

PS185 POLICY ANALYSIS

Seminar Leader: Gale Raj

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Times: Wednesdays and Fridays 3:45pm to 5:15pm

Location: K24, Seminar Room 12

Course Description

This course introduces students to policy analysis and policymaking. What are public policies you may ask? Public policies are courses of action made by governments to solve societal problems by changing behaviors. They include laws, regulations, incentives, and providing services, goods and information. It is important to remember that policies not only include what governments choose to do but also what they choose not to do. Policies by individual governments, groups of governments and intergovernmental organizations can impact outcomes for people, communities, industries, and the environment in different parts of the world. The main question this course addresses is whether and how effectively do policies address or solve problems faced by people. Do policies change behaviors?

As an introductory course we will spend time learning about and discussing foundational concepts on what are public policies, how they are evaluated to understand their benefits and challenges, and importantly, from theoretical perspectives understand why certain types of policy mechanisms work or do not work in addressing or solving problems in the world. We will also apply the foundational concepts and theories to real-world policy case studies addressing policy problems in different country contexts.

A major assignment of this course is a substantial research paper analyzing a specific problem and policy solutions. The research paper must apply concepts and theories of policy analysis learned in the course or through your own individual research. It must also include evidence and data, gathered from your own research, to support your arguments.

With this course, students will gain an understanding of a holistic approach to understanding public policy and policy analysis, both empirically, conceptually and theoretically. Students will also learn how to communicate about policy problems, options and recommendations verbally and in writing. Students will also gain experience reading academic research and conducting their own research for a final research paper.

Requirements

Readings

Articles will be uploaded in Google Classrooms and a Course Reader will be available after week 3.

In-class participation

It is expected that core readings are completed *before* each seminar as our discussions will be based on them. Please read actively – try to relate what you are reading with what you already know and have gained knowledge about the topic from other courses or from your own personal interests and explorations (engage in a personal self-reflective discussion). Take notes, be critical, ask questions, and come to class prepared to share!

We will be engaging in and discussing current issues concerning policy analysis and public policies. Many if not most of the issues will be news-worthy items and part of current public debates. It is highly recommended that you regularly check the news and/or other policy related reporting outlets (newspapers, blogs, policy briefs, Twitter, etc.) for insights and different opinions that relate to the topics in the course – which can be shared during class discussions.

Participating in different ways, either through larger group discussions or in small group/partner exercises, is an integral part of the learning process and it is expected that every student makes a good effort in this regard.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an

extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Course Assignments, Deadlines, and Grade Breakdown

1. Discussion participation 15%

Half of this grade will be based on in-class discussions of the readings and also include participation in small group work or in pairs.

2. Written assignment 15%

For this first written assignment, you are to address the question 'What is policy analysis?'. Please reflect on the different ways in which policy analysis is conducted and for what purpose. Compare and contrast between two to three different approaches or methods of policy analysis and their strengths and weaknesses. Please reference your arguments based on readings. Your paper must be based on a minimum of 3 references. Two of these references must be from the syllabus.

The paper must be between 1,000 to 1,250 words (not including the bibliography) in 1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman. Please use the Chicago Style of Referencing.

*Please conduct research for this assignment. This is not an opinion piece.

Written assignment deadline: Friday, 6 February 2026 by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

3. Policy memo 15%

Please choose one policy problem and present points on two policy options weighing their opportunities/benefits and challenges/costs. One of these policies will be recommended and expanded on as the best policy option based on analysis and evidence.

The policy memo must be written from the perspective of a particular actor chosen from the following list:

- Staff for a member of parliament or congress or political party

- Industry lobby group
- Nongovernmental campaign organization
- Trade union representative
- A different actor (based on discussion with and approval of seminar leader)

This means you are a policy analyst working for or assisting one of these organizations and you are writing a policy memo to recommend a particular policy for your organization to present, lobby or campaign on in government.

The purpose of a policy memo is to briefly and succinctly inform a specific audience about a policy issue or policy problem and arguments for a specific policy recommendation.

The memo must include the following sections:

- Address the memo specifically to an actor/organization chosen from the list above
- 'Introduction' or 'Background' section briefly presenting the policy issue or policy problem.
IMPORTANT NOTE: the policy issue or problem is NOT the policy. It is a problem that occurs in society in the real world for which a policy is created to solve or address.
- Policy options section. Present 2 different policy options to address the policy issue or policy problem
- Policy recommendation section. Discuss and elaborate on the recommended policy option. Present academic concepts and arguments for why or for what reasons this is the best policy option for dealing with the policy issue or solving the policy problem. For example, what type of policy tool is it and what are the assumptions behind why it works? What target population does the policy address? What other theories help us understand why it would lead to the desired changes? Briefly compare and contrast with the non-recommended policy option with reasons why the recommended policy option is more superior or better. Also, address at least one weakness of the policy being recommended and if possible, provide a solution for mitigating it. This section is quite important, hence, put more effort into it.

