

# PA 873 - INTRODUCTION TO POLICY ANALYSIS

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Spring 2016  
University of Wisconsin, Madison  
La Follette School of Public Affairs  
Van Hise 159  
T 1:20-3:15  
Office hours: T 3:30 - 5:30 or by appointment

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## Course Description and Objectives

This course provides an introduction to the study of public policy and the professional practice of policy analysis with a focus on international policy issues. We consider a number of fundamental questions:

- What are the rationales for collective interference in private affairs?
- What are the limitations to collective action?
- What are the generic instruments of public policy?
- How can we measure social costs and benefits?
- What are the appropriate roles for policy analysts in democratic societies?

We also seek to improve our basic skills in analytical thinking, information gathering, and writing as we attempt to answer these questions.

## Course requirements & grades

**The course components are the following:**

- 4 memos, pop-briefing and class participation (40%)
- Midterm exam (30%)
- Policy analysis project (30%)

## Memorandum exercises

The 4 memorandum exercises provide an opportunity to practice analytical writing: the first exercise provides a general introduction; the remaining three are related to your policy analysis project. See the end of this syllabus for detailed descriptions of each memorandum exercise.

## Pop briefings

The pop-briefing simulates the sort of oral report you are likely to be called upon to make while you are working on a major project. You will have a total of ten minutes to provide an introduction to the issue you are addressing in your policy analysis project, pose an analytical question you are trying to address, and lead discussion of it. Work hard to keep the introduction of your issue to about one minute. You should allow at least five minutes for discussion. The discussion may be extended at my discretion. I will randomly select two or three presenters each class beginning on February 9.

## Class participation

Your active class participation will make the course more valuable for all of us; consider the positive externalities! As a rule of thumb, aim to make a comment or ask a question at least once during each class.

## Midterm

The midterm will be a test of your mastery of the basic rationales for, and limits to, public policy.

## Policy analysis project

A semester-long project on a randomly assigned topic gives you an opportunity to apply the concepts and craft skills introduced in the course.

- First draft due April 26
- Final report due May 13

I strongly prefer that you submit assignments electronically through Learn@UW.
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## Academic integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Dean of Students Office for additional review. For more information, or if you have any doubts about how the above terms are defined, please refer to <http://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>.

The UW Writing Center has a [handout](#) on acknowledging, paraphrasing and quoting sources. For your policy analysis project, please read this handout – especially if you have any doubts about how to cite sources. I also recommend scheduling a writing consultation with the Writing Center to go over your writing; their trained instructors can offer feedback for revision.

## Religious observances

If a religious observance will require you to miss class time, please notify me *within the first two weeks of class* of the specific days or dates on which you request relief. If the date you will miss is an exam, we will schedule a make-up exam time either before or after the regularly scheduled exam.

## Communication and office hours

I usually respond to written requests and questions quite quickly, but please do not assume that I will respond in less than 48 hours (I may be traveling, or at a conference, for example). In other words, be prepared to email me questions or meeting requests well in advance. [Here](#) is a part-serious, part-humorous discussion on writing professional emails. Most of you will know most of it, but it is worth a glance if you ever find yourself foregoing punctuation or capitalization in professional correspondence.

## Course materials

We will rely extensively on the assigned (required) textbook, available at the UW Bookstore:

- Weimer, David L. and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, 5th edition (Longman/Pearson, 2010)

All other readings and class materials listed in this syllabus will be available available on Learn@UW.

## Schedule/overview

Rough outline of topics. Please note that I may add or drop readings during the semester; I will announce changes in class and update the syllabus on Learn@UW.

