Policy Analysis and Evaluation – Syllabus

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Tuesday 6:00-8:30 PM
SBS N702

Course Overview

This course provides an analytical gateway to the world of public policy. Public policy refers to the actions taken by *governments* (national, state or local) to achieve a designated *public benefit*. While this definition is not especially controversial, in practice the development and implementation of specific public policies can be highly contentious. Why? Because public policies usually impose coercion either through regulation or taxation; because they often don't achieve what they set out to do; because they may harm or inconvenience many constituents; because of extreme partisan and ideological polarization and, not least, because they usually cost a lot of money, either in taxes or in costs imposed on individuals and companies.

That said, the “deciders” of public policy – voters, politicians and bureaucrats – needn't “fly blind.” In this course, you will be introduced to the analytical concepts, political and philosophical principals, and operational methods that enable one to intelligently design a public policy to achieve a specific public benefit, or to determine if one being proposed or on the books will do so. You will also learn about political, institutional and functional factors that severely limit the deployment of successful public policies in a democratic and diverse society like the United States.

Policy development begins with the identification and definition of a problem or opportunity that a governmental institution can or should attempt to deal with, follows through with an analysis of potentially appropriate courses of governmental action (i.e. the “policy”) to deal with the issue and the steps needed to implement such policy, and concludes with ways of evaluating – and possibly modifying – the policy if it is implemented. The larger context in which public policy operates includes the political and ideological constraints that limit policy options, the policy tools available to American national, state and local governments, concepts drawn from welfare and public finance economics, the impact of specific policies on affected stakeholders and their likely reaction, and the many pitfalls attending policy implementation.

By the end of this course, students will:

- Understand politically disparate views on how government can advance the public welfare in a democracy with a market-based economy
- Have a thorough knowledge of the structure of American government, including its deeply-ingrained intergovernmental dimension, and the public policy tools at its disposal
- Understand how government actions redistribute benefits and costs among diverse constituencies and affect intra-societal equity
- Understand the reasons for, and extent of, partisan and ideological polarization and its impact on the development and execution of American public policy
- Be able to define and analyze a perceived public welfare concern and develop evidence-supported actions that government might take to address it
- Understand the legal and political issues involved in translating any public policy into actual legislation
- Be able to determine the costs, benefits and likely effectiveness of any proposed or implemented public policy
- Evaluate the political and functional consequences of public policy legislation once it is enacted

The course's class time will consist of instructor-led discussions of the concepts and tools that shape public policy development, vigorous in-class discussions, and – toward the end – student reports on specific policy proposals. We will focus primarily on real world issues in a variety of functional areas and at all levels of

government, and examine currently proposed or recently implemented policy ideas through the prism of some key analytical frameworks.

Course Requirements

1) Understanding how policy is developed:

Each student must research three current public policy concerns, and review the laws (proposed or existing) to address them. Prepare a policy memorandum for each law summarizing the law, the reasons for its adoption and critique the law's rationale and known (or likely) effectiveness.

- Land use or environmental policy of concern to a Long Island town or village.
- Education or health care policy of concern to the state of New York.
- Transportation or housing policy of concern to the nation.

All three memoranda are due on October 23.

In conducting the research, it may be best to begin with a newspaper search of controversial issues in each domain (local, state, national), followed by retrieval of pro and con arguments and text of the law in question.

2) Analyzing the merits of proposed policies:

Each student will join a policy team (team size will depend on class enrollment) responsible for justifying or critiquing a specific local, state or national domestic public policy – including a brief version of the law that would establish it. The policy can be one that exists or is currently being proposed. The work product will be a policy report (approximately 20+/- pages) and an in-class PowerPoint summary presentation. The report must include: 1) a compelling justification for adopting or scrapping the policy; 2) a well-developed description of the specific policy and its associated legislation; 3) data and other information documenting the scope of the issue the policy addresses, resources needed to implement the policy, anticipated outcomes, and 4) political and other factors that might work for or against the policy. Each team hypothetically represents an organization or agency that is analyzing, developing and/or implementing the policy, with each team member playing a specific functional role. Ideological viewpoints – including “Tea Party” perspectives – are entirely welcome.

Due: Presentations: November 27, December 4, December 11; Paper submitted: December 18.

3) Examinations: Midterm (take-home): short-answer test covering concepts discussed in the readings and in class: distributed October 30, due November 6; Final: application of class concepts to potential policy legislation: distributed December 11, due December 18.

Required Readings

Required texts (available through the bookstore):

Charles Wheelan, 2011. *Introduction to Public Policy*.
New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Eugene Bardach and Eric M. Patashik, 2016, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis*.
Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Students must also read *The New York Times* (online or print) **every day**, especially all “Upshot” columns, editorials and op-ed articles – and be prepared to discuss in class the public policy issues that are being covered. In addition, students must also regularly read at least one policy journal (such as *The New Republic*, *Commentary*, *The American Prospect* or *National Review*) and contribute its policy perspectives to class discussions or assignments. There is a list of policy journals and their associated ideological perspectives posted on Blackboard in the Documents section.

Course Schedule

August 28:	Understanding public policy: basic concepts and definitions.
September 14:	Rationale for and definition of “public goods.” Wheelan, Section I (Chapters 1-2).
September 11:	Economic justifications for public policy. Wheelan, Section II (Chapters 3-4).
September 18:	Moral justifications for public policy. Wheelan, Section II (Chapter 5). Class discussion applying criteria to current events.
September 25:	Mr. Peter Cove – Dealing with poverty
October 2:	Professor Frank Myers – Utilitarianism
October 16:	Professor Frank Myers – John Stuart Mill
October 23:	Who wins – who loses: concept of “utility” in the politics of public policy. Wheelan, Section III (chapters 6-8). (Policy assignment due)
October 30:	Income redistribution, equity and ideology. Distribution of Midterm Take-home Exam. Wheelan, Section V (Chapters 14-15).
November 6:	Connecting the dots: from public concern to policy solution – the policy “syllogism.” Submission of Midterm Take-home Exam. Bardach, Parts I and II.
November 13:	Process of designing good policy. Policy pitfalls, evaluation and metrics. Bardach, Parts III and IV.
November 20:	The ingredients of a successful policy report. Report and presentation preparation workshop. Wheelan, Section IV (Chapters 9-13).
November 27:	Presentations
December 4:	Presentations
December 11:	Presentations. Distribution of take-home Final Exam.
December 18: 11:15AM	Submission of take-home Final Exam; Submission of final paper.