

## Concepts and Methods of Policy Analysis Social Work 594 - Winter 2006

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### **Description**

This course engages students in the concepts and applied practice of policy analysis and evaluation. Two generic policy questions structure our work. Given an identified problem, what policy or program should be selected? And given a particular policy or program, how do we know if it is working? Throughout we pay special attention to the ways in which interests of vulnerable or traditionally disempowered individuals and groups are represented or excluded in the policy process and the social justice implications of these patterns.

This course builds on basic research principles from foundation-year research methods courses by applying them to questions of policy suitability and effectiveness. This course also complements the policy process content in Social Work 594: Policies, Processes and Institutions.

**Objectives:** Students will

- develop skills for systematic policy analysis and policy and program evaluation;
- foster and learn to communicate a critical understanding of the implications of policy planning, design and evaluation processes for the distribution of resources and principles of social justice;
- advance skills in researching, creating, and interpreting policy-relevant information;
- reflect on the possible roles of social workers within the policy analysis process, including ethical use of policy analysis in furthering professional values; and
- refine skills in written and oral communication.

### **Details:**

**Readings:** Our main texts are *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* by Eugene Bardach (2000, Chatham House or Second Edition, 2005, CQ Press) and *Policy Paradox* by Deborah Stone (2002, Norton). Supplemental readings are on electronic reserve. Readings assigned for a class date should be read and contemplated before class. To facilitate discussion, students are expected to bring copies of readings and/or detailed notes to class.

**Format:** Learning will take place in and out of class and during a trip to the state legislature in Olympia. Class sessions typically include a combination of discussion, lectures, in-class case exercises and discussions, and time for peer-consulting on your projects. Most weeks will also include a short lecture on a technical aspect of policy analysis or practice (“tool time”).

**In-class participation:** The productivity and fun of these seminars will vary in direct proportion to your level of preparation and engagement. It is hoped that a tone of open discussion will be maintained throughout the course. As a courtesy to other students and the instructors, please come to class on time and prepared to contribute. Class attendance is a necessary condition for participation and demonstration of preparation. For this reason, class absences will affect your grade. If you must miss class, please notify Jen before class and negotiate a substitute plan for participation.

**Written assignments:** A series of short written assignments integrate class concepts through analysis of a policy question related to student interest and/or practicum placement. Written assignments include:

- a brief (1-2 page) problem and possibilities statement outlining your topic for the matrix and effectiveness memos (ungraded);
- a matrix memo consisting of a decision matrix and no more than 4 pages of supporting text (description attached);
- an effectiveness memo describing a cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis (description attached); and
- a final project consisting of a revision or extension of one or both memos and a brief reflection on the policy analysis process. More details will be provided in class.

Written work submitted should be the student's original writing created in response to the assignment in question. Instructor/s may not have adequate time to comment on assignments turned in past the due date and students will not be able to reflect on comments. To motivate promptness, late assignments will automatically lose one point (1.0 on a 4.0 scale) per day or fraction thereof.

The ability to write clearly is perhaps the most important skill a policy analyst can develop. For this reason, feedback on written work will focus on style as well as content. The Bardach text contains some useful hints for writing. The *SSW Guidelines for Student Papers* contains an excellent section on writing effective prose. Use these resources. Two other useful guides are on electronic reserve:

Dobel, J. Patrick, Elmore, Richard, & Werner, Laurie. (2003). Memo Writing. *The Electronic Hallway*, Seattle: University of Washington.

Musso, Juliet, Biller, Robert, & Myrtle, Robert. (2000). Tradecraft: Professional Writing as Problem Solving. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 19(4), 635-646.

**Grading:** Numeric grades will be assigned according to the following scale.:

A/A-	4.0-3.5	Mastery of subject content, demonstration of critical analysis, creativity and/or complexity in completion of the assignment. The difference between an A and an A- is based on the degree to which these skills are demonstrated.
B+	3.4-3.2	Mastery of subject content beyond expected competency.
B	3.1-2.9	Mastery of subject content at level of expected competency; meets course expectations.
B-	2.8-2.5	Less than adequate competency, but demonstrates learning and potential for mastery of content.
C-/C+	2.4-1.7	Demonstrates a minimal understanding of subject content. Significant areas need improvement to meet course expectations.

