

PS185 POLICY ANALYSIS (GROUP A)

Seminar Leader: Gale Raj
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Office Hours: By appointment
Course Times: Wednesdays and Fridays 10:45am to 12:15pm
Location: W16, Seminar Room 9

Course Description

This course introduces students to policy analysis of public policies. Public policies are established by governments to change behaviors of individuals and groups of people. Public policies are laws, regulations, and the provision of services, goods and information. Public policies impact unevenly outcomes for individuals, families, communities, industries, and the environment.

As an introductory course we will spend time learning about and discussing foundational concepts for evaluating public policies to better understand their benefits and challenges, and importantly, from theoretical and conceptual perspectives on why and how policies improve the lives of some and worsen them for others. This includes understanding how people and groups are socially constructed to fit in a spectrum of deserving and undeserving and the various biases which inform policymaking and policy analysis.

The class will be structured with discussions of real-world public policies, informal group work to analyze policy case studies from different countries, topics and contexts. A major assignment is a final research paper analyzing a specific problem and public policy solutions.

With this course, students will gain an understanding of a holistic approach to understanding public policies and policy analysis, both empirically, conceptually and theoretically. Students will also learn how to communicate about societal problems and public policy 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

All readings will be uploaded in Google Classrooms.

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 for example 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 discuss current issues concerning public policies and policy analysis in every class. 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 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 group discussions or in 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.

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.

Course Assignments, Deadlines, and Grade Breakdown

1. Discussion participation

15%

This grade will be based on in-class discussions of the readings and 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 to you?'. 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, 25 September 2026 by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

3. Policy memo

15%

Please choose one problem and present two different policies to address the problem, weighing their opportunities/benefits and challenges/costs, and recommending one of them with an expanded discussion on why it is the better policy option based on analysis and evidence.

The policy memo must be written from the perspective of a particular actor (real or fictitious), such as:

- Staff for a member of parliament or congress or political party
- Industry lobby group

- Nongovernmental campaign organization
- Trade union representative
- Concerned person from the community/group
- A different actor (based on discussion with and approval)

The policy memo must also be addressed to a person or organization that is involved in policy analysis or policymaking. It can be real or fictitious.

Remember, the purpose of a policy memo is to briefly and succinctly inform a specific audience about a problem and arguments for a specific policy recommendation.

Please strictly follow these instructions for how to write the memo. You must include all of the following sections:

At the top of the memo, include who the memo is addressed to, who it is written by, and a subject line. It should look like this:

To:

From:

Subject:

Section 1. 'Introduction'

Briefly describe the problem (to which a policy is needed to address). This should be brief and around 1/2 to 2/3 of a page.

Section 2. Policy options

Briefly write two different policies that would address the problem. This must be brief. One to two sentences per policy is sufficient.

Section 3: Policy recommendation

State which of the two policy options you are recommending and explain why this is the better choice.

This will be the longest section of the policy memo. It will also be the most important section of the memo in terms of academic quality. Please make sure you address the following points in this section:

- ✓ The type of policy tool it is
- ✓ Assumptions for why it works.
- ✓ The direct and indirect target populations the policy impacts. This should also include points on intersectionality and socially constructed ideas of deserving/undeserving
- ✓ Use academic concepts and theories, from the syllabus and/or your own reading and research, to support your arguments, reasoning and discussion.
- ✓ Briefly compare and contrast your recommended policy with the one that was not recommended by giving reasons why the recommended policy is more superior or better.
- ✓ Discuss one weakness of the recommended policy (this cannot be because it is too costly) and provide a solution for mitigating it.

Tips:

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

**Please do 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 Harvard Style of Referencing.

Policy memo deadline: Friday 16 October 2026 by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

4. Individual presentation in preparation for research paper 10%

Please make a 5-to-7-minute presentation on your preliminary research for your final paper (also refer to instructions for the Policy Research Paper for more guidance). A 5-10 minute question and answer session will follow your presentation. You can use powerpoint slides or not.

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.

I will provide verbal feedback on your presentation, so please take notes, and follow-up with an in-person meeting with me during office hours.

Please include the following in your presentation:

- ✓ The problem you will be focusing on for your policy recommendation.
- ✓ Some background information and context about the problem.
- ✓ The policy you have chosen to address the problem. State what type of policy tool it is and which target population it addresses.
- ✓ Give two to three reasons why you will be arguing for or against this policy.
- ✓ At least one theoretical or conceptual argument that explains why the policy works or does not work in addressing 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 12.

5. Research paper 45%

The aim of the research paper is to present, discuss, and analyze a problem and a policy to address it. You must present an analysis FOR or AGAINST the policy and why based on theoretical/conceptual reasoning and empirical evidence.

The research paper MUST include all of the following sections:

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 do more reading outside of the syllabus.

Please conduct research using academic papers, such as academic journals, academic books, and academic reports.

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 18 December 2026, by 11:59pm via Google Classrooms.

Weekly Themes and Readings

Week 1: Introduction to study of public policy and policy analysis

Wednesday, 2 September

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

Friday, 4 September

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

Week 2: Public policies and neoliberal ideology

Wednesday, 9 September

Wacquant, L. (2009). Social Insecurity and the Punitive Upsurge. In *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*

Friday, 11 September

Wacquant, L. (2009). The Scholarly Myths of the New Law-and-Order Reason. In *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*

Week 3: Social constructionism and understanding policy problems

Wednesday, 16 September

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

Alphonso, G. M. (2021) Political-economic roots of coercion-slavery, neoliberalism, and the racial family policy logic of child and social welfare, *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, 11 (3).

Friday, 18 September

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

Week 4: Intersectionality and public policy I

Wednesday, 23 September

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.

Friday, 25 September

Hankivsky, O., & Cormier, R. (2011). Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(1)

Week 5: Intersectionality and public policy II

Wednesday, 30 September

Rujumba, J. and Kwiringira, J. (2019) 'If They Beat You and Your Children Have Eaten, That Is Fine...' Intersections of Poverty, Livelihoods and Violence Against Women and Girls in the Karamoja Region, Uganda", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality and Public Policy*

Friday, 2 October

Chaudhuri, M., Thimm, V. and Mahler, S.J. (2019) "Scaling Educational Policy and Practice Intersectionally: Historical and Contemporary Cases from South and Southeast Asia", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality and Public Policy*

Week 6: Policy tools and instruments

Wednesday, 7 October

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

Friday, 9 October

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

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

Week 7: Film

Wednesday, 14 October and Friday, 16 October

Merchants of Doubt film

FALL BREAK

Wednesday, 21 October and Friday 23, October

Week 8: Policy analysis methods

Wednesday, 28 October

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, 30 October

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.

Week 9: Policy evaluation

Wednesday, 4 November

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*

Friday, 6 November

Bovens, M., Hart, P., and Kuipers, S. 2008. 'The Politics of Policy Evaluation' in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*

Week 10: Policy case study #1

We will read, discuss, and analyze two 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, 11 November and Friday, 13 November

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

Week 11: Guest lecture

Wednesday, 18 November

Friday, 20 November

Week 12: Individual presentations

Wednesday, 25 November and Friday 27, November

Policy case study #2

Wednesday, 2 December and Friday, 4 December

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

Week 13: Wrapping up

Wednesday, 9 December

Readings to be determined

Friday, 11 December

Readings to be determined
