

# PLCY 71: INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

## COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2005

Section 01: Tue-Thur 9:30-10:45 PM Howell 106

**Instructor:** *Mort Webster*

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### **Course Objectives:**

How should mercury emissions into the air from power plants be regulated? Should failing schools be held accountable, or will this take resources from students who need them most? Should the federal government do anything about the rising costs of health care and concurrent increase in the number of uninsured families? Should Social Security be privatized?

More importantly, HOW would you answer any of these questions? If you worked for a governor or senator and they asked you to prepare a report on an issue and make a recommendation, how would you do it?

This main goal of this course is to introduce you to the concepts and tools useful in performing a policy analysis, and to give you practice using them. Specifically, by the end of this course, you will be able to:

- *Perform an analysis of a policy issue and recommend a particular course of action.*

Behind this main objective are two meta-objectives: this course aims to help you to:

- Improve your critical/analytical thinking skills,
- Develop familiarity with a range of public policy issues.

## **The Policy Analysis Process**

This course will help you to develop the skills to perform a policy analysis. The standard policy analysis approach follows a set of steps, each of which we will spend time on in this course.

This list of steps is an outline both for this course and for the analysis that you will conduct.

- Define and frame a policy problem,
- Identify the key stakeholders (individuals and groups) for an issue,
- Identify the relevant criteria needed to choose the “best” policy,
- Identify or create alternative solutions,
- Assess the outcome of each alternative in terms of each criterion,
- Assess the tradeoffs between alternatives,
- Identify barriers to implementation,
- Recommend the best alternative,
- Communicate your recommendation and the reasoning behind it to a client/decision-maker.

## **How this course will work:**

This course is designed to introduce you to useful concepts and skills and then to practice applying them to real-world policy issues. You will have opportunities to practice each method multiple times in several contexts, including in-class discussions of policy cases, short homework assignments, individual policy memos, and group policy analyses.

### *In-class Discussions*

I have set up the schedule so that we can alternate between learning a new concept or technique, where the readings tend to come from textbooks, and actual policy cases so that we can apply the new material. Most of the cases are from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and tend to read more like stories than textbooks.

### *Discussion Questions*

I will often assign discussion questions for a reading assignment to be written and handed in in-class when we discuss the reading. These are NOT meant to take any more time than you would otherwise spend on the reading. Rather, they are intended to help you focus on the relevant parts of the reading and be more prepared for discussion. These are only graded as to whether you handed them in with some reasonable thought. At the end of the semester, 10% of your grade will be the fraction of these that you handed in. I anticipate 10-15 of these over the semester (roughly once a week). Also, some of these questions may show up again on the mid-term or final. Past classes have found these helpful in doing the readings, so I will try to give you discussion questions for every class, even when they are not due.

### *Homework Assignments*

There will be two short homework assignments in addition to the policy analysis project. These will consist of a few problems on paper to help you make sense of the concepts and practice the tools introduced in class.

### *Policy Analysis Project*

The focal point for your practice and exploration will be a detailed policy analysis of a specific issue conducted over the semester in several stages, both individually and as groups. You will have a choice of one of 5 issues to focus on for this project:

- Air Pollution Regulatory Reform
- Health Care Reform
- Education Reform
- Social Security Reform
- Passenger Rail Reform (Amtrak Privatization)

This project will allow each of you to choose an issue that is of particular interest to you. Each of these is described in more detail on the course website with some background materials. After two weeks, I will ask you for your preferences and will attempt to create groups that meet everyone's interests.

The policy analysis will have an individual component and a group component. The individual policy memo is a short (1-2 pages) paper that lays out the analysis to be performed. This part will give you practice defining the problem, identifying stakeholders, laying out criteria, and identifying alternatives to be examined. The memo is to be done twice, allowing you to rewrite and incorporate any feedback from the first version into the second.

