



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

MSPP-GP 3100.001

Applied Policy Analysis

Summer 2021

Course Information

Instructor: Karina Christiansen, PhD MPP

- Email: kmc596@nyu.edu
- Office Hours: By Appointment

Lecture: M/W May 24-26, **OFF M 5/31**, W June 2, M/W June 7-9, M June 14
5:30-9:30pm [remote]

Course Description

Students often pursue policy studies out of a motivation to serve the public interest – to make a difference in public life, either from within, or by influencing those within, seats of public policy decision-making. How, in practice, are policy professionals influential? One characterization of the policy analyst is as a “technical, nonpartisan problem solver” – a methods expert, able to apply tools of analysis to a variety of issues, comparing and contrasting alternatives based on criteria such as efficiency, effectiveness, or feasibility. Their credibility is in their objectivity. Another characterization is that a policy analyst is “a producer of policy arguments,” who recognizes that “to say anything of importance in public policy requires value judgments, which must be explained and justified.”¹ What is the role, then, of a policy professional in real world applied settings - a city agency, a non-profit advocacy organization, a consulting firm? When and how does that role shift between analyst, adviser, or advocate? How do ethics, moral considerations, and values come into play?

The goal of this course is to explore these questions – what it means to be a policy professional in applied settings – while practicing concrete skills and modes of inquiry central to the policy discipline: effective written and oral communication, ability to apply ethical frameworks to public policy decision-making, and to conduct a frame-critical policy discourse analysis.

¹ Majone, Giandomenico “Analysis as Argument” – see readings for Class #4.

Learning Objectives

- Practice clear, persuasive, and effective policy communication through writing and oral presentations.
- Understand and apply basic principles of ethical frameworks for policy analysis: social justice, Kantian v Utilitarian theories of the moral life, respect for autonomy, and beneficence.
- Understand and apply frame-critical policy analysis: what values are embedded in policy narratives? How do political actors use symbolic representation (e.g. metaphor) to argue for their version of the problem/policy solution?
- Gain practice working in situations that mimic real world settings: collaboratively, under time constraints, for different audiences, and with limited information.

Assignments & Grading

The final grade will be based on meaningful class participation and the following assignments: [1] Executive Summary, [2] Oral and Written Testimony, and [3] Final Briefing Book.

[1] Class Participation (20%): Your attendance and active participation is required to meet the learning objectives in this course. You will be expected to come to class prepared for meaningful participation in course discussions and small group activities. Each student will facilitate class discussion on at least one reading – offering a brief summary of the reading’s main concepts/arguments and its relevancy to the course, and ask your classmates at least four open-ended questions for discussion or activities to promote student engagement with the topic. Prepare for class discussion to last around 20 to 25 minutes per reading. Facilitators should **submit discussion questions by 5:30pm EST on the day of class** in the appropriate Forum thread. Your facilitation of a reading is worth 7% of your final grade and your active participation in these discussions is worth 5% of your final grade. The remaining 8% of your participation grade will come from submitting thoughtful **reflections on the asynchronous materials to the NYU Forum thread by 5:30pm EST the day of class**. Any missed Forum post will result in losing 4% (missing more than one will result in losing up to 8% of your total grade).

[2] Executive Summary (20%): The executive summary is typically the most important part of a policy memo – it is also the part most likely to be read. A good executive summary manages to communicate the most essential information found in the brief or report: what the problem is, why it matters, and what ought to be done about it. It is written in clear, active, and concise language. You will receive a policy report in class on Wednesday, 5/26 with the executive summary redacted. In class we will have an exercise on writing top lines on that report for your supervisor (in this case your audience is the executive director of an anti-poverty non-profit). An original executive summary for the report will be **due on Sunday, 5/30 at 5:00pm**. It should be no more than 400 words, single-spaced, 12 point font, with 1 inch margins.

[3] Oral/Written Testimony (20%): Oral and written testimony is a vehicle for concerned citizens, technical and scientific analysts, and policy issue advocates to inform the policy

decision-making process. Testimony before city council or other legislative bodies is often short – just 3 to 5 minutes to make a case about what is likely a complicated policy issue. In 2018, Congress passed the bipartisan criminal justice reform bill, the First Step Act. You will be asked to give a 4 minute oral testimony to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary about what should be included in the Second Step Act – what is your recommendation for the future of federal criminal justice sentencing reform and why? You will be evaluated on your ability to provide a concise overview of the problem, an analysis of the shortcomings of the First Step Act, and clear, coherent support for your recommended policy. In addition to your oral presentation, each student will submit written testimony related to your oral testimony not to exceed 600 words (about 1.5 pages single spaced). Oral and written testimony will be **due by 5:30pm EST on Monday 6/14**.

