Political Science 219: Introduction to Public Policy

Fall Term, 2014
T-TR 4:00 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.
Ingraham Hall 222

Eileen Harrington
Adjunct Associate Professor
Eharrington2@wisc.edu
Room 411 North Hall
Office hours: Tuesday 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Thursday 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Overview

Public policy is defined in many ways. I think of public policy as the government’s effort to address problems that spill over into the public sphere and that cannot, or should not, be solved in a purely private way. Some public policies address large problems (e.g., the UN’s International Arms Trade Treaty, which seeks to regulate the private sale of conventional weapons to participants in private, armed conflicts that terrorize civilian populations). Other public policies focus with laser-like precision on highly localized problems (e.g., the Madison City Council’s effort to protect consumers and competition by regulating private “ride sharing” firms, such as Uber and Lyft). These vastly different policy initiatives share a common impetus: Governmental or quasi-governmental entities have concluded that a problem exists, and that the problem is likely to cause harm that can be ameliorated by the allocation of public resources.

My objective in teaching this course is to help you understand public policy – the process of making it, and how to go about analyzing it. During the first four or so weeks of the semester, we will focus on the nuts and bolts of public policy creation: authorities, institutions, and procedures. During the next five or six weeks, we will work more in the conceptual realm to explore tensions in policy making and policy analysis; what questions to ask when analyzing policy options; and how to think about different approaches to policy making. We will spend the final four or five weeks on policy development, learning how to frame questions, gather and test evidence, use straw persons to test theories, and project outcomes. Throughout the
course, you will do policy work by preparing and submitting written assignments, and participating in class discussion.

Roughly two-thirds of our class time will be lecture, and one-third discussion. This will vary from class to class. An important part of policy work involves oral advocacy and presentation, so class participation is an important part of your coursework.

This course, then, is about problem solving in the public realm. I spent thirty years of my career examining, developing, advocating, critiquing, implementing, and defending public policy. It was a great privilege to do that work. I am eager to share with you my passion for public service and public policy work in the hope that you will become even better participants in the public life we share as a nation and a society.

- Eileen Harrington, September 2014

**Basis for Assessment**

Your grade will be based on your performance in the following areas:

Class participation (10 percent) Your class participation will be noted and evaluated.

Policy memoranda (3) (60 percent; 20 percent per memorandum) You will write three brief policy memoranda, not to exceed three double-spaced pages, excluding source references. You will follow exactly a format that will be distributed in class.

Final exam (30 percent) The final exam will cover the entire course, and will be given on December 14, 2014, Ingraham 222 at 10:05 a.m.. Please do not sign up for this course if you cannot be present for the final, as there will be no exceptions made.

**Books for Purchase**

We will make substantial use of three texts that are recommended for individual purchase:


A useful resource, but not required for individual purchase (you may consider sharing copies if you do not purchase your own):


Supplemental materials may be made available at learn@uw

**Tentative Class Schedule**

**Week one:**

Public policy and the policy-making process.

*Discussion:* Is there a difference between politics and policy? Can we have politics without policy, or policy without politics?

Read Birkland, chapters 1 and 2

**Week two:**

Policy making authorities, structures, actors and roles.

*Discussion:* What is federalism, and does it help or hinder public policy development in the United States? Do judges make law, interpret law, or both? What’s the difference? How important are “unofficial” actors in U.S. policymaking?

Read Birkland, chapters 3-5
Week three:

Agenda setting, policy types, tools, and decisions.

Discussion: What are Wisconsin’s current numbers for job losses, job gains, unemployment, personal income growth, and consumer spending? How does Wisconsin compare with other Midwestern states? The nation? Argue that these numbers show that existing policies are working, and that existing policies are not working.

Read: Birkland Chapters 6-8

Week four:

Policy implementation, success, and failure.

Discussion: What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative? Who supported this initiative, and why? Who opposed it initially, and why? Have interest groups and actors changed positions on Common Core, and if so, why? Do you think the Common Core initiative has succeeded, failed, or is the jury still out? How would you define success and failure for this initiative?

Read: Birkland Chapter 9

Submit: First policy memorandum due 9/25/14.

Week five:

Tensions and concepts in policy development: political science and economics.

Discussion: President Obama and Congress are at a seeming impasse on U.S. immigration policy. Stated simply, one side supports changes to existing law and policy to permit some undocumented U.S. residents to remain in the U.S. with the possibility of becoming U.S. citizens by meeting a series of requirements. The other side supports existing law and policy to require deportation of undocumented U.S. residents. Pick one side, and argue for it applying an economic or
political rationale, and then argue against your position using the opposite rationale.

Read: Stone, Part I
CQ Researcher, Social Policy, 11. Immigration Conflict

Weeks six and seven:

Differing perspectives on similar goals, or does liver taste the same to you as it does to me?

Discussion: Well before this summer’s police officer-involved fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, many cities and communities adopted or were considering policies to require police officers to wear forward-facing video cameras. Discuss this policy initiative in terms of one or more of the policy goals discussed in Deborah Stone’s text.

Other possible discussion topics: Laws permitting concealed carrying of arms; laws prohibiting marriage between same-sex partners.

Read: Stone, Part II
Watch: Wisconsin gubernatorial debates on October 10, 2014 and October 17, 2014

Weeks eight and nine:

Defining problems through various disciplines: framing policy issues is like looking through a kaleidoscope: one turn, and everything looks different.

Discussion: Name one policy issue that arose in one of the debates. Describe how each candidate used problem framing, values, goals, symbols, numbers, and other elements discussed in Stone’s book to address the issue and make their argument. What were the most and least persuasive arguments? Was one candidate more persuasive?

Read: Stone, Part III

**Weeks ten and eleven:**

Conceptual solutions to policy problems.

*Discussion:* Identify one environmental policy, adopted at the federal or state level, and intended to reduce pollution of some sort. Using Stone’s discussion in Part IV, identify the policy tools or instruments used in this policy. How would you measure the success or effectiveness of this particular policy?

Read: Stone, Part IV

**Weeks twelve and thirteen:**

Doing the work: Applying the Eightfold Path

*Discussion:* Following Bardach’s Eightfold Path, be prepared to discuss the following policy proposal: The federal government should restrict online data collection by political campaign committees and other political organizations. What’s the problem? What’s the nature of the problem? Provide some evidence. What are the alternatives? What are the likely outcomes? What are the trade-offs? Tell your story.

Read: Bardach, Parts I and II

C.Q. Researcher, *National Politics, 2. Social Media and Politics*

Submit: Third policy memoranda due December 2, 2014.

**Weeks fourteen and fifteen:**

Putting it all together: Foundations, tensions, and approaches to policy development and analysis.

No discussion, no reading. We will review where we have been, what we’ve learned, and hear some stories about how all of this really works.