

*Carnegie Mellon University
Heinz College
School of Public Policy and Management*

90-730

POLICY ANALYSIS IN PRACTICE

Fall 2023 Syllabus

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DAY/TIME/PLACE: Monday, 9:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.
HBH 2003

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment only

NOTE: Prior to 2021, this course was called *Methods of Policy Analysis*. The name was changed to better reflect the content of the course.

PREREQUISITES

This course is designed for students in the Master of Science in Public Policy and Management program who have skills equivalent to what is taught in the School's core courses in economic analysis, statistical methods, management science, financial analysis, organizational design, policy and politics, and professional writing. In addition, an understanding of American government institutions and programs will be necessary in order for a student to participate effectively in the class discussions and to successfully complete the assignments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

If you successfully complete this course, you will:

1. Understand the key steps needed to analyze complex policy problems and to help public officials make decisions about public policies.
2. Gain experience in carrying out each of those steps in order to analyze real-world problems in a wide range of different policy areas.
3. Understand how and when policy problems gain the attention of policy-makers.
4. Understand many of the common pitfalls in policy analysis and how to avoid them.

5. Improve your ability to think critically about policy problems, develop creative alternatives for addressing problems, identify the advantages and disadvantages of policy alternatives, and anticipate what is necessary for successful implementation of policies.
6. Improve your skills in effectively communicating policy analyses to decision-makers.
7. Understand what it is like to work as a policy analyst in a government or civic agency and what techniques can be used to increase your effectiveness in that role.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE CONTENT

Successful policy analysis in real-world settings is far more than being able to analyze data, run regressions, use optimization models, or identify market failures. It involves:

- anticipating issues that may need analysis;
- determining when a problem exists that warrants government action;
- determining what is causing a problem and what other factors affect it;
- developing creative alternatives to address the problem;
- analyzing the impacts of alternatives on different political interests, both quantitatively and qualitatively;
- assessing the uncertainties in impact estimates;
- defining and prioritizing the goals to be achieved in making policy decisions;
- comparing alternatives in order to support decisions that can be successfully adopted and implemented in a political environment;
- communicating the results of analyses and recommendations in ways that will successfully influence policy decisions; and
- resolving ethical dilemmas policy analysts can face in carrying out their work.

The course is designed to teach you how to carry out all of these tasks successfully. You will learn a systematic multi-step process for conducting policy analyses on realistic policy problems. You will gain experience in applying that process to a variety of different policy problems through both class discussions and assignments. The examples used will primarily be based on real-world cases, with all the complexity that implies. The course will also improve your understanding of how public policies are actually developed, analyzed, and implemented in the real world, and it will show you how the work that policy analysts do can help to improve this process and lead to more effective policies and programs.

The focus of the course will be on how to analyze *new* policy problems and issues, not how to evaluate *existing or past* programs. Although we will review the results of some policies and programs that have been developed in the past, the primary goal of that will be to apply lessons from those experiences in analyzing new problems and developing policies to address them.

Statistics, econometrics, operations research, financial analysis, and other sophisticated analytical tools are taught in depth in many other courses at the Heinz College and elsewhere at Carnegie Mellon, and you will not learn more of these types of methodologies in this course. Instead, this course should complement those other courses by helping you understand when and

how to apply analytic methodologies effectively in addressing real world problems. In addition, the course will demonstrate approaches to analysis that can be used when data or time are insufficient to allow use of complex methods, as is often the case in many policy analysis roles.

The specific policy problems in the course have been selected to give you knowledge and experience with policy analysis in different substantive areas (e.g., criminal justice, economic development, education, energy, environmental protection, health, and human services) and different types of government policies and programs (e.g., subsidy and entitlement programs, tax incentives, regulations, etc.). Some of the topics may be familiar to you while others will likely not be. The ideas, techniques, and experience in one substantive area can provide important lessons for tackling problems in other, seemingly very different substantive areas. Consequently, there is a significant benefit to learning about and analyzing policy problems in diverse areas, including areas you may think you are not interested in. Moreover, having a basic understanding of multiple policy areas will help you to identify or pursue a wider range of job opportunities.

