DPI-130: Rethinking Policy Design

SPRING 2013

Mondays and Wednesdays  |  2.40 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.
Weil Seminar Room      |  Belfer Building BL-1

Shopping Day
January 25 | 2.40 p.m. – 3.55 p.m. | Belfer Building BL-1

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

When designing public policies aimed at tackling society’s great challenges decision makers must choose from what can seem like a bewildering menu of tools. In pursuing their goals, policy makers might opt for tools that are highly structured and involve heavy-handed intervention; alternatively they might elect to use softer, looser, and less visible tools. Some tools require public officials to remain firmly in control, while others see them contracting out important tasks to charities, community groups, and profit-making organizations.

This course focuses on helping you think about the complexities and dynamics of present-day governance through a systematic and critical examination of differences between key policy tools. The course focuses on seven categories of policy tool: (1) those that empower unelected arm’s-length public bodies; (2) those that involve non-profit organizations and private corporations in the planning and delivery of public goods and services; (3) tools that promote a free-market logic within the public sector; (4) ones that make it more difficult for ordinary citizens to know the scale and effects of government action; (5) tools aimed at making citizens better informed; (6) tools that involve ordinary people and civil society in policy-making processes; and (7) tools that inconspicuously nudge people to change how they think and behave.

Like politics more generally, policy design is an art of the possible; through this course you will therefore learn about the substantive, organizational, structural, and ideational forces that constrain and animate the choice of policy tools. In so doing we will examine how tool choice plays an important role in preserving as well as altering ideals of
citizenship, the vibrancy of community life, the power of private capital, and the size and visibility of the state. Whether crafting policy with or from within government or advocating from without, by the end of this course you will be better able to understand the technical as well as the socio-political and economic value and limits of improving on old tools and turning to new ones.

Fundamentally comparative in scope, the course uses readings from a range of disciplines to examine both historical and contemporary cases from the United States and Europe as well as middle-income and developing countries. The course draws on real-world examples covering a range of policy fields and issue areas, including education, healthcare, social services, policing, unemployment, and environmental protection.

The course comprises three parts. Part 1 begins by placing the task of “tool choice” within the larger context of the policy-design process. We then go on to explore path-breaking works that – using different criteria and typologies – illuminate the toolkit available to contemporary policy makers. Part 2 introduces you to different theoretical models and empirical examples that will help you better understand the context-contingent nature of tool choice. In particular you will examine change and continuity in some of the most important factors influencing the availability and feasibility of policy tools. In Part 3 you will study a variety of real-world cases with the aim of bringing to life the following key types of policy tools: namely, delegating, marketizing, submerging, informing, involving, and nudging.

NOTE FOR MPP CANDIDATES

DPI-130 fulfills SUP and DPI concentration requirements for MPP candidates.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your final grade will be determined as follows:
- Participation and engagement: 30%
- Response paper: 15%
- Op-eds: 30%
- Group presentation: 25%

1. Participation and Engagement

This is a discussion course. The quality and value of our meetings are therefore crucially dependent on your coming to class prepared and willing to discuss the assigned readings and actively engage with the larger themes and questions they address. My expectation is that, in preparation for each class session, you will have read and thought hard about individual assigned texts and the issues that cut across them. Your participation-and-engagement grade will depend mainly on the quality of your participation in class discussions and your engagement with fellow students. The following types of class
participation are particularly welcome: bringing in specific evidence/ideas from a session’s assigned reading(s); building on and responding to the comments of other students; and linking your professional experience to the material being discussed.

I very much hope that you will participate frequently in class discussion and engage actively and productively with your fellow students; a greater quantity of comments in class will not however necessarily guarantee you a higher participation-and-engagement grade. Comments that are off-topic, excessive in length, or disrespectful of the opinions of others will decrease your participation-and-engagement grade.

As part of your participation-and-engagement grade, ahead of eight of the course sessions you should submit one (or at most two) questions related to one or more of the assigned readings. Each question should be around 25-30 words in length and should end in a question mark. After stating your question, you may elaborate upon it in a separate paragraph (no more than 100 words), but doing so is not required.

Submission: Post your question to the course website by 5 p.m. the day before the session for which the question is intended.

2. Response Paper

The primary goal of this assignment, worth 15% of your final grade, is for you to engage critically with the readings and issues covered in Part 2 of the course. 4-5 pages in length, your response paper should be used as an opportunity to bring the assigned readings for a single session into conversation with one another. In writing your response paper you are free to draw on pertinent evidence beyond the readings with which you happen to be familiar; if you choose do so, this should serve the purpose of demonstrating critical engagement with the assigned readings and the issues they raise.

Submission: You should submit your response paper electronically by 2 p.m. on the day of the class for which the readings you are responding to have been assigned.

See “Notes on Written Assignments” below for links to useful writing resources and for information on how to format and submit your response paper. I will distribute a grading rubric for response papers after class begins.

