Carnegie Mellon University
Heinz College School of Public Policy and Management

90-730
METHODS OF POLICY ANALYSIS
Fall 2014 Syllabus

INSTRUCTOR: Harold D. Miller
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DAY/TIME/PLACE: Monday
9:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.
HBH 2503

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment only

PREREQUISITES
This course is designed for students at the Heinz College School of Public Policy and Management who have completed or exempted core courses in economic analysis, empirical methods, management science, financial analysis, organizational design, and policy and politics, or who have developed equivalent skills through work experience. In particular, a good understanding of economics and statistics, and an understanding of American government institutions and programs, will be required to understand most of the class discussions and readings. Students will need to utilize theories and methodologies from all of these disciplines in carrying out some of the assignments for the course.

DESCRIPTION
Successful policy analysis in real-world settings is far more than being able to collect data, run regressions, use optimization models, or identify market failures. It involves:

- anticipating issues that will need analysis;
- determining whether problems are real and what is causing them;
- defining and prioritizing the goals to be achieved in addressing the problems;
- developing creative alternatives to address the problems;
• carrying out accurate and complete analyses of the impacts of alternatives, including consideration of qualitative and political considerations;
• developing recommendations that can be implemented effectively;
• presenting analyses and recommendations both orally and in writing in ways that will actually influence decisions;
• resolving ethical dilemmas in conflicting roles; and
• in general, confidently applying critical thinking skills.

Rather than defer the development of these skills to the "school of hard knocks" (i.e., a real policy analysis job), this course is designed to teach you some key principles which can provide guidance in carrying out policy analyses, and also to provide some practical experience in applying those principles to realistic policy problems. The course will provide an understanding of how public policies are actually developed, analyzed, and implemented, and of the role of the policy analyst at each of these stages. The examples used will primarily be real-world cases, with all the complexity that implies.

Although this is called a "methods" course, the primary “methods” it will teach are strategies for thinking critically and creatively about public policy problems and solutions and ways for helping government leaders to make good decisions about public policies. Statistics, econometrics, operations research, financial analysis, and other sophisticated analytical tools are taught in depth in many other courses at the Heinz College and elsewhere at Carnegie Mellon; the Methods of Policy Analysis course is not intended to teach more of these types of methodologies. Instead, this course is focused on enabling students to apply appropriate analytic tools to real-world problems within real-world constraints on data and time.

During the course, you will learn by doing analyses yourself and by discussing how to analyze problems in class, rather than (merely) reading books or articles or listening to lectures. You will examine several different complex policy problems in depth, and you will jointly (through class discussion) and individually (through assignments) assess the importance and causes of these policy problems, develop alternative approaches for addressing them, evaluate the impacts of those alternatives, and grapple with the complex and often conflicting considerations involved in making recommendations for action. The specific policy problems have been selected to expose you to a range of substantive areas (e.g., criminal justice, economic development, education, energy, environmental protection, health, and human services) and to a range of generic types of public policies (e.g., regulations, entitlement programs, incentives, etc.). One of the goals of the course is to demonstrate that the ideas, techniques, and experience in one substantive area can provide important lessons for tackling problems in other, seemingly very different substantive areas, and consequently that there is a benefit to learning about and doing policy analyses on issues in diverse areas. Moreover, even if you intend to focus your career on policy issues in a particular area, the job market may not cooperate during the early stages of your career; consequently, many students have found it valuable to develop some knowledge and experience in policy areas beyond those in which they are primarily interested.

The course will also examine in depth each of the stages in the policy analysis process, beginning with the factors that determine which policy problems will be dealt with by policymakers, and continuing with some of the principles and pitfalls involved in analyzing problems,
developing and analyzing alternatives, and implementing policies and programs in a political environment. These discussions will draw on a wide range of policy examples and detailed cases that demonstrate the principles being discussed.

