EPE 603: Introduction to Educational Policy Analysis  
Spring Semester 1999  
Class meets Tuesdays, 4:00 to 6:30 p.m.

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Purposes/Goals  
Traditionally, educational policy analysis has been concerned with determining the effects on educational outcomes, practices, and organizational structures of specific governmental policies. The audience for this work has usually been governmental officials, or those who are in some position to manipulate education policies. For the purposes of this class, however, we will define educational policy analysis as the application of sound social scientific research methods to problems in the practice of education at all levels, with due attention given to the historical, socio-economic, and political context of those problems. This broader definition of educational policy analysis reflects the fact that the “discipline” has been varied, and that the ground rules for its practice are not fixed. Moreover, there is no reason why work in this field should not be addressed to wider audiences, nor should its practitioners hesitate to borrow heavily from a range of methodologies, disciplines, and conceptual orientations.

This course is not designed to teach specific data analysis skills. Rather, through the course graduate students will learn about the policymaking process in general, and about the literature of and key concepts within the educational policy analysis field in particular. We will focus especially on the impact of politics on the policy process, given that the latter is so closely linked to the former. Equipped with a deeper understanding of the policy process as it operates in the education arena, students will then be better prepared to apply qualitative and quantitative analytic skills learned elsewhere to problems in education policy. Indeed, students will pursue their own research projects on an education policy problem of their own choosing during the latter phases of the course.

The Roadmap  
We begin the course with a brief look at the growth of the policy sciences movement itself, and the place within that movement that educational policy analysis occupies. Next we will focus on how to conceptualize the policy process, an understanding of which is crucial for competent policy analysis. We then take up a series of important topics relevant to the policy analysis enterprise: the roles of analysts themselves; policy implementation difficulties; and evaluation within education policy analysis. As the reading portion of the course winds down, we will look at systemic reform—of which KERA is exemplary—as an approach to “policy coherence,” and at the limitations on the “policy planning and analysis” perspective in terms of improving public education at all levels. The course ends with presentations by students regarding the educational policy analyses they are carrying out themselves on various issue areas within K-12 or higher education.
Assignments

Course Participation — Each student should come to class having thoroughly read and reflected upon the readings, and should be ready to discuss them. Graduate seminars provide marvelous opportunities to interact with and learn from others, but you must be prepared if we are to derive the greatest benefit from the setting. Each week, please bring to class with you a sheet of paper containing the following information: one or two sentences summarizing the main point(s) of each reading section, and one or two or three unanswered questions or problems that occurred to you as you read the material. (Written and oral participation: 15% of grade)

Oral Report/Written Synopsis (4 pages) — Each member of the seminar will choose one class session, and will prepare a brief (10-15 minute) oral report summarizing and critiquing the reading assignments for that session. One week later you will need to turn in a 4 page written version of the presentation. In both the oral and written reports, focus on gleaning the arguments made by the author(s). If we have more students than course sessions, students can pair up for presentation purposes. Variable due dates (15% of grade)

Writing Project (4 pages) — Early in the course, I will expect you to spend some time in a library perusing back issues of Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis. Choose an article that interests you, although it should be at least 7 or 8 pages long and not overly technical. I would then like you to summarize and critique the article. I will be particularly interested in your description of how the author(s) proceeds—the statement of the problem, the methodology chosen, the findings, etc. And in the second part of the paper, please tell me if the article “works,” if it in fact tells us something worth knowing that might clarify policy issues at stake or that might lead to feasible policy changes. Before you begin, however, you should contact me about the article you’ve chosen, so I can approve it. Due February 23, 1999 (20% of grade)

Research Paper (12-15 pages) — I would like to allow great flexibility in terms of topics and approaches for your paper. Ideally, you would pick a policy issue of interest to you, and do some analysis of your own. We should probably have a conversation or two about the project; brainstorming together might help us settle on the best strategy for you. Alternatively, you might want to choose a piece of education legislation—at the state or federal level—and assess the policy landscape that gave rise to the legislation, the policy studies that influenced policymakers’ thinking about the issue area, etc. We will discuss various project possibilities and alternative approaches over the course of the semester. One page sketch of project due April 6, 1999; Paper due May 5, 1999 (50% of grade)

Books to Purchase


Laurence Steinberg, Beyond the Classroom (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996)
Class 1: January 19

**Introduction and Overview**

“Policy analysis…is about relationships between people. When we like the results of interaction between doctors and patients or teachers and students, we reinforce our approval of the institutional arrangements under which such persons come together. When we don’t approve, we try to alter these relationships. Major changes take place when we shift the pattern of relationships (by paying doctors through government, or giving parents vouchers enabling them to choose public schools) so that outcomes change. Thinking about analysis as relations between people much like us—not as strange symbols or desiccated dollar signs—is not only more human but also more accurate.

Policy analysis, to be brief, is an activity creating problems that can be solved. Every policy is fashioned of tension between resources and objectives, planning and politics, skepticism and dogma. Solving problems involves temporarily resolving these tensions.”

Aaron Wildavsky

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Class 2: January 26

**The Policy Sciences Movement:**

**Perspectives on the Broader Enterprise**


Class 3: February 2

**Educational Policy Analysis within the Enterprise**


Class 4: February 9

**Conceptualizing the Policy Process: Part I**

A. Agenda setting  
B. The players in the game  
C. Theoretical considerations


Class 5: February 16

**Conceptualizing the Policy Process: Part II**

A. The problem stream  
B. The policy “soup”  
C. The political stream  
D. Policy “windows”

Class 6: February 23

Politics and Policy Making

A. Democracy and Policy-making  
B. The Position of Business  
C. Interest Groups and Advocacy Organizations  
D. Citizens as Players


E. “Issue Networks”


Class 7: March 2

Experts and Policy Entrepreneurs in the Analysis Game


Class 8: March 9

Implementation Studies and Evaluation in Educational Policy Analysis: Promises and Prospects


Break: March 15-20
Class 9: March 23

**Systemic School Reform: The Search for K-12 Policy Coherence**


Selected Reading on KERA [TBA]

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Class 10: March 30

**What’s the “Use” of Educational Policy Analysis? Translating Policy Research into Practice**


Class 11: April 6

**Policy Analysis and Planning as Panacea: Limitations on Policy Change and Policy Analysis: The Power of Culture I**


Class 12: April 13

**Policy Analysis and Planning as Panacea: Limitations on Policy Change and Policy Analysis: The Power of Culture II**

Laurence Steinberg, et al., *Beyond the Classroom*. Chapters 6-10, pp. 101-194.

Class 13: April 20 No Class—AERA Convention

Class 14: April 27

**Student Research Project Presentations**

Paper Due: May 5