Policy Analysis
POLITICAL SCIENCE / ETHICS & POLICY STUDIES
PSC 723/EPS 710
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Spring 2010

Professor: Dr. Kenneth E. Fernandez
Office: Department of Political Science; Wright Hall B209
Office Hours: T 3:30-5:00pm & W 10:00-11:30am, or by appointment.
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Time/Date: T 5:30 – 8:20pm., Wright Hall B224
Website: http://faculty.unlv.edu/kfernandez/psc723.htm

Class Description: This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the study of public policy and provide you with experience in policy analysis. Key issues explored include: the nature of policy analysis, the various stages and actors of the policy process, theories of public policy, methods used to analyze public policies, and factors shaping the actual utilization of policy analysis. Students will gain experience in the various methods of defining and describing public policy problems and issues, formulating and assessing possible strategies and alternative responses, recommending policy actions for decision making, designing and evaluating implementation plans, and communicating policy advice in written and oral presentations. We will use a variety of short cases and a semester-long project to develop these skills.

Course Objectives

1. Familiarize students with the literature, research and theories regarding the policy process
2. Understand what policy analysis entails
3. Explore the various methods and approaches to policy analysis
4. Comprehend the political economy/rational choice approach to policy analysis
5. Lean how to apply the concepts and approaches of policy analysis to pragmatic policy cases
6. Understand the inherent problems and biases of policy research in various settings

Course requirements: This graduate seminar will not be a lecture based course. Instead it will be a hands-on course where participation in and outside the class will determine your grade.

1. Class Participation and Attendance (15% of grade): This course is designed as a workshop and in-class participation is crucial. Come prepared to contribute to class discussion by carefully reading the assignments and providing thoughtful feedback on the work of other students. Each student will be assigned specific readings from the syllabus in which they will be required to submit 5 critical questions/comments that address or identify a strength, weakness, contradiction, or need for clarification in the reading. Because the class meets only once a week, missing class or part of class can affect your grade.

2. Reading Summary and Presentation (20%): The readings will be divided up among the class and each student will be responsible for writing and presenting a formal overview of their assigned readings—the main topics, arguments, findings, policy recommendations. Students will be expected not only to summarize
the assigned material but to isolate critical arguments made by the author as well as flaws in the arguments or methodology. Everyone should read all assigned readings and come to class with questions and comments. The various readings will be randomly assigned to students. If you have a conflict on the days/readings assigned it will be your responsibility to trade with another student and notify the instructor of the change.

3. Case Studies (15%): Three cases from the Kennedy School of Government Case Program will be examined (pension reform; mass-transit; mental health care). Prior to the class meeting each student will do some library research and write up a brief literature review (2 pages with 5 citations)* summarizing the scope, causes, and potential solutions of the policy problem being addressed. Each student will present their findings and recommendations. *Note, the citations must be different from the ones previously done in other classes - see http://faculty.unlv.edu/kfernandez/psc723.htm

4. Group Project – 5 project reports (10% each)
Each student will participate in the class research project. The class will be divided into three teams which will be given various tasks to complete and report back to the class at various times throughout the semester (see Class Schedule below). Teams will be randomly assigned and may change during the semester. Further information on this project will be provided in a handout on the first few class meeting.

The assignment of letter grades is as follows:

92 <= A  
80-81 = B- 
67-69 = D+
90-91 = A- 
77-79 = C+ 
62-66 = D 
87-89 = B+ 
72-76 = C  
60-61 = D-
82-86 = B  
70-71 = C- 
> 59 = F

Required Texts (a copy of each text has been placed in Physical Reserves at the Lied Library):


Additional Readings available on WebCampus (https://webcampus.nevada.edu)


John F. Kennedy School of Government Case Program, Harvard University:
Case #C14-01-1639.0. 2001. “Sound Move: The Debate over Seattle’s Regional Transit System.”
Case #C16-06-1837.0. 2006. “Pension Reform in California.”


CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 January 12: Introduction to Course
A. Course Design: Objectives, Structure, Philosophy and Expectations
B. Class Policy Analysis Project Description and Team Assignment
C. Complete CITI Course - http://www.unlv.edu/Research/OPRS/citi-info.htm


Week 2 – January 19: Theories of Public Policy
A. Rational Choice
B. Irrationality and Public Policy
C. Learning and Public Policy

Due: CITI Certificate

Week 3 – January 26: What is Policy Analysis?
A. Discuss the Steps in the Analytic Process
B. Problem Identification and Definition
C. Data and Method in Policy Analysis

Due: Progress Report #1: Answers to preliminary questions (see handout)


Week 4 – February 2: Case Example #1

Due: Brief Literature Review on Mass-Transit in Urban Areas (email instructor by 2pm)
Case: #C16-02-1649.0. Sound Move: The Debate Over Seattle’s Regional Transit System

Week 5 – February 9: Efficiency, Competition, Markets
A. Collective Action Problems
B. Market Efficiency
C. Market Failure

Due: Progress Report #2

Week 6 – February 16: Fairness and Equality in Policy Analysis
A. Rationales for Policy Intervention
B. Social Welfare Goals and Values

Due: Brief Literature Review on Relevant Issue: Managed Health Care (email instructor by 2pm)
Week 7 – February 23: Government Failure
A. Paradox of Democracy and Voting
B. Principle Agent Problem, Shirking, Rent Seeking
C. Correcting Market and Government Failure

Due: Progress Report #3  

Week 8 – March 2: Policy Adoption and Implementation
A. Feasibility of Policy
B. Factors affecting Success
C. Costs, Bargaining Costs, and Opportunity Costs

Due: Brief Literature Review on Relevant Issue: Pension Reform (email instructor by 2pm)  
Case: #C16-06-1837.0. 2006. “Pension Reform in California.”  

Week 9 – March 9: Doing Policy Analysis
A. Problem Analysis
B. Goals and Constraints
C. Methods/Communicating Results


Week 10 – March 16: Cost-Benefit Analysis
A. Monetization
B. Estimating Effects and Net Benefit
C. Limitations to Cost-Benefit Analysis

Due: Progress Report #4  

Week 11 – March 23: The Politics of Policy Analysis
A. Review the steps in the analytic process
B. Consideration of politics, bounded rationality and alternative models of policy resolution


March 30: SPRING BREAK March 29-April 3

NO CLASS

Week 12 – April 6: Policy Analysis Example: Criminal Justice

Week 13 – April 13: Policy Analysis, Research Design and Statistic
A. Quantitative Analysis of Policy Outcomes
B. Replication and Verification


Week 14 – April 20: Comparative and Foreign Policy Analysis
A. Does comparative or foreign policy analysis need different theories and/or methods?
B. Culture and Policy Analysis


Week 15 – April 20: Maintaining Research Quality and Integrity in Policy Research
A. Government Sponsored Research
B. Minimizing Bias and Conflicts of Interests


Finals Week – May 5 at 6pm: Final Team Reports
A. Progress Report #5
B. Discussion of Project and Final Oral Report