

Grinnell College
ECN/PST 295
Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Mon. Wed. 1:30 – 3:00; Thurs: 2-4, and by appointment

Syllabus: Foundations of Policy Analysis

A good part of social organization—of what we call society—consists of institutional arrangements to overcome these divergences between perceived individual interest and some larger collective bargain.—Thomas Schelling

What is missing from the policy analyst's tool kit – and from the set of accepted, well-developed theories of human organization – is an adequately specified theory of collective action whereby a group of principals can organize themselves voluntarily to retain the residuals of their own effort.—Elinor Ostrom

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.—Adam Smith

Man is a social animal.—Aristotle

Broadly speaking, one might define a policy as a plan, course or method of action—or possibly inaction—generated as the outcome of some decision-making process of some agency, public or private (government, corporation, club, etc.) which is intended to influence future decisions or actions of some set of agents (individuals, groups, or organizations). Public policy, the main focus of this course, naturally, concerns decisions of government and related agencies. A need for policy, at any level, arises when individuals or groups, left themselves as in, for example, pursuing their own interests, are *expected* to pursue a course of action that is *somehow deemed*, by some group or entity, to be harmful to the interests of some (often larger) group or entity. In more colloquial terms, a need for policy arises whenever a divergence between individual and collective interests arises, where the definition of “collective” clearly depends upon the context. In this course, we will call such a divergence of interests a *collective-action problem*, a key concept. A mere “need” for policy arising from some perceived collective-action problem does not, however, guarantee any particular policy outcome. Hence examination of the policy process is essential.

This course will open with some discussion of the rationale for policy, linking it to the concept of market failure and more generally to problems of collective action, using simple game theory to illustrate key relationships. It will proceed to examine the policy-making process, beginning with discussion of how an idea actually becomes part of a policy agenda (where some measure of “good” is frequently not the relevant criterion). Discussion will include a brief examination of relevant decision structures, using the US as the main example with some attention to general principles, followed by discussion of policy actors, both official and unofficial, as in interest groups. From this foundation, the course will proceed to examine interactions of power,

language, position, group, and structures in policy processes, with reference to policy design, enactment and the all-important question of implementation. Discussion here will refer to various short case examples. Class analysis will proceed to discussion of modeling policy processes, again with reference to game theory. Discussion will close with a brief introduction to formal policy analysis in the sense of comparing feasible policy alternatives (for specific problems), which have survived a relevant agenda-setting process. In the last two weeks, students will present policy projects.

Readings

Birkland, Thomas A. *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*, Second Edition, Armonk, N.Y.:M.E. Sharpe, 2005.

Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, Second Edition, New York, Longman Press, 2003.

Bardach, Eugene, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, Third Edition, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009.

Additional readings, including the following, will be placed on e-reserve:

Allison, Graham T., "Conceptual Models of the Cuban Missile Crisis"

Bentham, Jeremy, "On the Principle of Utility"

Boorstin, "Image and pseudo events"

Edelman, "Symbols and political quiescence"

Hardin, Garrett, "The Tragedy of the Commons"

Lipsky, Michael, "Street Level Bureaucrats as Policy Makers"

Mansfield, Edwin and Gary Yohe, sections on game theory from *Intermediate Microeconomics*

Mankiw, Gregory N., chapters 10 and 11 on externalities, public goods and common resources
from *Introduction to Economics*

Meltsner, Arnold J., "The Seven Deadly Sins of Policy Analysis"

Mills, C. Wright, "The Power Elite"

Olson, Mancur, "The Logic"

Orwell, George, "Political Language"

Rowlands, Ian, "Science and ozone layer depletion," "Interests and ozone layer depletion"

Sabatier, Paul A. "Advocacy Coalition Framework"

Stone, Deborah, "The Market and the Polis"

Wildvasky, Aaron, "The Art of Policy Analysis"

Wilson, Woodrow, "On Congressional Government"

Evaluation:

There will be one mid-term exam, one-take home exam, one paper, and a final exam. The mid-terms and the paper will each count as ½ of the final. All of these jointly will constitute about 75% of the grade. In addition, students will give periodic oral presentations, individually or in groups. There will be a few problem sets. Oral presentations, class participation, *including attendance*, and problem sets will jointly count for approximately 25% of the grade.

Course Outline -- Preliminary Schedule

I. Introduction to Policy and Policy Processes (Week 1)

The Concept of Policy

Birkland, Chapter 1

Handout 1: Definitions of Policy

Conceptual Approaches to Policy:

Jeremy Bentham, "On the Principle of Utility,"

Deborah Stone, Chapter 1: "The Market and the Polis"

Kingdon, Chapter 1

II. Market Failure, Collective Action, and Rationales for Policy (Weeks 2 – 3)

Externalities, Public Goods, Common Resources

Mankiw, chapters 10 and 11

Olson, "The Logic"

Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons"

Elementary Game Theory and Modeling Collective Action Problems

Mansfield and Yohe pp. 441-455; 473-477

Handout 2: Problems of Collective Action

Other Types of Market Failure; Other Collective-Action Problems

Rowlands, "Science and ozone layer depletion"

**Worksheet 1 due

III. Historical Context; Structural Context, and Actors -- Official and Unofficial (Weeks 4-5)

Historical Context

Birkland, Chapter 2

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

Structure and Official Actors

Birkland, Chapter 2; selections from Kingdon chapter 3

Edmund Burke, "Speech to the Electors of Bristol," (1774)

Woodrow Wilson, "Congressional Government" (1885)

Unofficial Actors and Interest Groups

Birkland, Chapter 4; Kingdon, Chapter 3, selections

****EXAM 1: Thursday, Feb. 19****

IV. Agendas, Power, and Interest Groups (6 end – 7)

Coalitions and Advocacy:

Birkland, chapter 5
C. Wright Mills, “The Power Elite”
Robert A. Dahl, “Who Governs?”
Sabatier: “Advocacy Coalition Framework”
Rowlands, “Interests and ozone layer depletion”

Language of Advocacy:

George Orwell, Political Language
Boorstin, Image and pseudo events
Edelman, Symbols and political quiescence

Modeling Ideas:

Kingdon, Chapter 4
Worksheet 2 Due

V. Policy Types, Design and Enactment (Weeks 8-9)

Types:

Birkland, chapter 6
Case studies

Design and Enactment:

Birkland, chapter 7
Case Studies
Kingdon, chapters 5-8

VI. Policy Implementation (Week 10)

Implementation and Conceptions:

Birkland, chapter 8
Graham T. Allison, “Conceptual Models of the Cuban Missile Crisis”
Michael Lipsky, “Street Level Bureaucrats as Policy Makers”

Take home Exam due Tuesday, April 7

VII. Modeling the Policy Process (Week 11)

Kingdon, Chapter 9
Birkland chapter 9
Worksheet 3 Due

VIII. Policy Analysis (Week 12)

Arnold J. Meltsner, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Policy Analysis"

Aaron Wildvasky, "The Art of Policy Analysis"

Bardach, Chapter 1

IX. Student Projects (Weeks 13-14)

Use Bardach as a reference.

Final Exam: Thursday May 14, 9:00 a.m. Plan accordingly!