

III. Knowledge, Ethics and Public Policy

Prof. Fred Eidlin

Fred Eidlin is Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada). BA (Dartmouth), MA (Indiana University), PhD (University of Toronto). He is interested in foundational problems of the social sciences and public policy, especially where inquiry runs into intellectual difficulties. He is also interested in the dynamics and developmental tendencies of Soviet-type regimes, and in problems of their transition, the relationships between ideas, emotions, and social structure, in perceptual, belief, and symbol systems.

Aims and objectives:

Specialized knowledge, including policy science, plays an important role in the formulation and evaluation of public policy. If it did not, government agencies would not be hiring graduates trained in public policy and administration. Nor would they be regularly training and upgrading their employees in these fields of knowledge.

Yet some scholars are skeptical about the very idea of using government purposefully. Others, though not ruling out purposeful use of government, argue that public policy can do no more than muddle through. Such strong and moderate skeptics advance weighty arguments as to how difficult it is to engineer social change. How can policy scientists deal with such problems as flawed theory, incomplete information, unintended consequence, and the openness of political systems? What is the relationship of policy science to democracy? Are policy scientists merely servants of the people, or do they sometimes know better than the people what is in the public interest? Does the expertise of policy scientists give them any special authority as to the ethical aspects of policy formulation and evaluation? What about the reality that the instruments available to policy makers are all too often blunt, unresponsive, and inefficient? How can the reality be addressed that there is not one single public interest, but many, often conflicting, public interests?

This course develops an approach that might be called "hopeful realism." It approaches the study of public policy critically and realistically, while retaining hope that better policy science might contribute to bringing about a better society. Looking at concrete policies, policy-making processes, and theories, it examines both typical sources of policy failure, and typical conditions that appear to promote success. It recognizes that, despite all difficulties involved, countless examples of successful public policy actually exist. Success may often be only partial, but the historical record provides grounds for hope that policy science may learn to do better.

Method of presentation:

Seminar presentations, lectures, and discussion.

Course requirements:

Short paper on selected problem area (email).....	10%
Participation and presentation on problem area.....	10%
Mid-term Examination (in class, computers allowed).....	20%
Research paper (by email)	30%
Final Examination (by email)	30%

Participation and short papers:

Since the course is run as a seminar, attendance and participation are important. As a 4000-level seminar this course requires regular completion of all assigned readings and active informed participation in class discussion, as well as written work. Two requirements provide some tangible structure and incentive for this effort.

Before each class period every student should formulate 2 or 3 questions addressing the issues raised by that week's readings. These questions should not be longer than 10 to 15 typed lines each. They should be submitted by email, and some will be selected for discussion in class. They will not be formally "graded," but will factor into assessments of class participation.

Second, each student will be a member of at least one "research group." These groups will have 3-6 members. Each will be responsible for a set of thematically-related readings. These sets of reading will consist of either a chapter in Shafritz (each contains several readings), or ½ of the Hirschmann book. Each group will be responsible making a presentation on one of these sets of readings. Each group member will be responsible for researching and presenting a critical analysis of one reading. The group as a whole will decide how best to coordinate the individual presentations so that they address the thematic relationship. Groups should first meet to discuss presentation strategy, and decide who is responsible for what. Before making their presentation, each group should arrange to discuss its plans with the instructor. After presenting in class, each student will submit a short paper (3-6 pages) based on his/her critical presentation.

Required readings:

Albert Hirschmann, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*

Shafritz, Lane, & Borick, *Classics of Public Policy*

Additional readings will be placed on Blackboard.

Term paper assignment:

The task is to research and analyze a particular public policy in a particular jurisdiction. Papers should identify and explore the following questions: (1) How and when did the problem first emerge as a public problem? (2) How and when did this public problem get onto the agenda of government? (3) Were there different and/or competing explanations of the causes of the problem, and different theories and prescriptions concerning what to do about it? (4) What social, economic, and political interests were at stake and in conflict with each other? (5) What political processes account for the nature of the policy eventually adopted, and (6) How well did the policy work? How effective was it?

The title and character of the project is to be discussed and approved by the due date.

Sources must include articles in scholarly journals, documents, and monographic literature (books). Papers must not rely excessively on Internet sources? (This restriction does not, of course, apply to scholarly journal articles found through the Internet). Papers should be approximately 18-22 pages in length. It does not matter which presentation style you use, so long as it is recognized (e.g., Turabian or APA), and as long as you consistently adhere to one style throughout your paper.

Course Outline

Part I: Lectures with discussion

The policy process

Knowledge, science, democracy, and public policy and administration Ethical issues in public policy

Perception and misperception in public policy and administration: The role of theory in public policy and administration

Readings:

Eidlin and Appelbaum, "Social Science, Social Engineering, and Public Policy"

"Reason, Unreason, and Social Scientific Knowledge in the Policy Sciences"

Eidlin, "The Ethics of Imperfect Knowledge in Policy Science"

"The Radical Revolutionary Strain in Popper's Social and Political Theory"

"Blind Spot of a Liberal: Popper and the Problem of Community"

"Popper's Social-Democratic Politics and Free-Market Liberalism"

"Impediments to Reform in Post-Soviet Agriculture"

"Some Thoughts on the Collapse of the GDR and Its Consequences"

"Individual Needs and Societal Necessities"

"The Gorbachev Revolution" and "An Imaginary Report which Mikhail Gorbachev Did Not Present to the 27th Congress of the CPSU"

"Power and the State: Some General Problems"

Part II: Presentation and discussion of readings in thematic sets

Group 1. Hirschmann, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*

readings: chs. 1-3

Group 2. Hirschmann, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*

readings: chs. 4-6

Group 3. Shafritz, ch. 1: "The Context of Public Policy" readings: 1, 2, 3

Group 4. Shafritz, ch. 2: "Public Policymaking" readings: 4, 5, 6, 7

Group 5. Shafritz, ch. 3: "Interests, Groups and Public Policy" readings: 9, 10, 11, 12

Group 6. Shafritz, ch. 4: "Agenda Setting" readings: 13, 14, 15

Group 7. Shafritz, ch. 5: "The Political Economy of Public Policy" readings: 17, 18, 19

Group 8. Shafritz, ch. 7: "Policy Implementation by Executive" readings: 24, 25, 27

Group 9. Shafritz, ch. 9: "Foreign Policy" readings: 34, 35, 36

Group 10. Shafritz, ch. 10: "Public Policy as Public Relations" readings: 38, 39, 40

Group 11. Shafritz, ch. 11: "Policy Analysis" readings: 41, 42, 43

Part III: Student presentations with discussion

20-minute presentation of results of term-paper research, with interruption allowed for questions, criticisms and disagreements.