P11.1022 Introduction to Public Policy

Course Objectives

This is a required core course in the Wagner School curriculum. It is designed to provide students with an intellectual framework for developing their own answers to these questions:

1. In modern societies, what are the appropriate roles of organizations in the public sector, the private for-profit sector, and the private non-profit sector? This requires an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each sector and the options for designing policies and programs that mix the sectors.
2. What are appropriate norms for assessing the institutional arrangements for making public policy decisions, and how might institutions in the United States be altered to make them more responsive to these norms? This requires an understanding of the nature of the current institutional arrangements and of the options available to improve them.
3. How can the professional activity of “policy analysis” contribute to promoting better policy decisions by public officials? This requires an understanding of the specific tasks involved in doing policy analysis and of the limitations of analytic work as a determinant of policy decisions.

Course Organization and Requirements

As detailed in the outline below, the course is organized into three parts – one each corresponding to the three questions above. Each of the weekly class sessions will consist of about 90 minutes of a combination of lecture and discussion covering the designated topic and readings, a 10 minute break, and a workshop session of about 30 minutes devoted to helping students prepare the required assignments.

Students must complete the four assignments and roles described below:

#1 – Analysis of a non-profit organization – due October 1
Select a nonprofit organization and analyze the organization in terms of these topics:
   a. Description of the organization’s mission, governance, finances and performance indicators.
b. Discussion of the extent to which the organization suffers from “voluntary failures” identified in readings and class presentations

c. Critique or defense of how this organization’s mission could or could not be better performed through a different allocation of responsibilities among the three sectors

The analysis should be 5-6 pages (up to about 1,500 words). It should draw upon reports from the organization and, if practical, one or more interviews with agency staff or board members.

Students should select their organization no later than the second class (September 17). The name of the organization should be submitted to the instructor via e-mail in advance of the second class. Selections will be discussed in the workshop portion of the second class, and information about preparing the assignment will be provided in the workshop portion of the second and third classes.

#2 – preparation of proposed revisions to the U.S. constitution – due November 12

Students will be assigned to a group intended to serve as a mock constitutional convention. The groups will meet during the workshop sessions of classes 4-9 and other times of their selection. Each group must prepare a written report covering these topics:

1. A summary of the amendments they would recommend to the U.S. constitution.
2. An argument for why each of the proposed amendments is an improvement.
3. A comparison of their recommendations to the 23 by Larry Sabato in the required reading indicating which ones are included and which ones not included, and why.
4. An op ed type article (about 750 words) making the case for the proposed amendments to the general public.

The report submitted by each group should include a description of the role played by each member in preparing the report. Generally, all members of the group will receive a common grade on the assignment unless this part of the report indicates reasons for doing otherwise.

#3 – Evaluation of an official piece of policy analysis – due December 17 (in lieu of final exam)

Students will select a written document intended as a piece of policy analysis and evaluate how well the document serves the purposes of policy analysis. The evaluation should cover each of the steps described in the Bardach book, indicating strengths and weaknesses for each component. The evaluation should be about 5 pages (about 1,250 words).

Students will be provided a list of recommended documents for evaluation, but you may select a document on your own. The name and full citation of document you are evaluating should be submitted via e-mail to the instructor no later than November 25. The workshop portion of the last four classes will be devoted to assisting students in preparing the evaluation.
#4 Class presentation and participation
Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate in class discussions in a manner that reflects familiarity with the required readings. Students should inform the instructor in advance by e-mail of any absences indicating a reason for the absence. In addition to preparing the written report for Assignment #2 on constitutional revisions, one or more members of each group will make an oral presentation to the full class on November 12 making the case for their proposed changes. The class will then vote on which group’s set of amendments they prefer. The two groups receiving the largest numbers of votes will then present their proposals to Professor Rogan Kerssh’s class on November 16, and that class will then vote to select a final winner. Professor Brecher will grade each presentation in his class, and winners of the election in Professor Kersch’s class will receive additional “bonus” credit toward their grade.

Course Grades
Course grades will be a weighted average as follows:
- Written assignment #1 – 25%
- Written assignment #2 – 25%
- Written assignment #3 - 30%
- Class presentation and participation – 20%
Students with more than one absence for non-emergency or medical reasons may have their grades lowered, and students failing to meet the deadlines for assignments may have their grades lowered.

Criteria for letter grades follow the norms established for the Wagner School. The school-wide statement of grading policy is attached to this syllabus.

Course Readings
The required course readings are concentrated in three books available at the NYU bookstore:

Additional shorter readings are listed below in the course outline and will be available on the course Blackboard site.
COURSE OUTLINE

Part I – The Three sectors – who should do what?

A. The market – September 10
   The case for a market system – its allocative and technical efficiency.
   Critiques of the market as normative and positive theory.
   Market dependence on government regulation.
   Robert Kuttner, “The Limits of Markets,” *American Prospect*
   (March/April 1997); Interested students may want to read the book by Kuttner from
   which this article is drawn – *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets*.