The topics discussed in class are limited to U.S. domestic policy issues. Foreign policy and defense policy issues are not discussed, although the approaches to analyzing problems taught in the class will be applicable to many aspects of these issues. Since the cases and assignments deal with U.S. domestic policy issues in some depth, you need to have a reasonable degree of familiarity with U.S. federal, state, and local government institutions and programs to understand the class discussions and successfully carry out the assignments. International students without this level of understanding may experience some difficulty and they will likely need to spend extra time doing background research on the topics.

Effective written and oral communications are essential skills for a policy analyst. The ability to clearly and convincingly convey the results of an analysis to a decision-maker can make the difference between whether an analysis has an impact on policy or is ignored. Poor grammar, confusing style, and typographical errors in written materials can do as much or more to reduce the credibility of an analysis as inaccuracies in calculation or improper use of quantitative methodologies. Consequently, in the assignments in the course, you will be expected to produce well-written memoranda and other materials. A significant portion of the grade for each assignment will be based on the quality of your writing and the thoroughness of your proofreading, and failing grades will be given to assignments that are difficult to understand or have been poorly proofread.

**OBJECTIVES**

If you successfully complete this course, you will:

1. Have an in-depth understanding of several complex policy issues in diverse substantive areas.
2. Understand the major steps in the policy analysis and development process, including (a) how and when policy issues become important, and (b) how policy initiatives are developed, analyzed, presented, implemented, evaluated, and terminated.
3. Understand a number of common pitfalls in policy analysis and how to avoid them;
4. Improve your ability to think critically about policy issues, think creatively and analytically about alternatives for addressing the issues, and think practically about successful implementation of recommended alternatives.
5. Develop experience in doing both quick turnaround and in-depth policy analyses on complex policy issues.
6. Improve your skills in communication of policy analyses to decision-makers.
7. Understand what it is like to work as a policy analyst in a government or civic agency and what techniques can be used to increase your effectiveness in that role.
TEXTBOOK/READINGS

There will be no textbook for this course. There are no textbooks on the market which provide a good treatment of the full range of material in the course, and it would be unreasonably expensive for you to buy a separate book for each segment of the course, even if there were a good book for each segment (and in some cases there is not). Instead, most of the key concepts will be conveyed through a combination of lecture and discussion in class. Consequently, attendance in class is essential.

In addition, a series of journal articles and book chapters will be distributed that specifically target the topics of the course. Some of these readings will be required, and class discussion or assignments will be based on their content; these readings will be distributed before the relevant segment of the course. Some optional readings may also be distributed after the relevant segment of the course to reinforce or expand on topics in class. It is important that you read and understand required readings. Although you will not be tested on the specifics in these readings, you will be expected to understand and remember the basic ideas and principles that the readings convey, and to demonstrate your understanding of the readings during the discussions in class and through the assignments submitted. When specific readings are assigned for particular class sessions, you should plan to complete the readings prior to class and be prepared for discussion about them in class.

In addition, since “policy analysis” is not just a task that is assigned to “policy analysts” working in government or civic agencies, but a set of critical thinking skills that can be applied to issues affecting citizens every day, you are encouraged to read a newspaper each day and think about current public policy issues using the techniques and perspectives being discussed in class. This will help enrich the discussion in class and reinforce the skills being developed through in-class discussions and assignments.

POLICIES ON ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend every class and be on time. The bulk of the material to be learned will come through the lectures and discussions in class, and the readings will not serve as an effective substitute. Therefore, missing a particular class means you will have missed the opportunity to learn the material covered in that class, and that could seriously impair your ability to understand the material in later classes and to successfully complete the assignments. If an illness or something urgent prevents you from attending a class, you should notify me of this promptly. I will not be able to repeat any material that you miss.

RESCHEDULING OF CLASSES

Although I will do my best to avoid it, if it is necessary for me to miss a scheduled class session due to out-of-town travel, I will announce it well in advance in class and by email. If the class needs to be rescheduled, I will make every effort to reschedule it at a time convenient for all students.
POLICIES ON TARDINESS, CELL PHONES, PAGERS, COMPUTERS, TAPE RECORDERS, FOOD AND DRINK, AND OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF CIVILITY AND RESPECT

Please come to class on time and stay for the full class session. Coming to class late or leaving early is disruptive to other students and means that you will miss important material. If you routinely arrive late or leave early, you will receive a reduced score for class participation. Being “on time” means being in the room and seated, at or before the scheduled class starting time. If something urgent requires you to be late or leave early on a particular day, please let me know in advance.