3. Op-eds

In order to help you reflect on the policy tools covered in Part 3 of the course, you will write three 2-3 page op-eds, each of which is worth 10% of your final grade. Each op-ed will be a response to one kind or another of brief news piece covering a real-world policy or policy proposal (e.g., government press release, newspaper or magazine article, online news story, video clip), which I will distribute a week before the relevant due date. Each news piece will focus on one of the seven broad categories of policy tool covered in this course. Your op-ed should primarily be grounded in the readings for the session(s) that deal(s) specifically with the policy tool in question. You should use these readings as the
source of and launch pad for a critical and analytical treatment of the policy tool covered in each policy announcement. I am very happy to see you use your op-eds as opportunities to reflect on readings from prior sessions and especially those from Part 2 of the course, but only do so if this serves as a vehicle for analyzing the policy tool in question.

**Submission:** Each op-ed should be submitted electronically by 2 p.m. on the day of the class in which the tool discussed is the same as that addressed by the new piece. For example, if you choose to write an op-ed in response to the news piece that deals with market mechanisms in the developing world, then submit your op-ed by 2 p.m. on April 3. If you choose to write an op-ed that responds to a news piece related to a policy tool to which two course sessions are dedicated (namely, sessions 12 and 13, sessions 20 and 21, and session 22 and 23), please submit your op-ed by 2 p.m. on the day of the second session.

See “Notes on Written Assignments” below for links to useful writing resources and for information on how to format and submit your response paper. I will distribute a grading rubric for your op-eds after class begins.

### 4. Group Presentation

A quarter of your final grade will come from an end-of-semester group presentation. The goal of this assignment is to leverage the advantages of teamwork in order to produce a critical assessment of a real-world government strategy. Your group’s assessment of this government strategy should be carried out exclusively from the point of view of policy tools, using the language, concepts, and knowledge encountered and generated in the course of the semester.

At the beginning of the semester you will be assigned to a group. By the end of the third week of class each group will propose to me a shortlist of three government strategies as potential topics for their end-of-semester presentation. To qualify for inclusion in your group’s shortlist, a government strategy may be one that is already in effect or one that is being proposed, for example in the form of a Green or White Paper. A strategy may have been issued by any tier of public authority, from local government through to an international organization. Crucially, to make it on to your group’s shortlist a strategy must be a substantial attempt by government to tackle a major and thorny public-policy issue—for example, educational underachievement, environmental protection, child poverty, obesity, re-offending, socio-economic inequality, public-sector corruption. The strategy that each group will present on will be decided in class # 9 (February 27), and the remainder of the semester should be used by each group to prepare collectively for the presentation.

In order to discuss any questions or issues that arise in preparing for the presentation, I will meet with each group individually in Week 9 of class. To help you and your group prepare the most effective presentation, I will distribute a grading rubric when topics are assigned.
COURSE POLICIES

Missed classes: This course requires that you manage your time well, keep track of the assigned readings and, most importantly, attend every class session. Plan your schedule around the class meeting; avoidable conflicts such as doctor’s appointments or job interviews are not excused absences. Students who miss class due to minor illness such as a cold may be asked to complete a make-up assignment, such as a short paper, to receive credit for the class. If you will be absent for a total of two full weeks or more over the course of the semester due to non-emergency and/or avoidable reasons (including vacations, travel, or training), you may be ineligible to take this course. Please let me know in the first week of the course if you have planned an extended absence.

Use of the internet and electronic devices: Surfing the web during class is distracting to you and to your colleagues sitting near you. I therefore ask that you use your laptops and tablet PCs only for referencing course readings and taking notes. Use of cell phones and smart phones in class is not permitted. Violations of this policy may result in a ban of laptop use in class.

Extensions: In the interest of fairness to your colleagues, the deadlines in this syllabus are firm. Extensions for assignments will not be granted except in the case of serious illness, family emergency, or religious observance (see below). Late response papers and op-eds will lose a full letter grade for each 24 hours or portion thereof.

Grading concerns: Students are encouraged to consult with me during office hours about questions on an assignment prior to submitting the assignment. In the event of a low grade on an assignment, students will not be allowed to rewrite or to resubmit an assignment for an improved grade, except in extraordinary circumstances as determined by the professor. If you have faced an extraordinary circumstance that resulted in a lower grade on an assignment and you would like the opportunity to resubmit an assignment, please contact me within one week of receiving your grade. If you feel that there was an error in the calculation of your grade, you may submit a re-grading request. All such requests must be submitted to me in writing, along with a memo explaining where you believe an error was made. If you elect to have an assignment re-graded, please be aware that it may result in a lower grade on the assignment.

Religious conflicts: Students may ask for reasonable and timely accommodations for religious observances. Please review the syllabus closely to determine if religious obligations will present scheduling conflicts with any of the assignments. Students must inform me of any conflicts within the first two weeks of the semester.

