

## PPOL 5150: Public Policy Analysis

<b>Semester:</b>	Spring 2025-26
<b>Class time:</b>	<b>Tuesday</b> evenings, <b>6:30 – 9:20 PM</b>
<b>Class venue:</b>	Room <b>5620</b> (near lifts 31/32)
<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>Dr Alvin Li</b> Division of Public Policy, HKUST Email: <a href="mailto:lia@ust.hk">lia@ust.hk</a>
<b>Office hours:</b>	By email appointment
<b>Teaching associate:</b>	Dr Holvert Hung ( <a href="mailto:hholvert@ust.hk">hholvert@ust.hk</a> )

### Course description

Public policy analysis is a critical discipline that addresses the complex decision-making processes faced by government officials in their daily work. These officials must regularly evaluate whether to initiate new policies, continue existing programs, modify current initiatives, or terminate ongoing projects. This course provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and conducting effective policy analysis, equipping you with essential knowledge and analytical tools to make informed policy decisions.

The curriculum dives deep into the fundamental aspects of policy analysis, beginning with the crucial skill of identifying and defining policy problems. Students learn systematic approaches to establishing evaluation criteria, conducting thorough assessments of policy alternatives, and making strategic choices among competing policy options. A significant emphasis is placed on developing your ability to project and analyse potential policy impacts, ensuring that policy recommendations are both practical and evidence-based.

Throughout the course, you will engage with real-world policy scenarios and learn to navigate the complex interplay between technical analysis and political feasibility. The course emphasises the importance of understanding both the theoretical foundations and practical applications of policy analysis, preparing you to make meaningful contributions to public sector decision-making. By combining analytical rigour with practical application, this course enables you to develop the professional competencies needed to address contemporary policy challenges effectively.

## **Course objectives**

This comprehensive course aims to cultivate essential analytical capabilities in policy analysis among MPP students, providing a robust foundation for professional policy work. You will develop a thorough understanding of fundamental policy analysis concepts and techniques, learning to identify and apply these tools effectively in real-world policy contexts. This course emphasises practical application, enabling you to demonstrate competency in employing analytical techniques to address concrete policy challenges and problems faced by public sector organisations. A critical component of the learning objectives includes developing the discernment to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate applications of policy analysis within the public sector context. Beyond technical proficiency, this course cultivates an appreciation for the complex institutional and political landscape within which policy analysis operates, making sure you understand how these contextual factors influence policy decisions and implementations. Through this multifaceted approach, you will be equipped with both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to public policy development and analysis.

## **Course learning outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify the importance of political, administrative and analytical capacity in shaping policy development.
- Explain key challenges in various key tasks in policy development.
- Sharpen your analytical skills in leading and managing key tasks in policy development.
- Improve your skills in crafting policy messages and communicating more effectively with different stakeholders in policy development and policy process.

## Course expectations

Given that this is a graduate-level course, you are expected to demonstrate a high level of responsibility and independence in your learning approach. While the subject matter may be new to many, the course structure demands consistent engagement through mandatory attendance and thorough preparation of assigned readings before each class. The success of our learning environment depends heavily on your preparedness and willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue.

As a core course for MPP students, active participation and engagement are the cornerstone of this course's learning environment. You are expected to thoroughly prepare for each session by completing assigned readings and actively contributing to discussions and debates. The classroom serves as a forum for sharing our diverse perspectives and experiences, where we engage respectfully with our peers' viewpoints and contribute meaningfully to collective learning.

This course emphasises a collaborative and interactive learning environment with minimal technological distractions. Laptops, tablets, and smartphones are generally discouraged and not allowed during class time – trust me, you'll learn much more and have a lot more fun without them! Mobile phones should remain silenced and stored away during class sessions to maintain attention and foster meaningful discussions.

## Core readings

1. **Weimer, D. L., & Vining, A. R. (2017).** Policy analysis: Concepts and practice (6th ed.). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Weimer and Vining's textbook offers a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding policy analysis as both an art and a science. The text systematically explores market failures, government failures, and distributional issues as fundamental rationales for public policy intervention. It provides a robust analytical framework for evaluating policy alternatives while emphasising the importance of understanding institutional and political contexts. The book's strength lies in its thorough treatment of economic concepts and their application to policy analysis, complemented by detailed case studies that demonstrate these principles in action.

2. **Bardach, E., & Patashnik, E. M. (2019).** A practical guide for policy analysis: The eightfold path to more effective problem solving (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: CQ press.

