From Theory to Practice: Teaching Policy Analysis through Case Method and Client-based Projects

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Teaching Policy Analysis

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THE NEW SCHOOL FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy

Conceptualizing a
Policy Analysis Curriculum

- Skill-building and tool development

- Transparent, rigorous decision-making in the face of constraints

- Conveying argument in clear and concise written and verbal form

Conceptualizing a
Policy Analysis Curriculum

- Strong theoretical foundations
  - Motivates one approach over another
  - Framework for tackling "messy" problems
  - Critical thinking about strengths and weaknesses

Conceptualizing a
Policy Analysis Curriculum

- Application of theory to practice
    1. Practice = using theoretical model on actual "data"
    2. Practice = repeated application (both simulated and "live")

The Milano School

- *Graduate* programs in urban policy, management and international affairs

- Multiple professional degrees and one doctoral program

- Mix of part-time and full-time students

- Age range: 20-66 years

- Class size averages 25 students (less for electives)

The Milano Policy Analysis Curriculum

- Client work present at every stage of the degree (unlike other core competencies)

- Three-part curriculum:

  i.   Introduction to policy analysis

  ii.   Laboratory in Issue Analysis

  iii. Professional Development Report (Adv. Seminar)

Course 1: Intro to Policy Analysis

- Meets 2x per week
- Approx. 25 students per class with 1 TA
- Part 1: Learning the five-stage model
- Part 2: Cost-Benefit Analysis
- Part 3: "Trial" Round Client Issue Analysis

Part 1: Learning the five-stage model

- Very formalized decision model

Exhibit 1: Five-Stage Decision-making Model

1	Problem definition
2	Select evaluative criteria
3	Generate alternatives
4	Analysis of trade-offs
5	Make a recommendation

- Every stage applied to a case
- Deliverable: 1 policy memo (1st version is typically revised)

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Part 2: Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Simplified treatment of CBA
- Covers basic discounting
- Includes Excel-based workshop
- Key topics addressed:
  - Validity and transparency of assumptions
  - Sensitivity analyses
  - Standing
- Deliverables:
  - 1 discounting exercise
  - 1 policy memo

Part 3: "Trial" Round
Client Issue Analysis

- Simulated client-based issue analysis
- Teams of 4/5 work with faculty advisor and TA on actual policy issue (topic and data recycled from previous year's "Lab" projects)
- Includes group dynamics orientation
- Culminates with team presentation to "client"
- Deliverable: two-page memo addressed to client

Course 2: Lab in Issue Analysis

- "Live" client-based issue analysis
- Clients and issues are diverse:
  - Govt. and non-profit
  - Technical and topical
  - For example: housing and community development, criminal justice, environmental sustainability
- Teams of 4/5 work with faculty advisor and TA on actual policy issue (2 projects, 15 weeks)
- Culminates with team presentation to client
- Deliverables:
  - Two-page memo addressed to client
  - Comprehensive report submitted to client

Course 3: Professional Development Report (PDR)

- Culminating course (typically completed in final semester)

- Solo client-based issue analysis

- Student responsible for securing client and selecting issue

- Regular meetings with faculty advisor

- Deliverable: comprehensive report submitted to client

Tangible Outcomes

- Style and precision of writing are transformed
- Policy-relevant and concise writing samples for job market
- Method for tackling complicated problems
- Refined presentation (and interview) skills
- Networking opportunities via clients
- PR opportunity for Milano

Including a space for alternative approaches

- Decision-making models outside of the stage heuristic

- International perspectives

- Multi-media forms of policy communication

- Non-metric-based analysis

Making Policy Analysis Relevant

- Formal foundations

- Transparency and rigor

- Integrated client-based curriculum (vs. solely a culminating experience)

- Policy analysis as a useful skill/tool for *all* professional degree programs

Thank you!

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EXTRA SLIDES

Client	Central Policy Issue
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation	What performance metrics should the Recreation Division employ to help guide new programming, redefine and measure the success of existing programming?
Materials for the Arts, NYC Dept. of Cultural Affairs	What should Materials for the Arts do to increase its base of support?
Office of Vital Records, NYC Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene	How can the Corrections & Amendments Unit enhance its workflow in order to create a more customer responsive and efficient process?
Hostelling International New York	How should Hostelling International respond to a recently enacted New York law banning short–term rentals (less than 30 days) in most multi-unit residential buildings, a law that goes into effect May 1, 2011?
Gale Brewer, New York City Councilwoman	What should Councilmember Brewer propose the City do to improve voter turnout?
United Way NYC	How should United Way restructure its food stamps outreach program in order to better achieve the organization's goals of expanding access to food stamps for low income New Yorkers?
Annenberg Institute for School Reform	What should the Annenberg Institute for School Reform recommend to optimize the role students and parents can play in meaningful and sustainable school transformation?
Citizens Budget Commission	What position should the Commission take with regard to the construction of waste-to-energy facilities for the disposal of the City's municipal waste?
Office of School & Youth Development, NYC Dept. of Education	What should the Office of School and Youth Development do to improve attendance in high school, particularly 9th grade?
NYC Department for the Aging	How would the City develop a template for accomplishing the multi-use of underutilized City buildings, using, as the case study, the co-location of DFTA senior services in underutilized school buildings?
Brad Lander, New York City Councilman	What could Councilmember Lander do to make the NY Harbor greener and more efficient?
Brooklyn Community Foundation	What Educational Management Organization (EMO) model should the Brooklyn Community Foundation (BCF) adopt to effectively transform Community School District 16?
Build it Green NY	What new businesses might BIGNY create that would be sustainable, while providing cost effective services to New Yorkers with positive effects on the environment?
Neighborhood Housing Services of NYC	How might they improve their reverse mortgage program?
Taxi & Limousine Commission	How should the Taxi and Limousine Commission operationalize the Five-Borough Taxi Plan, a new category of taxicab (called a Borough Taxi) that would be permitted to pick up "street-hail" passengers outside Manhattan?
Freshkills Park Administrator	What strategies should the Freshkills Park Administrator pursue for capital and expense budget funding to complete the site's construction and to maintain the park?
iMap America	What should iMap America do to best build and circulate safe and accurate information by and for youth to make better decisions?
SAGE (Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders)	How can SAGE advance affordable housing opportunities for LGBT older adults in NYC?
Seedco	What position should Seedco take on the latest changes proposed to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act (TANF)?

Outline

- Conceptualizing a policy analysis curriculum
- The Milano School
- The Milano policy analysis curriculum
- Outcomes
- Alternative approaches
- Concluding thoughts