Tips:

- You can use figures, graphs, and tables (unless excessive, they will not be included in the word count)
- Bullet points can help get points across quicker and also in a more succinct manner
- Always write in COMPLETE SENTENCES including bullet points
- Convince the reader of your arguments by citing papers, studies, research, news items, etc.

* This is an academic assignment and not one that is supposed to simulate a real-world policy memo. I will be grading this assignment.

**Please conduct research, including academic sources, for this assignment. This is not an opinion piece.

The policy memo must be between 1,000 to 1,250 words (not including the bibliography) in 1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman. Please use the Chicago Style of Referencing.

Policy memo deadline: Friday 10 April 2026 by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

3. Individual presentation 10%

Please make a 5-to-7-minute presentation on your policy research topic (also refer to instructions for the Policy Research Paper for more guidance). There will be a 5-minute discussion following your presentation. I will provide written feedback separately via email to each student.

In order to make sure everyone has sufficient time for their presentations, no one will be allowed to present longer than 10 minutes. Please practice ahead of time to make sure you do not go over 10 minutes.

The aim of this assignment is to prepare you for your policy research paper. Please use this as a good opportunity to receive feedback on your PRELIMINARY research idea for the policy research paper.

Please present on the following topics, which you can use as a format or outline for your presentation. This loosely corresponds to the sections of your policy research paper, which you can refer to for more guidance.

1. Introduce the policy problem or policy issue
2. Provide some background and context to the policy problem and policy issue
3. Present the public policy solution for the policy problem you will analyze and the target population it addresses. Discuss whether you will be arguing for or against this public policy solution and two to three reasons why.
4. Include at least one theoretical or conceptual argument that helps explain why the policy you are analyzing works or does not work in addressing or solving the problem.

**If you will be using a power point presentation, please email it to me in advance.

Individual presentations will be scheduled for week 13. Students are required to submit an abstract of their paper via email to the instructor, following the four core components outlined above. The abstract should be no more than 200 words. The abstract does not need to provide a complete or final overview of the paper; it can present preliminary work. Its purpose is to help you refine your paper topics.

Final Paper Abstract Submission: Day before your presentation in Google Classrooms.

Individual Presentations: Wednesday 29 April 2026 in class.

4. Policy research paper 45%

The aim of the policy research paper is to present, discuss, and analyze a policy problem and a public policy solution to solve the problem resulting in arguments for or against the public policy solution.

IMPORTANT NOTE: the policy issue or problem is NOT the policy. It is a problem that occurs in society in the real world for which a policy is created to solve or address.

The research paper MUST address all of the following, which correspond to the different sections of the policy research paper:

1. INTRODUCTION section: Introduce a policy problem or policy issue. As an introduction section, please also include a synopsis of the paper.
2. BACKGROUND section: Discuss the background and context to the policy problem or policy issue. This can include a number of factors which helps us understand the reasons behind and the features of the policy problem or policy issue. This can be factors which are historical, geographical or location-specific, social, economic, political or geo-political, event-specific, etc. For a good and comprehensive discussion, a combination of factors should be presented – as policy problems or policy issues are complex.
3. ANALYSIS section: Discuss ONE public policy solution at the local, national or global scale (law, regulation, international treaty, etc.) that IS CURRENTLY or HAS BEEN USED to deal with the policy problem or policy issue. Discuss its challenges and opportunities and the reasons behind them.

There are 2 options of argumentation you must choose for this section:

- a) If you are arguing IN FAVOR of the public policy solution, then your discussion here should provide convincing arguments and evidence for why you support the public policy solution. This requires convincingly USING THEORIES AND CONCEPTS to discuss WHY THE POLICY WORKS in solving or addressing the problem. Also, discuss one alternative policy which have failed (or would fail) and why – this would be done in a way to support your discussion in favor of the policy you are arguing for. *This is an important section of your policy research paper, so please put more effort here.*
- b) If you are arguing AGAINST the public policy solution, then your discussion here should provide convincing arguments and evidence to back up why the public policy solution is not or was not helpful or is failing or has failed. This requires convincingly USING THEORIES AND CONCEPTS to discuss WHY THE POLICY DOES NOT WORK in solving or addressing the problem. Also, discuss one alternative policy which is superior and why – this would be done in a way to support your discussion against the policy you are arguing against. *This is an important section of your policy research paper, so please put more effort here.*

4. CONCLUSION section: This is a summary of your research paper, recapping the main points from each section.

*For a good grade, your paper must lean heavily on academic concepts, ideas, and theories. We have read and discussed many of them in class, please refer to them and more. Please conduct research using academic papers, such as academic journals, academic books, and academic reports.

