2013

Syllabus: Experiential Reflections on Public Policy, with a Spotlight on Sustainability

Marissa Carrere
University of Massachusetts - Amherst

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UWW330 Experiential Reflections on Public Policy, with a Spotlight on Sustainability
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
Fall 2013
This is an online class with no live sessions

Instructor: Marissa Carrere   **Contact: mcarrere@english.umass.edu**

Required Text

Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, *Policy Design for Democracy* (1997)

> Students are responsible to obtain copies of the book by Week 3 of the course. New copies are available on Amazon.com (currently listed at $12.40). Any additional readings will be posted on the website.

Course Description:

In this course, students will study a theoretical model for understanding and analyzing public policy, and they will apply this model to their professional and life experience. This course focuses on the application of theoretical material to narrative accounts of a student's experience, with the goal of informing experience through interdisciplinary research. With a collaborative work environment and through regular small-group and full-class discussions, this course critically investigates real world public policy issues.

> This course can satisfy the Integrative Experience general education requirement.
> Integrative Experience (IE) courses address the following three criteria:
>
> > 1. Providing a structured, credited context for students to reflect on and to integrate their learning and experience from the broad exposure in their General Education courses and the focus in their major.
> > 2. Providing students with the opportunity to practice General Education learning objectives such as oral communication, collaboration, critical thinking and interdisciplinary perspective-taking, at a more advanced level.
> > 3. Offering students a shared learning experience for applying their prior learning to new situations, challenging questions, and real-world problems.

Course Overview

"Public Policy" as a term has become a bit mystified; it can seem like some alien process occurring in bureaucratic chambers far, far away from our everyday lives. Of course, this is not the case. Nearly every facet of our lives—including our professional work as well as activities within our home

communities—reflect the pervasive and often intimate influence of public policy. Policies established by governments at all levels (national, state, and local) guide and determine what happens in our lives. Sometimes we are vaguely aware of the public policies that are operating in the background. Sometimes we may possess personal expertise in a policy area through our work or chosen voluntary effort. Often we may be completely in the dark about an area of policy that may be affecting our lives or our community. This course will focus on developing students' awareness of the public policies that shape their experience, and providing the student with a theoretical framework to analyze and better understand public policy. Students will identify a specific law, (national, state or local) that they have encountered in their personal experience. A theoretical model of policy analysis will be introduced in the class through readings and case studies. The model will break down policy design into the constituent elements of: goals and problems to be solved, agents and implementation structures, rules and tools, rationales and assumptions. In addition the model will introduce how policy benefits and burdens are influenced by the social construction of the intended target populations, as perceived by policy makers. Students will then use this theoretical model to perform a case study, researching and analyzing the particular law they have identified.

Course Goals

- Understand the theoretical framework. Students investigate a model of public policy analysis developed by Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram. Through written assignments, case studies and online discussion, students will demonstrate an understanding of this theoretical framework.
- Research policy materials. Students will utilize library and internet resources to research primary and secondary materials related to their chosen area of policy. Results of this research will be demonstrated by inclusion in their written submissions.
- Focus on personal experience. Students will identify an area of public policy that has impacted their own lives, through work, community, or personal experience. Students will demonstrate, through written work and discussion, their ability to critically apply the theoretical model in an analysis of their chosen area of policy.

Sustainability Spotlight

This semester, our course is privileged to be part of The Sustainability Curriculum Initiative, established by the UMass Du Bois library. The Sustainability Curriculum Initiative has twofold goals for its participants here at UMass: to increase our involvement in teaching/learning, researching, and practicing environmental sustainability, and to increase students' information literacy through use of the library's online databases.

We will cap our course with a research project in which students will consider a sustainability policy issue that is related to their chosen policy area. For some students, the connection might be very obvious. For instance, a student work in the trucking industry and writing about policy related to commercial motor vehicle licensing, might do a spotlight project on commercial trucking emissions policy. For some students, the connection might not be so obvious, and will require a little creativity. However, it stands to reason that *all* elements of our professional or personal lives are in some way affected by environmental concerns.

If you are a person who happens to have an academic, career, or personal interest in environmental issues, and it would be valuable to you choose a sustainability-related policy for your semester-long Case Study, you are welcome and encouraged to do so. In that case, you and I can speak individually

so I can put you in touch with our liaison librarian—our class has access to sustainability-specialized librarians, which might be helpful to you prior to the Spotlight Project.