Assignments and activities are weighted as follows:

Participation (individual and group, includes in-class presentations)	40%
Ungraded assignments	10%
Written assignments (memos and final project)	50%

**Web page:** Bookmark <http://depts.washington.edu/sswweb/courses/romich/594/index.html> .This site will be a source for updates, links to on-line readings, and other class resources.

**Academic Accommodations:** If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disability Resources for Students, 448 Schmitz, 206-543-8924 (V/TTY). If you have a letter from the office of Disability Resources for Students (formerly Disabled Student Services) indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to Jen so we can discuss the accommodations you might need for this class.

### Preliminary Course Overview\*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>Overview</b>		
January 6	Introduction	Readings
January 13	No class meeting	Assignment: investigate professional communication practices
January 16	Policy-making in action	Olympia trip – details provided via e-mail and at first class meeting
<b>Defining the decision</b>		
January 20	Developing policy criteria Normative v. positive considerations	Babcock Place case Problem and possibilities statement due January 24
January 27	Developing policy proposals	Criteria presentations Constructing an alternative matrix Matrix due January 31
<b>Projecting outcomes</b>		
February 3	Evaluation and experimental designs	Team Read case Matrix memo due February 7
February 10	Program evaluation and non-experimental designs	Team Read presentations Grassroots Assistance in Rural China case
February 17	Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis	Fiscal note review
<b>Analysis in practice</b>		
February 24	Working with clients and constituents	Grassroots Assistance presentations Efficiency memo due February 28 Student matrix presentations
March 3	Decide! Wrap-up and reflection	Student matrix presentations
March 10	No class meeting End-of-quarter event TBA	Final project consultations Final project due March 17

\*Specific readings, timing of topics, and assignment due dates are subject to change and adjustment as needed in order to help students meet course objectives. Expect updates throughout the quarter.

## Readings

Page numbers for texts refer to Bardach (2005) *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, CQ Press.) and Stone (2002) *Policy Paradox* (Revised edition, Norton).<sup>1</sup> Other readings are on electronic reserve. Readings are required unless otherwise indicated. Reading load varies week-to-week and students are advised to plan accordingly.

### 1. January 6 – Introduction: Policy analysis and the policy process

Bardach – p. 1-59, “The Eightfold Path” (read all at once now and review relevant sections as we focus on them over this week and the next few)

Stone – p. 1-35, “Introduction” and “The Market and the Polis”

Gilbert, Neil, & Terrell, Paul. (1998). Ch. 9, “Who Plans? Choices in the Process of Policy Formulation” In *Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Needham Hts, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Gordon, I., Lewis, J., & Young, K. (1993). “Perspectives on policy analysis.” In M. Hill(Ed.), *The policy process* (pp. 5-9). Hertfordshire, UK: Simon & Schuster.

Sample policy analysis paper.

Tool time: Back of the envelope (BOTE) calculations

Assignment – ask practicum instructor or mentor about what constitutes solid or exemplary professional communication skills.

### 2. January 16, 2005 – Policy-making in action (Olympia trip)

Plan to be in Olympia 8:30 – 2:00. Details TBA.

## Defining the policy analysis decision

### 3. January 20 – Criteria for analysis; Doing policy research

Babcock Place case

Bardach – p. 10-15, “Assemble some evidence”; p. 25-35, “Select the criteria”; p. 61-89, “Gathering Data for Policy Research”

Stone, Deborah A. – p. 37-129 “Goals,” “Efficiency,” “Equity,” “Security,” and “Liberty”

(optional) Steuerle, C. Eugene, & Bakija, Jon M. (1994). Ch. 2 "Social Security Principles and Rationales". In *Retooling Social Security for the 21st Century: Right and Wrong Approaches to Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

Tool time: Presenting large and small numbers

(optional) Niederman, D. and D. Boyum (2003). Ch. 5 “Gaining perspective.” in *What the numbers say: A field guide to mastering our numerical world*. New York, Broadway Books.

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<sup>1</sup> If you have an older version, please note some differences. Bardach’s first edition and revised first edition lack the section on “Smart (best) practices” and the Appendix A example of a policy analysis but are otherwise quite similar. Stone’s unrevised edition (1997) lacks the chapter on “Policy Paradox in Action,” but is again otherwise similar.