** If you would like to modify your approach, please come see me in advance to discuss and receive approval for an exception to these instructions

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER:

- This is a research paper, which means please do research for it. Start early!
- Arguments, in order to be strong and convincing, must be backed up with academic concepts, ideas and/or theories and evidence.
- Write clearly and logically.
- Please proofread your paper before turning it in to ensure there are no awkward sentences, grammatical errors, unfinished sentences, and spelling errors.
- Please come see me during office hours if you have ANY questions (for example on the topic, research, formulating arguments, conducting analysis, etc.) or would like to discuss your plans and progress on the paper.

The policy research paper must be between 3,000 to 3,500 words (not including the bibliography) in 1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman. Please use the Chicago Style of Referencing.

Research paper deadline: Friday 15 May 2026, by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Assignments more than 24 hours late will not be accepted. Letters of accommodations from students must be shared with me at the start of the semester.

Weekly Themes and Readings

Week 1: What is public policy and policy analysis?

Wednesday, 28 January

We will begin the semester with an introduction to the origins of public policymaking and its aims and objectives.

Hassel, A. and Wegrich, K. (2022) Chapter 1 – ‘Public Policy’, in *How to do Public Policy*.

Friday, 30 January

Mintrom, M. and Williams, C. (2012) 'Public policy debate and the rise of policy analysis', in Routledge Handbook of Public Policy.

Werner Jann and Kai Wegrich, 'Theories of the Policy Cycle' in Frank Fischer, Gerald J Miller and Mara S Sidney, Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods, CRC Press, 2007

Week 2: How do we understand policy problems? Understanding social constructionism and intersectionality in policy analysis

The first step to policymaking is understanding the policy problem – the problem definition stage. How societal problems are defined are contingent on a variety of factors, which are themselves theorized. We will discuss the limits and opportunities of the different theories presented.

Wednesday, 4 February

Lister, R. (2010) 'What's the problem? Social constructionism', Chapter 5 in *Understanding Theories and Concepts in Social Policy*, Policy Press.

Schneider, A., Ingram, S., and DeLeon, P. (2007) Social construction and policy design, Chapter 4 in *Theories of the Policy Process*, Westview Press.

Friday, 6 February

Manuel, T. (2006) 'Envisioning the Possibilities for a Good Life: Exploring the Public Policy Implications of Intersectionality Theory', *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 28:3-4, 173-203.

Bishwakarma, et. a. (2007) 'Educating Dalit Women: Beyond a One-Dimensional Policy Formulation', *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association of the Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, 27: 1.

Supplementary reading: Hankivsky, O. et al. (2012) Intersectionality-based policy analysis, in An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis Framework, Simon Fraser University.

Week 3: Picking the right policy: Policy design and instruments

There are a variety of classifications of policy instruments or tools. One classification distinguishes policies as regulatory instruments which permit or forbid certain behaviors through sanctions, financial based policies which (dis)incentivize behaviors through monetary rewards or by increasing costs, informational

based instruments to raise awareness, and organizational arrangements for the provision of services and goods.

Wednesday, 11 February

Schneider, A. and Ingram, S. (1990) Behavioral assumptions of policy tools, *The Journal of Politics*, 52 (2): 510-529.

Friday, 13 February

Hassel and Wegrich (2022) How to Choose and Design Policy Instruments, Chapter 4 in *How to do Public Policy*.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Public Policies (excerpt pp. 33-49), in Cristoph Knill and Jale Tosun, Public Policy A New Introduction, 2nd Edition, Palgrave and Red Globe Press, 2022.

Week 4: Nudges as public policy: What it is and its critiques

This week, we will discuss these and a fairly new and innovative policy instrument -- 'nudges'. What are they? Are they really a 'new' policy instrument? What are its critiques about?

Wednesday, 18 February

Sunstein, C.R. (2014) 'Nudging: A Very Short Guide', *Harvard University*.

Friday, 20 February

Feitsma, J. (2019) "Debating the behavioural state" in *Inside the Behavioral State*, University of Utrecht Doctoral Study.