In the discussions in class, you will be encouraged to offer creative ideas. You will also be expected to treat the other students and their ideas with respect. You can disagree with another student’s ideas, explain why, and offer alternatives, but please do so in a respectful way. Disrespectful or offensive actions toward other students will not be tolerated and will result in a grade penalty or expulsion from the course.

Please do not engage in sidebar conversations with other students during class. If you have a question or an important point to make, you should make it publicly as part of the class discussion.

Cell phones, smart phones, iPads, music players, and other electronic devices not being used for purposes related to the class discussion should be turned off during class. Answering or talking on cell phones or sending text messages during class is strictly prohibited. If you are expecting an urgent call during the scheduled class time that cannot be taken at any other time, please notify me at the beginning of the class.

You may use computers, tablets, or other devices in class for note-taking, but for no other purpose unless explicitly authorized to do so. If you use an electronic device in class for other reasons, you may be prohibited from using it at all.

You may not use audio or video recorders or cameras in class without prior permission from me.

POLICIES ON CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

There will be several assignments as part of the course. These will be individual assignments, not group projects, so you will be expected to work independently and to submit written material that represents your own personal work effort.

If you do not understand an assignment, or you are having significant difficulty completing it, you are welcome and encouraged to seek help from me; just send me an email with your questions, or schedule a meeting with me after class or at another mutually convenient time. You are not permitted to seek assistance on graded assignments from other faculty or individuals who are not currently taking the course. If you do seek and receive such help, you will be
considered to have cheated, since the assignment is being represented as your own thinking and work.

    Unless it is specifically authorized in writing as part of a graded assignment, collaboration between you and another student is strictly prohibited and will be considered cheating.

    The most extreme form of cheating is directly copying another student’s work. However, since there will be no single “right” way to do the assignments in this course, any unusual similarities between the approaches to analysis or presentation in the assignments submitted by you and another student will also be taken as a rebuttable presumption that cheating has occurred by both you and the other student.

    If you attempt to help another student with an assignment, you may well be subject to a penalty for cheating, so please restrain your otherwise commendable impulses to help friends and colleagues. **If you have any doubt as to what type of assistance or collaboration is acceptable on a particular assignment, please ask me for guidance and wait for an answer before undertaking that assistance or collaboration.**

    If you use materials from a book, article, website, or other source as part of your analysis and fail to properly reference it or to acknowledge that it is not your own creation, you will be considered to have plagiarized that material.

    If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing in the preparation of materials that are evaluated for grading purposes, you will not only fail that assignment, but you will automatically be failed in the course, and you will be referred to the Dean for additional disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion from the school.

**ELECTRONIC AVAILABILITY OF MATERIALS**

    The major materials for the course will be posted on Carnegie Mellon’s Blackboard web-based course management system. The link is [http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard/](http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard/). Most classes will also have handouts that will not be posted on Blackboard.

**ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING**

    There will be no examinations in the course. Grading will be based on four components:

1. **Assignment 1** (20%)
2. **Assignment 2** (20%)
3. **Assignment 3/Policy Analysis Project** (40%)
4. **Class participation** (20%)
Assignments

In order to help you gain practical experience in carrying out a policy analysis and to demonstrate mastery of the principles in the course, you will be expected to complete three assignments during the course of the semester.

The third assignment (the “Policy Analysis Project”) will be more complex than the first two and will be due at the end of the semester. The work you carry out on this final assignment will give you an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to apply many of the principles and methods that you have learned throughout the course. The end product of this project is not "a term paper," but will involve the development of several realistic documents (for example, a memorandum describing your analysis and recommendations in a format appropriate for an elected official and a press release or Q&A describing the recommended proposal). It is important to note that the value of the work you do on the Policy Analysis Project can go beyond the grade for the course. A well-done project can be used to demonstrate to prospective employers the kind of policy analysis work that you can do. This can be a significant advantage when competing for policy analysis jobs. The Policy Analysis Project will not be a group project, and you will be responsible for carrying out the work on it yourself.

