# **PUBPL-UA800**

# **Senior Seminar Fall 2024**

## **Instructor Information**

* Sarah Ludwig
* Email: sil2005@nyu.edu
* Office Hours: Mondays, 1:00-2:00 p.m. and by appt.

## **Course Information**

* Meeting Times: Mondays 4:55–7:25 pm
* Location: Silver, 31 Washington Place, Rm. 506

**Course Description**

Positions in government, nonprofit, public policy and other civic sectors embody the highest levels of civic commitment in our society. To succeed in the complex field of public policy, it is critical to develop political acumen, strong presentation and listening skills, and facility with data necessary to advance positive change.

In this class, you will learn how to produce original public policy research. The class integrates theory and practice and will provide you with analytic tools and perspectives needed to excel in a relevant graduate program or professional policy setting. You will be expected to engage directly with policymakers and leaders, including guest speakers, and contribute to the field as part of your coursework.

## **Course and Learning Objectives**

Thorough understanding and competence in public policy analysis and production including:

1. A broad set of policy analysis skills that may be applied in various professional and research settings.
2. Experience producing high-quality policy memos, presentations and data visualizations, which may be useful to you in your job search, future work, and advanced education.
3. Familiarity with policy analysis, development, and implementation.

## **Required Readings**

Please obtain the following book for the course:

*A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem-Solving*, by Eugene Bardach and Eric M. Patashnik. The book is on reserve in Bobst Library, and available to read online via the [NYU Library website](https://library.nyu.edu). You may read any edition of the book; used copies should be readily available for you to buy online. This book must be read before the second class session.

Other course readings will be provided as PDFs or via hyperlinks.

## **Course Expectations**

* **Attendance**: Students are required to attend all class sessions and to come to class on time and prepared to discuss assigned readings and prompts listed on the syllabus and on Brightspace. Any absence or even lateness exceeding five minutes must be preceded by an email to the professor. Each unexcused absence or frequent lateness will lead to a lower final grade in the course. It is the responsibility of students who miss class to obtain notes from a classmate and keep up with the course material.
* **Brightspace**: Much of our communication outside of class will take place through Brightspace. Students are expected to check Brightspace on a regular basis, and to read all announcements and other information posted.
* **Research**: Students are expected to engage in desk research (online and in the library) *and* spend significant time speaking directly with relevant policy actors. Qualitative portions of your research may be done through surveys, site visits, and interviews. Please let me know if you need help identifying contacts in the field.
* **Use of Laptops, Phones & Other Electronic Devices**: All phones must be put away and silenced during class. Students are expected to demonstrate respect for their classmates and professor by limiting the use of laptops during class to note-taking and other activities directly related to class discussion. If devices appear to become a distraction to students or their classmates, I will ask that they be put away during class.
* **Assignments:** Students are expected to complete all assignments – and submit them to Brightspace by the due date and time, following instructions provided in the syllabus and on Brightspace. It is your responsibility to ensure that your uploaded assignments are in the correct file format and accessible. Delays caused by a student’s failure to follow instructions may lead to a lower grade on the assignment. If you are confused about any aspect of the assignment, it is your responsibility to ask questions in class or email me well in advance of due dates.

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## **Assignments, Due Dates & Grading**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DESCRIPTION & SCOPE** | **DUE DATES** | **FINAL GRADE %** |
| **Class participation and reading responses:** Students will be assessed on their overall participation in class discussions. Attendance does not constitute class participation. As indicated on the syllabus and Brightspace, students are required to post a brief reading reflection to our class forum, for five out of six weeks where reading response prompts are posted (extra credit for students who submit all six).  | ***Five reading reflections due on Brightspace by Monday, 4:00 p.m., for the corresponding class – Weeks 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9*** | 25% |
| **Op-ed:** Students will produce an original op-ed on a policy topic. | ***October 28*** | 15% |
| **Policy Memo Development, Presentation and Final Product:** Students will develop a research plan, draft a policy memo for review, practice and present a memo, and produce a final memo to be presented to an actual policymaker.Rolling deadlines throughout semester, as indicated. | **Research** **scope of work** ***September 30*: Initial research idea and plan** ***November 11:* Annotated outline**  | 10% (5% each) |
| ***December 2 and 9:* Policy Presentations in class** | 50% |
| ***December 16:* Final Policy Memo**  |

