

NYU Law: Communicating Academic Work to Policymakers Seminar

Spring 2022

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CLASS MEETINGS

This class meets on Wednesdays from 4:20 to 6:20 pm on the following dates:

1. January 19
[no class on January 26]
2. February 2
3. February 9
4. February 16
5. February 23
6. March 2
7. March 9

OVERVIEW

This seminar is designed for students who are developing a policy proposal and want to learn how to effectively advocate for it with policymakers and the public. We will work on translating policy ideas into short written pieces (such as slide decks, talking points, and op-eds) that can be used to advance a proposal with policymakers, thought leaders, and the media. Two weeks of the course will be devoted to in-class presentations and discussions of each student's work.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

For the first four weeks, we will discuss best practices for communicating with policymakers and the public. The only requirements will be to do the assigned readings and attend class. In the fifth class, each student will prepare and present a slide deck to classmates who will play the role of policymakers and their staff. Students will then write reaction papers for each other, and in the final class, present a revised deck incorporating the feedback they received. Students will also write an op-ed and tweet thread and circulate them in advance of the last class.

Grading:

- 20% on draft rollout materials and presentation
- 20% on revised rollout materials and presentation
- 20% on op-ed and tweet thread
- 10% on reaction papers
- 30% on class participation

ASSIGNMENTS

Note: This syllabus may be revised as the semester unfolds. Before doing the readings for the next class, check the course site for the most current version of the syllabus.

Class 1 (Jan. 19): Briefing policymakers

Our first class will cover the basics of how to present an idea to a policymaker.

Short writing assignment:

- **By Tuesday, Jan. 18 at noon:** email to the instructor a summary of your policy proposal (250 words or fewer). The summary should be written so it can be understood by a policymaker who is not an expert on the issue.

Reading:

- Academy Health, "[Communicating with Policymakers: Delivery Tips 101](#)"

Class 2 (Feb. 2): Writing for policymakers

This class will focus on how to create written products that appeal to policymakers.

Readings:

- Selections from Martha B. Coven, *Writing on the Job: Best Practices for Communicating in the Digital Age* (forthcoming from Princeton University Press)
 - Required:
 - Chapter 1 (Developing a Professional Style)
 - Chapter 3 (Writing a First Draft)
 - Chapter 10 (Writing about Numbers)
 - Chapter 11 (Data Visualizations)
 - Chapter 12 (Slide Decks)
 - Chapter 16 (Public Speaking) – just the discussion of talking points
 - Optional:
 - Chapter 2 (Getting Started)
 - Chapter 4 (Editing)

Class 3 (Feb. 9): Writing for the public

This class will address media and social media strategies for advancing a policy proposal. We will be joined by a guest speaker, [Rebekah Carmichael](#), Assistant Dean for Communications and Chief Communications Officer at the law school.

Readings:

- Selections from Martha B. Coven, *Writing on the Job: Best Practices for Communicating in the Digital Age* (forthcoming from Princeton University Press):
 - Chapter 14 (Writing for Media)
 - Chapter 15 (Commentary)
- Bret Stephens, “[Tips for Aspiring Op-ed Writers](#)” (Aug. 25, 2017), *New York Times*
- Trish Hall, “[Op-Ed and You](#)” (Oct. 13, 2013), *New York Times*

In addition, please come to class on Feb. 9 prepared to share an op-ed you have found that is related to the topic you'll be writing about, however tangentially. It should be from a media publication, rather than an open online forum, but it can be in any publication, including an online-only publication.

Class 4 (Feb. 16): Audience and framing

This class will focus on how to analyze the audience for your policy proposal and frame the proposal to appeal to that audience.

Readings:

- Excerpt from George Lakoff, *Don't Think of An Elephant!* (2014): pp. 1-29
- Excerpt from Frank Luntz, *Words That Work* (2007): pp. 149-78
- Excerpt from G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa, *The Art of Woo* (2007): pp. 111-16
- Trabian Shorters, “[The Power of Perception: A Beginner's Guide to Asset-Framing](#)” (2019), *ChangeAgent*

Class 5 (Feb. 23): Initial presentations

This week will be the first round of student presentations. Plan on your mock meeting lasting no more than 30 minutes, including frequent interruptions for questions. Each presentation will be followed by 20 minutes of feedback.

To allow for unmasked presentations, we'll do this class by Zoom, using this link:
<https://nyu.zoom.us/j/92678623470>.

Writing assignment:

- Prepare drafts of:
 1. **the slide deck** you will use to present your proposal. The deck should include no more than 10 slides, including your cover slide, and at least two visuals.

2. **1-2 pages of talking points** that can be used to present the deck. They should be single-spaced with a blank line between bullets.

By 5 pm on Tuesday, Feb. 22: email a PDF of your deck to the other students and the instructor. In your email, explain:

- who your audience is and therefore what roles we will be playing (e.g., Senator X, Assistant Secretary Y, or Mayor Z—and their staff)
- any relevant background (e.g., Senator X cares about _____ issue and is known for working across party lines).

Before class, review the decks and prepare to answer tough questions about your proposal and to ask tough questions of other students about their proposals.

Class 6 (Mar. 2): Policy advocacy

This class will focus on how to build an advocacy strategy to advance your proposal, including engaging potential allies inside and outside of government.

Writing assignment:

- Write a reaction paper in response to your classmate's presentation and email it to the student and instructor by the start of class. The paper should provide feedback on the presentation itself and the deck, covering both style and substance. It should be 1-2 pages, single-spaced. Feel free to write informally and use the first person.

Readings:

- [Putting Prosperity Within Reach: Advocating for Equitable Public Policies](#), Prosperity Now, July 2017
- Excerpt from Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (1998): pp. 10-25
- [Anand Giridharadas: 'What wealthy people do is rig the discourse'](#), by Christopher Petrella, *The Guardian*, Feb. 28, 2019

Class 7 (Mar. 9): Final presentations

This week will be a repeat of class 5, but with revised materials. The mock meetings will again last no more than 30 minutes (including frequent interruptions for questions), and each presentation will be followed by 20 minutes of feedback on the revised presentation as well as your op-ed and tweet thread.

Writing assignment:

- Prepare:
 1. **an op-ed** (600-800 words)
 2. **a tweet thread promoting your op-ed** (6 tweets maximum). It should include at least 2 graphics and, where possible, links or graphics for each tweet.

- ***By 5 pm on Tuesday, Mar. 8:*** circulate your op-ed and tweet thread to other students and the instructor.
- Read other students' op-eds & tweet threads in advance of class.
- In addition, revise your deck and talking points, based on the feedback you received. Email copies to the instructor by the start of class.