

North Carolina State University
Department of Public Administration
School of Public and International Affairs

PA 598—The Policy Process—Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Monday, 4 to 5:30 pm, or by appointment.

The goal of this course is to introduce you to key features of the *public policy process*. In so doing, you will gain an appreciation of the *politics* of public policy making. A famous political scientist, Harold Lasswell, once said that politics is the process by which a society decides “who gets what, where, when, why and how” That “what” includes goods, services, right, benefits, and anything else that can be allocated through the collective actions of members of society. Understanding the *politics* of policy making is rather different from doing *policy analysis*, which often derives its principles from economics. The study of public administration also differs substantially from the study of public policy, although all of these aspects of policy studies overlap.

I hope to highlight these overlaps in this course in something I call “evidence-based policy advocacy.” How can one participate in political advocacy based on *evidence*, when so much of politics seems driven more by emotion and ideology than by logic and evidence? Indeed, you will often hear people dismiss debates over important policy matters as being “just politics,” which means that the debates have no real importance.

This belief is mistaken, and, if it leads to apathy, can lead to whole segments of our society being left out—or opting out—of crucial decisions.

Your role as a participant in policy making is particularly important, because you will learn tools—analytical and rhetorical techniques—that will make you a more effective participant in public policy than the vast majority of your fellow citizens. While this might not strike you as fair, it is a function of the fact that you have chosen to learn important skills that can be harnessed for private gain, or to serve some sense of the “public interest,” however you choose to define it. In this course we will learn how to make pointed but sound arguments that advocate for particular policy options based on *your* sense of the public good, which might not be agreed upon by everyone.

Returning to the theme of *evidence-based policy advocacy*, what do I mean? I mean that, in simplest terms:

1. You are not a neutral participant, observer, or analyst in the policy process. Nor are other actors in the process. “Viewpoint neutrality” is more important if you are a social scientist, seeking to “objectively” assess the way the world, or some part of it, works. You, your allies and adversaries, on the other hand, have goals that respond to problems that you, and they, believe are worth solving.
2. To be an effective advocate for a position, you need to be able to make strong arguments based both in *rhetoric*—that is, based in how we tell stories about politics—and in *evidence*, by which I mean some kind of proof that your arguments are sound.

3. **Some rhetoric is more effective than other rhetoric, much as some evidence is more credible than other forms of evidence. In this course, we will place considerable emphasis on gathered through the application of the scientific method. A key challenge for us will be to consider how such *evidence* is gathered, used, and countered by proponents and advocates of policy change.**

While this course has significant applied aspects, you will be exposed to important policy theories as well.

How this course will work

This is not a class on public policy theory. I will introduce you to key public policy theories, but I am more concerned with giving you hands on experience in thinking about policy problems and their solutions. To that end, you will be creating a policy *portfolio* that you will add to, bit by bit, over the course of this semester.

To do this portfolio effectively, we need to create a simulated situation that will allow you to be creative, but within a reasonably well-defined structure. Here's the situation:

President Barack Obama will be inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States on January 20. As you may know, his chief press aide, Robert Gibbs, is an NCSU graduate.¹ The president elect is very impressed with his press aide, and in the course of learning more about his press aide he learns that NCSU's MPA program is full of bright, energetic students who will go a long way in public service or in any career.

As a result, President Obama has tapped you to assist him in helping to set his administration's agenda for the next four years. He has a lot on his plate, but he is looking for fresh new ideas of where he can leave a positive stamp on public policy. He's therefore hired you, and your classmates, to develop new ideas that he wants you to pursue as special assistant to the president. You will report your findings to Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's chief of staff (and this is the person to whom you will address your memos).

In providing your advice, you have near total latitude as to what policy ideas you wish to advance. The only restrictions on your choices are (1) that the issue must be a domestic concern; and (2) the issue must be one that the federal government can constitutionally address somehow (which still leaves a lot of room).

In this assignment, you will spend the semester using various research tools to explain three aspects of your problem:

1. The nature of the problem—what we call the *problem stream*.
2. The *politics* of the problem.
3. The policies that have been tried in the past to remedy the problem, and that are being promoted as likely solutions to the problem.

Course Requirements and Grading

Everyone is expected to be prepared to discuss the weekly readings and to participate in all the in class presentations and assignments. There will be several short presentations throughout the semester. This is a graduate seminar, so your performance will be very much assessed by your *active participation* in this class. *Participation*, not simply *attendance*, is vital to your success in this course. With over twenty students in the course this semester, active participation on your part will be absolutely crucial.

