

PSCI 3040: Introduction to Public Policy
Fall 2011
Course paper and interim assignments

The goals of PSCI 3040 include enabling students to 1) analyze the policymaking process in terms of a theoretical model, 2) develop substantive policy expertise 3) conduct research and 4) write well. The course paper is a tool toward these ends. Further, providing significant undergraduate research experience is central to WMU's mission and distinctive identity; our semester-long focus on learning to do research and producing a significant research paper aligns with this strategic aim.

Each student will prepare a paper of 10-12 pages analyzing the policy process and summarizing the substance of policy in a *domestic policy* issue area of his or her choice. Examples of issue areas include the environment, energy, health care, education, financial regulation, agriculture, immigration and homeland security. *You may not choose Social Security* because we cover that area together in class. Also, please *avoid heavily judicialized policy areas*, that is, areas in which the courts are the primary actor in legitimating policy; choose areas in which policy legitimation has occurred primarily through statutory, administrative and regulatory actors. The final paper is described below, but first several interim assignments – building blocks toward a final paper of good quality – are explained.

Interim assignments

	<i>Due on</i>	<i>Weight in final course grade</i>
Library assignment	Sept 27 or 29	2%
Policy area proposal	Oct 6	2%
Annotated bibliography	Oct 27	10%
Policy community map	Nov 10	10%
Roundtable	Various	<u>6%</u>
		30%

Library assignment

A training session on using Waldo library's data bases to find books and articles on U.S. public policy is scheduled for September 27, during regular class hours. Please report to Waldo Library, Classroom A rather than the usual classroom on that day. The library liaison for the Political Science Department, Maria Perez-Stable, will present this training and has prepared a brief assignment as practice using the library's data bases. You can do the assignment during the library session and hand it in when you leave or hand it in at the next scheduled class meeting. Ms. Perez-Stable has also created a resource guide especially for this project, available at: <http://libguides.wmich.edu/PSCI3040>

Policy area proposal

This is a brief statement – at least a paragraph and not more than a page – of the policy area on which you will write your paper. State what the policy area is, a little about timely questions in this area, and why you are attracted to study it.

Most policy areas are broad and complex, so it will be necessary to narrow the topic within the area. For example, within environmental policy you might choose to focus on regulation of ocean resource extraction, air quality, water quality, or soils management. Within education policy, you might want to know about financing for higher education. Within health care policy, you might study some aspect of health policy that is addressed in the current federal

health care law. If you choose a policy area that is addressed primarily at the state level – electric utility regulation or health care for lower income people, for example – consider narrowing the topic by choosing a particular state. If you plan to narrow the topic within a general policy area, identify the focus in your proposal. Choosing a topic that is *manageable* is crucial to success, so please feel free to consult with me or the graduate assistant as you identify and narrow your topic. To ensure that you start on the right track with a manageable project, I may require revision of your topic after I read your proposal.

Late penalty: for each day late (weekends included), one point will be subtracted from the score on your **final paper**.

Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of sources on a topic, with a brief discussion of each source. Typically most, or all, of the entries in an annotated bibliography are secondary sources, but sometimes an annotated bib includes primary sources as well. *Secondary sources* are books and articles in which the author has analyzed information and offers an interpretation. A *primary source* is some social artifact that you yourself will analyze as part of your research. It could be a quantitative data base with raw numbers, a letter written by someone you are researching, an image, or other material that you interpret as part of your research. Please begin working on an annotated bibliography of sources that you plan to use for your paper by the fourth week of the semester. You will be starting this step before your policy area proposal is approved because you have to begin research in order to choose a policy area.

Your annotated bibliography must include at least **six secondary print sources** that you plan to use in writing your final paper. Print sources include scholarly books, articles in scholarly journals, government reports, think tank reports, and articles in popular periodicals such as newspapers and magazines. Your minimum six print sources must include at least *one academic book* and *two articles from scholarly journals*. The remaining print sources may be additional scholarly books and articles, reports from government agencies or research institutes, or articles from good magazines and newspapers. What constitutes a “good” magazine or newspaper is somewhat subjective and I am the subject, so if you are not sure whether the periodical you are considering is a good source for your research, please ask me. Useful popular periodicals include national newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* as well as specialized weekly news magazines that focus on issues with active agenda status in Washington like the *CQ Weekly* and *National Journal*. Additional good magazines will vary depending upon your issue area, but might include *Scientific American* or other popular science magazines; prominent general business periodicals like *Business Week* or more specialized business publications; *American Prospect*, *Nation*, and other politically inclined periodicals.

Web sites are *not* print sources. You will very likely use some in this research, but they don’t count in the requirement to identify at least six secondary print sources. *Wikipedia* or any other encyclopedia, whether print or on-line, may not be included in the annotated bibliography. You might use an encyclopedia to help you get started, but use it track back to research that the writer of the entry relied on, to get a handle on unfamiliar concepts, and so on. But don’t cite to an encyclopedia in your paper.

Your annotated bibliography should also include a particular primary source: a data base called CQ Congress Collection which is available through WMU’s Waldo library. It’s a nice resource for political scientists with both policy questions and political questions. Get in there and look around. Think of at least one way to use it for your policy paper. That means it will be included in your annotated bibliography and as a source for your final paper.

Each entry in the annotated bibliography should have one or two paragraphs. For a secondary source, please summarize the piece, including its central question and main arguments, and indicate preliminarily how it will be useful for your paper. For example, you might find a piece that helps you identify the actors in the policy community in your area. Another piece might be good for conveying how your issue got on the policy agenda; another might be one that you plan to use to identify the technical content of policy in your area. In short, think about how you will use the books, articles and reports that you find. Pay attention to finding material that permits you to cover all required aspects of the paper. For the CQ Congress Collection (and any other primary source you may plan to use), your entry should describe the types of information that are available in the source and suggest questions relevant to your paper that you could answer using this information.

