PPOL 615: Capstone Seminar in Public Policy

**Winter 2012**
Location: 280 SWKT
Wednesdays, 4:00-6:20 pm

*Instructor:*
Sven Wilson
Office: 830 SWKT; Phone: 422-9018; Email: sven@byu.edu
Office Hours: W, Th: 3:00-4:00pm (and by appointment)

**Expected Learning Outcomes**

As a capstone experience this course will touch on *all* the expected learning outcomes of the MPP program. These are listed below:

*MPP students will be able to:*

1. *Intelligently apply the policy analysis framework in approaching policy problems.* In particular, they will be able to:
   a. conduct extensive background research relevant to a wide range of social problems.
   b. identify the costs and benefits accruing to different groups of people from different policy alternatives.
   c. compare different normative criteria in making policy choices.
   d. understand the policy-making process, particularly the political realities associated with adopting, implementing, and evaluating policy.

2. *Successfully implement the technical tools of policy analysis.* In so doing, they will
   a. understand and critique statistical and other technical research in the policy sphere.
   b. perform statistical analysis, including multiple regression analysis, and will understand the strengths and limitations of statistical measures in conducting public policy research.
   b. build analytical models to aid in the policy analysis process, including decision analysis, linear programming and forecasting.
   c. develop a proficiency in computer software relative to conducting policy analysis, including statistical software and spreadsheets.

3. *Effectively communicate client-focused analysis in a real-world, professional environment.* They will be able to:
   a. write effectively for different audiences, including elected officials and other policy decision makers, policy analysts, and the public.
   b. achieve excellence in making oral presentations to different kinds of audiences and master presentation software.
   c. work effectively with others in conducting analytical projects.
   d. lead a project and manage the work efforts of others.
Readings:

All readings in the seminar are chosen by participants and will be made available to class members on Blackboard. (Refer to the Daily Schedule for class assignments).

All participants in the seminar should read opinion pages of the the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal daily. Participants should also subscribe to and read Utah Policy Daily (http://utahpolicy.com), particularly the news related to the 2012 session of the Utah Legislature.

There will be periodic quizzes and short writing assignments pertaining to the readings (see focal point 4 below)

Course Requirements

This course requires a lot of work. However, students who apply themselves and do not get behind will not have trouble earning an excellent grade in the class. The purpose of class time is to assist you in progressing on your assigned analytical work. For that reason there are no texts or exams. Everything we do in class will be focused on completing your portfolio of assigned work and helping your peers.

This course has four focal points, which are discussed below. You are encouraged to find as much overlap as possible between the focal points. For instance, I encourage you to pick a policy brief that is related to either your legislative case study or to your 611 policy analysis. Similarly, when picking a bill to analyze, you might want to pick one that is related to a topic you have previously researched. Furthermore, I encourage you to use research you may be producing as part of a research assistantship, internship or other job, including work you have done before. To summarize, these are good professional rules to apply in this course:

1. **Re-Use**: If you’ve done it before, don’t do it again, just make it better.
2. **Borrow**: If someone else has done it, use what they did (but never take credit for others’ work)
3. **Polish**: The goal is to produce polished, highly professional work, not to do busy work or go through the motions. Clients (and your professor) care about outputs, not inputs.
4. **Get paid**: By all means, if someone values your work enough to pay you for it, go ahead. That is why you are in this program, to produce analysis that someone would want to pay you for.

This course is the capstone of your career at BYU. Some of you are better prepared to create a portfolio of high-quality work than others, which means that more work will be required from some for others. God will judge you on your effort and your heart. I grade you based on what you produce.
Grading:

Grades will be assigned based on the following weights

1. Focal Point 1: Legislative Case Study: 30%
2. Focal Point 2: Policy Brief: 20%
3. Focal Point 3: Completed Portfolio: 20%
4. Focal Point 4: Participation and Review: 30%

**Focal point 1: Legislative Case Study**

This assignment requires you to choose a bill that is being considered (or very likely to be) in the current 2012 session of the Utah Legislature and write a case study of what you learn. In contrast to your 611 project, this is *not* a client-focused exercise. It is academic, and you will pitch your work to your peers: trained policy analysts and other professionals.

The case study should consist of a *policy* analysis of the bill and a *political* analysis, describe as follows:

**Policy Analysis:**

1. What are the policies contained in the bill?
2. What objectives are they designed to address?
3. What alternatives might be considered to meet the objectives?
4. What are their likely impacts? (costs/benefits *and* their distribution)
5. Are the policies in the bill the best option to achieve the bill’s objectives?

**Political Analysis:**

1. What are the politics behind the bill (answering questions such as who supported and opposed the bill in and outside the legislature and why)?
2. What kind of media coverage was there and what was the impact of that?
3. What happened to the bill from the time it was introduced through committee to the House and Senate floor to ultimate vote, and what role did the executive branch play in the process?
4. What explains the success or failure of the bill?

The purpose of the paper is to use your analytic skills in understanding the policy-making process. To do well in this assignment, you will need to go well-beyond simple internet research. *You need to make contacts with participants and stakeholders and conduct interviews with them.* For purposes of the assignment, it doesn’t matter if the bill passes or not; the analysis will be useful in explaining success or failure and in assessing possible policy impacts.
The products of your research will include

1. an oral presentation to the class (this is an academic project, not client-focused)
2. a paper (approximately 4,000 words) that reports the findings from your case study.