¹ See <http://www.ncsu.edu/featured-stories/engaging-society/nov-2008/robert-gibbs/index.php>

Lectures, Weekly Workshops, and Memos

Each week's class meeting has two basic parts, which are then accompanied by homework in the form of memo writing. The first part is the lecture, in which I will present an overview of the issues raised in the reading, and will draw on my experience in research and in the literature to help flesh out the ideas in the reading. Anything covered in lectures is, of course, fair game for the final exam. The second element of each class is what I call the "workshop." The workshops are demonstrations of how to find and use information generally available from the internet, but, specifically, from high quality sources like government statistical reports, government organizations, the academic literature, respected sources of statistics, and the like. Much of what we will cover is happening at the same time I am writing a book called the *Public Policy Toolkit*, which will cover most of the topics we address in the workshop component of this course. Some time will be devoted to describing how to use data and display it effectively.

Something you may find unusual compared with most undergraduate courses is the recursive nature of the course and of our efforts to learn. We will return to similar themes several times throughout the semester. So, while the assigned readings are a guide, I strongly urge you to have read all the assigned texts by week 7 of the semester. This may sound like a lot to read, but the reading load is not large for a graduate course of this sort.

Memos and Final Portfolio

You will be writing memos to President Obama's chief of staff. As you might imagine, such work must be of the highest quality. No administration will tolerate poor staff work, even when you've been given as broad a mandate as you have. Thus, you should keep in mind these aspects of the memos, which, in the end of the class, will be collected into your own policy portfolio:

1. Excellent writing is a *must*. Note that the criterion is *excellence*, not mere adequacy. Excellent writing includes
 - a. Proper grammar, punctuation and mechanics
 - b. Clear, concise prose style. Wordy, needlessly long-winded memos just take up space and waste your and your readers' time. **Do not try to write in a "scholarly" or "academic" style** because most students' idea of what constitutes academic writing is incorrect. Of course, there are windy, unintelligible academic writers, but remember that your memos are *not* scholarship—they are action documents.
 - c. Excellent documentation of claims from sound and credible sources.
 - i. Sound and credible sources:
 1. Academic journals
 2. Technical reports
 3. Reports from government agencies like the EPA (although not always)
 4. Analytical articles in popular journals written by experts in the field.
 - ii. Poorer sources
 1. Newspaper articles in *any* paper, including the New York Times and Washington Post. There are exceptions, which I will discuss.

But, most of the time, these sources will just steer you to original reports and analyses that you should find and assess on your own (remember, your professionalism is at stake here. You may sparingly cite newspapers to discuss the politics of an issue—to raise ideas, for example—but you cannot use journalism as a replacement for hard evidence.

2. Popular magazines and TV news programs, etc.
3. Wikipedia or any encyclopedia. Use Wikipedia to help you understand a concept—some of the articles are quite good. But this isn't evidence. Any paper that cites Wikipedia will be returned ungraded on the first instance. On the second presentation of any paper with a Wikipedia reference, the assignment will earn zero credit.

Often, Wikipedia refers readers to source information, and if that information is good, you can use it.

4. Blogs or other material by nonexperts. Anyone can start a blog and publish nonsense. On the other hand, some experts do create blogs, and their work can be useful. The quality of a blog is related to the quality of the blogger and any sponsoring organization, so proceed with caution.

Students with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. Students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653. http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/

Academic Integrity

Any form of academic dishonesty, including, but not limited, to plagiarism will result in severe consequences. Any plagiarism found in the any paper will result in a failing grade for that assignment *and* referral to appropriate university authorities for further action that can range from a failing mark on an assignment to expulsion. I will fail any student for any egregious violation of academic honesty, such as cheating on the final exam, and will pursue university sanctions as well. However, you should note that I have never personally had to discipline a graduate student for plagiarism, and I doubt this should be a major issue in our course. If you have questions about this policy, or about making sure that you don't run afoul of it, please ask!

Students should familiarize themselves with the university policies regarding academic policy found in the Code of Student Conduct (www.fis.ncsu.edu/ncsulegal/41.03-codeof.htm) that apply to this class. If you have any questions regarding this policy, please feel free to discuss with me.

