

Introduction to Public Policy

PP5340

Professor Douglas Spencer
University of Connecticut

Fall 2014

Class

Library 402
Tuesdays 4:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Contact

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Course Description

This course is part of the core curriculum for the Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree at UConn. The purpose of the course is to introduce you to the fundamentals of public policymaking in the United States and to provide instruction and practice in oral and written communication skills. In particular, this course is designed to help you develop clear writing skills. We will make extensive use of case studies and examples. The case studies provide examples of how professionals have addressed specific policy issues—sometimes well, sometimes poorly. By reading the experiences of others who have grappled with difficult policy problems, you will be better prepared to grapple with them yourselves.

Fundamentals of public policy making

We will discuss the structure, nature and resolution of public policy problems in the United States through the reading, review and discussion of a series of case studies. We will look at the policymaking process, including various policy approaches, accountability and ethics, and citizen participation. We also will discuss specific public policy problems and issues, such as the environment, privatization, and education.

Written and oral communication skills

Clear communication is a critical professional skill. Professional writing requires clearly reasoned and directly stated arguments. The Department of Public Policy has developed a Writing Guide to help you learn the keys to professional writing. The third week of class will be devoted entirely to professional communication, with a focus on writing and important skills necessary for making clear and persuasive presentations. You will also be required to write three Policy and Management Memos (PMM) on your own and author an original case study with a group of other students.

Required Readings

Readings for the course will be posted on the course HuskyCT site. We will be reading case studies, academic articles, and news stories relevant to our weekly discussions.

One of the main purposes of this course is to teach you to be a good writer. To that end, I recommend that you purchase the following book, but it is not required for the course.

- John W. Swain and Kathleen Dolan Swain. 2014. *Effective Writing in the Public Sector*. New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Disciplinary action will be pursued if such conduct is discovered. All work that you submit for credit during this course must represent your own work and no one else's. For definitions of academic misconduct and further information, see Appendix B of the University of Connecticut student code located on the web at <http://www.dosa.uconn.edu>. This code specifies that “The appropriate academic consequence for serious offenses is generally considered to be failure in the course. For less serious offenses regarding small portions of the course work, failure for that portion is suggested, with the requirement that the student repeat the work satisfactorily for no credit.”

Students should be especially careful in their writing to properly cite material and ideas taken from other sources. The University of Connecticut Library offers a useful guide, available at <http://lib.uconn.edu/instruction/citing.html>, that includes a tutorial for understanding citations and links to citation style guides.

Late Work

Students are expected to meet all deadlines specified in the course schedule or verbally by me. Late work will not be accepted except for unforeseen emergency circumstances. See me immediately if you think you might have a problem with this expectation.

Class Cancellations

Class will be cancelled only if absolutely necessary. If it becomes necessary to cancel class, students will be notified by email and/or HuskyCT as soon as possible. If the weather is inclement, students should call the campus emergency closing information line at (860) 570-9327 or check the campus website <http://hartford.uconn.edu/>.

Students With Disabilities

According University of Connecticut policy, the university “is committed to achieving equal educational opportunity and full participation for persons with disabilities.” Assurance of equal educational opportunity rests upon legal foundations established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. By federal law, a person with a disability is any person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment; (2) has a record of such impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities such as self-care, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, or learning.” All students with disabilities are entitled to a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Any student who requires special accommodations due to a disability should contact the Regional Campus Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities at (860) 570-9204 or jacqueline.santiago@uconn.edu. For more information regarding the accommodations process at the University of Connecticut, you may also visit the Center for Students with Disabilities website at <http://www.csd.uconn.edu>.

Absences due to Religious Observance

Students anticipating any conflicts with class attendance or assignments due to religious observances should inform me in writing within the first three weeks of the semester, and prior to the anticipated absence, and should take the initiative to work out with the instructor a schedule for making up missed work.

Grading

Course grades will be based on the following breakdown:

In-class participation	10%
Policy and Management Memos	
Memo #1	15%
Memo #2	20%
Memo #3	20%
Memo #4	20%
Group presentation	15%
Total	100%

Participation (10%)

This course makes extensive use of the case method and class attendance and participation is expected. It is important that class members be well prepared to discuss the assigned case studies because effective learning from case discussion depends on (a) familiarity with the details of the case and (b) readiness of individuals to contribute to a collective articulation of the problem at hand. You will be graded on your week-to-week contributions to classroom discussions.

Policy and Management Memoranda (75%)

You will prepare four policy and management memos. Each memo will analyze issues presented in a case study that will be posted on HuskyCT. These memos should not exceed 2 single-spaced pages, meaning that you must write concisely in order to fully respond to the assignment questions. Your memos will be formatted according to the guidelines in the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY WRITING GUIDE. Your memos will be reviewed by me and by your peers. You should expect to receive substantial feedback on each of your memoranda because of the novel writing style and demand for precision and clarity. You will have the chance to revise the memos after these reviews. For two of the assignments, you may choose to revise and resubmit your graded memo and I will average the two grades.

Group Presentation (15%)

Good communication skills in the public sector are not limited to writing. With a group of 2-3 other students you will prepare an in-class presentation about a current public policy problem. You will be graded for the quality of your slides and the professionalism of your presentation.