The grade for the Policy Analysis Project and for each of the first two assignments will be based on (1) the creativity, quality, and thoroughness of the analysis, (2) the extent to which your submission was responsive to the specifications of the assignment, (3) the extent to which you applied the principles and methods taught in class (where appropriate), and (4) the quality of the written presentation.

There will be no tolerance for sloppy work, and written documents are expected to be proofread carefully. Significant numbers of typographical errors or confusing sentences will typically result in a failing grade for the assignment.

All assignments should be submitted by email (addressed to Miller.Harold@GMail.com) no later than the date and time specified as the deadline for the assignment. (Assignments should be emailed to me directly; I will not use Blackboard for submission of assignments.) Do not assume that because you hit “send” that I received the assignment! If you do not receive a reply from me within a few hours indicating that I received the assignment, contact me to verify that I received it.

All documents you submit should be in Microsoft Office format (Word, Excel, and/or PowerPoint), not PDF or other formats. (If you want to also submit a document in PDF format to ensure proper formatting, that is fine, but please also submit the Word, Excel, and/or PowerPoint files that were used to generate it.) All assignments should contain sufficient supporting materials to enable me to determine how you reached your conclusions and to verify any calculations you made. Also, before emailing the documents, make sure that they print out in a professionally formatted manner. (A spreadsheet submitted merely as documentation of calculations need not be formatted, but if a spreadsheet is submitted as a table for a formal report, then it should be formatted to print in a way that would be acceptable as part of such a report.)

Late assignments will not be accepted (i.e., a failing grade will be given if an assignment is late). You should start working on each assignment as soon as you receive it in order to ensure
you have adequate time to complete it in a high-quality fashion, since all assignments will require a considerable amount of data analysis, creative thinking, writing, and editing.

No extensions on deadlines will be granted. Moreover, if you do a poor job on an assignment or fail to submit it on time, you will not be given an opportunity to do additional assignments to raise your grade. “Incomplete” (I) grades for the course will not be given, except in cases of documented severe illness or other extraordinary circumstances with approval from the Dean.

**In-Class Discussion**

In-class discussion will represent an essential part of the course, and you will be expected to prepare for this and participate actively. One of the key objectives of the course is to teach you how to think critically and rapidly about issues, and classroom participation is an important measure of your ability to do so. Participation will be evaluated primarily by the quality of your contributions, rather than the quantity of those contributions. In other words, a few thoughtful and creative ideas will carry more weight than many trivial or obvious points, and counterproductive participation (e.g., trying to dominate the discussion, going off on tangents, or belittling the ideas of other students) will carry negative weight.

You should prepare for each class by: (1) reading any articles assigned for class and being ready to comment on them and answer questions about them; (2) reading case discussion materials and being ready to offer recommendations about how a policy-maker should address the situation described in the case; and (3) reviewing your notes from the previous classes and being prepared to ask and answer questions about the topics covered in those classes. If for some reason you have been unable to prepare for class, you should let me know in advance.

Given the importance of participation, failure to attend classes without acceptable justification could result in a failing grade for the class participation component, and possibly a failing grade for the course. Moreover, as noted earlier, missing a particular class means you will fail to learn the material covered in that class, and that will have negative effects on your ability to master material in later classes and to successfully complete assignments.

You are welcome and encouraged to ask questions during class about anything you don’t understand, including topics covered in previous classes. The goal of the course is to improve your knowledge and skills, and the only way I will know that you don’t understand something is if you ask a question! Don’t worry about asking “dumb questions” – it is almost a certainty that if you don’t understand something, someone else doesn’t understand it either, and so any question you ask will usually be helpful to other students as well as yourself. Asking questions will never hurt your grade, but failing to ask a question about something you don’t understand could hurt your grade if your lack of understanding leads you to do something incorrectly on an assignment.