To: Students in Public Administration Courses

Public Administration faculty members have observed that some students may be unsure of what constitutes academic dishonesty. The following statement (used with permission) describes a range of behaviors that constitute academic dishonesty “Plagiarism, or presenting another’s works or ideas as one’s own, is a form of

stealing. The instructor reserves the right to examine any source used by the student before giving a grade on a paper, and to give an “incomplete” in the course if necessary, to allow time to obtain sources. Students should be prepared to show source material to the instructor for the purpose of verifying information. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes the following offenses: 1) Claiming as your own work a paper written by someone else (including unpublished papers). 2) Turning in a paper that contains paraphrases of someone else’s ideas but does not give proper credit to that person for those ideas. 3) Turning in a paper that is largely a restatement in your own words of a paper written by someone else, even if you give credit to that person for those ideas. The thesis and organizing principles of a paper must be your own. 4) Turning in a paper that uses the exact words of another author without using quotation marks, even if proper credit is given in a citation, or that changes the words only slightly and claims them to be paraphrases. 5) Turning in the same paper, even in a different version, for two different courses without the permission of both professors involved. 6) Using any external source (notes, books, other students, etc.) for assistance during an in-class exam, unless given permission to do so by the professor.” Kendra Stewart et al., Columbia College.

Further details on academic integrity are in NC State University’s Code of Student Conduct (http://www.ncsu.edu/student_conduct). The public administration faculty has agreed that violations of academic integrity must have consequences. Consequently, students who cheat (behaviors cited in point 1 and 6 or similar behavior) may receive at least an F in the course; other forms of dishonesty, similar to those covered in points 2 through 5 may result in at least a 0 for the assignment.

Grading

Grading weights are approximately as follows:

Class participation 30%

Memos (taken together) 35%

Final exam: 35%

I not will grant incompletes in this course unless particularly extraordinary and compelling circumstances are *documented*. It is usually better to take a lower mark and get the project out of the way than it is to wait.

Some general ground rules

Following are some ground rules for the course; none of these should be unfamiliar to you in your role as graduate students and as professionals. Remember, these rules apply to me too!

- Class will start promptly at 6:00 and will most often end no later than 8:50. We may need to run longer for particular activities, but I will try to warn you if this is the case in the week before.
- As suggested above, I expect professional, graduate-level writing in any written material for this course, including e-mail. I will return written work ungraded if they contain more than a minimum number of writing, spelling, mechanical, formatting, or stylistic errors. You will have 48 hours to resubmit the paper in proper form. Professional writing is also expected in email. Messages to “Hey, professor” or similar salutations will just be ignored. An important part of this course is to prepare you to work in a professional setting (in this case, we are simulating working for the *President of the United States*, after all) , so this norm will be enforced to a degree you may never have experienced before.

- Please *turn off* cell phones before class. If you are expecting a call, please (1) set the phone to “vibrate” or some other unobtrusive signal; (2) inform me that you may have to take a call during class; and (3) leave the room to take the call, *without answering in class*. All pagers, Blackberries, etc., are to be turned off or at least set to vibrate as well. I expect that cell phones will be turned on in class only if you are expecting a genuine emergency call. I know how addictive these devices are, but they distract other people, so please put them away for the duration of the class.

If you have a computer with wireless internet access, you must restrict your use of that capacity, while in class, to class-related activities. Abuse of the internet during class (twitter, email, IM, Facebook, shopping) will result in your being counted absent for the day.

- All papers, memos, or other written material for this class are to be sent to me via e-mail. *I do not accept paper copies of any written assignments*. Documents *must* be in one of the following formats: Microsoft Word .doc; Rich Text Format (.rtf). No other formats are acceptable. (Nearly all word processors today will save to .rtf.). If you are using Microsoft Office 2007, your documents may save in the default .docx format. I cannot read these files; please convert to .doc or .rtf format. Even though you will be sending in your papers via email, please format them as proper documents that would eventually be printed.
- Please let me know if you must miss a class for personal or professional reasons *before* class, either by phone or via e-mail. If you are part of a group that expects you in class, you must also inform at least one member of your group.
- Technically, food and drink is not allowed in the classroom, but I will not strictly enforce this rule. But please respect the spirit of this rule by bringing in vast quantities of food, and please ensure that drinks have lids or are in bottles.

