

PPOL 6101D

Special Topics in Public Policy: Reasoning for Public Policy and Governance

Lecture: Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:20 pm (Millennium Tower 1, Room 1)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00 am-1:00pm, or by appointment (IAS 2016)

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Policymakers frequently draw lessons from the past to navigate the complexities of the present: *What policies have succeeded? Why do some policies fail in one context but thrive in another? How can we avoid promoting ineffective policies or 'reinventing the wheel'? Can history serve as a reliable guide for contemporary and future decision-making?*

This course delves deeply into the opportunities, challenges, barriers, and trajectories of integrating historical thinking and reasoning in policymaking. Students will be encouraged to leverage historical knowledge and evidence to develop innovative approaches to examining current and future policies. Through a comprehensive exploration of theoretical frameworks and historical case studies from Hong Kong and around the globe, students will be trained to scrutinise issues surrounding the “usability” of history, including the use, misuse, and abuse of historical narratives, as well as critical concepts such as causality, contingency, and analogies.

In addition to traditional lectures, this course will feature interactive workshops designed to stimulate critical thinking and deepen argumentation skills. These sessions will provide a collaborative environment where students can apply historical analysis to contemporary policy issues, fostering a robust and nuanced understanding of the course content.

By the end of the course, students will be equipped to formulate policy opinions on contemporary issues, grounded in historical context and with clear policy relevance. Inspired by the historian Marc Bloch’s concept of “historical sensibility,” this course aims to instil in students a profound appreciation for how historical perspectives can inform and enhance public policy. Ultimately, this course prepares students to become adept at using history responsibly

to shape effective and informed policies for the future, fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between the past and present in the realm of public policy.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Having taken this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe, discuss, and explain various historical methods and their relevance to public policy;
2. Evaluate the practices, strengths, and limitations of using historical analysis in policymaking;
3. Identify and critically assess the use and misuse of historical narratives in policy formulation and implementation;
4. Employ a diverse set of tools, methods, and frameworks to effectively and responsibly incorporate historical perspectives into contemporary policymaking; and,
5. Develop a “historical sensibility” or an attentive disposition towards the sensitivities and temporalities of the past, recognizing the importance of context and nuance in applying historical lessons to current and future challenges.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course achieves these learning outcomes by employing a combination of lectures, seminar discussions, and assessment geared towards the development of the student’s ‘historical sensibility’. The first half of the class is dedicated to lectures while the rest of the session is designed for seminar discussion of cases. This structure will also allow students to actively participate in class by leading the discussion, raising questions, and facilitating the process of inquiry. As this is an elective course, knowledge of history or historical methods is helpful but not necessary. This course is open to all students.

COURSEWORK/ASSESSMENT

Grading is based on 100% of the coursework.

Reflection Paper (15%)

Due: 25 September 2026 (F)

Students will complete a reflection paper based on the assigned class activity. This exercise requires thoughtful engagement with both the process and the outcomes of the task, encouraging critical self-assessment and deeper understanding of the material. The paper should be 3 to 4 pages in length, demonstrating clear organisation, coherence, and analytical reflection rather than mere description. Detailed guidelines and expectations will be discussed further in class.

Historical Debate (25%)

Due: 24 November 2026 (T)

This is a group task. A historical debate entails the discussion of a current issue discussed and grounded on historical policies. The objective of this assessment is to see contemporary issues in light of historical antecedents. This activity allows for students to see these issues from multiple perspectives operating on a variety of contexts and contingencies. The topics will be decided and assigned in the middle of the semester. More instructions will be provided in class.

Historical Policy Paper (40%)

Due: 04 December 2026 (F)

Policy papers are pieces that have an enduring impact. The aim of this task is for students to showcase their historical sensibility by examining the continuities and discontinuities of the past and present. Students are tasked to write a historical policy paper, based on a real-life example, that employs one of these approaches: *reasoning through process*, *reasoning through comparison*, or *reasoning through analogy*. The target is to produce a 4,000 to 5,000-word piece that adheres to high standards and grounded on historical sources.

Active Class Participation (20%)**Throughout the semester**

To monitor student progress, daily worksheets will be distributed and collected at the end of each class. These worksheets count towards both participation and attendance. Students are responsible for ensuring their worksheet is submitted to the teaching assistant before leaving; unsubmitted worksheets—*regardless of attendance*—will be treated as a missed exercise and recorded as an absence. No make-up worksheets will be provided under any circumstances.