Performing a full analysis of policy alternatives is a difficult job and in the real world is almost always done by teams of experts working together. We will mirror this approach in the class. Once you have framed the analysis as individuals, the remaining analysis will be done as groups. You will work together to predict the effect of each alternative to be considered on each criterion, explore the tradeoffs between criteria, consider implementation issues and potential pitfalls, and reach consensus on a recommendation to be communicated to your client. As for the individual memo, you will be required to hand in a draft report on your analysis, and the final report must reflect feedback received on the draft.

Although the early assignments are as individuals, I strongly urge you to begin working as groups immediately to gather information, scope out the problem, and support and help each other in this process. Finally, part of your final project grade will be determined from confidential evaluations by your group members. This is to increase your incentive for forming supportive working relationships, and to provide you with constructive feedback on your work habits for the future.

*After-hours Briefing on Policy Analysis Project:* In order to efficiently prepare each group for their project and give additional topic-specific background, I will hold one meeting on each topic area (e.g., health policy). These meetings will be at 5pm, during the weeks of September 20 and 27. The specific day for each topic will be scheduled within the first few weeks of the semester.

These meetings are optional, but it is strongly recommended that at least one member of each team attend, and as many as possible.

### *Exams:*

There will be one in-class mid-term exam. This will consist of short-answer questions on the concepts covered to that point. Some questions will likely come from the homework and discussion questions. The final exam will be a take-home exam. It will consist of a new policy case to analyze briefly, and some questions on the policy analyses from the group projects.

**Course materials (required):**

In an effort to put together the best reading materials for you at the lowest cost, the readings can be found in three different places. If you are unsure where to find a reading, check the syllabus or ask me.

- 1) Coursepack for PLCY 71, Webster, Fall 2004 [Available at Student Stores].
- 2) Additional readings available as PDF files on the course website:  
<http://www.unc.edu/~mort/plcy71.html>
- 3) Kennedy School Cases: Access through [www.xanedu.com](http://www.xanedu.com) Price: \$28.75 – instructions for access will be supplied in class and on the course website.

### Course assignments and student evaluation:

Your **final grade** will be based on the following assignments/exams:

2 Individual policy memos	20%	
20% draft memo		
80% final memo		
2 Homeworks	5%	
Mid-term exam	10%	
Group Policy Analysis (presentation + paper)	35%	
20% group paper,		
10% group presentation		
5% peer evaluation		
Take-home Final exam	15%	
Discussion Questions	10%	(written answers handed in)
Class Participation	5%	

Final grades will follow a traditional non-curved scale:

A	90+
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 or below

\*\*\*I want to stress that you are **NOT** in competition with others in this class to get a better grade. This is intentional to foster as much collaboration and cooperation as possible in this class as possible. Grading criteria for the writing assignments will be specific and point-based and will be distributed before the assignment is due.

*Late Assignments:* points will be subtracted from late assignments at a rate of 10% per day. Since assignments build on the previous one, it is in your interest to complete each one. If you think that you may not be able to finish an assignment on time, please come speak to me as soon as possible.

## Detailed Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Tuesday, Aug. 30

Topic: Introduction to course

Reading: Kraft & Furlong, Ch. 4 (CP)

Objective: Begin thinking about what public policy is, what is required to inform “good” public policy choices, and skills are needed for policy analysis.

Thursday, Sept. 1

Topic: CASE: Cleveland School Vouchers

Readings: KSG: “The Cleveland School Voucher Program: A Question of Choice (A)”

KSG: “The Cleveland School Voucher Program: A Question of Choice (B)”  
(Xanedu)

Objective: Use case to practice problem definition and stakeholder identification; explore issues in education policy.

Tuesday, Sept. 6

Topic: Problem Definition

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 4 (CP)

Objective: Learn how to develop a ‘problem statement’ for a policy analysis.

Thursday, Sept. 8

Topic: CASE: Clinton Health Care Reform

Reading: KSG: “The Battle over the Clinton Health Care Proposal”

KSG: “The Battle over the Clinton Health Care Proposal: Sequel/Epilogue” (Xanedu)

Objective: Use case for more practice at problem definition and stakeholder identification; explore issues in health policy.

Tuesday, Sept. 13

Topic: Market Model

Reading: Munger, Ch. 3 “A Benchmark for Performance: The Market” (Course Website)

Objective: Review microeconomic theory – why are markets a good way to allocate resources in society?