**FEEDBACK**

You are strongly encouraged to let me know — in person, by telephone, via e-mail, or through an anonymous note — at any time if there are ways that the course could be improved, if
you are having problems mastering the material, or if the course is not meeting your needs or expectations. While it may not be possible to address all concerns or solve all problems, I am committed to make improvements when possible and to explain why other concerns or suggestions cannot be addressed. There is no grade penalty for "complainers," and you are welcome and encouraged to come forward with any suggestions or criticisms. In addition, evaluation forms will be distributed at the middle and end of the course in order to get some specific feedback on how well the course is working. (These will be in addition to the official course evaluation form administered by the Heinz School.)

If you disagree with a grade you receive on an assignment or for the course as a whole, you are welcome to request that I re-evaluate the work you submitted and/or the computations I used in assigning the grade.

READINGS

(All readings will be available for download from Blackboard for registered students.)


SCHEDULE

The following is a tentative schedule of topics. The number of days devoted to a particular topic may be increased or decreased depending on class interest, etc. If there are significant changes in the schedule, a revised schedule will be distributed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
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| August 25 (#1) | Course Overview  
                          Introduction to Policy Analysis  
                          Case #1: Prescription Drugs and the Elderly  
                          Assignment #1 Distributed                       |
| September 1  | Labor Day Holiday – No Class                                            |
| September 8 (#2) | Entitlement Programs, Part 1                                             |
| September 8  | Add/Drop Deadline                                                       |
| September 15 (#3) | Complete Reading #1  
                          Agenda Setting in Public Policy                         |
| September 19 | Assignment #1 Due at 5:00 p.m.                                         |
| September 22 (#4) | Entitlement Programs, Part 2  
                          Analyzing Problems  
                          Case #2: State Support for Higher Education  
                          Case #3: Bias in Graduate Admissions                   |
| September 29 (#5) | Complete Reading #2  
                          Modeling Causes                                          |
| October 6 (#6) | Complete Reading #3  
                          Developing Alternatives  
                          State and Regional Economic Performance  
                          Assignment #2 Distributed                                |
| October 13 (#7) | Analyzing Impacts, Part 1  
                          Economic Impact Analysis                                  |
| October 20 (#8) | Complete Reading #4  
                          Analyzing Impacts, Part 2  
                          Subsidies and Incentives, Part 1                       |
<p>| October 20   | Mid-Semester Grades Due                                                 |
| October 24   | Assignment #2 Due at 5:00 p.m.                                         |</p>
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<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
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<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>Analysing Impacts, Part 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>(#9)</td>
<td>Subsidies and Incentives, Part 2</td>
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<td>Policy Analysis Project Distributed</td>
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<td>November 3</td>
<td>Sanctions and Resources</td>
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<td>(#10)</td>
<td>Case #4: Getting Tough on Gun Crime</td>
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<td>November 10</td>
<td><em>Complete Reading #5</em></td>
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<td>(#11)</td>
<td>Regulations and Interests</td>
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<td>Case #5: Improving Air Quality</td>
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<td>November 17</td>
<td><em>Complete Reading #6</em></td>
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<td>(#12)</td>
<td>Communicating Analysis</td>
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<td>Prevention vs. Treatment</td>
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<td>Case #6: Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td><em>Final Course Evaluation</em></td>
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<td>November 24</td>
<td><em>Complete Reading #7</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>(#13)</td>
<td>Implementation Analysis</td>
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<td>Case #7: Implementation Issues in Welfare Reform</td>
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<td>Until November 26</td>
<td><em>Opportunity to Submit</em></td>
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<td>Draft Policy Analysis Project for Feedback</td>
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<td>December 1</td>
<td>Ethical Issues in Policy Analysis</td>
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<td>(#14)</td>
<td>Case #8: What Would You Do?</td>
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<td>Course Review and Wrap-Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 6</td>
<td><em>Policy Analysis Project Due at 5:00 p.m.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15</td>
<td><em>Final Grades Due</em></td>
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