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329-01 Public Policy Practice

John Fairfield

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Introduction

Campaigning for elective office employs a fairly predictable formula to reach a much defined goal. On a certain date prescribed by law, the winner is selected by virtue of receiving the greatest number of votes. Victory is expressed in a numerical value and the issue is settled until the next election. Brutally simple!

Making public policy is as nuanced as campaigning seems simple. Even the most basic policy-making rules enshrined in constitutions and reverenced by years of practice are vulnerable to the will of the people appropriately exercised. So, while there are constitutions, laws, rules and traditions that serve as structural elements and guide posts that may control the flow of policy making, a huge part of success depends on one’s ability to negotiate informal, nuanced, often vague, tentative, conditional agreements. This really is more an art then a science.

This course is intended to help you develop the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in shaping public policy from school boards to municipal and county governments, to the Statehouse and to the United States Congress. We build upon and broadens the skills and knowledge you gained in Mass Media and Campaign Practice by challenging you to become effective in a variety of settings with multiple objectives.

We seek to learn what public policy is and how we can effectively participate alongside the men and women who act in concert and in conflict in an effort to enact the laws and policies by which we are governed. Such engagement does not ignore the various structures of governance. We respect and learn from what has gone before us. It is always easier and
“safer” to move within the well-built path of existing rules, norms and power structures…as long as they lead in the direction you are seeking. For the next three months we will live in that vague, unstable world of making connections and building relationships. Several skills are essential to be effective in building the relationships that make us agents in those transactions but it will take hard work and patience to develop the contacts that lead to those relationships.

Learning Objectives

The Learning Objectives described below are a good personal guide for each of you to understand the course objectives and what the learning expectations are for each student over the entire semester.

Professionalism: The most critical element to success as a policy advocate is to establish one’s credibility. Opinions of others are shaped in the first ninety seconds or so of an introduction. That first minute and a half may not determine the meeting’s success or failure. However, in a world of sound-bite communication, judgments are made in that time that may require both parties’ to expend additional energy to move forward in a positive way. Every encounter from asking street directions to asking for a meeting with a United States Senator begins with a flash of judgments. We must do all we can to start every encounter in a positive way and to strategically build on that success. This includes timeliness, appearance, demeanor, attentiveness and mutual respect regardless of how significant you consider the audience to be.

Critical Analysis: Students learn to apply critical analysis in a variety of settings often under dramatic time constraints. In addition, they must be able to adapt that analysis to a variety of subject areas including legislative intent, policy proposals, critical path analysis, probability, and human dynamics. They use their critical analysis to formulate strategies and arguments intended to build constituencies.

Multidisciplinary Learning: Students must develop an increasing capacity to merge ideas and analysis from an unpredictable variety of sources including prime source documents, first person accounts, observation of official proceedings and informal communications.
Team Work: Students become increasingly familiar with and adept at working in various iterations of team settings often under demanding timelines. This includes short term research sessions, effective debriefings (given and received), impromptu strategy determinations, shifting team membership, working with less than ideal resources. Always respecting and supporting the group’s intended outcomes.

Effective Communication and Oral Presentations: This includes meetings settings of a varied nature and intention. The ability to communicate ideas, asks effective, timely questions, seek support and negotiate compromises. The setting for these communications will range from elected officials, legislative aides, think tank representatives, policy advocates, any potential allies and/or opposition advocates. They must be able to communicate by phone, in conference calls, face-to-face, and by email and phone message. In addition, they may be called upon to do a formal presentation of their issue before a legislative committee of some body of representatives.

Written Communications: Students must demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively, often with short preparation time, to varied audiences through traditional communication methods, also in white papers, press releases, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces and general circulation pieces.

Methodology

As with the campaign class, you will work in teams. However, the team membership is more fluid than in the policy class and will change based on the assignment. Generally, everybody will get to do everything, that is, research, analysis, strategy, a wide variety of communications and, leadership opportunities will be distributed across all class members. This is especially true when we get to DC. In a single day, you may be in four or five different teams in as many different locations in the city. You will learn to count on your teammates and they will count on you. You will use and develop a wide range of skills and build many new relationships.
There will be “work products” (position papers, research, phone scripts, media talking points, general communication literature) individuals will do on their own or contribute to in a team effort.