The topics discussed in class will be limited to U.S. domestic policy issues. Foreign policy and defense policy issues will not be discussed, although the approaches to analyzing problems taught in the class will be applicable to many aspects of those types of issues. Since the cases and assignments deal with U.S. domestic policy issues in some depth, you need to have a reasonable degree of familiarity with U.S. federal, state, and local government institutions and programs to understand the class discussions and successfully carry out the assignments. International students without this level of understanding may need to spend additional time doing background research on the topics in order to understand class discussions and successfully complete the assignments.

Effective written communication is an essential skill for a policy analyst. The ability to clearly and convincingly convey the results of an analysis to a decision-maker can make the difference between whether an analysis has an impact on policy or is ignored. Poor grammar, confusing writing style, and typographical errors in written materials can do as much or more to reduce the credibility of an analysis as can the inappropriate use of quantitative methodologies or inaccuracies in calculations. Consequently, you will be expected to produce well-written memoranda and other materials in the assignments. A significant portion of the grade for each assignment will be based on the quality of your writing, and you may receive a failing grade if you submit materials that are difficult to understand or have been poorly proofread.

COURSE MATERIALS

There will be no textbook for this course, since there are no textbooks that provide a good treatment of the full range of material in the course. Instead, most of the key concepts will be conveyed through a combination of lecture and discussion in class. This means that attendance in class is essential.

In addition, a group of articles has been assembled to supplement the information provided in class and to provide a foundation for some of the class discussions. You will not be tested on the specifics in these readings, but you will be expected to understand and remember the basic ideas and principles that the readings convey, and to demonstrate your understanding of the readings during the discussions in class and in the assignments you submit. When specific readings are

assigned for particular class sessions, you should plan to complete those readings prior to class and be prepared for discussion about them in class.

The readings for the course will be posted on Carnegie Mellon's Canvas web-based course management system. Most classes will also have one or more handouts to support the discussion, but not all of these will be posted on Canvas.

In addition, since policy analysis is not just a task that is assigned to policy analysts working in government or civic agencies, but a set of critical thinking skills that can be applied to issues affecting citizens every day, I encourage you to read news articles about current public policy issues and think about how the techniques and perspectives being discussed in class might apply to them.

CLASS DISCUSSION

The class discussions are an essential part of the course, and you will need to participate actively to gain the maximum benefit from the course. You should prepare for each class by: (1) thinking about the discussion in the previous class so you can ask questions about anything you didn't understand; (2) reading any materials and thinking about any questions specifically assigned for discussion at the class.

During the discussions in class, I encourage you to make comments and offer creative ideas. In most cases, there is no one "right" solution to any problem nor is there only one "right" way to analyze a problem, so expressing concerns about the approaches discussed in class and proposing alternatives is welcome. In doing so, please treat other students and their ideas with respect. You can disagree with another student's ideas, explain why, and offer alternatives, but please do so in a respectful way. Disrespectful or offensive actions toward other students will not be tolerated.

Please do not engage in sidebar conversations with other students during class. If you have a question or an important point to make, you should make it publicly as part of the class discussion, or hold it for discussion after class. Since there is a lot of material to cover during the course, we will not be able to spend as much time on individual topics as they deserve, so do not be offended if I say we need to move on to a new topic sooner than you would like.

Although it will be helpful if you take notes on the key points covered in class, I recommend that you do not try to write down everything that is discussed in class. You will gain the greatest benefit from the course if you actively engage in thinking about the topics we discuss and if you contribute to the discussion in class. It is difficult to do that if you are trying to write or type everything that is said. I will repeat the most important points in multiple classes, but if you feel you have missed or forgotten something important, feel free to ask about it.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Please ask questions during class or after class about anything you don't understand, including topics covered in previous classes. The goal of the course is to improve your knowledge and skills, and the only way I will know that you don't understand something is if you ask a question! Don't worry about asking "dumb questions" – it is almost a certainty that if *you* don't understand something, *someone else* doesn't understand it either, and so the answer to any question you ask will usually be helpful to other students as well as yourself. Asking questions will never hurt your grade, but *failing* to ask a question about something you don't understand *could* hurt your grade if your lack of understanding leads you to do something incorrectly on an assignment.