**See end of syllabus for detailed instructions for each assignment.**

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## **Semester Overview and Class Schedule**

## Below is the tentative class schedule. Topics and dates may shift, based on guest speakers’ availability and our collective research progress. **All assignments and discussion prompts are posted for each week on Brightspace, along with other relevant information.**

| **Week** | **Date** | **Lecture Topics and Assignment Due Dates** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | 09/09/2024 | **Course Intro & Overview****What Is Policy?** |
| 2 | 09/16/2024 | **What is Policy Analysis?** |
| 3 | 09/23/2024 | **What is Policy Analysis? (cont’d)****Perfecting the Your Policy Memo Topic** |
| 4 | 09/30/2024 | **Advocacy, Community Organizing, and Activism****Guest Speakers: Jennifer Ching, North Star Fund | Beverly Brown Ruggia, NJ Citizen Action**Scope of work for policy memo due on Brightspace by 4:55 p.m. |
| 5 | 10/07/2024 | **Race and Equity in Policy Analysis and Program Change**In-class exercise. |
| 6  | \*\*Tuesday\*\*10/15/2024 | **City and State Policy****Guest Speaker: NYC Council Member Shekar Krishnan** |
| 7 | 10/21/2024 | **Federal Policy****Guest Speaker: Diane Standaert, CFPB** |
| 8 | 10/28/2024 | **Independent research/writing**No in-person class; instructor available for 1:1 meetings.Op-ed due on Brightspace by 4:55 p.m. |
| 9 | 11/04/2024 | **Qualitative Research Methods – including interviewing**In-class exercise. |
| 10 | 11/11/2024 | **Data Methods and Visualizations**Annotated policy memo outline due on Brightspace by 4:55 p.m. |
| 11 | 11/18/2024 | **On Writing** |
| 12 | 11/25/2024 | **Putting it Together: Effective Presentations** |
| 13 | 12/02/2024 | **Final Presentations – to class and invited guests** |
| 14 | 12/09/2024 | **Final Presentations – to class and invited guests** |
|  | 12/16/2024 | Final policy memo due on Brightspace by 6:00 p.m. |

## **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner’s Academic Code](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/code). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/policies/academic-oath). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, they should consult with me.

Because writing is a form of thinking, in this class you are not permitted to use ChatGPT or other AI tools as a shortcut or substitute for drafting and editing written work, except as specifically and clearly permitted. Taking credit for writing you did not create is a violation of NYU’s Academic Integrity policy. We will discuss this further in class; students may be asked to sign a statement of understanding regarding this policy.

## **Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Student Accessibility**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Student Accessibility website](https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/student-accessibility.html) and click on the Academic Accommodations tab or call (212-998-4980) or email (mosescsd@nyu.edu) CSA for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early in the semester as possible.

## **NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays**

[NYU’s Policy on Religious Holidays](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-calendar-policy-on-religious-holidays.html) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of any religious holidays that might coincide with class sessions and/or assignment deadlines, so we may make reasonable accommodation.

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## **Overall Assignment Guidance**

*For all submissions please add your name, date and a document title (or headline) at the top of your document. For the document title please use your first and last name. Also, all submissions must be made as Word document attachments, unless instructed otherwise.*

The writing and presentation expectations for this course are distinct from traditional college-level classes. Below are suggestions to keep in mind as you compose your assignments.