Thursday, Sept. 15

Topic: Markets: Prison Camp Example

Reading: Munger, Ch. 3

“A Benchmark for Performance: The Market (Appendix)” (Course Website)

Objective: Use case to practice concepts of markets and allocative efficiency.

Tuesday, Sept. 20

Topic: CASE: FISHBANKS

Reading: Fishbanks Reading Packet (Course Website)

Objective: Simulation Game: Play the role of a Fishing Company and Explore the effects of your decisions.

Thursday, Sept. 22

Assignment Due: <**Group Assignment Due – Ground-Rules**>

Topic: Collective Action Failure

Reading: Bickers & Williams, Ch. 4: “The Problem of Collective Action” (CP)

Objective: Use experience of FISHBANKS to explain collective action failure; what policy approaches can be used to correct this?

Tuesday, Sept. 27

Topic: Collective Action Failure and Market Failure

Reading: Munger, Ch. 4: “Evaluation and Market Failure” (CP)

Objective: Practice identifying policy issues as market failures or not, and if so, which type of market failure.

Thursday, Sept. 29

Topic: Market Failure

Reading: Munger Ch. 7 “The Welfare Economics Paradigm”

Callan, “Modeling Market Failure” (Course Website)

Objective: Continue practice identifying market failures and proposing possible corrections.

Tuesday, Oct. 4

Assignment Due: <**HW 1 Due: diagnosing market failures**>

Topic: Criteria

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 5 (Course Website)

Objective: Learn to generate lists of criteria for evaluating policy alternatives.

Thursday, Oct. 6

Topic: Alternatives

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 6 (Course Website)

Objective: Practice generating alternative solutions for policy problems.

Tuesday, Oct. 11

Topic: Writing a Memo

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 2 (Course Website)

CBO Gasoline Study (Course Website)

Objective: Introduction to how to write a policy memo; use CBO example to identify effective techniques.

Thursday, Oct. 13

Assignment: <**Memo 1 Due**>

Topic: CASE: SO<sub>2</sub> Pollution and Acid Rain

Reading: KSG: “Cleaning up the Big Dirties’: The Problem of Acid Rain” (Xanedu)

Objective: Use case to practice identifying market failure and explore political barriers to policy solutions.

Tuesday, Oct. 18

\*\*\*\* **MID-TERM EXAM** \*\*\*\*

Thursday, Oct. 20    **No Class**    Fall Break

Tuesday, Oct. 25

Topic: CASE: California Welfare Reform

Reading: KSG: “California Welfare Reform” (Xanadu)

Objective: Use case to explore tradeoffs among criteria and how they lead to different problem definitions by different players.

Thursday, Oct. 27

Topic: Equity Vs Efficiency

Reading: Stone Ch.2: “Equity” and Ch. 3: “Efficiency” (CP)

Objective: Explore conceptual tension between equity and efficiency in policy debates.

Tuesday, Nov. 1

Topic: Criteria-Alternatives Matrices and Tradeoffs

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 8 (Course Website)

Objective: Practice building criteria-alternative matrices for an analysis and using to identify critical tradeoffs.

Thursday, Nov. 3

Assignment Due: <**Memo 2 Due**>

Topic: Implementation and Political Feasibility

Readings:

Kraft and Furlong, Ch. 6: “Assessing Policy Alternatives”

Weimer and Vining, Ch. 13 (Course Website)

Objective: Be able to identify implementation barriers and political obstacles to theoretically ideal policies; how to reformulate alternative to have greater chance of success.

Tuesday, Nov. 8

Topic: CASE: Jobs in Oakland

Reading: Wildavsky and Pressman, *Implementation*, Chs. 1-3 (CP).

Objective: Practice identifying implementation barriers for case.

Thursday, Nov. 10

Topic: Methods of Evaluating Alternatives

Reading: Patton & Sawicki, Ch. 7 (Course Website)

Objective: Explore different approaches for evaluating alternatives, choosing the right method for the problem.