HEALTH & SAFETY IN THE CLASSROOM

Although the pandemic has officially ended, COVID has not disappeared, and other respiratory and viral infections such as influenza and RSV are always more likely to spread in the fall. Because we will be together in a relatively small room for 3 hours every week, it makes sense to take simple steps that can help prevent the transmission of COVID and other communicable diseases. Specifically:

- **If you are ill, or even if you suspect that you may be developing an illness, please stay home in order to avoid spreading infection to anyone else in the class and to help yourself get better as quickly as possible.** Even if you don't test positive for COVID, you could still have COVID or you could have the flu or some other illness you could transmit. Moreover, you will likely get better faster if you stay home and get adequate rest! If you can notify me before class that you are not attending, please do so, but otherwise let me know whenever you are feeling well enough to do so. If you have to miss class, I will do my best to make a recording of the class available so you can catch up on what you missed.
- If I become ill or test positive for COVID, I will either cancel class or attempt to conduct the class over Zoom. If this happens, I will notify you as early as possible, most likely the day before class.
- If the rates of COVID or other infectious diseases in Allegheny County reach significant levels, I may start wearing a mask while teaching and encourage you to wear masks as well. In these cases, you should wear a high-quality mask (ideally, a KN-95 mask, but at least a multi-layer cloth or paper mask with no air vent, not a bandanna or scarf), and you should wear the mask properly (i.e., over your nose and mouth and under your chin) in order for the mask to be most effective.
- If the University determines that infection levels are high enough that classes should no longer be carried out in person, I will do my best to teach the course via Zoom. Since the course was not designed for remote learning, some adjustments may be needed to the syllabus.
- You are welcome to wear a face mask during any or all classes if you wish to do so, regardless of whether they are required or recommended. (However, if you are feeling ill, you should stay home; don't come to class when you are sick even if you wear a mask.)

ATTENDANCE & PROMPTNESS

Please plan to attend *every* class, as long as you feel healthy enough to do so. The bulk of the material to be learned will come through the discussions in class, and the readings will not serve as an effective substitute.

Please come to class *on time*. Coming to class late is disruptive to other students and means that you will miss important material. Being “on time” means being in the room and seated, *at or before* the scheduled class starting time. If you routinely arrive late, you will receive a failing grade for class participation. If something urgent requires you to be late or leave early on a particular day, please let me know in advance.

If you cannot attend a class because of a meeting or travel, please notify me of this promptly. Although I will not be able to repeat the material that you miss, I will ensure you receive any assignments or other materials distributed during the class, and if I have recorded the class, I will provide you with a link to the recording.

ASSIGNMENTS

Individual, Not Group Work

In order to help you gain practical experience in carrying out policy analyses and to enable you to demonstrate that you have learned the principles taught in the course, you will be expected to complete several assignments during the course of the semester. All of the assignments will be individual projects, not group projects, and you will be responsible for carrying out all of the work on each assignment by yourself.

Allowing Adequate Time

The assignments will require you to use the approaches discussed in class to analyze policy issues with which you likely have little or no prior knowledge or experience; they will not merely be minor variations on examples discussed in class. There will not be a single “right” way to do the assignments (but there will be many wrong ways to do them). The principles and examples discussed in class will help you to develop a successful response to each assignment, but the class discussions will not tell you exactly how to do an assignment.

As a result, the assignments will require considerable time and thought. In order to ensure you can allocate sufficient time to complete the work that is necessary, you will have several weeks to complete each assignment. However, that amount of time will only be adequate if you begin working on the assignment as soon as you receive it. It is unlikely that you will do well on an assignment if you wait until shortly before it is due to work on it.

