Date: Monday, February 20, 2017  
To: Policy Analysis Class  
From: Mark Carl Rom  
Topic: Draft Policy Analysis Course Syllabus

Introduction

How are we to decide which policy to choose? One answer is pure authority: the policy is simply what the Emperor decrees. A second is through democratic processes: our policies reflect the will of the people (or of those people with power in this process) as expressed in voting. A related option is through the bargaining among interests. Or through pure ideology, or tradition.

Perhaps there is a better way. Perhaps we can decide — or at least make recommendations concerning — which policy to adopt through analysis that systematically compares policies, through some process, by some criteria, to determine (or at least suggest) that Policy A is better than Policy B. Better, of course, is always in the eye of the beholder: policy analysis does not and cannot produce a scientific answer regarding what should be done. Policy analysis cannot determine whether we should always allow abortion, never allow it, or permit it in some circumstances. But policy analysis can allow public scrutiny as to the reasons why Policy A is preferable to Policy B. We may not all agree on the recommendations but, with luck, the processes we use to analyze policy can help decision makers judge which criteria are more important, which facts are more compelling, which policy is more feasible and acceptable, and what the various tradeoffs are in choosing one policy over another.

Why is it so hard to make the world a better place? What can we do to make it better? These two questions guide our exploration of public policy analysis. To make effective policies, we need to understand the fundamentals of public policy, of human behavior, of the various policy institutions (especially markets and governments), of the tools of analysis, and the process of policy analysis.
**Goals**

This course has two main goals.

The first is to develop your competence in understanding the various elements of public policy and public policy analysis.

The second is to build your skills in public policy analysis so that you can be a more effective analyst and advocate.

**Policy Analysis is Difficult**

Learning to develop appropriate quantitative skills to undertake sophisticated analysis requires three semesters (at least) of sustained study. Even then, difficult judgment calls remain in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the evidence.

Good policy analysis also requires substantial data-analytic skills, but these skills are only one component of high quality policy analysis. Political understandings are also crucial: Will the policies be politically acceptable? Will existing institutions be able to carry them out? Social and psychological skills are also essential. Will individuals behave as you anticipate? Will important stakeholders support these policies, or at least not object too strenuously? Resource limits constrain us: Do we have sufficient time and funds to conduct serious analysis, and to carry out what we hope?

Policy analysis will vary in the size and complexity of the project, the amount of relevant and useable data, and the time and resources available to the analysis. Some analysis must be done quickly (now!) under highly uncertain circumstances. In other cases, large research teams work months to analyze policy. In the policy world, you may well be required to “give me the analysis now” or “here’s your team, here are your resources, and get back to me in six months”.

So: let’s think big, but let’s also be realistic in what we can accomplish.

**My Philosophy and Class Strategies**

I am persuaded that lecturing is, in general, not the optimal way for students to master course material. Although I will at times be a ‘content provider’, we will typically use other learning strategies in the classroom. The classroom will often be ‘flipped’ — you will be expected to have absorbed the assigned readings before we come to class, and the class will focus on applications. We will emphasize in-class applications, sometimes individually and other times in groups. Peer learning has proven to be
effective, and will be used when possible. Appropriate preparation, and deep engagement in class, are expected.

Students often come to classes with the expectation that the professor will present, and professors are also typically comfortable with these expectations. This class may not always be so comfortable for us, and so we will proceed flexibly.

**Readings**

One book is required for this course:

Wheelan, Charles. *Introduction to Public Policy*. (NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011). You can buy it here or from any online vendor.

Other readings will be provided via links to online postings.

**Course Requirements and Student Assessment**

Your performance will be assessed through three components:

1. You will write a policy analysis memo providing a policy recommendation — if a policy change is desirable — regarding what should be done do to address the problem of your choice in Argentina or another country. This memo will be approximately 3000 words in which you define the problem, assemble evidence, construct alternatives, select criteria, project the outcomes, confront the tradeoffs, make the decision, and provide a recommendation. This can be done through a “criteria-alternatives matrix” or other methods (e.g., cost-benefit analysis). The memo is due at 6 p.m. on Friday, July 1; you must mail it to me at romm@georgetown.edu. The memo will be worth 60 percent of your final grade. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval in writing.

2. You will have a midterm exam/activity in which you will use the knowledge and tools developed during the first five days of class. The activity will be in-class. It is worth 15 percent of your final grade.

3. Your participation in class is worth 25 percent of your final grade. Participation will be assessed based on your attendance as well as your active and informed participation in class discussions. Your participation score will also include brief written activities assigned in class. These activities will not be graded for content, but your score will be based on thoughtful engagement. Each class will be worth 3
points: 1 point for attendance, 1 (or two points) for thoughtful engagement, and sometimes 1 point for the in-class assignment.

**Policy Analysis Topics: Your Final Project**

This is an introductory course: we have limited skills, many demands, and little time. I consequently **strongly** recommend that you avoid choosing highly complex topics for your final projects such as “what should policies be toward global climate change?” or “what is the ideal tax system?”

Instead, I **strongly** recommend that you focus on issues that are important but reasonably narrow and well-defined. The examples listed below are simplified but illustrative. You can choose to work on them if you wish, but you are free to consider other policies to analyze. [Note: These examples are generally from the US context, and are presented as normative questions, which cannot be answered definitely, so you might want to reframe them in terms of the merits and demerits, the costs and benefits, the goods and harms, that the different policy options entail.]

