

Public Affairs 873: Introduction to Policy Analysis

Spring, 2017
University of Wisconsin
La Follette School of Public Affairs
PubAff-873-002

Monday: 1:20–3:15 PM
Room: EDUCATION L173
Webpage: Learn@UW
3 credits

INSTRUCTOR

Professor Greg Nemet

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Room 209 Observatory Hill Office Bldg.
Office Hours: (with some variation—will post 1 week ahead)
Monday 11:30a-12:30p
Tuesday 2–3p

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course provides an introduction to the study of public policy and the professional practice of policy analysis with a focus on international policy issues. We consider a number of fundamental questions:

- What are the rationales for collective interference in private affairs?
- What are the limitations to collective action?
- What are the generic instruments of public policy?
- How can we measure social costs and benefits?
- What are the appropriate roles for policy analysts in democratic societies?

We also seek to improve our basic skills in analytical thinking, information gathering, and writing as we attempt to answer these questions.

REQUIREMENTS

Completing the course requires the following:

Four memorandum exercises, pop-briefing, and class participation

The four memorandum exercises provide an opportunity to practice analytical writing: the first exercise provides a general introduction; the remaining three are related to your policy analysis project. See the end of this syllabus for descriptions of each.

The pop-briefing simulates the sort of oral report you are likely to be called upon to make while you are working on a major project. You will have a total of ten minutes to provide an introduction to the issue you are addressing in your policy analysis project, pose an analytical question you are trying to address, and lead discussion of it. Work hard to keep the introduction of your issue to about one minute. You should allow at least five minutes

for discussion. The discussion may be extended at my discretion. I will randomly select two or three presenters each class beginning on February 6.

Your active class participation will make the course more valuable for all of us.

Midterm examination

A test of your mastery of the basic rationales for, and limits to, public policy.

Policy Analysis project

A semester-long project on a randomly assigned topic gives you an opportunity to apply the concepts and craft skills introduced in the course. Penultimate draft due *April 24* and final report due *May 5*. Note that the draft due on 4/24 is *not* a first draft, but a nearly final one as you would prepare for a client. The 4/24 draft provides the primary basis for the project grade.

ACKNOWLEDGING SOURCES

All assignments require proper acknowledgment of sources as detailed on course website. In summary:

1. If you use an author's specific word or words, you must place those words within quotation marks and you must credit the source,
2. Even if you use your own words, if you obtained the information or ideas you are presenting from a source, you must document the source.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform me if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the UW-Madison's McBurney Disability Office - <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>.

EVALUATION

Grades will be assigned based on the following:

- 40% Memos, pop-briefing, and class participation
- 30% Midterm exam
- 30% Policy analysis project

I will consider presentation and punctuality in evaluating all assignments.

READINGS

There is one required book for this course, which is available at the UW Bookstore:

- Weimer, David L. and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, 5th edition (Longman/Pearson, 2010)

All other readings listed in this syllabus will be available on the Learn@UW website.

INSTRUCTOR'S BIO

Gregory Nemet is an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin in the La Follette School of Public Affairs and the Nelson Institute Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment (SAGE). He is also chair of the Energy Analysis and Policy (EAP) certificate program. His research and teaching focus on improving analysis of the environmental, social, economic, and technical dynamics of the global energy system. This work is motivated by a general interest in understanding how to expand access to energy services while reducing environmental impacts. He teaches courses in energy systems analysis, governance of global energy problems, and international environmental policy. His research analyzes the process of technological change in energy and its interactions with public policy. He has been an author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Global Energy Assessment (GEA). He received his doctorate in energy and resources from the University of California, Berkeley. His A.B. is in geography and economics from Dartmouth College.

Class Schedule and Reading List

1. January 23:

Course Introduction

Course overview. Policy analysis projects randomly assigned and briefly discussed.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 1.

2. January 30:

Policy Analysis: Overview

We consider two important questions that we will revisit throughout the course: What roles does policy analysis play in democratic societies? What roles should it play?

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 2, 3, and 14.
- Musso, J., R. Biller, et al. (2000). "Tradecraft: Professional writing as problem solving." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19(4): 635-646.
- *Exercise #1 due at the beginning of class.*

3. February 6:

Market Failures as Rationales for Public Policy I

Welfare economics specifies the assumptions under which market equilibria are Pareto efficient. Certain violations of these assumptions are commonly identified as market failures: public goods, externalities, natural monopolies, and information asymmetries. Market failures provide important rationales for collective interference with individual choices. Our goal is to understand these basic market failures, and other limitations of the competitive framework, for purposes of framing and modeling policy problems.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 4, 5, and 6.

4. February 13:

Market Failures as Rationales for Public Policy II

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 4, 5, and 6.
- Pielke Jr, R. A. (2007). *The honest broker: making sense of science in policy and politics*, Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1 “Four idealized roles of science in policy and politics.”

5. February 20:

Goals Other Than Efficiency as Rationales for Public Policy

Though efficiency is almost always one of the relevant goals in policy analysis, it is rarely the only one. It is useful to develop conceptual foundations for thinking about distributional and other goals that commonly arise in policy analysis.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 7.
- *Exercise #2 due at the beginning of class.*

6. February 27:

Government Failure as Limitation and Rationale

Just as markets fail in systematic ways, so too does collective action. Such generic government failures interfere with the effective correction of market failures and produce public policies that themselves are policy problems.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 8.

7. March 6:

Midterm examination

Test covering the concepts developed in the first half of the course.