The benefit of producing high quality work on the assignments, particularly the final assignment, can go beyond the grade you receive in the course. Since the assignments will focus on realistic policy issues, the material you prepare can be used to demonstrate to prospective employers the quality of the work that you can do. This can be a significant advantage when competing for policy analysis jobs.

Format of Submissions

All documents you prepare for an assignment should be submitted in Microsoft Office format (Word, Excel, and/or PowerPoint), not PDF or other formats. (If you want to *also* submit a document in PDF format to ensure proper formatting, that is fine, but please submit the Word, Excel, and/or PowerPoint files that were used to generate it as well.) All assignments should contain sufficient supporting materials to enable me to determine how you reached your conclusions and to verify any calculations you made.

Before submitting your documents, make sure that they print out in a professionally formatted manner. A spreadsheet submitted merely as documentation of calculations does not have to be formatted for printing, but if a spreadsheet is intended to serve as a table in your memo or report, then it should be formatted to print in a way that would be acceptable as part of such a report.

There are no page limits on the material you can submit for an assignment, nor is there any “expected” length. In general, what you submit should be *as long as necessary* (in order to convey all of the important information) and *as short as possible* (by avoiding unnecessary or unimportant information).

Timeliness of Submissions

There will be a specific deadline for submission of each assignment. Late assignments will *not* be accepted. You will receive a failing grade if an assignment is submitted after the stated deadline. Deadlines for assignments will be strictly enforced; if the deadline for an assignment is 5:00 p.m., an assignment submitted at 5:01 p.m. will be considered as a late submission and you will automatically receive a failing grade for that assignment. It will be far better for you to submit an incomplete or imperfect product *before* the deadline than to try and prepare something better but miss the deadline, because you can receive partial credit for the former but you will not receive any credit for the latter.

All assignments should be submitted by email (addressed to Miller.Harold@GMail.com) *before* the date and time specified as the deadline for the assignment. (Assignments should be emailed to me directly; I will *not* use Canvas for submission of assignments.) Do not assume that because you hit “send” that I received the email containing your assignment! If you do not receive a reply from me within a few hours indicating that I received the assignment, contact me to verify that I received it.

No extensions on deadlines will be granted. Moreover, if you do a poor job on an assignment or fail to submit it on time, you will not be given an opportunity to do additional assignments to raise your grade. “Incomplete” (I) grades for the course will not be given, except in cases of documented severe illness or other extraordinary circumstances with approval from the Dean.

GRADING

There will be no quizzes or tests in the course. Grades will be given for each of the assignments and also for class participation, and the grades will be combined based on the following weights:

- **Assignments 1 & 2 — 40% (total)**
- **Assignment 3 — 30%**
- **Class Participation — 30%**

The grades for the assignments will be based on (1) the creativity, quality, and thoroughness of the analysis, (2) the extent to which your submission was responsive to the specifications of the assignment, (3) the extent to which you used applicable principles and methods taught in class, and (4) the quality of the writing. Written documents must be proofread *carefully*. Significant numbers of typographical errors or confusing sentences may result in a failing grade for the assignment.

The grade for class participation will be based on the quality of your contributions, not just the number or frequency of contributions. A few thoughtful and creative ideas will carry more weight than many trivial or obvious points, and counterproductive participation (e.g., trying to dominate the discussion, going off on tangents, or belittling the ideas of other students) will carry negative weight. Given the importance of participation, failure to attend classes without acceptable justification could result in a failing grade for the class participation component, and possibly a failing grade for the course.

If you disagree with the grade you receive on an assignment or for the course as a whole, you are welcome to request that I re-evaluate the work you submitted and/or the computations I used in assigning the grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Since the assignments will NOT be group projects, you will be expected to work *independently* on each assignment and to submit written material that represents your own personal work effort. Unless it is specifically authorized in writing as part of a graded assignment, collaboration between you and another student is strictly prohibited.