Bardach and Patashnik's book provides an essential framework through the renowned "Eightfold Path" methodology for policy analysis. This systematic approach guides students through crucial steps: defining problems, gathering evidence, constructing alternatives, selecting criteria, projecting outcomes, confronting trade-offs, making decisions, and crafting compelling narratives. The text excels in its practical orientation, offering concrete tools and techniques that students can immediately apply to real-world policy challenges. Its emphasis on storytelling and evidence assembly particularly strengthens students' abilities to communicate policy recommendations effectively.

These core texts can be enriched through diverse supplementary resources that bring policy analysis into contemporary contexts. Current news articles and op-eds from quality publications can provide real-time examples of policy challenges and solutions, while policy-focused podcasts offer in-depth discussions of current policy debates. Video content from reputable sources such as think tank presentations, TED Talks, and academic lectures can visualise complex policy concepts and provide diverse perspectives on policy issues. These multimedia resources help bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, making abstract concepts more tangible and demonstrating how policy analysis tools are applied in contemporary settings.

## **Assessments**

This course uses a diverse assessment strategy designed to evaluate different levels of learning outcomes and practical competencies:

Written assignments x 4:	40% (10% x 4)
PAE client project preparation:	20%
Final group project:	30% (20% report + 10% presentation)
Class participation & attention:	10%

## Academic integrity and AI policy

Academic integrity lies at the heart of our learning community and your professional development in this course. Your unique perspectives, critical thinking, and original analysis are what make our classroom discussions rich and meaningful. When you engage with others' ideas, proper crediting through citation (e.g. using APA format) enriches our academic discourse and acknowledges the collaborative nature of knowledge creation.

To nurture your intellectual growth and analytical capabilities, this course emphasises the development of your original thinking and independent judgment. While artificial intelligence tools have become commonplace in many settings, this course provides a valuable opportunity to cultivate and demonstrate your own analytical skills. Therefore, we strongly **discourage the substantial use of generative AI in all assessments**, including essays, presentations, and reports, unless explicitly allowed. As per PPOL's policy, all references will be checked for existence, accuracy, and relevance. This policy remains in effect during the semester and for one year afterwards.

Your success in this course comes from your personal engagement with the material, your unique analysis, and your individual growth as a policy analyst. We encourage you to take pride in developing and expressing your own ideas while respecting academic integrity principles. This includes using proper quotation marks when quoting, giving credit when paraphrasing, and ensuring all submitted work represents your original effort.

## Participation and assignment policy

The classroom environment in this course is designed as a collaborative learning space where knowledge and insights emerge through dynamic interaction. Our sessions will follow a flipped classroom approach, emphasising mutual knowledge generation and collective wisdom-building. My teaching philosophy emphasises inquiry-based learning through open-ended questions that explore your unique insights, perspectives, and critical thinking rather than seeking predetermined answers. Our classroom serves as a safe space for constructive dialogue, where students are encouraged to build upon each other's contributions, whether in agreement or respectful disagreement.

I completely welcome spontaneous questions during lectures to ensure clarity and deeper understanding. Active participation extends beyond mere attendance - it involves engaging with case materials, contributing to discussions, and sharing your unique perspectives drawn from your diverse backgrounds and experiences.

This approach is particularly vital in public policy analysis, where multiple viewpoints often illuminate different aspects of complex situations.

Regarding assignments, the assessment structure is carefully crafted to develop crucial knowledge and competencies relevant to public policy analysis. While high standards and full effort are expected, I acknowledge the demands of your postgraduate studies and other commitments. If you experience any genuine difficulties meeting deadlines, you should not hesitate to email me and the TA to arrange reasonable extensions. For medical-related absences or extensions, please provide appropriate documentation such as a certificate of sickness obtainable from your doctor. My goal is to create a supportive learning environment that prioritises meaningful learning and skill development over rigid deadlines. This flexible approach is for you to produce your absolute best work while maintaining a healthy balance with other academic and personal commitments during your postgraduate learning journey.

## Weekly course outline

This comprehensive course is structured in two main parts over 13 weeks, providing a thorough foundation in public policy analysis. Part I (Weeks 1-5) establishes the conceptual foundations of policy analysis, beginning with an introduction to the profession and its products, followed by detailed explorations of market failures, government failures, and various policy rationales. Students examine real-world cases ranging from kidney transplant policies to P2P economy regulation (cases to be updated). Part II (Weeks 6-13) focuses on the practical application of the "Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving in Policy Analysis," covering essential skills from problem definition and evidence gathering to outcome projection and cost-benefit analysis. Each week combines theoretical readings with practical case studies, culminating in student presentations and a final project.

### Part I: Foundations of Policy Analysis

#### **Week 1: Introduction to Policy Analysis: Profession and Products**

- What are the core components and goals of policy analysis as a profession?
- How does policy analysis differ from academic research?
- What distinguishes policy analysis as a professional practice?