#### 4. January 28 – Developing policy options

Bardach – p. 15-25 “Construct the Alternatives”; p. 91-105 “Smart Best-Practices Research”; p. 123-131 “Things Governments Do”

Stone – p. 261-264, “Solutions” and selection of Ch.11 “Inducements,” Ch. 12 “Rules,” Ch. 13 “Facts,” Ch. 14 “Rights,” or Ch. 15 “Powers” (skim all and read one or two most relevant to your memo topic).

Salamon, L.M. (2002). “The new governance and the tools of public action.” *The Tools of Government: A guide to the new governance*. L. M. Salamon. Oxford, Oxford University Press: skim pp. 1-18, read pp. 19-47.

Tool time: Presenting incidence and change

(optional) Niederman, D. and D. Boyum (2003). Ch. 4 “Playing the percentages.”

#### Projecting policy outcomes

#### 5. February 4 - Evaluation and experimental designs

Case: Team Read

Nachmais, David. “The role of evaluation in public policy.” Reprinted in Stella Theadoulou and Matthew Cahn (eds.) 1995. *Public Policy: The essential readings*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. p. 173-180.

Rossi, Peter H., Freeman, Howard E., and Lipsey, Mark W. (1999). Ch. 1 “Programs, policies and evaluations” and Ch. 9 “Quasi-experimental impact assessments” in *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Shadish, William R., Cook, Thomas D., & Campbell, Donald T. (2001). Ch. 1 “Experiments and generalized causal inference.” (p. 1-22 required, 23-32 optional) In *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Generalized Causal Inference*: Houghton-Mifflin.

Tool time: A guide to gooder riting (sic)

(optional) writing references listed on p. 2

#### 6. February 11 – Non-experimental evaluation designs

Case: Grassroots Assistance in Rural China

Greene, J. C. (1998). Qualitative program evaluation. *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage: 372-399.

Greene, J. C. (2000). "Integrating multiple methods to better understand welfare reform." *Poverty Research News* 4(1).

(optional) Doolittle, Fred, & Sherwood, Kay E. (2003). “What Lies Behind the Impacts? Implementation Research...” In M. C. Lennon & T. Corbett (Eds.), *Policy into Action : Implementation Research and Welfare Reform*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

(optional) Browse evaluations at <http://www.mdrc.org>

Tool time: Elasticity

(optional) Selection, p. 29-34 from Lewis, M. A. and K. Widerquist (2001). *Economics for social workers*. New York, Columbia University Press.

## **7. February 18 – Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis**

Bardach – p. 27-37 “Project the outcomes”

Stone – (review) p. 61-85 “Efficiency”

Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey. (1999). Ch. 11 “Measuring efficiency.”

Weimer, David L., & Vining, Aidan R. (1999). Ch. 12 "Benefit Cost-Analysis" In *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Barnett, W. S. (1992). Benefits of Compensatory Preschool Education. *Journal of Human Resources*, 27(2), 279-312.

TBA – State fiscal note

Tool time: Tax incidence

(optional) Slemrod, J. and J. M. Bakija (2000). Selections, p. 64-75. *Taxing ourselves: a citizen's guide to the great debate over tax reform*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

## **Part 3: Practicing Policy Analysis**

## **8. February 25 – Research and evaluation with clients and constituents**

Weimer and Vining (1999), Ch. 3 "Toward Professional Ethics" and Ch. 10 “Landing on your feet.”

Student presentations

Tool time: Expected value and risk

(optional) Frank, R. H. (2003). Section on “Probability and expected value” pp. 210-211. *Microeconomics and Behavior*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

## **9. March 4 - Decide! Wrap-up and reflection**

Stone – p. 232-257 “Decisions”

Stone – p. 384-414, “Policy Paradox in Action”

White, Louise G. (1994). Policy Analysis as Discourse. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 13(3).

Student presentations

Tool time? TBA

## **10. TBD - End-of-quarter event**

## Memo #1 – Decision Matrix

Prepare and present an initial matrix of policy alternatives, evaluative criteria, and projected outcomes. This assignment will be constructed as a policy analyst reporting to a non-partisan client, and will consist of three parts: 1.) a cover letter; 2.) a matrix of alternatives, criteria, and outcomes; and 3.) a memo explaining the matrix.