The majority of worksheets correspond to case studies on historical policies that will be examined throughout the term. Evaluation will reflect not only completion of the worksheets but also preparedness and participation in seminar discussions. Active engagement with the material and with fellow students is expected. As most seminar discussions presuppose familiarity with the assigned readings, students are expected to complete them in advance. Persistent neglect of the weekly readings will result in removal from the course and a failing grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Date	Week	Topic and Activity
01 September	1	History, Policy, and Reasoning
Module I: Evidence and Interpretation		
08 September	2	Sources and Evidence
15 September	3	Field Trip: Government Records Office
Module II: Approaches and Tools to Writing Policy History		
22 September	4	Causality, Context, Contingency
29 September	5	Comparative Historical Analysis
06 October	6	Historical Analogies
13 October	7	Models, Frameworks, and Methods
20 October	8	Criticism in History and Policy
Module III: Focusing on Historical Issues		
27 October	9	Historical Issues I: Agency
3 November	10	Historical Issues II: Placement
10 November	11	Historical Issues III: Institutions
17 November	12	Historical Issues IV: Environment
Module IV: The Future of History and Policy		
24 November	13	Student Debates

All readings and materials will be posted on Canvas. At the very least, students are expected to have read the posted materials. It will be very difficult to follow in the lectures and discussions if students do not at least prepare for the class.

There is no single textbook for this course. However, students may benefit from the following works as guide for this course:

Ashford, Douglas E. *History and Context in Comparative Public Policy*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

Bayly, C. A., Vijayendra Rao, Simon Szreter, and Michael Woolcock. *History, Historians and Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue*. Manchester University Press, 2020.

Berger, Stefan, Heiko Feldner, and Kevin Passmore, eds. *Writing History: Theory and Practice*. London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.

Cauvin, Thomas. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

- Donnelly, Mark, and Claire Norton. *Doing History*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Green, Alix R. *History, Policy and Public Purpose: Historians and Historical Thinking in Government*. Springer, 2016.
- Jordanova, Ludmilla. *History in Practice*. London: New York: Arnold; Oxford University Press, 2000.
- May, Ernest R. *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Neustadt, Richard E., and Ernest A. May. *Thinking In Time: The Uses Of History For Decision Makers*. Simon and Schuster, 1986.
- Rothman, David J., and Stanton Wheeler. *Social History and Social Policy*. Elsevier, 2013.
- Sayer, Faye. *Public History: A Practical Guide*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.
- Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. 5th ed. 1984. Reprint, Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Tosh, John. *Why History Matters*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

GRADING

The Division of Public Policy rigorously upholds the University's high academic standards and commitment to intellectual integrity. For each assignment, we will provide detailed outlines and marking rubrics. As you prepare your work, it is advisable to consult Bloom's Taxonomy as a guiding framework (see the guide below).

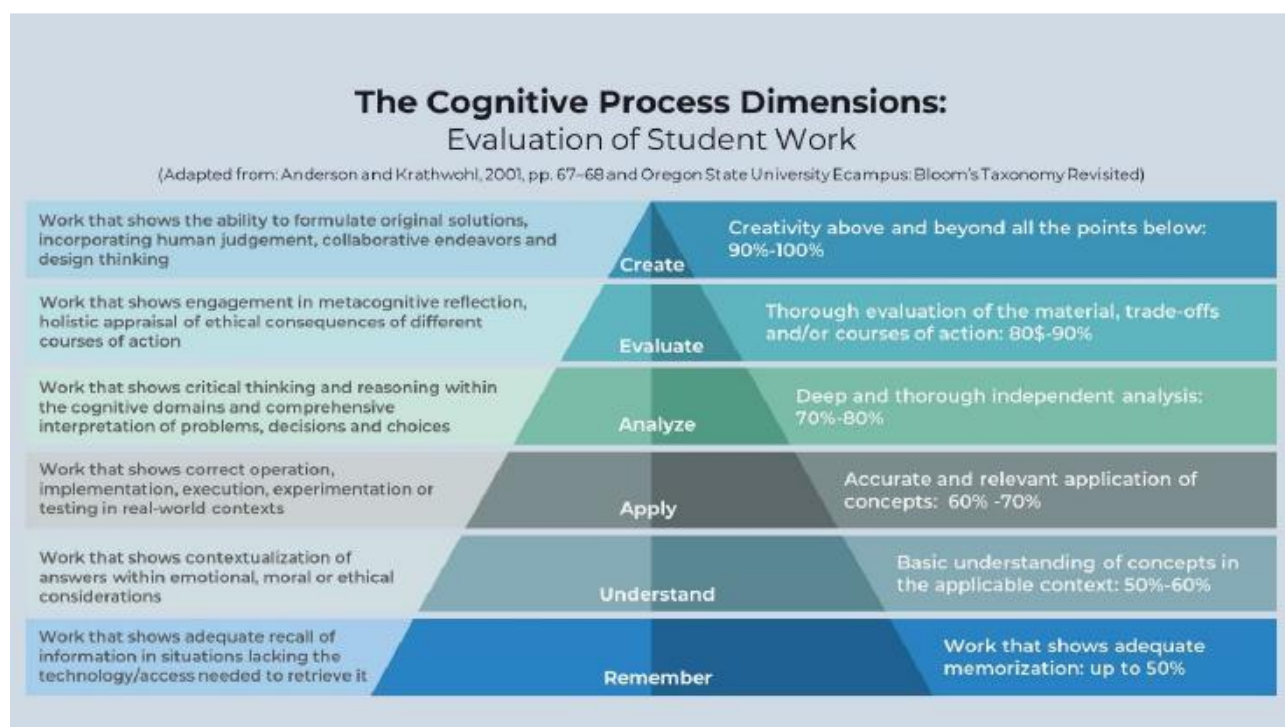
VERY IMPORTANT: Please note that meeting basic requirements does not guarantee an 'A' grade. Even a 'very good' piece of work, aligning with the 'evaluate' level of Bloom's Taxonomy, may receive a 'B' or 'B+' at best. An 'A' paper represents the highest calibre of scholarship: it demonstrates adept use of sources, original thought, nuanced arguments, accurate citations, and a logical, coherent flow. In essence, an 'A' paper is of publishable quality, suitable for submission to international journals and other scholarly platforms.