#### **Week 2: Rationales for Public Policy—Market Failures**

- What types of market failures justify policy intervention (e.g., public goods, externalities, information asymmetry, monopoly)?
- How do you identify and diagnose different types of market failures in real-world cases?
- When and why should governments intervene to address specific market or institutional shortcomings?

#### **Week 3: Other Limitations of the Competitive Framework and Distributional Goals**

- What are the limitations of relying solely on competitive markets to solve policy problems?
- How do distributional considerations and social justice feature as goals in public policy?
- How can the justice framework be applied to analyse policy impacts on different groups?

#### **Week 4: Policy Problems as Market and Government Failures**

- What are the key signs and causes of both market and government failures in policy cases?
- How can government actions inadvertently lead to policy failures—what is the "law of unintended consequences"?
- What frameworks help distinguish between market-based and government-based sources of failure?
- Case Study: The Banana Project in Hainan Province (Case subject to change)

#### **Week 5: Correcting Market and Government Failures: Generic Policies**

- What are the generic public policy tools used to correct market and governmental failures (regulation, taxation, subsidies, etc.)?
- How should the effectiveness of policy interventions (such as Pigouvian taxes) be evaluated in terms of societal goals?
- What alternative or hybrid policy instruments can enhance value in complex sectors (e.g., sharing economy)?
- Case Study: Regulating the P2P Economy (Case subject to change)

### Part II: The Eightfold Path to Policy Analysis

#### **Week 6: Defining the Problem and Gathering Information for Policy Analysis**

- How do you frame and refine a policy problem for analysis—what are problem definitions and issue frames?
- What methods are used to gather evidence and information relevant for robust policy analysis?
- How might different framings of a problem lead to different policy recommendations or solutions?
- Case Study: Fighting Crime and Prison Reform (Case subject to change)

#### **Week 7: Constructing the Alternatives**

- What are the techniques for generating and testing alternative solutions to policy problems?
- How do best practice/benchmarking and analogies help in constructing realistic alternatives?
- What lessons can be learned from comparative case studies (e.g., plastic bag bans/taxes) in different policy settings?
- Case Study: Plastic Bag Policies Across Countries (Case subject to change)

**Week 8: Selecting Criteria and Projecting Policy Outcomes**

- What criteria are used to evaluate different policy alternatives (efficiency, equity, political feasibility, etc.)?
- How do analysts project and forecast the potential outcomes and impacts of each alternative?
- How are trade-offs between different criteria handled and communicated in practice?
- Case Study: Relocation of the Beijing Zoo (Case subject to change)

**Week 9: Political Feasibility and Stakeholder Analysis**

- What factors determine the political acceptability and implementability of policy proposals?
- How do you systematically map and analyse the interests of stakeholders in the policy process?
- What practical strategies exist for managing opposition and building support for policy change?

**Week 10: Using Decision Matrices in Policy Analysis**

- How do we use decision matrices?
- How do we weigh different criteria?
- How do we handle trade-offs?
- Case Study: California's Scrap Tire Policy (Case subject to change)

**Week 11: A Practical Guide to Cost-Benefit Analysis**

- What are the main steps and assumptions involved in carrying out a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for policy options?
- How do you handle uncertainty, discounting, and valuation of non-market benefits and costs in a CBA?
- What role does CBA play in policy decision-making, and what are its limitations in practice?
- Case Study: Hong Kong-Mainland High-Speed Rail Link (Case subject to change)

**Week 12-13: Final Presentations and Wrap-up synthesis**

- Student group presentations
- Course wrap-up and synthesis

[More updates on supplementary readings and weekly cases will be added soon]

## **Final word**

In our rapidly evolving world, the ability to conduct rigorous policy analysis is not merely an academic pursuit — it's an essential skill for creating meaningful societal change. I'm thrilled to embark on this journey with you through the complexities of public policy analysis! Throughout our Monday evening sessions, we'll explore fascinating real-world cases ranging from kidney transplant policies to environmental challenges, engage in dynamic policy discussions, and learn from the diverse perspectives that each of you brings to the classroom. Whether your interests lie in market failures, distributional justice, cost-benefit analysis, or policy implementation, the analytical frameworks and practical tools you'll develop in this course will serve you throughout your career in public service. The world needs thoughtful, skilled policy analysts who can navigate complex societal challenges while balancing multiple stakeholder interests. I'm looking forward to guiding you through the "Eightfold Path" and other analytical approaches in an engaging, collaborative environment where we can collectively explore how to craft better public policies. Let's make this semester a transformative experience where we not only master the technical aspects of policy analysis but also discover how we can contribute to building more effective and equitable public policies. See you in class!