Books

Bardach, Eugene. 2009. *A practical guide for policy analysis : the eightfold path to more effective problem solving*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. ISBN: 1568029233.

Birkland, Thomas A. 2005. *An Introduction to the Policy Process : Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*. 2nd ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. ISBN: 978-0765614896.

Kingdon, John. 2003. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Longman. ISBN 0321121856.

Stone, Deborah. 2002. *Policy Paradox*. New York: Norton. ISBN: 0393976254

All these books are available at the NC State Bookstore, although you may find better prices or used copies on-line through the usual sources. If you do purchase a new copy of my book, please let me know: University regulations require that I donate my book royalties to a charity. I've donated my anticipated royalties for this year to the university's general scholarship fund.

Statement on Course Evaluation

Schedule: Online class evaluations will be available for students to complete during the last 2 weeks of spring term: 8 a.m. April 13 through 8 a.m. April 27,

Students will receive an email message directing them to a website where they can login using their Unity ID and complete evaluations. All evaluations are confidential; instructors will never know how any one student responded to any question, and students will never know the ratings for any particular instructors.

Evaluation website: <https://classeval.ncsu.edu/>

Student help desk: classeval@ncsu.edu

More information about ClassEval: <http://www.ncsu.edu/UPA/classeval/>

Course Schedule

The course schedule follows this page. It is subject to modifications which will be announced in class and via email.

Wk	Day	Topic	Reading	In-Class Workshop activity	Due by noon the following Sunday
1	1/12	Class introduction and overview	It would be good to start reading my text (Birkland) now to get a head start. You should also read Bardach once cover to cover. Then we will consider each chapter as noted	None	Within 3 days of first class meeting: what is your particular area of interest in public policy? Write a one-page description (~300 words) of this policy area. Feel free to explain your opinion and <i>why</i> you believe what you do.
2	1/19	MLK Holiday	Kingdon, Chapter 1	None	Assignment, due on January 22 via mail: Problem statement
3	1/26	Overview of the policy process I	For the next three sessions we will cover all of the Birkland book and the Kingdon book. For my book, you can skim chapters 1. Read chapter nine in my book before you read Kingdon. We will return to these ideas throughout the semester, so don't worry if you don't "get it" on the first pass.	Overview: finding and using policy information In class activity: share five high-quality sources of policy information on line or on the web. A solid place to start is http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/guides/	Short memo on key factual information on the policy area you have selected. Why is it important? Is anything being done about it? This will be more a sketch than a finished product.
4	2/2	Overview of the policy process 2	Same as before		Three things: 1. Restated problem definition 2. Revised factual memo 3. Reflective memo on how you found your sources
5	2/9	Professor Birkland Out	Professor Birkland out for IEI Emerging Issues Forum		
6	2/16	Problem definition 1	Bardach (Part I, step one), Stone Parts I, II and III	Finding information about <i>problems</i> --statistical, academic, otherwise	Revised problem statement (see assignment)
7	2/23	Problem definition 2	Same as before		
8	3/2	Spring Break			
9	3/9	Groups, Power, and agenda setting.	Review Kingdon and Birkland, 2-6	Discovering which groups are active in the policy domain	Memo on supporters and opponents among legislators, agencies and interest groups. Which groups are most active? Use <i>data</i> . (Due noon, Sunday, March 15).

10	3/16	News media and agenda setting	Birkland, Chapter 4; May 1991 (emailed to you)	Understanding the "politics" of the problem"	Op-ed piece on your problem for a newspaper. (Due Sunday, March 22).
11	3/23	Institutional agenda setting	Kingdon; Birkland, Chapter 5		Memo on agenda setting (see assignment) (Due Sunday, March 29).
12	3/30	Sources of ideas and learning	Birkland 2006, Chapter 1 (emailed to you); Bardach Part III	Finding policy ideas	Memo on ideas that you have found to solve the problem, with pros and cons of each alternative (April 5)
13	4/6	policy design and tools, and implementation	Stone part IV, Bardach, Appendix B, Birkland	Finding implementation and evaluation information	Memo on which alternative you have selected, including an implementation plan.
14	4/13	Monitoring, evaluation and feedback	Birkland, Chapter 8		Revised policy design memo, including a section on evaluation.
15	4/20	Final course summary			Final portfolio due on April 27, 2009. You should plan to rewrite most memos based on my comments, and then place in portfolio.