Extra Credit

You may earn extra credit by attending a department professional development seminar and/or a talk at the department's speaker series during the semester. Sign-in sheets will be provided at these events to verify attendance. Attendance at each event will add 1% toward your final participation score. You may earn up to 3% total. For the speaker series, you must post a short (two or three paragraph) reaction to the presentation on the course HuskyCT discussion page. Your reaction post can cover several things, including but not limited to the following items:

- Linking the session information to class discussion and concepts,
- Paragraph-long responses to questions posed by the instructor (when posted),
- Discussing how what you learned gives you a different perspective for viewing a particular policy area or part of the policy process,
- Posting Internet links to relevant articles in newspapers or periodicals about current events with a discussion of why the link relates to the speaker's topic and information, and/or
- Well-thought out responses to other students' postings to initiate an online dialogue about the topic.

Assignment Schedule

	Due date(s)
First PMM	9/09 – First draft due
Case: <i>Crosswalk at Babcock Place</i>	9/16 – Draft returned with professor’s comments
	9/23 – Submit memo for grade
	9/30 – Graded memos returned
Second PMM	10/07 – Draft due for in-class review
Case: <i>Seattle’s Solid Waste Crisis</i>	10/14 – Submit memo for grade
	10/21 – Graded memos returned
	10/28 – Resubmit memo for grade (optional)
Third PMM	10/28 – Draft due for in-class review
Case: <i>Rural Democracy</i>	11/04 – Submit memo for grade
	11/11 – Graded memos returned
	11/18 – Resubmit memo for grade (optional)
Fourth PMM	11/18 – Submit memo for grade
Case: <i>TBD</i>	12/02 – Graded memos returned
Group presentations	12/2 & 12/9

Course Overview

Date	Topic	Case & Assignment
8/26	Introduction & Course Overview	<i>Crosswalk at Babcock Place</i>
9/2	Professional Writing & Presentations	<i>Writing Exercises</i>
9/9	Privatization	<i>Contracting Out Texas Prisons</i> PMM 1 first draft due
9/16	Introduction to Policy Analysis	<i>Solving Seattle's Solid Waste Crisis</i>
9/23	Politics & Policy (combined)	Guest speaker: Jason Jakubowski PMM 1 due for grade
9/30	Ethics and Policy, part 1	<i>Decision to Drop Atomic Bomb</i>
10/7	Ethics and Policy, part 2	<i>Scandal in Santa Clara</i> PMM 2 in-class review
10/14	Role of Citizens in Decisionmaking	<i>Rural Democracy</i> PMM 2 due for grade
10/21	Environmental Policy	<i>Puget Sound Water Authority</i>
10/28	Education Policy I (combined)	Guest speaker: Nathan Kuder PMM 3 in-class review
11/04	Education Policy II (combined)	Guest speaker: Josh Hyman <i>Education Reform in Rhode Island</i> PMM 3 due for grade
11/11	Law & Public Policy (combined)	<i>U.S. v. Virginia</i>
11/18	Public Budgeting and Policy (combined)	Guest speaker: Katrina Spencer PMM 4 due for grade
11/25	NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING	
12/2	Group presentations	
12/9	Group presentations	

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

I am committed to following the schedule below. However, it may be the case that our discussions move faster or slower than I anticipate. If it is necessary to revise the current schedule, I will let you know and will circulate an updated syllabus at that time.

August 26: Introduction & Course Overview

- Expectations for the course
- Overview of writing assignments
- What is public policy?
- Ecological inference fallacy

Required Reading

“Learning With Cases” (handout)

Case study: *Crosswalk at Babcock Place*

September 2: Professional Writing and Presentations

- Sample PMMs
- Writing for a professional audience
- Effective presentation skills
 - Message-driven slide layout
 - Horizontal and vertical consistency

Required Reading

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY WRITING GUIDE

Bratkovic, B. 2007. “Running an Effective Meeting,” *Government and Finance Review*, (April), pp. 58-60.

Theisen, P. 2010. “Focus on Your Story Rather Than Content.”

Schneier, B. 2010. “Worst-case thinking makes us nuts, not safe.” *CNN.com*, May 12.

References for Writing Style

Swain, J. and K.D. Swain. 2014. “The Mechanics of Writing,” in *Effective Writing in the Public Sector*, Armok, NY: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 17-36 (chapter 2).

Purdue OWL, “Conciseness”

Purdue OWL, “On writing paragraphs”

September 9: Privatization

- Public goods
- Types of service delivery options
- The free-rider problem
- Make vs. buy decision

Required Reading

Elliott Sclar. 2001. "Public vs. Private Production: Is One Better and How Would You Know?" in *You Don't Always Get What You Pay For*, Cornell University Press, pp. 47-68 (Chapter 3).

Government Finance Officers Association. 2006. *Managed Competition as a Service Delivery Option*.

Case study: *Contracting Out for Prisons in Texas*

Assignment: PMM #1 first draft due

September 16: Introduction to Policy Analysis

- Policy Process
- Rational decision-making
- Incrementalism
- The Market vs. The Polis

Required Readings

Teasley III, C.E., 2008. "Rationality in Public Administration," *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration* (IEPPA). Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 1904-1910.