Date	Topic	Book chapter
January 19, 2016	Introduction	
January 26, 2016	Policy Analysis: Overview <b>[Memo 1 due]</b>	1, 14*
February 2, 2016	What is the role of the policy analyst?	2, 3
February 9, 2016	Market failures as rationale for public policy I	4, 5, 6
February 16, 2016	Market failures as rationale for public policy II	4, 5, 6*
February 23, 2016	Goals other than efficiency as rationale <b>[Memo 2 due]</b>	7
March 1, 2016	Government failure as limitation & rationale	8*
March 8, 2016	<b>Midterm</b>	
March 15, 2016	Structuring analysis I	15
March 22, 2016	<i>Spring break</i>	
March 29, 2016	Structuring analysis II	15
April 5, 2016	Policy design I <b>[Memo 3 due]</b>	9, 10, 13
April 12, 2016	Policy design II	9, 10, 13
April 19, 2016	Adoption & implementation	11, 12*
April 26, 2016	Cost-benefit analysis <b>[1<sup>st</sup> draft of policy analysis due]</b>	16, 17
April 29, 2016	<b>[Memo 4 due]</b>	
May 3, 2016	Policy analysis project discussion	
May 13, 2016	<b>[Final policy analysis due]</b>	

\*Additional readings for this class, described in the detailed schedule below

## Detailed schedule

### January 19 - Introduction

Course overview. Assign and briefly discuss policy analysis projects.

### January 26 - Policy Analysis: Overview

We will discuss past student projects as well as the basics of information gathering for policy analysis

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 1 & 14
- Musso, J., R. Biller, et al. (2000). "Tradecraft: Professional writing as problem solving." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19(4): 635-646.
- **Memo 1 due**

### February 2 - What is the role of the policy analyst? [Professor Herd]

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 2 & 3

### February 9 - Market failures as rationale for public policy (I)

Welfare economics specifies the assumptions under which market equilibria are Pareto efficient. Certain violations of these assumptions are commonly identified as market failures: public goods, externalities, natural monopolies, and information asymmetries. Market failures provide important rationales for collective interference with individual choices. Our goal is to understand these basic market failures, and other limitations of the competitive framework, for purposes of framing and modeling policy problems.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 4, 5 & 6

### February 16 - Market failures as rationale for public policy (II)

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 4, 5 & 6
- Hardin, Garrett. 1968. "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162(3859): 1243-48.

### February 23 - Goals other than efficiency as rationale

Though efficiency is almost always one of the relevant goals in policy analysis, it is rarely the only one. It is useful to develop conceptual foundations for thinking about distributional and other goals that commonly arise in policy analysis.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 7
- **Memo 2 due**

### March 1 - Government failure as limitation & rationale

Just as markets fail in systematic ways, so too does collective action. Such generic government failures interfere with the effective correction of market failures and produce public policies that themselves are policy problems.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 8
- The Economist. 2011. "The People's Will," April 20. <http://www.economist.com/node/18563638>.

- The Economist. 2011. “Rules for Fools,” May 12. <http://www.economist.com/node/18678963>.
- Plumer, Brad. 2013. “The U.S. Has Few Farmers. So Why Does Congress Love Farm Subsidies?” The Washington Post, July 12. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/07/12/the-u-s-has-few-farmers-so-why-does-congress-love-farm-subsidies/>.
- *Optional*: Bellemare, Marc F., and Nicholas Carnes. 2015. “Why Do Members of Congress Support Agricultural Protection?” Food Policy 50 (January): 20–34.

### March 8

- **Midterm**

### March 15 - Structuring analysis (I)

An overview of the steps in the rationalist mode of policy analysis. We consider how to frame and model policy problems, select appropriate goals and criteria, specify policy alternatives, predict and value consequences, identify trade-offs among alternatives, and effectively communicate recommendations.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 15

### March 22 - Spring break

### March 29 - Structuring analysis (II)

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 15

### April 5 - Policy design (I)

A discussion of how to design policies. We will consider generic policies as starting points for design, as well as borrowing and adapting designs used in other contexts.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 9, 10 & 13
- Bring the **goals/alternative matrix** for your policy analysis to class, either as a PowerPoint slide or pdf page. Be prepared to present it to the class.
- **[Memo 3 due]**

### April 12 - Policy design (II)

...continued

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 9, 10 & 13

### April 19 - Adoption & implementation

A realistic assessment of policy alternatives almost always requires consideration of the feasibility of their adoption and implementation. How can we make predictions about feasibility? How can we alter policy alternatives to improve their feasibility?