1. Should the US raise the full retirement raise for receiving Social Security benefits? If so, by how much, for whom, and how fast?
2. At what age(s), and for whom, and how often, should mammograms be considered preventive care under the Affordable Care Act?
3. Should PEPFAR change its policies regarding the allocation of funding or the use of funding to reduce the spread of HIV in Africa?
4. Should municipal water supplies be fluoridated?
5. Should the US require that foods containing GMO (“genetically modified organisms”) be labeled with that information?

**Schedule**

**1. Monday, May 15: What is Public Policy**

Overview and Introductions

What is Public Policy? Public Decision Making

Why is It So Hard to Make the World a Better Place?

**Readings:**
2. Tuesday, May 16: Why We Do What We Do

Understanding Behavior: Rational Man and Woman
Understanding Group Behavior: Collective Action
Evaluating Social Welfare

Readings:
Wheelan, Chapters 3-5

Activities:
Class projects involving:
Wheelan, Chapter 1, “Maximizing Human Potential: The First Arab Human Development Report” — Team 1
Wheelan, Chapter 3, “Childbearing as a Lesson in Rationality: Understanding Fertility” — Team 3
Wheelan, Chapter 4, “Collective Ruin: Why Do Some Societies Fail?” — Team 4
Wheelan, Chapter 5, “Animals, Infanticide and Ethics: Peter Singer’s Modern Utilitarianism” — Team 5

3. Wednesday, May 17: Markets and Government

The Political Process
The Market System
The Role of Government

Readings:
Wheelan, Chapters 6-8
Activities:
Class projects involving:
Wheelan, Chapter 6, “The Candidate with the Most Votes Loses: The Election of 2000” — Team 1
Wheelan, Chapter 7, “Why Are We So Rich? Understanding Productivity Growth (and Its Mysteries”) — Teams 2 and 4
Wheelan, Chapter 8, “The Drug Problem? Pharmaceutical Pricing” — Teams 3 and 5

4. Thursday, May 18: Tools for Analysis
Gathering and Measuring Information
Basic Data Analysis
Reading:
Wheelan, Chapters 9—11

Activities:
Class projects involving:
Wheelan, Chapter 9, “Women in Science? The Controversial Comments of Former Harvard President Larry Summers” — Teams 1, 2,
Wheelan, Chapter 10, “Is Screening for Lung Cancer a Good Thing? When Knowing More Can Be Bad for Your Health” — Teams 3 and 4
Wheelan, Chapter 11, “Multiple Regression” — Team 5

5. Friday, May 19: Making Policy
The Role of Institutions
Policy Design
Readings:
Wheelan, Chapters 14-15

Activities:
Wheelan, Chapter 14, “Global Governance: Reform at the United Nations” — Teams 1 and 3
Wheelan, Chapter 15, “The Elusive Goal of Education Reform: No Child Left Behind” — Teams 2, 4 and 5

Midterm exam/activity preparation

6. SATURDAY, MAY 20
Midterm Activity/Exam

7. MONDAY, MAY 22: THE CRITERIA-ALTERNATIVES MATRIX
Readings:
The Basics ("Weighted Decision Matrix" = CAM) (link)
Weighting the Criteria (link)

Activities:
Practice CAM

8. TUESDAY, MAY 23: COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS
Readings:
Wheelan, Chapter 12.
Gruber, Jonathan, “Cost-Benefit Analysis” (file)
Kotchen, Matthew. “Cost-Benefit Analysis”. (Link)
Shively, Gerald and Marta Galopin. “An Overview of Benefit-Cost Analysis.” (Link)

Activities:
Wheelan, Chapter 12, “The Grief Factor: Calculating the Compensation for the Families of 9/11 Victims” — Teams 1, 2 and 5
C-B Worksheet

9. WEDNESDAY, MAY 24: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND DISTRIBUTIONAL ANALYSIS
Readings:
Zsuzsa Varvasovszky and Ruairí Brugha, “How to Do (or Not to Do) A Stakeholder Analysis,” Health Policy and Planning, vol. 15, no. 3 (2000): 338-345 (Link)


Maya Gainer, "Defending the Environment at the Local Level - Dom Eliseu, Brazil, 2008–2014," Princeton - Innovations for Successful Societies, 2015” (Link)

CRS, "Budgetary and Distributional Effects of Adopting the Chained CPIP” (Link)

Jared Carbone, Richard Morgenstern, Roberton Williams III, and Dallas Burtraw, "Deficit Reduction and Carbon Taxes: Budgetary, Economic, and Distributional Impacts” (Link)

THURSDAY, MAY 25: NATIONAL HOLIDAY

FRIDAY, MAY 26: PROGRAM EVALUATION AND IMPACT ANALYSIS

Readings:

Wheelan, Public Policy, Chapter 13


Impact analyses from a student (Nausheen Khan) in a Georgetown Policy Analysis class in 2016 (Link)

Activities:

Wheelan, Chapter 13, “The Economics of Political Correctness: Does Abortion Lower Crime? — Teams 3 and 4

Final projects must be submitted to romm@georgetown.edu by Friday, June 30 at 6 p.m. local time