To aid in understanding your personal effort, you should chronicle your experiences, your individual contributions and your contributions as a team member with enough detail that it would be recognizable to an outside reader. To do this, you are to keep a journal that you give me a hard copy of every two weeks, on time, without fail. You should keep cumulative, electronic version.

You can use the journal to comment, to vent, to validate, to make suggestions or to offer constructive criticism. I will review and return your entries with comments and a letter grade within a week. Our schedule will get hectic with a great deal of pressure at certain times and we may have unpredictable demands put on us by outside events. At the end of the semester, your journal with comments from me will serve to inform some a final presentation, as yet to be determined.

Part of your evaluation is also based on your regular attendance and participation in class and in group meetings. It is important to be prepared to do much of the work this semester (even more than last semester) out of the classroom in team meeting and with individual assignments, such as, arranging meetings with parties- of-interest, preparing talking points, planning meeting agendas and host of other demands.

Nevertheless, in-class time remains critical and regular attendance is required.

This is a non-traditional course that requires commitment, team work, focus and, most of all, agility, that is, the ability to remain upright and moving forward while encountering challenges and obstacles. If you stick with it, you will learn much about how to be a public advocate and, you may learn a great deal about yourself, your abilities, and your interests.
Student Evaluations

In addition to the Learning Objectives described above, your evaluation this semester is based on class and team participation (30%), written field reports (30%), your effort to engage the policy process by participating in a wide range of communication efforts (30%), and the end-of-the-semester final presentation (10%). Each of these components will be measured for the quality of the content, the effort put forth and the professional level of presentation based on the following scale:

A+ to A: **Consistently excellent** level of participation in every aspect of the course including research, strategy development, and showing personal initiative in class and in the field. Consistently working to support your team. Demonstrate a willingness to challenging yourself to work in unfamiliar environments. Consistent effort to understand and evaluate the way our government legislates and administers public policy. All assignments turned in on time.

A- to B+: **Level of excellence expected from a PPP Honor student** in all aspects of the course stated above.

B to B-: Commitment to **good quality work** in all aspects of the course listed above.

C+ to C-: **Less than a consistent level of quality** work in all aspects of the course listed above.

Several points about the operation of the course:

1. There are two fundamental cornerstones to maintaining one’s effectiveness working in public life: honesty and discretion. A breach
of either of these principles jeopardizes your credibility. Without credibility, who will want you to be their advocate? Who will listen to you, and if they do, will they believe you? Trust is the foundation of relationships in public life. That foundation is then built upon by consistent performance, doing what you say you’ll do when you said you’d do it. If you want to “be in the room,” you have to be trusted and you have to give people reasons to want you in the room. Our class is run on these principles, internally and externally

2. Please note that I take very seriously the policy on page 52 of the Xavier Catalog regarding standards of ethical behavior.

3. As noted in several places above, political engagement is a dynamic, sometimes disorganized and often unpredictable way of life. The schedule we keep over the semester may need to be adjusted to meet the political and public events that unfold over the next several weeks.

4. Success - that is, your learning - in the course depends largely on your initiative, persistence and willingness to navigate unfamiliar territory.

4. In many important ways, you will teach yourself and each other with a variety of support systems including faculty, very capable and experienced teaching assistants, upper-class "consultants" and faculty will accompany us when we go to Washington. These are veteran students and faculty who have made the trip. Their role is to assist in preparing and executing your two day lobbying effort.

Reflections from a PPP Colleague

“…your life for the next twelve months (sic) will be completely, completely given over to the Cult of the Public…reading thousands of pages, going to hundreds of meetings, writing dozens of papers and going to sleep most days past 2 am with the satisfaction that you are profoundly challenged and
deeply respected by your program. Best class I ever took.” (T.S., class of 2010.)