

Communicating Academic Work to Policymakers

Spring 2018

Professor Lily Batchelder

Initial Syllabus

2/28/18

Class: Wednesdays, 2:10-4:00pm in FH 118 (only meets second 7 weeks)
Office hours: Wednesdays, 10:30-12:30, or by appointment
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This seminar is designed for students who have already written a long paper that includes a policy proposal and want to learn how to advocate for their proposal with policymakers and the public. We will work on translating your ideas into shorter written pieces and oral remarks that are geared towards policymakers, thought leaders and the media.

Course Requirements

The seminar meets weekly starting on March 7. During classes 1 to 3 and 6, we will discuss examples of key tools for communicating with policymakers and the public. During classes 4 and 6, each student will present their proposal to the class as if we are a key decision maker and his or her staff. We will then give you feedback on your presentation and written materials. During the final class, each student will present their proposal again after incorporating the feedback they received.

Initial Rollout Materials

For your initial in-class presentation, you will need to prepare drafts of the following “roll-out” materials.

1. *Talking points*
 - a. Talking points designed to persuade a key decision maker to support or oppose your proposal (1 page; for all page limits single-spaced is fine but please include space between paragraphs and bullets), and
 - b. Talking points to respond to potential tough questions (aka tough Q&A) (3 pages).

2. *Presentation document* (should include at least one graphic). Either:
 - a. A fact sheet (1-2 pages), or
 - b. A PowerPoint deck (6 slides plus a title slide).

Note: There are some free infographic tools that students found helpful in the past at <http://www.creativebloq.com/infographic/tools-2131971>.

3. *Public education piece*. Either:
 - a. A policy brief (2,000-3,000 words including an abstract of no more than 250 words), or
 - b. An op-ed (600-800 words).

We will spend 20-25 minutes on your briefing, which will involve you going through your talking points and presentation document, while we frequently interrupt you with questions. We will then spend 10 minutes providing you with feedback.

You will need to circulate your presentation document and public education piece to the class by the end of day on the Friday before your presentation. For example, if you are presenting on April 11, you should circulate these draft materials by the end of the day on April 6. As part of that email, please tell us who your audience is and therefore who we are (e.g., the staff of Senator X, the Assistant Secretary for Y and her staff, the head of Z nonprofit) and any relevant background (e.g., Senator X has been a champion on this issue and is known for working across party lines). You should circulate your talking points immediately after your in-class presentation.

Reaction Papers

For each initial presentation, two students will be assigned to write reaction papers, providing feedback on the presentation itself and accompanying materials. This feedback should be divided into sections on the presentation and substance. Reaction papers should be no more than 2-pages single-spaced, and are due one week after the presentation (so by 2pm on the following Wednesday) to me and the presenter.

Revised Rollout Materials and Presentation

On the last day of class, everyone present again based on the feedback you received. We will spend 12 minutes on your briefing (again including frequent interruptions) and 5 minutes on feedback.

Again, you will need to circulate your presentation document and public education piece to the class by the end of day on the Friday before the class (i.e., April 20).

Final Rollout Materials

Based on the feedback you receive in class, you should revise your package of roll-out materials, including your talking points. Your final set of roll-out materials is due by noon on the last day of exams (May 15).

Grade

20% of your final grade will be based on class participation (judged on quality as well as quantity), 15% on your draft rollout materials, 20% on your reaction papers (10% for each), 15% on your revised rollout materials, and 30% on your final rollout materials.

Assignments

Class 1 (3/7) – Sharpening Your Policy Proposal: Making Complex Ideas Accessible, Actionable, and Policy Relevant

This week's class will focus on how to sharpen your policy proposal so that it has the most impact. This includes making sure that is clear, addresses counter-arguments, provides policymakers with sufficient detail to be actionable, and takes into account constraints in the current political environment. To prepare, please read:

- **Discussion paper** (feel free to skim)
http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/THP_Kearney_DiscPaper_Final.pdf
- **Policy brief** (read)
http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/THP_Kearney_Brief_Final.pdf
- **Blog post**
http://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/new_tax_legislation_would_increase_return_to_work

Class 2 (3/21) – Overview of Tools for Communicating to Policymakers

Guest Lecturer: Martha Coven, Lecturer and John L. Weinberg/Goldman Sachs Visiting Professor, Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs

This week's class will cover some of the main tools used by researchers and advocates to communicate their ideas to policymakers. We will talk about what works, what doesn't, and why.

Please read the following documents in advance. Each is an example of a type of communication that we will discuss in class.

- **Talking points:** "Talking Point Guidelines" posted on NYU Classes
- **Graphics:** <http://www.vox.com/2015/8/24/9183525/gun-violence-statistics> (focus more on the charts and graphs than on the text)
- **Policy brief:**
https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/LookingForward_FinancialAid_2017.pdf
- **Op-ed:** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/02/23/the-white-house-proposes-a-new-rule-to-help-preserve-retirement-savings/>
- **Oral advocacy:** Excerpt posted on NYU Classes from G. RICHARD SHELL AND MARIO MOUSSA, THE ART OF WOO (2007)

Class 3 (3/28) – Persuading a Policymaker

This week's class will focus on how to be effective in meetings with policymakers as preparation for your in-class presentations. Topics include the importance of framing, clarity and precision.

- **Framing, word choice and plain language**
 - FRANK LUNTZ, WORDS THAT WORK 149-178 (2007) (posted on NYU Classes).
 - GEORGE LAKOFF, DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT! 1-12 (2014) (posted on NYU Classes).
 - Try using the tools at readability-score.com and hemingwayapp.com to analyze your summary of your proposal, or anything else you have written.
- **Talking to policymakers**
 - <http://www.academyhealth.org/files/phsr/CommunicatingWithPolicymakers.pdf> (posted on NYU Classes)
- **Graphics**
 - http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/mayjune_2011/features/the_information_sage029137.php?page=all&print=true
 - <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/news/2015/12/10/127024/infographic-criminal-records-are-a-family-sentence/>
- **Fact sheets**
 - *To come*

- **Tough Q&A** (feel free to read quickly)
 - <http://www.dol.gov/protectyoursavings/doc/2015FAQs-ProtectingSavings.pdf>

Classes 4 and 5 (4/4 – 4/11) – Class Presentations

Each week we will have three presenters. Presenters should plan on the mock “meeting” lasting for 25 minutes (which will include us frequently interrupting you), followed by 10 minutes of feedback.

Everyone who is not presenting that week should read the materials circulated in advance. Students who are presenting that day should not read each other’s materials, instead playing the (common) role of a meeting participant who did not review anything that the meeting requester shared in advance.

Class 6 (3/18) – Convincing the Public: Media Strategy

*Guest Lecturers: Nick Thompson, Editor-in-Chief, Wired Magazine
Farah Stockman, Reporter, New York Times*

This week’s class will cover media strategy: how the press works, what makes a good op-ed and press release, how to talk to reporters, and how to get your work out on social media.

Readings to come.

Class 7 (4/25) – Final Class Presentation

As noted above, everyone present again based on the feedback you received. We will spend 12 minutes on your briefing (again including frequent interruptions) and 5 minutes on feedback.

Everyone should read each other’s revised public education pieces, but not the presentation document.