This semester I have asked you to read about a great deal of public policy theory, as a way of setting a foundation for the more “applied” or “practical” ideas that we have discussed during class. Indeed, the memos you have written are very much oriented toward application, even as hints of theory appear in them, even if you’re not asked to quote theoretical material. And, indeed, the level of theory we engage in the books is not all that deep, compared with some very difficult and controversial theories that have arisen about the policy process in the past 25 years.

In this essay, I would like you to consider the value of theory in the practice of policy advocacy. In about five single spaced pages (and no more than seven), please address the following question:

What is the value of scholarly or theoretical research to people seeking to actually work in policy, rather than just those who wish to study it?

Here are some suggestions for organizing your essay.

1. What are, to you, the most interesting and useful theories of policy and the policy process? These theories include, in broad terms, the stages model of public policy, Kingdon’s streams, Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework, and Baumgartner and Jones’ description of punctuated equilibrium (all of which are summarized in chapter 9 of my book). Do not overlook Stone as a source of good ideas as well. Use the most interesting and useful theories to make your argument—but don’t just write about one theory. This will not be sufficient for this final exam.
2. Explain how one would use these theories to help shape the analysis of public policy, and the advocacy of the positions you take in the work you have done this semester.
3. Consider whether, in the end, you believe these theories are realistic depictions of how policy is made, or whether these are “too theoretical” in the sense that they overlook key features of how policy making really works.
4. Finally, if you wish, you can explain whether you believe that we need new theories of the policy process, or if existing theories of the policy process need only be altered somewhat to make them more consistent with “reality.”

This essay should be written as if it will be printed, with your name on the document, page numbers, etc. You may, however, also submit a paper copy as a backup. I will grade and return the emailed copy, but if I cannot find the email I will look to the paper copies.

Better papers will reflect engagement with the class readings and your projects. Lesser papers will reflect little or no familiarity with the readings and the ideas contained therein. As always, writing matters.

The exam is due by Thursday, April 30, at midnight. (I will start reading them on Friday). No late exams will be accepted under any circumstances, including but not limited to job responsibilities, car trouble, or other things that do not constitute an immediate threat to health, life, or property. Please plan your time accordingly.