The bill you analyze must be approved by the professor. You must submit a one paragraph proposal of what you want to do and explain why you think it is important. If two students want to do the same bill, then whoever proposes first will be selected.

If you want to pick a part of a large bill (rather than the whole thing), that is appropriate. If you want to consider two or more smaller bills that are related, that is also appropriate. Just make the case.

Focal point 2: Policy Brief

The policy brief is a document which outlines the rationale for choosing a particular policy alternative or course of action in a current policy debate. The purpose of the policy brief is to convince the target audience of the urgency of the current problem and the need to adopt the preferred alternative or course of action outlined and therefore, serve as an impetus for action.

Your assignment is to produce a highly polished policy brief (approximately 2,000) words. It should be both visually and rhetorically effective.

More detail on the policy brief can be found on Blackboard, including the detailed grading rubric that will be used.

Focal point 3: Portfolio Development

At the end of the semester, participants are required to produce a portfolio consisting of 5 items:

1: The legislative case study
2: The policy brief
3: A significant revision/extension of the 611 policy project
4-5: 2 papers that the participant has written and revised over the course of the MPP program (These can be from any class, but they cannot be the first draft of your 611 paper; they will not be graded critically for content, but they should be polished papers that are “ready for public consumption”).
The expectations for how much you are expected to revise your 611 paper depends on its quality. This will be handled on a case-by-case basis. For students who have not yet had 611, you will have the assignment of beginning your 611 paper that you will then polish off when you take 611 in the Fall. I will work with you individually on coming up with a topic and setting expectations.

Your portfolio is the capstone of your education in the MPP program. It should be something that you are proud to show people.

**Focal point 4: Participation and Critical Review**

This content of this seminar is determined by seminar participants. You are required to complete the following tasks:

**Seminar Participation**

1. Select assigned readings (probably about 50-75 pages) related to a topic of your choosing (ideally, related to your case study, your policy brief, or to one of the papers in your portfolio). These must be turned in on Blackboard at least 1 week prior to your assigned day.
2. Prepare a list of discussion questions to accompany your readings (one of these may be selected as a short writing assignment or form the foundation of a quiz).
3. Lead a 45-60 minute discussion based on your discussion questions. You will probably want to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes the main points of the readings, but the bulk of the time should be used for discussion. The professor will not lead the discussion, but may interrupt occasionally.
4. Lead a 1-hour discussion on a topic of your choice, based on readings you select. Ideally, this topic will be related to either your legislative case study or your policy brief.
5. When assigned, prepare a short “data moment” to present to the class (this consists of a cool graph or table that you have come across in your travels that you want to bring attention to)
6. When assigned, prepare a short “policy moment” to present to the class (this consists of, perhaps, a brief news clipping, abstract, or other short item that would be of interest to the class).
7. You will also be required to present either your policy project or our legislative case study as a poster presentation in the Fulton Conference on April 5, 2012. The deadline for uploading posters is Mon., 3/28 at noon. Cash prizes are awarded.

Presentations must be submitted at least 48 hours before the presentation date. See Daily Schedule for due dates.
Critical Reviews

1. Prepare a 1-2 page critique of a classmate’s policy brief
2. Prepare a 1-2 page critique of a classmate’s progress report on the legislative case study
3. Be a discussant for a classmates’ oral presentation on the classmate’s policy brief (3-5 minutes). This requires preparing and presenting a short PowerPoint presentation in response to the case study.
4. Be a discussant for a classmate’s oral presentation on the legislative case study (5-7 minutes). This requires preparing and presenting a short PowerPoint presentation in response to the case study.

Class Structure

A typical class day will consist of the following:

1. Quiz/Writing assignment
2. Data Moment
3. Policy Moment
4. Student-led discussion
5. Informal discussion of progress on course assignments

Other Course Information:

* Blackboard: You can use Blackboard to see announcements, get links to required readings and supplemental materials, and submit homework assignments, papers and exams. **ALL (yes, I mean ALL) course work must be submitted on Blackboard** (anything you submit on email will be shredded). You are also required to check Blackboard frequently for any updates (I will also email you all announcements).

* Professor consultations: You are expected and encouraged to make use of consultation hours to talk about your work. I have hours that I am committed to being available in my office. Please make an appointment to come see me whenever you need to!

* Academic integrity: From the Academic Honesty section of the BYU Honor Code: "The first injunction of the BYU Honor Code is the call to 'be honest.' Students come to the university not only to improve their minds, gain knowledge, and develop skills that will assist them in their life's work, but also to build character. 'President David O. McKay taught that character is the highest aim of education' (The Aims of a BYU Education, p. 6). It is the purpose of the BYU Academic Honesty Policy to assist in fulfilling that aim. Any violations of academic integrity, including cheating on exams (or helping others do so) will be dealt with strictly. All violations will be reported to the Honor Code office, and punishments may include grade reductions, including the assignment of an E grade. Punishments are at the
discretion of the instructor, and the university may assign additional penalties at its discretion.

University Policies

* **Sexual harassment:** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 378-2847.

* **Students with disabilities:** Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895, D-282 ASB.
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<td>4-Jan</td>
<td>Organizational Meeting</td>
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<td>11-Jan</td>
<td>Individual Consultations</td>
<td>Policy Brief Proposal</td>
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<td>18-Jan</td>
<td>Individual Consultations</td>
<td>Legislative Case Study Proposal</td>
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<td>25-Jan</td>
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<td>8-Feb</td>
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<td>15-Feb</td>
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