[4] Final Briefing Book (40%): A policy brief is a versatile communication tool used by actors across the policy analysis and advocacy spectrum to bring attention to a problem and its potential policy responses. For this class, each student will choose a policy issue and explore: (1) its historical context and problem framing, (2) an analysis of policy alternatives proposed by different stakeholders, and (3) your recommendation for a feasible, appropriate policy response, with justification for that recommendation. The purpose of this final project is to apply the concepts and frameworks that have been explored in the course (e.g. ethical principles, frame critical analysis, effective argumentation) to a policy problem that interests you. The structure and content of briefing books are sensitive to their intended reader – whether a policymaker, a supervisor at work, or your professor in a course. I am your audience for this briefing book, and I am interested in your mastery of course concepts – as such, you will be expected to cite course readings and provide an analysis, not just a description, of the policy context, alternatives, and recommendations. Your briefing book will have an executive summary that is no more than 300 words. The entire briefing book will be no more than 4 pages single spaced (not including references), in 12 point font, 1 inch margins. The briefing book will be **due by 11:00pm EST on Monday 6/21**.

Course Schedule

Please complete all assigned readings **before** the assigned lecture. Asynchronous materials must be completed prior to our class meetings, and a ~150-200 word reflection (unless otherwise specified) posted on the related Forum thread prior to meetings at **5:30pm EST** on the day of class.

Class #1: Ethical Frameworks and Public Policy [5/24/2020]

Asynchronous Materials: Jacobson v. Massachusetts Case Study

- Read:** Gostin, L. O. (2005). Jacobson v Massachusetts at 100 years: Police power and civil liberties in tension. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(4), 576-581.
- Listen:** Podcast (30 minutes): <https://trumpconlaw.com/40-jacobson-and-covid>
- Post:** ~150-200 word reflection on the NYU Classes Forum

Readings:

- Beauchamp, T. L., & Walters, L. (1999). Ethical theory and bioethics. *Contemporary issues in bioethics*, 1-32.
- Kass, N. E. (2001). An ethics framework for public health. *American journal of public health*, 91(11), 1776-1782.
- Gostin, L. O., & Powers, M. (2006). What does social justice require for the public's health? Public health ethics and policy imperatives. *Health Affairs*, 25(4), 1053-1060.

Activities:

- Applied Policy Analysis self reflection and discussion
- Public health and police power: applying Jacobson framework and ethical principles to current policy issues

Assignments:

- None

Class #2: Policy Communication: Executive Summary [5/26/2020]

Asynchronous Materials:

- None

Readings:

- Mintrom, M. (2003). Chapter 1. People skills for policy analysts. Georgetown University Press.
- Behn, Craft of Memo Writing 2013-3.wpd (August 23, 2013)
- Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J. et al. Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 8, 30 (2021).

Activities:

- Applied Skill:** What makes for effective policy writing? Activity on addressing common writing challenges, from the CQ Press Writing Guide for Public Policy.
- Policy Lab:** Writing top lines for a professional audience, using the “Still Life Report” on criminal justice sentencing issues and recommendations for reform. Read report, write a “top line” e-mail to your boss (the executive director of an anti-poverty non-profit). Compare and contrast with classmates – why did you select that content? What formatting is more or less effective? How easy is it to read and understand for a non-expert reader? How did you determine what your audience “needed” to know?

Assignments:

- Executive Summary, due Sunday, May 30th @ 11:00pm

Class #3: **Frame-Critical Policy Analysis [6/2/2020]**

Asynchronous Materials:

- None

Readings:

- McBeth, M. K., & Clemons, R. S. (1999). Postmodern policy analysis in the premodern west: Problem definition in the Yellowstone bison case. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 21(2), 161-175.
- Stone, D. A. (2002). Chapter 2: Equity. *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. WW Norton & Co, New York.
- Stone, D. A. (2002). Chapter 6: Symbols. *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. WW Norton & Co, New York.

Activities:

- Guest Speaker:** Advocate for food justice, with experience in city government and non-profit organizations.
- Policy Lab:** Apply frame-critical policy analysis on problem definition for criminal justice sentencing reform in small groups.

Assignments:

- None

Class #4: **Solutions Chasing Problems: Alternatives [6/7/2020]**

Asynchronous Materials: “First Step Act” Case Study

- Read:** Brennan Center - How the FIRST STEP Act Became Law — and What Happens Next <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/how-first-step-act-became-law-and-what-happens-next>
- Listen:** Podcast (36 minutes): Incarceration Inc. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/5-principles/id1461499182?i=1000452726969>
- Post:** ~150-200 word reflection on the NYU Classes Forum

Readings:

- Majone, G. (1989). Chapter 4: Analysis as Argument. Evidence, argument, and persuasion in the policy process. Yale University Press.
- Cairney, P. (2018). Three habits of successful policy entrepreneurs. *Policy & Politics*, 46(2), 199-215.

Activities:

- Guest Speakers:** Mayoral advisors on criminal justice policy in NYC.
- Policy Lab:** Apply frame-critical policy analysis on specifying alternatives for criminal justice sentencing reform in small groups.