* Pull Your Reader in with Clear, Concise and Engaging Exposition: In this class you are NOT writing for the professor or fellow students, but for extremely busy policy professionals. You must grab their attention right away and keep them engaged. Shorter, tighter sentences are always better. Do not repeat facts or over-explain information that a smart policy reader likely already knows. In other words, if you are writing a piece about affordable housing aimed at the commissioner of the local housing authority you should spend little time explaining how unaffordable housing is (the commissioner already knows this!) and focus on a specific aspect of affordability relevant to your argument.
* Make One Point, and Make it Well: Rather than addressing multiple points or covering the waterfront, articulate one major point. Remember, a busy professional (really anyone) may have trouble retaining more than one idea from your document, so it is your job to carefully choose the one piece of knowledge you want to convey and back it up with sound reasoning and facts.
* Tell Your Reader Something They Don’t Already Know: Aim for original research and analysis. Policymakers are generally intelligent - you need to take them to a new place, provide new information or give them a new perspective. You want your reader to walk away thinking, “I never thought of it that way before.”
* Do Your Homework: Aim to pull in class readings, discussion, and even fellow students’ comments to prove your points. Good policy analysis consists of synthesis. You will be judged on your ability to thread together insights and lessons from the class. Come to class prepared to participate. Do the readings and write down one or two points you want to make, in advance.
* Watch Your Grammar and Clarity. This should go without saying, but all work must be read, re-read, copyedited and proofread before submitting. If there are more than a few typos in any written submission, the paper will be downgraded one full letter grade. Pay particular attention to name spellings; if a public official’s name is misspelled, the paper will be automatically downgraded. Similarly, pay attention to the clarity of your writing. All students are encouraged to visit the writing center at least once during the semester.
* Revise – and revise again! Similar to the point above you simply must work on assignments multiple times. This means for all written products, you should revise, edit, and rework before final submission. For verbal presentations, practice with friends, classmates, in front of a mirror, whatever strategy works for rehearsing your words. Good policy is developed through iteration.
* Go to the Source: It’s always best to verify data by contacting the original source. This means interviews, surveys and/or site visits. If you read that housing is unaffordable in Brooklyn because of luxury housing development, contact a tenants association and ask for their perspective, call a housing official responsible for Brooklyn, or go visit a few neighborhoods and note what you observe in terms of signs of gentrification.
* Get Visual: Whenever possible include visuals (maps, pictures, tables). Make creative use of headings, headlines, and text boxes to break up exposition.
* Follow Your Passion: If you are not committed and interested in the work, your audience will not be. Do not choose a policy area because it seems like one you should be addressing; choose one that you are passionate about.

### **Class Participation Guidance**

All students are expected to participate in every class, and to come to class prepared to discuss and critically reflect on the reading. You may be randomly called on and should have remarks prepared for every class. This means not only doing the reading but also scanning the web for related material, thinking about how the content connects (or doesn’t) with your research interests, and/or engaging with others about the core ideas – *before* each class session.

The goal of our class participation is not only to make sure you did the reading but also to provide opportunities for you to sharpen your presentation skills. Specifically, your comments should incorporate the following elements:

* **Critical Impression**: Do not simply repeat back the reading or other assigned content. Instead, bring your critical impressions to class. What is your take? What is your opinion? What did the author miss? What questions did the content provoke? What is a real-world example that captures what the author is getting at? What are ways in which the author reminded you of another author or another issue you are interested in?
* **Headlines**: Aim to present your ideas as a headline. Imagine you have just a sentence or two to grab our attention. Think of using phrases like, “If there’s one thing to remember about the reading it is…” or “The XX idea in the reading completely changed my thinking about YY topic.” You will be prompted in class to answer: “What is your headline from the reading?”

Another way to think about this is to ask: Why should we care about this policy issue/fact/perspective? In other words, imagine we all did the reading or heard the same speaker in class. What can you tell us that elevates our thinking, and what can we learn from *you* about the content?

* **Connect Comments:** Wherever possible, make comments and connections that build on what the professor and your classmates are saying.

**Reading Reflections**

Students must prepare brief, informal responses to weekly readings, for five out of six weeks for which reading response prompts are posted (Weeks 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9). Your reflections may be as brief as 150 words and no more than 400 words. *Reading reflections are due by 4 p.m. on the corresponding Monday – i.e., before class*. Late submissions will not be accepted without my express approval.

In your reflections, feel free to draw connections among the readings, as well as critique and raise questions about them – **but don’t just summarize the readings.** Rather, your reading responses should show you are thinking critically about the readings and engage you in reflecting on what you might bring to class discussion. We will refer to reading response prompts in class and you should be prepared to discuss them.

In class, students are expected to listen actively and offer their viewpoints. Inactive presence in

class will result in a reduction in the overall grade, whereas students who prepare reading

responses and make active contributions in class showing mastery of concepts and methods will

receive full points for participation. If you have concerns about classroom participation, please

see the professor early in the semester.

**Op-Ed**

For this assignment, you will write an original op-ed on a policy issue you feel passionately about. Your topic should be related to a public policy that is currently being discussed, or should be discussed, by the readers of a specific publication. Convince the reader that you are right and this is important. We will discuss the use of AI during the first weeks of class.