Stone, Deborah. 2010. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. Introduction & Conclusion.

Christopher Grandy. 2009. "The *Efficient* Public Administrator: Pareto and a Well-Rounded Approach to Public Administration," *Public Administration Review*, 69(6): pp. 1115-1123.

Case study: *Solving Seattle's Solid Waste Crisis*

September 23: Politics & Public Policy (combined)

- Guest speaker **Jason Jakubowski** '01, *Vice President of External Relations at Hospital for Special Care*

Required Reading

Caro, Robert A. 2002. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate*. Vintage Books. Chapter 24, "The Johnson Rule."

Assignment: PMM #1 due for grade

September 30: Ethics & Public Policy, part 1

- Absolute truth vs. Moral relativism
- Utilitarianism (consequentialist) vs. Deontology (duty)
- Justice as Fairness (the "veil of ignorance")

Required Readings

Plato, *The Allegory of the Cave*

Excerpts from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Excerpts from J.S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*

Excerpts from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*

Case study: *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*

October 7: Ethics & Public Policy, part 2

- Government accountability
- Disclosure and transparency

Required Readings

Amy Gutmann & Dennis Thompson. 1997. *Ethics & Politics: Cases and Comments*, Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishers, pp. i-xii, (Introduction).

Peters, Guy B. 2007. "Ethical Analysis of Public Policy" in *American Public Policy*, Washington, DC: CQ Press, pp. 450-466 (Chapter 17).

Svara. 2007. "Deciding How to Meet Obligations and Act Responsibly" in *The Ethics Primer for Public Administrators in Government and Nonprofit Organizations*, Boston: Jones and Bartlett, pp. 105-114 (Chapter 7).

Lewis, Carol W. and Stuart C. Gilman. 2005. *The Ethics Challenge in Public Service*. San Francisco, pp. 161-181.

Case study: *Scandal in Santa Clara*

Assignment: PMM #2 due for in-class review

October 14: Role of Citizens in Decisionmaking

- Logic of collective action
- Rational ignorance
- Democratic vs. republican form of government

Required Readings

Robbins, Mark D., Bill Simonsen, and Barry Feldman. 2008. "Citizens and Resource Allocation: Improving Decision Making with Interactive Web Based Citizens Participation", *Public Administration Review*, (May/June), 68(3): pp. 564-575.

Robbins, Mark D. and Bill Simonsen. 2010. *Citizen Participation: Goals and Methods*. Arizona State University/Alliance for Innovation Report commissioned by the International City/County Management Association.

Case study: *Citizen Participation in Monroe*

Assignment: PMM #2 due for grade

October 21: Environmental Policy

- Externalities
- Command and control
- Cap-and-trade
- Cost-benefit analysis

Required Readings

Kraft, M.E. & S. Furlong. 2010. "Environmental and Energy Policy," in *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives*, CQ Press, pp. 402-451 (Chapter 11).

Case study: *Puget Sound Water Authority*

October 28: Education Policy I (combined)

- Guest speaker Nathan Kuder, *Budget Director of Boston Public Schools*

Required Readings

Duncombe, W. 1997. "History of State Education Aid," in *The International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration*, Westview Press, pp. 741-745.

David Kirp. 2004. "The Futures Market" in *The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics*, Harvard University Press, pp. 76-92 (Chapter 3).

Assignment: PMM #3 due for in-class review

November 4: Education Policy II (combined)

- Guest speaker Josh Hyman, Assistant Professor of Public Policy

Required Readings

Angrist, Joshua D. and Jorn-Steffen Pischke. “The Experimental Ideal” in *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist’s Companion*, Princeton University Press, pp. 11-23 (Chapter 2).

Case study: *Education Reform in Central Falls, Rhode Island*

Assignment: PMM #3 due for grade

November 11: Law & Public Policy (combined)

- Separation of powers
- Delegation doctrine
- Statutory interpretation
- Equal protection analysis

Required Readings

Kerr, Orin S. 2007. “How to Read a Legal Opinion: A Guide for New Law Students”, *The Green Bag*, 11(2):51-63.

Weber, Bruce. 2009. “Umpires v. Judges,” *New York Times*, July 11.

Eskridge, Jr., William N., Philip P. Frickey and Elizabeth Garrett. 2000. “The Funnel of Abstraction” in *Legislation and Statutory Interpretation*, New York: Foundation Press, pp. 1-17, 241.

Case study: *United States v. Virginia*

November 18: Public Budgeting and Policy (combined)

- Guest speaker Katrina Spencer, Budget Director, University of Connecticut

Required Readings

Dautrich, K., Robbins, M. & B. Simonsen. 2010. “Budget Deficits in the States: Connecticut,” *Journal of Public Budgeting & Finance*, vol. 30, no. 1., pp. 130-151.

Case study: *Implementing Budget Cuts in the Basic Health Plan*

Assignment: PMM #4 due for grade

November 25: No class (Happy Thanksgiving)

December 2: Student presentations