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 11 & 12
- Breedlove, B. (2002). “The continuing education of a policy salesman.” Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 21(1): 132-136.

- Leman, C. K. and R. H. Nelson (1981). "Ten commandments for policy economists." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 1(1): 97-117.
- Robert, C. and R. Zeckhauser (2011). "The methodology of normative policy analysis." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management: 30(3): 613-643.
- Verdier, J. M. (1984). "Advising congressional decision-makers: Guidelines for economists." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 3(3): 421-438.

### April 26 - CBA

Although cost-benefit analysis (CBA) is rarely appropriate as a decision rule, it provides useful protocols for valuing the efficiency impacts of policy alternatives. We review basic concepts underlying CBA such as willingness-to-pay, opportunity cost, discounting for time, and the treatment of risk. We also consider the conceptual and practical limitations to its application.

- Weimer and Vining, Ch. 16 & 17
- **1<sup>st</sup> draft of policy analysis due**

### April 29

- **Memo 4 due at noon on Learn@UW**

### May 3 - Policy analysis project discussion

This session is set aside for revisiting topics of interest and discussing successful completion of projects.

### May 13

- **Final policy analysis due**
- This revised draft is due at 5pm, submitted as PDF to Learn@UW
- The title of the file should be [Last name]\_policy\_analysis\_2016.pdf
- The e-mail itself should indicate how you responded to comments on your initial report draft

## Memorandum exercises

### Memo 1

Read each of the following policy analyses available at Learn@UW:

- Emily Brunjes, "Addressing Drug Shortages"
- Edward Cubero, "Wolf Management in Wisconsin"
- Ben Nerad, "Addressing the Use of Cell Phones while Driving"
- Phil Sletten, "Corporate Tax Reform: Taxing Capital Value"

Write a memorandum to the client of one of these reports that makes a recommendation for action on the problem addressed in the report. You may focus on the recommendation in the report or argue for some other alternative. Your memorandum should be no more than three, double-spaced, typed pages in length. Your recommendation should be stated clearly in the last sentence of the first paragraph. The rest of your memorandum should indicate the advantages and disadvantages of your recommendation.

### Memo 2

One of the steps in defining a policy problem is framing it as a market or government failure. The framing helps you to determine if there is a strong rationale for government action and suggests generic policy alternatives for consideration. Prepare a three- to four-page (double-spaced) analysis that introduces the problem implied by your project statement and frames it as a market or government failure. (Projects often begin as a request for analysis of a specific alternative to the status quo. In such cases, problem definition involves identifying the underlying policy problem that prompts interest in the alternative.) After writing an introductory paragraph, divide your memorandum into two distinct parts. In the first part provide a sketch of the context for your problem. The sketch may be in the form of a brief history, or it may simply describe the symptoms of the problem. The second part should clearly frame your problem as a market or government failure.

It is likely that you will be able to provide a useful frame by focusing on one market or government failure. It may be that several others are applicable as well. While you may note these in passing, try to stay focused on the one that best helps you understand the nature of the problem from the perspective of the good of society. Your memorandum should show that you understand the concept and that you are able to apply it to a specific context.

Imagine that you are writing your memorandum to a colleague who will be working with you on the analysis. Assume that your colleague does not have much background in economics. Clearly explain any technical terms that you use. Also, avoid using diagrams. If you think that a diagram is essential, then put it in an appendix.

### **Memo 3**

When doing policy analysis, it is usually helpful to consider some possible policy alternatives in considerable depth well before preparing a full draft. Looking ahead to alternatives often helps one to refine goals and criteria. It also helps one anticipate the sort of information that will be useful for predicting consequences of alternative policies. Now is a good time for you to focus on *one* of your promising policy alternatives for your project.

In a brief memorandum of three double-spaced pages please do the following: First, clearly specify one of your policy alternatives in terms of all its essential elements. Second, briefly outline what you believe to be the major effects of the alternative, including both the use of resources required to implement it and its impacts. Third, discuss what information you hope to use to predict the magnitudes of the major effects.

### **Memo 4**

Prepare a brief memorandum of two or three double-spaced pages that provides your colleague with constructive criticism of his/her policy report.