Week 5: Film

Wednesday, 25 February and 26 February

Merchants of Doubt film

Week 6: Policy analysis methods

Decisions on policies are based on knowledge and evidence, which are important and contested fields in public policy analysis and research. This week begins a two-part discussion on how policy choices are made. This week we will consider qualitative policy analysis methods and mixed methods which combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. Economic policy analysis, such as cost-benefit analysis and impact assessments, have been dominant in policy analysis. We will discuss and critique these methods as well.

Wednesday, 4 March

Hassel, A. and Wegrich, K. (2022) How to Evaluate Policies, Chapter 6 in *How to do Public Policy*.

Yanow, D. 2019. 'Qualitative-interpretative methods in policy research', in Fischer, F. and Miller, G. (eds.) *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods*, Routledge.

Friday, 6 March

Weiss, C.H. and Birckmayer, J. (2006) 'Social experimentation for public policy', Chapter 39 in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford University Press.

Vining, A. R. and Weimer, D. L. (2009) Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Social Policies, Chapter 1 in *Investing in the Disadvantaged: Assessing the Benefits and Costs of Social Policies*, Georgetown University Press.

Supplementary reading:

Sen, A. (2000) 'The Discipline of Cost-Benefit Analysis', *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 29 (2): 931-952.

Week 7: Policy Implementation and Failure

Policy implementation is considered 'the missing link' between policy making and policy outcomes. The implementation of policies is a complex process that involves numerous actors, objectives, levels of governance, time constraints, and intermediary decision points. All these have impact on policy outcomes: sometimes, no matter how good the design, the outcomes may be underwhelming. This week we try to understand why this might be the case.

Wednesday, 11 March

J. Pressman and A. W. Wildavsky, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland*, University of California Press, 1984, Chapter 5.

Further Reading (optional): P. Dunleavy, "Policy Disasters: Explaining the UK's Record", *Public Policy and Administration*, 10:2 (1995)

Friday, 13 March

Hill, Michael. 2013. Chapter 9. Implementation: an overview. In *The Public Policy Process*, Sixth edition. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Week 7: Policy evaluation

Policy evaluation aims to understand whether policies are or have been implemented and how successful they are or have been at achieving their goals and objectives. Policy evaluation can be done to understand the outcomes of policies or as part of monitoring their implementation. Evaluation hinges on evidence. We will consider different types of data that are used as evidence as well as the politics behind them this and next week.

Wednesday, 18 March

Pankhurst, J. (2017) 'Evidence-based policymaking: an important first step and the need to take the next', Chapter 2 in *The Politics of Evidence: From evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence*, Routledge.

Friday, 20 March

Bovens, M., Hart, P., and Kuipers, S. 2008. 'The Politics of Policy Evaluation', in Goodin, R.E., Michael, M., and Rein, M. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, Oxford University Press.

Uri Gneezy and Aldo Rustichini, 'A fine is a price', *Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January 2000), pp. 1-17.

Week 8: Policy case study #1

We will read, discuss, and analyze three policy case studies developed by Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. You will engage in small group exercises to explore questions surrounding policy problems, solutions, analysis and unintended consequences.

Wednesday, 25 March and Friday, 27 March

Harvard Kennedy School Case Study: A Rising Storm: Eric Garner and the Explosive Controversy over Race and Policing

SPRING BREAK

Wednesday 1 April and Friday 3 April

Week 9: Guest lecture

Wednesday, 8 April

Readings to be determined

Friday, 10 April

Week 10: Innovations in policy evaluation – limits and opportunities

Big data and artificial intelligence (the use of algorithms or machine learning) has become the next generation of tools of policy evaluation and implementation. We will learn and discuss these new tools and their trade-offs between efficiency and biases.

Wednesday, 15 April

Schintler, L.A. and Kulkarni, R. 2014. 'Big Data for Policy', *Review of Policy Research*, 31: 343-348.

Eubanks, V. 2018. "A child abuse prediction model fails poor families", *WIRED*.

Friday, 17 April

Radiya-Dixit, E. and Djanegara, N. T. (2023) 'Race and Surveillance Brief', Stanford Center for Comparative Studies in Race & Ethnicity.

Margetts, H. and Dorobantu, C. (2019) 'Rethink government with AI', *Nature*, 568: 163 - 165.

Week 13: Policy case study #2

Wednesday, 22 April and Friday, 24 April

Harvard Kennedy School Case Study "No Trust in Miracles": Leading through a water crisis in Cape Town

Week 14: Individual presentations

Wednesday, 29 April

Week 15: Policy case study #3 and wrapping up

Wednesday, 6 May and Friday, 8 May

Harvard Kennedy School Case Study: ‘Wir Schaffen Das: Angela Merkel and Germany’s response to the refugee crisis in Europe’.

Wrapping up
