



**NYU**

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

**MSPP-GP 3100.001**

**Applied Policy Analysis**

**Summer 2023**

## **Course Information**

Instructor: Karina Christiansen, PhD MPP

- Email: [kmc596@nyu.edu](mailto:kmc596@nyu.edu)
- Office Hours: By Appointment

**Lecture:** M/T May 22 & 23, **OFF M 5/29**, T/W May 30 & 31, M/W June 5-7,  
5:30-9:30pm

**Room:** Bobst LL1.51

## **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.”<sup>1</sup> 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

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

ethical frameworks to public policy decision-making, and to conduct a frame-critical policy discourse analysis.

## 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] Strategic Planning Deck.

**[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 12:30pm EST on the day of class** by email. You will likely receive feedback and edits prior to class. Your facilitation of a reading is worth 8% of your final grade and your active participation in these discussions is worth 6% of your final grade. The remaining 6% of your participation grade will come from submitting thoughtful **reflections on the asynchronous materials to the NYU Brightspace Discussion thread by 3:30pm EST the day of class**. Any missed Discussion post will result in losing 2% (missing more than one will result in losing up to 5% of your total grade). As a short and intensive course, attendance is particularly important. One unexcused absence will result in a 4% reduction in your grade. Two unexcused absences will require a meeting with the Professor to identify additional required class assignments to make up for missed materials in order to avoid a larger reduction in your final grade and to ensure learning objectives are met.

**[2] Executive Summary (30%):** 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 Tuesday, 5/23 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 Friday, 5/26 at 11:59pm**. It should be no more than 300 words, single-spaced, 12-point font, with 1-inch margins.

**[3] Strategic Planning Deck (20%):** It is May 2023 and the New York State Legislature is debating a law that would eliminate cash bail throughout the state. If passed, the law would go into effect on January 1st, 2024. The NYC Mayor's Administration needs to be ready to articulate a vision for successful implementation and communicate preparedness if bail is eliminated in New York State. You are on a team of policy advisors at City Hall tasked with creating an initial high-level strategic plan to prepare for the Mayor's response and next steps. You will brief your direct manager, the First Deputy Mayor (FDM), so that she has the information necessary to advise the Mayor on communication and implementation strategies. Your brief will be presented as a deck of no more than 10 slides. The classic form of policy communication is a memo, and a memo does have its place in formal policy making. However, much intra-office policy communication happens via less formal mediums, including emails, one or two-pagers of mostly bulleted text, and slide decks. These slide decks often include text and data, and are not akin to an academic or Ted Talk style presentation, heavy on graphics and light on text. Rather, these decks are meant to serve as a deconstructed memo, inclusive of data, graphics, and key talking points. They should transmit complete information, so that they can be read and understood in the absence of the presenter. The elements of effective communication remain: text should be clear and concise, graphics should have adequate labels, and section breaks should include instructive headings and flow as a coherent narrative. The deck will be **due in class by 7:30pm on Wednesday 5/31, and your group will present on your proposal between 12 and 15 minutes, leaving 10 minutes for audience Q&A.**

**[4] Oral/Written Testimony (30%):** 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. Your assignment is to draft a short oral testimony on either of the two case studies we cover in class: federal sentencing policy or NYS bail reform. Identify: what is your recommendation for the future of criminal justice sentencing/bail 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 status quo, 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 400 words (about 1 page single spaced). Oral testimony will be **due in class 5:30pm EST on Wednesday 6/7 and a written version (can be exactly the same) will be due Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup> @ 11:59pm EST.**

## 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 Discussion thread prior to meetings at **3:30pm EST** on the day of class.

### Class #1: Ethical Frameworks and Public Policy [5/23/2022]

**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 Brightspace Discussion

**Readings:**

- Beauchamp, T. L., & Walters, L. (1999). Ethical theory and bioethics. *Contemporary issues in bioethics*, 1-32.
- 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.
- Stone, D. A. (2002). Chapter 2: Equity. *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. WW Norton & Co, New York.

**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 [5/23/2023]

**Asynchronous Materials:**

- None

**Readings:**

- Mintrom, M. (2003). Chapter 1. *People skills for policy analysts*. Georgetown University Press.
- Public Policy Writing that Matters – Chapter 6: How to Structure Policy Memos and Briefs for Maximum Impact
- Public Policy Writing that Matters – Chapter 10: Eleven Strategies for Ruthlessly Pruning Needless Words

### 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 Friday, May 26th @ 11:59pm

## Class #3: Policy Strategy: Implementation (1) [5/30/2023]

### Asynchronous Materials: “Bail Reform” Case Study

- **Read:** The Facts on Bail Reform and Crime – Brennan Center  
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/facts-bail-reform-and-crime-rates-new-york-state>
  - **Why is NYCs Bail Reform so Controversial?**  
<https://www.thecity.nyc/2022/2/21/22944871/new-york-bail-reform-controversy-eric-adams>
- **Post:** ~150-200 word reflection on the NYU Brightspace Discussion: How do you understand the reasons why bail reform was pursued (eg the “policy problem” advocates sought to address) and what challenges have ensued prior and during implementation to date?

**Activities:** Bail reform Strategy Deck in small groups

## Class #4: Policy Strategy: Implementation (2) [5/31/2023]

**Asynchronous Materials:** None

**Readings:** None

**Activities:** Present Bail Reform Strategic Planning Deck in Class, presentation due: 7:30pm, not to exceed 15 minutes.

- **Guest Speakers:** None

**Assignments:** Read 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. Draft testimony of no more than 400 words on next steps in New York State bail reform or sentencing reform. Students will present on 6/8 and final written testimony will be due 6/13.

## **Class #5: Frame-Critical Policy Analysis [6/5/2023]**

**Asynchronous Materials:**

- **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:**

- 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.
- Majone, G. (1989). Chapter 4: Analysis as Argument. *Evidence, argument, and persuasion in the policy process*. Yale University Press.
- Stone, D. A. (2002). Chapter 6: Symbols. *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making*. WW Norton & Co, New York.

**Activities:**

- **Guest Speaker:**

**Assignments:** Oral testimony due in class 6/7

## Class #6: Policy Communication: Oral Testimony [6/7/2023]

**Asynchronous Materials:** None

**Readings:** None

**Activities:**

- **Oral Testimony Presentations.** Students have 3-5 minutes to provide oral testimony on their recommendations for the next step in NYS bail reform. They will then take Q&A for 5 minutes by their classmates. Classmates will briefly give feedback on what was most effective, and an opportunity for improvement.

**Assignments:**

- Final Written Testimony due Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup> @ 11:59pm 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

## 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](mailto: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.

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



## **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.