

Public Affairs (LAF/ PubAffr) 888, Spring 2013 Comparative and National Social Policy

Doing Policy Analysis: Sequential Paper Assignment Handout

I. Purpose

This assignment has two goals: first, to give you the opportunity to explore an issue, social problem, or social program of **your** choice and possible solutions to same in some depth. Second, to teach you how to use policy analysis, i.e. to guide you through a systematic policy analysis of your own: a description and analysis of the issue; specification and evaluation of the policy alternatives to deal with the problem; and an examination of the implementation issues involved with applying the policy solution to the problem.

This is also an exercise in making tradeoffs. You will develop criteria against which to evaluate policy alternatives and use those criteria to confront the tradeoffs and to formulate a recommendation. No one solution you design will meet all of your criteria if you have specified them correctly, so choices must be made.

The readings for the third week of class, particularly the Weimer and Vining readings, are designed to help you complete this exercise. The chapters you are reading are a short guidebook to doing policy analysis, as are others, e.g. Gene Bardach's book.

This paper is 60 percent of your grade, so please pay attention. Thanks.

II. Grading and Logistics

The policy analysis paper will be completed in **three parts**. Each section should be **no more than 8 pages** double spaced; **the entire paper will be 20 pages or less**. I will allow a couple of extra pages for recommendations and for references but plan on 20 pages. **Each section is worth 20 points—total paper is worth 60 points**

5 points	soundness of analysis (clarity, crispness, creativeness)
5 points	integration of materials (reflecting class and outside sources)
5 points	presentation (organization, clarity, professionalism)
5 points	coherence (reads as one logical, coherent paper; especially important at the end)

The paper should be written as an academic research paper with all statements of fact, data, and direct quotations properly cited. You may use any **standard citation** style. The paper should have **subheadings** and be clearly laid out (e.g., see papers in the reader for example—and ones written for previous classes that I will put online later in the semester).

The initial assignment, a one page outline and list of 5 to 10 readings to consult is due via email ***on or before February 5th***. We will then iterate until we are set on a topic and approach by **February 12th**. The first part of the paper will be handed in via email on **March 5th**, graded and returned by **March 19th**. You will then be allowed to revise the original part I and combine it with part II, and your grade may improve. The second part will include the revised part I *plus* the new second part due on **April 16th**. It will be reviewed, graded and commented upon by **April 23rd**. If you want me to reconsider the first part, you must revise part I, and add on the new part II to make one document on **April 16th**. The third part of the paper, allows revisions of part II (similar to the rules for part I revision above). Part III must

(SAVE ME)

include the entire paper, including your final revisions to parts I and II. It is due on or before **Monday, May 13th**. I will therefore read parts of the sequential papers multiple times and the final document once. Note that if the Penniman Prize cutoff date is before May 13th, and you want to be considered for same, you may have to speed up your paper to qualify.

III. Initial Assignment: Pick a Topic

Pick a paper you did last term; or your “senior honors thesis,” or something that you are really interested in. Topic could be a *similar* paper for another class but for this class it will be a rigorous piece of policy analysis. **Write a paragraph about the topic and what you want to address. Include a “barebones,” (5-10 item) bibliography. This is required by February 5th.** Some suggestions of topics are being distributed today (end of this assignment memo) and they may or may not be helpful to you. Feel free to email me or speak with me if you want to discuss.

IV. The Parts:

Part I: “Problem” Analysis (due March 5th)

This section describes the symptoms, magnitude, and consequences of the problem you are analyzing, and identifies one or more plausible goals for government intervention (i.e. goals for a policy or program). Your analysis should convince a thoughtful, analytic reader (such as myself) of the existence and importance of the problem, and inform the reader about alternative goals for public intervention. **Warning:** you should not approach this as an advocate (watch out for exaggerated claims, etc.) and you should not begin by identifying the lack of a policy or program as the problem. Nor should you start with a program itself. All programs (e.g., Headstart) deal with a problem or issue (e.g., early childhood education). Look at Weimer and Vining (in reader, week 3) for ideas. You should consider the question of market failure (as they suggest), but may find other analytic frameworks more helpful in identifying a problem in need of remediation (e.g. the impact of poverty on child development, family economic welfare, poverty among elderly, long term care etc.). Your analysis should address the following questions:

What are the symptoms of the problem? Who is affected? How?

What is the magnitude of the problem? What happens if the problem continues?

What are the plausible *goals* for intervention? (There are usually more than one)

HINT: Don’t “skimp” on Part I by putting it off; a good start to the SP is important.

Part II: “Solution” Analysis (due April 16th)

This section describes and evaluates the policy alternatives designed to help meet the policy goals. You are expected to identify three or more policy or program alternatives (one of which may be to “do nothing” or to “maintain the status quo”) and to identify and logically support criteria by which these alternatives can be compared. The alternatives can draw on both existing policies and programs, or propose new ones. The criteria for evaluating the alternatives should be logically related to the goals you identified in Section I, and should highlight the implicit tradeoffs, which arise when pursuing competing goals. Look at the GAO’s “Children’s Programs” reading to find some good leads on criteria. Again, you should use Weimer and Vining (particularly the idea of *multigoal analysis*), but you don’t need to replicate their cost/benefit analysis. In the end you should arrive at a matrix, which specifies 3 to 4 policy/program alternatives and the 4 to 6 criteria for comparing them. Then you use the available evidence to fill in the matrix and compare the alternatives. In some cases you may find “hard” evidence

(SAVE ME)

(e.g., analyses which measure or predict policy impact in terms of dollars, developmental gains, days in foster care, months on welfare, etc.). On other dimensions, you will not have access to “hard” evidence and will need to make logical inferences about the impact (e.g. by predicting the direction and size of the impact).

This section should address the following questions:

What are 3 to 4 principal policy alternatives? (Existing or possible)

What (4 to 6) criteria should be used to evaluate policy alternatives?

How can they be measured and implemented?

Based on the existing evidence, what outcomes do you predict for each alternative on the specified evaluation criteria?

Part III: Final Tune Up: “Implementation” Analysis and Recommendations (due Monday, May 13th, latest acceptable date, emailed to me)

Now that you know the problem, the goals, the alternatives, and advantages of each, your job in this segment is to think critically about the implementation realities; to make the paper logically consistent and well-presented; and to add an Executive Summary (handout to be provided). You will want to consider the political interests and how they are organized, along with the capacity (both public and private) to enact policy alternatives. And remember, new policies create new politics (as well as the reverse!) Finally, you must decide! Based on your analysis, in about one page, make a recommendation for action or, if there is no single “best” solution, compare the relative benefits of the top two alternatives. Questions to be addressed in this section include:

Who are the primary stakeholders? What are their interests?

What is the extent of agreement on goals? What are the potential conflicts?

What is the existing institutional capacity for implementing various alternatives?

What are the implications of alternate solutions for creating capacity?

Then, in 1 to 2 pages, and based on your analysis in Parts I to III, can you recommend one policy alternative, which is clearly superior to the others? If not, what are the most important tradeoffs to consider in the choice between the top two alternatives?

V. Ph.D. Student Special:

Doctoral students can decide either to (a) complete the assignment as above; or (b) write a more complete research paper on a selected topic in social policy. **Whichever you choose, please hand me a 1 to 2 page detailed outline of your paper and bibliography on February 5th.**

You will be expected to produce a better paper (i.e. standards are higher) and you may expand the paper to 30 pages *at most*. The relative weight given to this assignment will also increase—to 65 percent or more of the grade—for PhD students, with some shrinkage in the points for the other assignments segments of the course. The idea is for you to produce what, in time, should become a publishable research paper. Many have done this; you can too.