ALSO IMPORTANT: Late submissions will automatically receive a one-letter grade deduction unless an extension has been granted by the instructor (a late submission after one week will automatically receive an 'F' grade). If you anticipate difficulties completing the task within the given timeframe, it is strongly recommended that you contact the instructor or teaching assistant as early as possible. Extensions are granted only with a compelling justification and supporting evidence, so it is in your best interest to address any issues promptly.

ALSO VERY IMPORTANT: Grade review requests must be submitted within one week of receiving your assessment. No requests will be considered after this deadline. Valid grounds for review include computational errors in grading, misapplication of rubric criteria, overlooked portions of your work, and clear discrepancies between feedback and assigned grade. Invalid grounds for review: 1) General statements like "I deserve a higher grade", "I was stressed doing this", or "I worked really hard", 2) Disagreement with course standards or expectations; and 3) Comparison to other students' grades.

Grade reviews examine *your entire submission*. **Your grade may be raised, remain the same, or be lowered based on this comprehensive re-evaluation.** Submit requests only when you have specific, documented concerns about the original grading.

To request a review, please provide a written explanation citing specific rubric criteria or pointing to concrete grading errors. Vague appeals will not be processed.



ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: I have little tolerance for academic dishonesty. Such behaviour is detrimental to both educators and students, undermining the integrity of the academic experience. The University defines academic dishonesty to include the following:

- Obtaining examination or test questions without the instructor's permission, or sharing these questions with others without authorisation
- Giving or receiving unauthorised assistance during examinations or tests
- Having someone else take an examination or test on your behalf, or taking one for someone else
- Submitting assignments that have received unapproved assistance from others, or providing such assistance to others
- Fabricating facts or references in assignments
- Using another person's work in an assignment and presenting it as your own
- Assisting another student in cheating

All submissions will undergo a Turnitin check, and thus, must be submitted through our academic platform, Canvas.

PLAGIARISM: HKUST defines plagiarism as "presenting work which is not your own and originates from other sources as if it is your own, without appropriate attribution to the sources." *This includes the use of generative AI for content creation.* This also covers all forms of work submitted for assessment as part of a University examination (e.g., theses, dissertations, take-home examinations, assignments, and projects). Plagiarism is considered a very serious academic and disciplinary offence which could result in expulsion from the University. The Division of Public Policy adheres and implements these rules strictly. If in doubt, please ask or seek for further advice.

AI POLICY

1. Rationale

Generative AI (ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, Quillbot, Jenni.ai, Poe, etc.) is now part of the research and writing environment. Banning it outright is neither enforceable nor useful preparation for policy careers. But AI tools hallucinate facts, citations, and sources, and they flatten the interpretive judgment that historical and policy analysis requires. This policy sets out where AI is permitted, where it is not, how to disclose it, and what happens if you don't. The AI policy is adapted from the Guiding Principles in the Use of Artificial Intelligence in History Education: <https://www.historians.org/resource/guiding-principles-for-artificial-intelligence-in-history-education/>.