Sustainability Spotlight Goals

- To think critically about sustainability and its intersections with students' particular academic or professional fields
- To think critically about sustainability in relation to policymaking
- To introduce students to the library's research resources and to help them become increasingly fluent in information literacy.
- To think creatively and innovatively about real world challenges and solutions in the field of sustainability, as students apply the policy elements they have learned about this semester to a practical problem

Course Requirements

This course asks you to be an active, thoughtful, respectful participant in our intellectual community, as we explore the parts and implications of public policy. We will spend the length of the course working together as a community—sharing insights and perspectives, working through intellectual problems, and challenging each other to become keener, more sensitive thinkers about public policy.

Your grade will be determined by the quality of your participation in each of the following categories:

Reading and Research:

> Although the reading assignments from week to week are relatively short, they are difficult and they will need close-reading and re-reading. You should use the posted materials and notes to help you work through any challenging portions of the reading. In addition, it is expected that you will work on researching your chosen area of policy, which will entail additional time each week. Some materials and resources will be posted on the web site to help in this research. The instructor will be available to guide you through the research process, as you find necessary.

Discussion

> The essential interaction in this course will take place in online discussions, and you should plan on devoting time (nearly) every week to these discussions. These discussions will involve reflection on the readings of that week, or will provide a space to share ideas about our case studies. It is essential that you review the posted "Guidelines for Online Discussion" to understand the expectations for this aspect of the course, and how the weekly discussion will be graded. Collaborative learning occurs through group discussion, and your understanding of the materials in this course can most effectively be improved through these weekly discussions.

Case Study: In Four Parts

To demonstrate understanding and knowledge of the framework and policy design, you will undertake a policy case study. The case study is divided into four discrete essays, each focusing on a particular goal.

Essay 1: Context of the policy
>	The objective for this assignment is to select and introduce a policy area (law, regulations, or court case) that you have encountered in your work, your personal life, or in your community. You will narrate your experience with this policy, telling the reader all you know experientially about the policy, in terms of context, background, history, anecdotal evidence, popular opinion etc. You will also begin to place this policy in the context of the framework we discover in Schneider and Ingram's Introduction.

Essay 2: Design Elements
>	The second assignment will follow our study of a theoretical model of policy design, which breaks policy down into elements, such as goals and problems to be solved, basic assumptions, tools and rules, and agents and implementation. You will use that model as a basis to explicate and analyze your chosen policy area.

Essay 3: Target Populations
>	The third assignment will build upon additional theoretical considerations around the social construction of target populations. You will develop further analysis of your chosen policy area with respect to that issue.

Essay 4: Sustainability Spotlight

>	Following introductory work with the Sustainability Research Databases available through the UMass Libraries, this assignment asks you to locate scholarly articles that address a sustainability issue that is somehow related to your policy area. After gathering and assessing your research, you will imaginatively put yourself in the position of a policymaker. What hypothetical policy would you propose in order to begin to address the sustainability issue described in the article? Drawing on the design elements we've investigated in this class, you will discuss how you would design a law. What would goal would be, the rationale of the goal, the rules, and the tools you might include in the law, including possible sanctions or incentives? Discuss the assumptions behind this hypothetical law—either scientific or normative. What would be the target populations, and how would they be benefitted or burdened? How would you frame this proposal to the public, in order to gain their support? What would you emphasize? What might be potential problems you would face in trying to design or pass this law?

Timeliness

Late work disrupts the flow of the course and thus the value of the learning experience. So every effort should be made to do advanced work and not get caught when the inevitable unexpected occurs. This is easier said than done as each week is a learning unit unto itself, so staying "tuned in" each week is key. You are, of course, welcome to submit work in advance of any deadline.

If there is illness or some other crisis that keeps you from being timely with the assignments then grace can be extended. However the key to grace is advanced communication (before the deadline) with the professor explaining the reason for late submission. Communication after the fact does not work. The instructor will decide if there can be an extension on the assignment.

Late Discussion posts will receive half-credit. Discussion posts will not be accepted more than 48 hours after the deadlines.

5% will be deducted for each 24 hours late for Case Study Essays.

Instructor Availability

Please know I am present and accessible as your instructor. I am available to answer your questions and I am excited to work with you individually, as you would like. I can be reached most easily by email at mcarrere@english.umass.edu. Also, I am available to meet with you for a real-time conversation: we can use the chat feature on this site, or we can plan to talk via Skype, cell phone, etc.

Should you at any point feel like you are falling behind or having difficulty with the course, contact me immediately so we can work together to develop a solution.

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 http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/

If you have any questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please contact me. I'm happy to work with you.