Tuesday, Nov. 15

Topic: Discounting for Time

Reading: Munger, Ch. 10 “Discounting II: Time” (Course Website)

Objective: Be able to discount a stream of costs and benefits over time into its present value for evaluation.

Thursday, Nov. 17

Assignment Due: <Group Draft Due>

Topic: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Reading: Munger, Ch. 11 “Cost-Benefit Analysis” (Course Website)

Objective: Be able to perform a simple cost-benefit analysis; identify the costs and benefits that should be included in an analysis.

Tuesday, Nov. 22

Topic: CASE: Arsenic in Drinking Water

Reading: KSG: “Arsenic in Drinking Water” (Xanedu)

Objective: Use case to practice cost-benefit analysis and its appropriate interpretation.

Thursday, Nov. 24 \*\*\*\* No Class – Thanksgiving \*\*\*\*

Tuesday, Nov. 29

Assignment Due: <HW #2 Due: cost-benefit analysis>

Topic: Pros and Cons of CBA

Reading: Kelman, “Cost-Benefit Analysis: An Ethical Critique”

Arrow et al, “Is there a role for benefit-cost analysis in environmental, health, and safety regulation?” (CP)

Objective: Class Debate: should cost-benefit be used for making public policy decisions?

Thursday, Dec. 1

Topic: Discussion of Group Projects

Tuesday, Dec. 6 <Group Presentations>

Thursday, Dec. 8 <Group Presentations>

Topic: Course Wrap-Up and Review for Final Exam

Assignment Due: <Final Group Papers Due>

**Final Exam:**

Scheduled Time: Tue. Dec 13 8:00 A.M.  
Takehome exam due by: Tue. Dec. 13, 12:00 P.M.

**Overview Schedule of Course Meetings and Assignments**

Week of	Tuesday	Thursday
Aug 30, Sept 1	Introduction to course	CASE: Cleveland School

	P&S Ch. 1	Vouchers
Sept 6, 8	Problem Definition P&S Ch. 4	CASE: Clinton Health Care Reform  <Poll: Project Prefs>
Sept 13, 15	Market Model Munger Ch. 3  <Assign Groups>	Markets: Prison Camp Example  Munger Ch. 3 - case
Sept 20, 22	CASE: FISHBANKS  Read Fishbanks Packet	Collective Action Failure  B&W Ch. 4 <Group Project Ground-Rules Due>
Sept. 27, 29	Collective Action Failure and Market Failure  Munger Ch. 4	Market Failure  Munger Ch. 7
Oct. 4, 6	Criteria  P&S Ch. 5  <HW 1 Due>	Alternatives  P&S Ch. 6
Oct. 11, 13	Writing a Memo  Memo Examples	CASE: The Big Dirties  <Memo 1 Due>
Oct. 18, 20	<b>MID-TERM EXAM</b>	<b>No Class</b>  <b>Fall Break</b>
Oct. 25, 27	CASE: California Welfare Reform	Equity Vs Efficiency  Stone Chs. 2&3
<b>Week of</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
Nov. 1, 3	Criteria-Alternatives Matrices and Tradeoffs	Implementation and Political Feasibility

	P&S Ch. 8	W&V Ch. 13 <Memo 2 Due>
Nov. 8, 10	CASE: Jobs in Oakland	Methods of Evaluating Alternatives  P&S Ch. 7
Nov. 15, 17	Discounting for Time  Munger Ch. 10	Cost-Benefit Analysis  Munger Ch. 11  <Group Draft Due>
Nov. 22, 24	CASE: Arsenic in Drinking Water	<b>NO CLASS</b>  <b>Thanksgiving</b>
Nov. 29, Dec. 1	Pros and Cons of CBA  Kelman, Arrow et al  <HW #2 Due>	Discussion of Group Projects
Dec. 6, 8	<Group Presentations>	<Group Presentations>  Course Wrap-Up

Final Exam Times:

Scheduled Time: Tue. Dec 13 8:00 A.M.  
Takehome exam due by: **Tue. Dec. 13, 12:00 P.M.**