If you do not understand an assignment, or if you are having significant difficulty completing it, you are welcome and encouraged to ask any questions you have during class or to send me an email with your questions. You are *not* permitted to seek assistance on graded assignments from other students in the course, from other faculty, or from other individuals who are not taking the course, since your submission is supposed to reflect only your own thinking and work. The only exception is writing assistance from the Carnegie Mellon Student Academic Success Center (SASC). You are welcome to use the SASC if you have difficulties in writing clearly, but if you do, you must ask the tutor to send me a copy of the report on the tutoring session.

The most extreme form of cheating is directly copying another student's work. However, since there will be no single "right" way to do the assignments in this course, any unusual similarities between the approaches to analysis or presentation in the assignments submitted by you and

another student will be taken as a rebuttable presumption that the two of you have collaborated in a way that is not permitted in the course. Consequently, if you attempt to help another student with an assignment, you may well be subject to a penalty for cheating, so please restrain any impulses you may have to help other students who are taking the course. **If you have any doubt as to what type of assistance or collaboration is acceptable on a particular assignment, please ask me for guidance and wait for an answer before undertaking that assistance or collaboration.**

If you use materials from a book, article, website, or other source as part of your analysis, you should properly reference it or acknowledge that it is not your own creation. Otherwise, you could be considered to have plagiarized that material.

If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing in the preparation of materials that are evaluated for grading purposes, you will not only fail that assignment, but you will automatically be failed in the course, and you will be referred to the Dean for additional disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion from the school.

COMPUTERS, PHONES, RECORDERS, ETC.

Cell phones, smartphones, music players, and other electronic devices should be muted or turned off during class. If you are expecting an urgent call during the scheduled class time that cannot be taken at any other time, please notify me at the beginning of the class.

You may use computers, tablets, or other devices in class for note-taking if you wish, but using these devices in class for other reasons is not permitted because it could become a distraction to other students as well as to you. You should also be aware that research has shown that retention is better if you take hand-written notes rather than typing notes into a computer.

You may not use audio or video recorders or cameras in class without prior permission.

FEEDBACK

You are strongly encouraged to let me know – in person, by telephone, via e-mail, or through an anonymous note – if there are ways that the course could be improved, if you are having problems mastering the material, or if the course is not meeting your needs or expectations. While it may not be possible for me to address all concerns or solve all problems, I will do my best to make improvements when possible and to explain why other concerns or suggestions cannot be addressed. There is no grade penalty for "complainers," and you are welcome and encouraged to make suggestions and criticisms. In addition, feedback forms will be distributed at the middle and end of the course so that I can get specific input on how well the course is working and how to improve it. (These will be in addition to the official course evaluation form administered by the University.)

READINGS

You should read the following articles before the appropriate class as indicated on the schedule. All readings will be available for download from Canvas for registered students.

1. *Design Issues in USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits, Congressional Research Service.
2. Peter J. May, "Hints for Crafting Alternative Policies," *Policy Analysis*.
3. Robert Behn, *The Craft of Memo Writing*.
4. *The American Jobs Act: President Obama's Plan to Create Jobs Now* (multiple excerpts).
Policies for Increasing Economic Growth and Employment in 2010 and 2011, Congressional Budget Office.
5. Michael O'Hare, "A Typology of Governmental Action," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.
6. Jack Walker, "Setting the Agenda in the U.S. Senate: A Theory of Problem Selection," *British Journal of Political Science*.
7. Mark H. Moore, "Anatomy of the Heroin Problem: An Exercise in Problem Definition," *Policy Analysis*.
Lee N. Robins et al, "Vietnam Veterans Three Years After Vietnam: How Our Study Changed Our View of Heroin," *The American Journal of Addictions*.
Theodore J. Cicero et al., "The Changing Face of Heroin Use in the United States," *JAMA Psychiatry*.
8. Arnold J. Meltsner, "Don't Slight Communication: Some Problems of Analytical Practice," in Giandomenico Majone and Edward S. Quade, *Pitfalls of Analysis*.
9. *Updated Economic Impact Analysis: Petrochemical Facility in Beaver County, Pennsylvania*, Robert Morris University School of Business.
A Cautionary Tale of Petrochemicals from Pennsylvania, Ohio River Valley Institute.
Beaver County's Economy Grew as Shell Invested in Cracker Plant, Pittsburgh Works Together.
Michael Roknick, "Developers Cautious on Impact of Cracker Plant Locally," *The Herald*.
10. "Political Feasibility and Policy Analysis," Arnold Meltsner, *Public Administration Review*.
11. *Clean Air Act: A Summary of the Act and Its Major Requirements*, Congressional Research Service.
Ozone and Ozone Standards: The Basics, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
12. Eugene Bardach, "On Designing Implementable Programs," in Giandomenico Majone and Edward S. Quade, *Pitfalls of Analysis*.