2. Permitted Uses (no citation required)

- Summarizing or clarifying a reading before you engage with it directly.
- Brainstorming or talking through ideas as a sounding board.
- Fixing grammar, syntax, and footnote/citation formatting, without altering content or argument.

3. Conditional Uses (citation/disclosure required)

- Using AI to sharpen phrasing in an already-written draft, provided it does not add, remove, or reframe your argument.
- Asking AI to suggest additional points, which you then fact-check and rewrite in your own words before including.
- Generating an image for a presentation, clearly labelled as AI-generated with a note on how it was produced.

4. Prohibited Uses

- Asking AI to write any portion of your essay's argument, analysis, or content, and submitting it as your own.
- Reproducing an AI-generated summary of a source in your literature review or citations without reading the source yourself.
- Using an AI-generated critique of a scholar's work as your own critique.
- Including any AI-suggested citation, quotation, or reference without verifying it against the original source.

5. Disclosure Requirement

Every essay must end with an **AI Use Declaration**, structured as the table below. Every writing task listed must appear as a row, even if AI was not used for it. Rows must be filled for the whole essay, not just where AI was used.

Writing Task	AI Used? (Y/N)	Tool	How It Was Used
Brainstorming / outlining			
Reading summaries			
Bibliography / source search			
Drafting (argument, analysis)			
Sentence-level editing (grammar, syntax)			
Citation / footnote formatting			
Images (if applicable)			
Other (specify)			

Instructions:

- “How It Was Used” must describe the specific action, not just “helped with writing.” Example: “Asked AI to check subject-verb agreement in paragraphs 3-5” or “Not used.”
- If AI was used for Drafting, the entry must also note what was accepted, edited, or rejected, per Section 3.
- A blank or missing table will be treated as an undisclosed AI use claim under Section 6.

Absence of a declaration will be treated as an implicit claim that no AI was used, and is subject to the same scrutiny below.

6. Verification and Documentation

I reserve the right to request supporting documentation for any submission where the originality or authorship of the work is in question. This may include, without limitation:

- research notes and outlines
- earlier drafts
- version histories (e.g., Google Docs history, Word track changes)
- AI chat logs, if AI was used

Failure to produce credible documentation on request will be treated as evidence supporting a finding of academic dishonesty.

7. Consequences

Violation	Consequence
Undisclosed AI use, later confirmed	Treated as plagiarism under HKUST policy
Fabricated or unverified citations/sources (AI-origin or not)	Treated as academic dishonesty regardless of disclosure
Essay substantially AI-generated in content or argument	Treated as plagiarism; referred to HKUST’s academic integrity process
Disclosed, permitted AI use per Sections 2–3	No penalty

All essays are screened through iThenticate and/or Turnitin’s AI detector. A high AI score alone is not proof of misconduct, but it will trigger a documentation request under Section 6.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Citation

Whether using the author-date system or footnotes, all citations in written assignments will follow the **18th ed. Chicago Manual of Style**. Please refer to this: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Lectures

Everyone is expected to attend lectures. Powerpoint slides of the lectures will not be uploaded. Everyone is also expected to take notes (whether via notebooks or laptops) in class. Recording of the lecture in any shape or form including the use of machine and AI-assisted translators, for any length and duration, and without the express consent and permission from the lecturer is strictly prohibited. There is no make-up work for participation activities unless you email the teaching assistant before class if you are going to be absent. If you are absent for the lecture, kindly inform the teaching assistant.

Readings

There is no standard textbook for the course. The readings for the course will be taken from a variety of sources including journals, book chapters, etc. and will be made available via Canvas. Students are expected to be responsible for their readings to facilitate learning and interaction during the seminars.

Use of Electronics

While we are all accustomed to using our gadgets for research and communication, laptop use within the classroom must only be used insofar as it helps in the learning process. Mobile phones must be switched off or put on silent at all times. Disruptions caused by these gadgets will entail deductions on your participation grade. Likewise, playing games or browsing through social media apps in class will have the same consequences.

Accommodation

Our classroom is, above all, a safe space for your thoughts, feelings, and identity. This class embraces the diversity of every individual, acknowledging the unique contexts from which each of you come from. It is essential that we extend the same respect to others that we ourselves wish to receive.

If you have any special needs or encounter challenges in your learning, please reach out to the instructor without hesitation. We are committed to doing everything within our power to ensure that your learning experience is safe, enjoyable, and meaningful.