B. The Non-profit Sector – September 17
   The current role of non-profit institutions in U.S. society and elsewhere.
   The positive aspects of voluntary organizations, and the limits of voluntary
   organizations. Relations between voluntary organizations and government.
   in Brief*, Urban Institute, 2009.
   Burton Weisbrod, “The Future of the Nonprofit Sector: Its Entwining with
   6, No. 4, 1997.
   Interested students may consult Lester Salamon, *The Resilient Sector: The State of
   Nonprofit America*, Brookings Institution Press, 2003, and E. T. Boris and C. E. Steuerle,
   eds., *Nonprofits and Government: Collaboration and Conflict*, Urban Institute Press,

C. The Public Sector – September 24
   The potential roles of the public sector and the “tools of government” in designing
   public policies. Criteria for selecting different approaches to government intervention.
   Lester M. Salamon, “The New Governance and the Tools of Public
   University Press, 2002. Interested students may consult additional chapters in this
   encyclopedic collection.

Part II – Institutions for Making Public Policy - the U.S. system and how to improve
it.
The core required reading for this part is Larry Sabato, *A More Perfect Constitution*.
Interested students may want also to read Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American
Constitution?*, second edition, (Yale University Press, 2003) which undertakes a similar
analysis and includes additional comparative material.

A. The national legislature – October 1
The U.S. bicameral structure and its merits relative to parliamentary systems. Possible reforms to make Congress more democratic.

Required reading: Sabato, Preamble and Chapter 1.

B. The Presidency – October 8

The case for separation of powers and critiques of the ‘imperial presidency.’ Options for modernizing the electoral college.

Required reading: Sabato, Chapters 2 and 4.

C. The Judiciary – October 15

The case for limits on judicial review and limits on lifetime tenure. Do we need a bigger Supreme Court?

In this class, we will also consider Sabato’s recommendations regarding mandatory public service.

Required reading: Sabato, Chapters 3 and 5.

D. The Federal Budget – October 22

Do we need a balanced budget amendment and a line item veto?

What else is wrong with the budget process?


E. Campaign Finance Reforms – October 29

The dilemmas of campaign finance and the options for reform given the Buckley v Valeo decision. Evidence of how effective reforms are and the impacts of the federal election laws.

Required reading: Sabato, pp. 152-153, U.S. Supreme Court, Buckley v Valeo. Interested students may consult the additional references supplied by Sabato on pages 299-300.

F. State and Local Variations on the Federal Model – November 5

Innovations in state constitutions and the reform movement for local government.

What are the lessons for federal reform, and what are the distinct weaknesses of American state and local governments?

Required reading: No required reading for this topic; the instructor will present material in class. Interested students may consult Virginia Gray and Russell Hanson, Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis, ninth edition, CQ Press, 2007.

G. Class Presentations and Voting – November 12 (and November 16)

Presentation of the groups’ proposed amendments. Discussion and voting on which to “adopt.”
III. Part III – Policy Analysis as a Professional Activity – the elements and potential of professional policy analysis

A. The Tasks of Policy Analysis – November 19
   The eight steps in policy analysis and how to do them well.

Note: No class November 26 due to Thanksgiving.

B. Criticisms of Professional Analysis – December 3
   Arguments about the rationality and objectivity of analytic work and its contribution to policy making.
   Required reading: Stone, *Policy Paradox*, Introduction, Chapters 2-10 and Conclusion.

C. Evaluating Policy Analysis – December 10
   A case study of policy analysis and applying the eight steps as a basis for assessment.
   Other criteria, including the “use” of analysis and its impacts.

D. Ethical Issues for Policy Analysts – December 15 (Note – This is a Tuesday, but NYU is on a Thursday schedule.)
   Three case studies illustrating issues relating to (a) how to respond to rejection of your advice (Clinton’s signing of welfare reform legislation), (b) how to deal with analysis that leads to conclusions that conflict with your personal values (the CBO’s analysis of the Clinton health plan), and (c) how to respond to orders from a boss that require improper conduct (the Medicare actuary’s handling of cost estimates for Medicare part D legislation). There are no required readings for this session; the cases will be presented by the instructor.
Grading Policy

Students will receive grades according to the following scale:

- A = 4.0 points
- A- = 3.7 points
- B+ = 3.3 points
- B = 3.0 points
- B- = 2.7 points
- C+ = 2.3 points
- C = 2.0 points
- C- = 1.7 points
- F (fail) = 0.0 points

Student grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

(A) Excellent: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well reasoned, creative, methodologically sophisticated, and well written. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.

(A-) Very good: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological or analytical approaches, and meets professional standards.

(B+) Good: Sound work for a graduate student; well reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.

(B) Adequate: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Demonstrates competency in the key course objectives but shows some indication that understanding of some important issues is less than complete. Methodological or analytical approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough or has shown other weaknesses or limitations.

(B-) Borderline: Weak work for a graduate student; meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is somewhat incomplete. Methodological or analytical work performed in the course is minimally adequate. Overall performance, if consistent in graduate courses, would not suffice to sustain graduate status in “good standing.”

(C-/+ ) Deficient: Inadequate work for a graduate student; does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological or analytical work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.

(F) Fail: Work fails to meet even minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas. Weaknesses or limits are pervasive.