Additional short readings may be assigned during the course of the semester.

SCHEDULE

The following is a tentative schedule of the topics that will be covered in the course and the due dates for readings and assignments. The topics may change or the number of days devoted to a particular topic may be increased or decreased depending on what happens in previous classes. If there are significant changes in the schedule, a revised schedule will be distributed.

DATES	TOPICS <i>NOTE: Topics and schedule are subject to revision</i>
August 28 (#1)	Course Overview Analyzing Policy Problems Case #1: Prescription Drugs and the Elderly
<i>September 4</i>	<i>No Class – Labor Day Holiday</i>
September 11 (#2)	<i>Complete Reading #1</i> Designing Subsidy and Entitlement Programs Analyzing Impacts of Policy Alternatives Case #2: Improving Access to Child Care
<i>September 11</i>	<i>Add/Drop Deadline</i>
September 16	<i>Part 1 of Assignment #1 Due at 5:00 p.m.</i>
September 18 (#3)	<i>Complete Readings #2 and #3</i> Designing Subsidy and Entitlement Programs (continued) Crafting Policy Alternatives
September 25 (#4)	<i>Complete Reading #4</i> Designing Incentive Programs Case #3: Tax Incentives for Job Creation
September 30	<i>Final Version of Assignment #1 Due at 5:00 p.m.</i>
October 2 (#5)	<i>Complete Reading #5</i> Designing Incentive Programs (continued) Types of Government Action
October 9 (#6)	<i>Complete Reading #6</i> Agenda Setting in Public Policy Analyzing Indicators Case #4: State Support for Higher Education
October 16	<i>No Class – Fall Break</i>
October 23 (#7)	Analyzing Indicators (continued) Modeling Policy Problems Case #5: Reducing Prison Overcrowding
<i>October 23</i>	<i>Mid-Semester Grades Due</i>
October 28	<i>Assignment #2 Due at 5:00 p.m.</i>

DATES	TOPICS <i>NOTE: Topics and schedule are subject to revision</i>
October 30 (#8)	Analyzing Impacts of Policy Alternatives Case #6: Sentencing Violent Criminals
November 6 (#9)	Complete Reading #7 Communicating Analysis (Part 1) Defining Policy Objectives Case #7: Reducing Heroin Use
November 13 (#10)	Complete Readings #8 and #9 Communicating Analysis (Part 2) Economic Impact Analysis Case #8: Evaluating Economic Development Projects
November 18	Part 1 of Assignment #3 Due at 5:00 p.m.
November 20 (#11)	Complete Readings #10 and #11 Analyzing Alternatives Affecting Multiple Interests Case #9: Improving Air Quality
November 27 (#12)	Complete Reading #12 Implementation Analysis Case #10: Implementing Welfare Reform
December 4 (#13)	Ethical Issues in Policy Analysis Case #11: What Would You Do? Course Review and Wrap-Up
December 13	Final Version of Assignment #3 Due at 5:00 p.m.
December 19	Final Grades Due by 11:59 p.m.