Each entry in the annotated bibliography should begin with the citation for the piece *in APA format, as it will appear in the bibliography of your final paper*. This means that you will have to properly format documentation well before the paper is due; this will save you time in writing up the final paper.

Note: Your final paper must include at least the six secondary print sources and the one data base described above. Perhaps you will find more sources that you want to use for the final paper after turning in your annotated bibliography. That's okay; you may use these additional sources and you do **not** have to revise the annotated bibliography to account for these sources. Just be sure to include everything you use for the final paper in the references list for that paper. That means that your references will include the seven sources from the annotated bib plus any additional sources you find later. It also needs to be clear in the body of the paper that you actually used the materials included in your references.

Late penalty: two points for each day late, weekends included.

Policy community map

A policy community is the set of formal and informal actors that participate in policymaking in a particular substantive area. They include – at a minimum – legislative committees, public agencies, interest groups and research institutes. For this assignment, use the internet as well as your research in print sources to identify the actors in the policy community for your policy area. Major participants in the policy communities of prominent policy areas usually have websites; find those websites. Some important actors may not have a presence on the internet; include these actors in your map anyway.

Hand in a paper of about three pages, in good prose (**not just a list!**), that describes the actors in the policy community. This interim paper may simply identify, describe and categorize the actors in well-constructed paragraphs – a paragraph for each actor. Or, this paper may be essentially the first draft of the more theoretically discussion of the policy community that you will include in your final paper. We will discuss these two approaches in class.

Attach a reference list in good APA format, including the websites you used; this list does not count as part of the two to three pages.

Late penalty: 2 points for each day late, weekends included.

Roundtable

A roundtable is a group presentation of the findings in a particular policy area by class members who have chosen that area for their final papers. The roundtable presentation should include the same components that a final paper includes. (See the list below of required components.) Groups can decide for themselves just how to present the material: feel free to be creative within the constraint that required components must be clearly covered.

Be sure to include some visuals – at a minimum, a graphic or list showing the policy community actors. Other helpful aids might include an overview outline of your presentation or a list of important dates in policy development. If you plan to use equipment, check it out ahead of time. For example, if you are going to use a computer and the overhead projector in the classroom, let's hook up **the** computer that your group will use sometime before your presentation date to ensure that it works with the projector. If you are using a Mac, you need a converter ; test it out! If you want to run part of a DVD, a video or audio file from your computer, or stream video off the web, get it cued up and test it ahead of time in the classroom.

There are a couple of things about group projects that students often don't like. One difficulty is finding time to get members of the group together. We will overcome this by using some class time for groups to meet. Follow-up communication outside of class will probably be needed, but this can be done with phones and email if in-class preparation time is used appropriately. A second problem that sometimes crops up is that somebody shirks and fails to contribute a fair share of the work. We will address that problem by having all members in each group do a confidential peer evaluation of the other members in the group. Each roundtable will receive one grade, but that will be a starting point from which some points may be deducted from an individual's grade if it is clear that the person did not help much.

Final paper

Due on: December 8

Weight in final course grade: 30%

In the final course paper, please demonstrate 1) that you have mastered the two main analytical devices used in the course: actors and steps, and 2) that you have developed expertise in your substantive policy area. Integrate discussion of the theories about actors and steps into your paper.

Guidelines about what to include:

- Overview of the policy area. What is the problem?
- The policy community. What is a policy community in general? Talk about the theory of a policy community and describe the policy community you have identified using the theory to structure your discussion: Who are the formal and informal actors in the policy community in your area? What are the goals of the various actors? Do they see the problem through different ideological lenses? Do they align into identifiable advocacy coalitions? What approaches to achieving goals do they advance? Are there differences among policy advocates regarding goals and methods of achieving those goals?
- Using the steps of the policy process, summarize development of substantive policy in your area over time. Include discussion of foundational statutes. There are different ways to structure coverage of steps in your paper. One way is to give each step roughly the same amount of coverage, perhaps three to five paragraphs or about a page for each. A second way to structure the paper is to highlight a step in which you are especially interested and give it disproportionate coverage. For example, you may be most interested in the various alternatives advanced in an area, or in evaluation of existing policy. If you choose to emphasize one step, that's okay, but you must still cover the remaining steps clearly though briefly.
- Identify issues currently under discussion.
- Don't forget to use CQ Congress Collection for some relevant question.

Format: 10-12 pages. Double-spaced. One-inch margins all around, except that you may drop the bottom margin to .5" if you wish. 12-point type. Cover page. ***I'm not kidding about the format!*** 11-point font is not 12 point font. A 1.5 inch margin is not a 1 inch margin. 14 pages is not 12 pages. 1.5" line spacing is not double-spaced. Points will be deducted for ignoring format requirements. Following format rules is part of professional research and writing.

Documentation: Please use APA style. Details are easily accessible on the web from Waldo Library's home page, in a library handout, and in books. The full APA manual is available at the Waldo Library reference desk.

Writing: The quality of the writing counts! The paper must be well-structured and well-written; mechanics must be correct. It is not cheating to get colleagues or writing center tutors to read your drafts and provide feedback. In fact, it is a good idea and entirely professional to seek feedback from others on your drafts. If you are not yet a good writer, be sure to use the writing center (located in Ellsworth Hall, room 1343; writing-center@wmich.edu; 269-387-4615).

Late penalty: Two points for each day late, weekends included. And remember, if your proposal was late, points will come off the final paper.