8. March 13:

Structuring Analysis I

An overview of the steps in the rationalist mode of policy analysis. We consider how to frame and model policy problems, select appropriate goals and criteria, specify policy alternatives, predict and value consequences, identify tradeoffs among alternatives, and effectively communicate recommendations.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 15.
- Weimer and Vining, pp192–204 in Ch. 9.

March 20: Spring Break.

9. March 27:**Structuring Analysis II**

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 15.
- *Exercise #3 due at the beginning of class.*

10. April 3:**Policy Design I**

A discussion of how to design policies. We will consider generic policies as starting points for design, as well as borrowing and adapting designs used in other contexts.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 9, 10, and 13.

11. April 10:**Policy Design II**

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 9, 10, and 13.

12. April 17:**Adoption and Implementation**

A realistic assessment of policy alternatives almost always requires consideration of the feasibility of their adoption and implementation. How can we make predictions about feasibility? How can we alter policy alternatives to improve their feasibility?

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 11 and 12.
- Breedlove, B. (2002). "The continuing education of a policy salesman." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 21(1): 132-136.
- Leman, C. K. and R. H. Nelson (1981). "Ten commandments for policy economists." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 1(1): 97-117.
- Robert, C. and R. Zeckhauser (2011). "The methodology of normative policy analysis." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*: 30(3):613-643.
- Verdier, J. M. (1984). "Advising congressional decision-makers: Guidelines for economists." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 3(3): 421-438.

13. April 24:**Cost-Benefit Analysis**

Although cost-benefit analysis (CBA) is rarely appropriate as a decision rule, it provides useful protocols for valuing the efficiency impacts of policy alternatives. We review basic concepts underlying CBA such as willingness-to-pay, opportunity cost, discounting for time, and the treatment of risk. We also consider the conceptual and practical limitations to its application.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 16 and 17.
- Moore, M. A., A. E. Boardman, A. R. Vining, D. L. Weimer and D. H. Greenberg (2004). "Just give me a number! Practical values for the social discount rate." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 23(4): 789-812.

Two hard copies of your policy analysis project report are due at the beginning of class. My evaluation of this draft of your report is the primary basis for my assessment of your project. Please also email a PDF version with the file name: last_name.pdf

Friday, April 28: *Exercise #4 due at noon via email.*

14. May 1:**Policy Analysis Project Discussion**

This session is set aside for revisiting topics of interest and discussing successful completion of projects.

Friday, May 5:

Revised policy analysis project reports due at 5pm submitted as a PDF file by e-mail attachment. The title of the file should be (your last name)-(word conveying subject)-2017.pdf. The e-mail itself should indicate how you responded to comments on your initial report draft. Line-by-line responses to my comments is usually the best way to do this.

MEMORANDUM EXERCISES

Exercise 1*(Due January 30)*

Read each of the following policy analyses available at Learn@UW:

- Blake
- Bower
- Rosales
- Sambo

Write a memorandum to the client of one of these reports that makes a recommendation for action on the problem addressed in the report. You may focus on the recommendation in the report or argue for some other alternative. Your memorandum should be no more than three, double-spaced, typed pages in length. Your recommendation should be stated clearly in the last sentence of the first paragraph. The rest of your memorandum should indicate the advantages and disadvantages of your recommendation.

Exercise 2*(Due February 20)*

One of the steps in defining a policy problem is framing it as a market or government failure. The framing helps you to determine if there is a strong rationale for government action and suggests generic policy alternatives for consideration. Prepare a three- to four-page (double-spaced) analysis that introduces the problem implied by your project statement and frames it as a market or government failure. (Projects often begin as a request for analysis of a specific alternative to the status quo. In such cases, problem definition involves identifying the underlying policy problem that prompts interest in the alternative.) After writing an introductory paragraph, divide your memorandum into two distinct parts. In the first part provide a sketch of the context for your problem. The sketch may be in the form of a brief history, or it may simply describe the symptoms of the problem. The second part should clearly frame your problem as a market or government failure.

It is likely that you will be able to provide a useful frame by focusing on one market or government failure. It may be that several others are applicable as well. While you may note these in passing, try to stay focused on the one that best helps you understand the nature of the problem from the perspective of the good of society. Your memorandum should show that you understand the concept and that you are able to apply it to a specific context.

Imagine that you are writing your memorandum to a colleague who will be working with you on the analysis. Assume that your colleague does not have much background in economics. Clearly explain any technical terms that you use. Also, avoid using diagrams. If you think that a diagram is essential, then put it in an appendix.

Exercise 3

(Due March 27)

When doing policy analysis, it is usually helpful to consider some possible policy alternatives in considerable depth well before preparing a full draft. Looking ahead to alternatives often helps one to refine goals and criteria. It also helps one anticipate the sort of information that will be useful for predicting consequences of alternative policies. Now would be a good time for you to focus on one of your promising policy alternatives (one other than the status quo) for your project.

In a brief memorandum of three double-spaced pages please do the following: First, clearly specify one of your policy alternatives in terms of all its essential elements. Second, briefly outline what you believe to be the major effects of the alternatives, including both the use of resources required to implement it and its impacts. Third, discuss what information you hope to use to predict the magnitudes of the major effects.

Exercise 4

(Due April 28 at Noon)

Prepare a brief memorandum of two or three double-spaced pages that provides your colleague with constructive criticism of his or her policy report. Your goal here is to provide a review of the policy memo that can consist of both a narrative and an itemized list. It will be helpful to frame your commentary as consisting of distinct items to which your classmate can respond in the final version of their policy memo. Submit your review by email to both me and your colleague. The title of the file should be:
(your last name)_ex4_(colleague's last name).pdf.