Start with a one-page (single-spaced) **cover letter** which restates your problem or question and outlines the alternatives to be considered. Assume your client knows the problem and is familiar with some or all of the alternatives. The purpose of this letter is to remind the reader, your client, of the information that she should already know.

Then develop a matrix and an explanatory memo. Prepare a **one-page matrix** in which you display two or three policy alternatives and two to four evaluative criteria. The key job of the matrix is to display the projected outcomes for each alternative against the evaluation criteria. The memo should be self-contained, so include a key and footnotes as needed.

In four pages of double-spaced 12 point font text, write a **memo** in which you explain the choices underlying the matrix. The following suggested page distributions are meant to help prioritize possible content:

- In 1 paragraph - 1 page, describe one or more of the alternatives using “tools” language.
- In 1-1/2 - 2 pages, explain how the chosen criteria represent the public interest.
- In 1-2 pages, explain how you have begun to project the outcomes of each policy alternative against the evaluation criteria.

Advice:

- You will have to make assumptions and limit your discussion. This is fine. Note your assumptions and proceed. The goal is not to cover all possible points but to present a coherent analysis given the time and space constraints.
- Focus on presenting an objective analysis, even if your client has a preferred position. This is an exercise in thinking through a policy from the position of “the public,” not a justification of an advocacy position.
- Choose real alternatives. Do not construct a “do everything” alternative. Do not devise a convenient straw-person to make your preferred alternative look better.
- Choose criteria that are relevant to the issue and capture the important tradeoffs. Consider issues of feasibility and implementation along with traditional concerns for efficiency and equity.
- The analysis of projected outcomes will vary with the type of criteria. At this point you should be able to include well-reasoned logical arguments, back-of-the-envelope calculations, some preliminary research evidence and some discussion of needs for additional research. Admit when you lack the information to project an outcome and describe what kind of information you would like to have. Include assessments of uncertainty as well.
- Limit yourself to no more than nine (9) outcome cells (i.e. 3 alternatives X 3 criteria OR 2 alternatives X 4 criteria).

## Memo #2 – Efficiency

Analyze an existing efficiency analysis and apply its findings to a problem of interest. This may be related to your matrix memo or it may address another question of interest. The project will consist of two parts: 1.) a cover letter (or memo) and 2.) a three to four-page memo. Single-space the letter and double-space the memo.

Choose an existing cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis. This may be a stand-alone published report, memo or academic article, or it may be part of a larger program evaluation. Some suitable analyses are listed at <http://faculty.washington.edu/romich/594/efficiency.htm> . Social Services Abstracts and EconLit are two good databases to search for others.

Address the **cover letter** to a client or constituent group. Explain how the analysis to be reviewed is related to a larger policy analysis. Assume that the client knows some background information. The letter should remind the reader, your client, of the information that she should already know and stimulate interest in learning about the application of cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analysis.

In the **memo**, describe the analysis and discuss how the findings inform the policy question you raise in the letter. This means:

- In less than one page, include brief contextual information about the analysis (was it a report within an agency? A legislative report? An academic article or report designed to inform policy more broadly?).
- In one or two pages, summarize the analysis in terms of the five steps for efficiency analyses addressed in class (identify standing, identify costs and benefits, monetize impacts, adjusting for time and risk, compare and report). Critically note assumptions or choices made by the researchers.
- In one or two pages, apply these findings to your problem of interest. What does this existing study tell you about efficiency concerns for your problem? How does this improve the estimates to be used in making the decision?

### **Advice:**

- Be clear about what this analysis can and cannot tell you. If it was done in a different political context or with a different population, state how those differences may matter in how it is interpreted.
- Back-of-the-envelope calculations may be helpful in applying this analysis to your problem. For instance, if you are using an evaluation of a policy change in a larger or smaller state, think about comparing the population size of that state with Washington's to get an estimation of cost for Washington.
- It may be helpful to think about upper- and lower-bounds. If you find an evaluation of a well-funded, fully-implemented program with solid administration, this may provide an upper bound as to both effectiveness and to cost.