Assignments:

- None

Class #5: Policy Recommendations and Advocacy [6/9/2020]

Asynchronous Materials: Public Hearings: Close Rikers Case Study

- Read:** N.Y.C. Votes to Close Rikers. Now Comes the Hard Part.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/nyregion/rikers-island-closing-vote.html>
- Watch:** First 16 minutes: <https://www.nonewjails.nyc/background>
- Post:** ~200-250 word reflection on the NYU Classes Forum: How did testifiers use ethical principles or problems frames to craft a persuasive argument? What strategies did you find most and least effective?

Readings:

- Brinsden, H., & Lang, T. (2015). An introduction to public health advocacy: reflections on theory and practice. London: The Food Research Collaboration.
- Pennock, A. (2018). Chapter 12, Legislative Testimony and Public Comment: Writing to Persuade the Government. *The CQ Press Writing Guide for Public Policy*. CQ Press.
- Musso, J., Biller, R., & Myrtle, R. (2000). Tradecraft: Professional writing as problem solving. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 19(4), 635-646.

Activities:

- Close Rikers Case Study discussion:** Discuss the strategies used by Close Rikers advocates at the City Council hearing, reflect on application of ethical principles, problem framing, and persuasive argumentation.

- **Professional Roles:** When, how, where are there differences in professional duties between an advocate or an analyst? Small group breakout to conduct a thematic content analysis on an Idealist search for “policy analyst” v. “policy advcate”.
- **Policy Lab:** The “First Step Act” is named so for a reason – it is understood even by its supporters to be just the first step in a longer process of criminal justice reform. Work in small groups to explore the following questions: What is on the table for the next step in federal sentencing reform? What fora are advocates and interest groups operating in to influence the next step in federal sentencing? By what criteria should we evaluate these recommendations?

Assignments:

- Oral and Written Testimony, “Recommendation for the Second Step Act” before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, due by 5:30pm EST before Class #6 (6/14)

Class #6: Policy Communication: Oral Testimony [6/14/2020]

Asynchronous Materials: None

Readings: None

Activities:

- **Guest Speaker:** TBD
- **Oral Testimony Presentations.** Students have 4 minutes to provide oral testimony on their recommendations for the next step in federal sentencing policy. They will then take Q&A for 10 minutes by their classmates. Classmates will briefly give feedback on what was most effective, and an opportunity for improvement.
- **Policy Lab:** How will you apply the concepts/modes of analysis covered in this course to the policy issue you choose for your final briefing book assignment?

Assignments:

- Final Briefing Book due Monday, June 21st @ 11:00pm EST

Course Policies

I am committed to making this course a valuable learning experience for you. You will be held accountable to the following policies. In return I ask you to communicate with me any information that I need to help you be successful in this course. My goal is for you to learn and succeed; the more I know, the more helpful I can be. I will be accountable to you to follow these policies (where applicable) as well.

- You are expected to attend all live sessions and actively participate (e.g., listen actively, ask thoughtful questions, demonstrate knowledge of readings). As a courtesy to your classmates, please be punctual. Please switch phones to silent and do not text during class. A pattern of absences or arriving late or leaving early will result in a lower grade. There are only 6 class meetings in this course – missing any class means missing a significant amount of course content. For each unexcused absence, I reserve the right to lower your course grade by one letter grade category (e.g., A- to B+).
- Generally deadlines are non-negotiable, unless there is prior and formal instructor approval. However, if you are concerned about not being able to make a deadline or are experiencing unusually difficult circumstances, please reach out so we can discuss an alternative plan. If there is something going on in your life that may affect how you handle this course and you feel comfortable sharing, please let me know.
- Though I am listed as the instructor, during this course we will learn from each other in a dynamic, interactive way. Consider your peers as resources and turn to one another if you have questions.
- I encourage your participation in every way, including asking questions via e-mail. However, I ask that you provide a 24-hour time window for me to respond to your questions or concerns.
- All papers in this class must be typed using 12-point, Times New Roman font, single-spaced with 1-inch margins on the sides, top, and bottom. Proofread all work.
- Use direct quotes in moderation and provide appropriate citations for ideas taken from other sources. Paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work must be acknowledged.² Use APA style guide for references.
- You are encouraged to be mindful of creating a respectful, inclusive, learning community. This means actively listening to all members of the course, engaging in thoughtful dialogue, and respecting diversity of perspectives and viewpoints.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by Wagner's Academic Code. All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath. Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to Professor Christiansen. If you are unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with Professor Christiansen.

² These policies rely heavily on those developed by Sophia Hwang and Corianna Sechel of NYU.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations.

Cell Phone Use

Cell phone use is prohibited during course meetings because it not only distracts you during class but it disrupts other students (especially during group activities.) If you need to make a phone call or send a text message, please leave the class discussion and return after you completed your call or text. As a remote course, it will be easier and more tempting to pass time on your phone or on your computer for activities not related to the class. Doing so is a disservice to yourself and to your classmates. Active class participation is part of your final grade and it is required to meet the learning objectives of this course. This is a professional degree, and you will be expected to engage during class time in a professional manner. If you repeatedly use your phone/computer for non-class activities during class meetings throughout the semester, Professor Christiansen and NYU Wagner Student Services will schedule a meeting with you to discuss your personal circumstances.