Accommodations: In compliance with Harvard University policy, I will provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Please provide your accommodations paperwork to me as soon as you have it available, within the first two weeks of the semester. For further information, please see the HKS Student Disability Coordinator.
Academic integrity: Plagiarism and cheating are absolutely unacceptable and will be pursued to the fullest extent of the University’s policies in accordance with the HKS Academic Code. Providing proper citations in your writing is both necessary and expected. If you have any questions about what constitutes correct citations, it is your responsibility to seek guidance prior to submitting your assignment. As stated in the Academic Code, in all writing, you must put any words that are not your own between quotation marks. All suspected violations will be reported to the Associate Dean of Students. I may make use of anti-plagiarism software both to detect and to confirm suspected plagiarized writing. I encourage you to consult the Kennedy School’s academic code (LINK).

SOME NOTES ON WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

In writing your response paper and op-eds, I encourage you to consult relevant writing resources available from the Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center, including those on: finding your writer’s voice [LINK]; writing analytic papers [LINK]; and writing an op-ed [LINK].

In order to make it easier for me to return comments to you as quickly as possible and to minimize the use of paper, all written assignments should be sent to me as email attachments in Word format, double-spaced, using Times New Roman size-12 font, with 1-inch margins. Please paginate your written work and include your name at the top right of each page. The page lengths noted above are exclusive of bibliographic references. When emailing me, please use the following format for your subject line: DPI-130: [Last Name], [First Name] – [Assignment Title—e.g., Response Paper, Op-ed #1, etc.].

OFFICE HOURS

I encourage you to see me during office hours with any questions or comments. Please plan to attend office hours for any questions related to course content or to course assignments; in-person discussion is far preferable to email. I hold office hours immediately following class on Mondays from 4.15-5.45 p.m. If you wish to see me during my office hours, you must sign up for a time slot online using this website. Please be sure to cancel your reserved time if you cannot come so that this time slot can be made available to other students. Prior to our meeting (and preferably by 9 a.m. on Monday morning) please send a brief bulleted list of the items you wish to discuss during office hours to Jeanne Burke (jeanne_burke@hks.harvard.edu).

READINGS

All but a handful of readings (marked with an asterisk) are available electronically through the course webpage. Readings marked with an asterisk are in the course packet, available for purchase from the Kennedy School’s Course Materials Office (Belfer
Building, Room G-7). A copy of the course packet will be on reserve at the Kennedy School library.

The only book you need purchase for this course is Suzanne Mettler’s *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*, published in 2011 by Chicago University Press. Copies of this book have been ordered and should be available for purchase from the Harvard Coop. A copy of this book will also be on reserve in the Kennedy School library.
## Overview of Course Schedule

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<th>Topic</th>
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<td>January 28</td>
<td>Meeting Challenges through Design</td>
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Part 1: Policy Tools 101

January 28

1. **Meeting challenges through design**


January 30

2. **The Toolkit**


February 4

3. **The Toolkit cont’d**


February 6

4. **Instrument Choice**


Part 2: Forces Shaping Tool Selection

February 11
5. Governance styles


February 13
6. Good governance and state capacity


February 18 No Class – President’s Day

February 20
7. Varieties of welfare capitalism in high-income democracies


February 25

8.  The welfare state in the developing world

Rudra, Nita. 2007. “Welfare States in Developing Countries: Unique or Universal?”  

Development Contexts.” In Gough, Ian, and Geof Wood, eds. Insecurity and Welfare 
Regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America: Social Policy in Development Contexts. 
Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 312-327.

February 27

9.  Experts

Politics 61(4): 703-730.

Relationship in Three Tableaux and Six Jurisdictions.” Sociologie du travail 52(2): 
255-273.

March 4

10.  Neoliberalism and permanent austerity

University Press. Chapter 1 (“Freedom’s Just Another Word”), pp. 5-38.


March 6

11.  The network society and value change

Castells, Manuel. 2010. The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, 
Society, and Culture Volume I. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley- 

West European Politics 31(1-2): 130-146.
Part 3: Key Categories of Policy Tool

March 11

12. Delegating to arm’s length public bodies – general issues


March 13

13. Delegating to arm’s length public bodies – case studies


March 18 & 20

No Class – Spring Break

March 25

14. Delegating to non-profit/for-profit private organizations in high-income democracies


March 27

15. Delegating to non-profit/for-profit private organizations in the developing world


April 1

16. Market mechanisms in high-income democracies


April 3

17. Market mechanisms in the developing world


April 8

18. Submerging


April 10

19. Informing


April 15

20. **Involving – general issues**


April 17

21. **Involving – case studies**


April 22

22. **Nudging – general issues**


April 24

23. **Nudging – case studies**


**April 29**

24. *Group presentation*

**May 1**

25. *Group presentation*