What is an op-ed? An op-ed, originally short for “opposite the editorial,” is an opinion piece. The idea of an op-ed is for a newspaper to invite outsiders, with potentially different viewpoints from those of the publisher, to use the platform to engage an audience around a specific topic.

An op-ed is a persuasive piece. There are generally two types: an op-ed that seeks to criticize and and an op-ed that proposes a solution. Both need to be grounded in facts and research. Most op-eds – including the one you will write – deal with policy ideas. Op-eds are often used as a mechanism for politicians and others to float new policy proposals and to see those proposals debated in the public sphere.

Here are important guidelines for writing your op-ed (be sure to follow all of them):

* Keep it short. Keep your op-ed to about 650 words.
* Keep your sentences short too.
* Make a single point – well. Focus on only one idea/policy recommendation. Do not get distracted or go off on tangents.
* Know your audience – think about the efficacy of your argument and the publication’s readership. Know what they care about and write about that.
* Avoid jargon – don’t exclude anyone.
* Get right to the point. Make your main argument in the first few lines.
* Use your personal voice, and keep it active. You are telling someone something. Tell readers why they should care.
* Acknowledge the other side. But do not trash others, and don’t issue a really tedious rebuttal. People still want to be entertained.

Additionally, there is one sort of overarching structure you should think about as you’re writing:

* Introduction: Tell your readers what you are going to tell them right away. Include your “thesis” immediately (within a sentence or two). Set up your narrative by including a quick personal story or anecdote (that you’ll refer back to in the body).
* Body: Include your facts and figures here. Really make your case. Think about the broader narrative.
* Conclusion: Tell your readers in a nutshell what you told them above. Make your summary plain and simple so there’s a clear takeaway.
* Credit statement: Address why you have authority to speak on this issue. A credit statement is similar to a bio, and it might look something like this: *John Smith is currently retired. Prior to his life of leisure, he worked on economic policy issues at the U.S. Treasury and at a small bank creating jobs*. The credit statement is basically a way to tell your readers why they should take your op-ed seriously. The credit line should be no longer than 40 words and should appear either at the very beginning or the very end.

And, when you're done writing you're still not done: you've got two more important steps:

* **First, think about your audience:** Who is your audience? It is hard to overstate how much this matters. Newspapers know who their audience is, and they need content. If your audience matches their audience, they are more likely to say yes to your submission.
* **Second, think about how you're going to promote it.** If you are the content creator, what you do with it afterwards is just as important as what you write. You are not done once it is published. Publishing – by itself – is not what you care about. Readership by the correct target audience is. The best op-ed is worth nothing if no one sees it.

For more guidance, see, for example, the Op-Ed Project’s [Op-Ed Writing: Tips and Tricks](https://www.theopedproject.org/resources).

**In your submission, you should include three items: (1) your op-ed; (2) a credit statement (i.e., your bio); and (3) an explanation of where you are planning on publishing your op-ed and why you chose that publication.** The latter two requirements are just as important as the op-ed itself – remember, part of the appeal of an op-ed is *who* it reaches – not just what it says. Your explanation of where you are planning on publishing can be shorter (a paragraph is fine), but please make sure to include a conversation about the audience of the paper. As an example, if you publish an op-ed arguing that climate change is fake, you should not publish your op-ed in Popular Science Magazine. Their readership likely believes that climate change is real, and as such that audience would make little to no sense for that op-ed. And, your credit statement can be fun! If you feel that you don’t have enough credibility on a certain topic, just find a way to make it relevant. As an example, if you were to publish an op-ed arguing that we should reinstate net neutrality, your credit statement could look something like this: *Jane Smith is a student at New York University and an avid Internet user – in fact, she can’t really remember what it was like to live without it.*

**File format:** Word document, with your name in the file path

**Assignment format:** Op-ed

**Length:** About 1-2 pages single spaced (~650 words) for the op-ed, with an additional paragraph describing audience and publication.

**Sources:** Yes. You may use any style you prefer – footnotes, APA, MLA are all fine.

**Scope of Work for the Policy Memo**

For this assignment, you should demonstrate a clear and concrete sense of the work you have done and plan to do for your final project. The scope of work is not a narrative, but a game plan for conducting your research. You can write in short sentences or bullets. The exact format is up to you, but be sure to include the following categories in your plan:

1. Summary: In just a few sentences, succinctly summarize your issue and proposed solution.
2. Client: Who is the client?
3. Context: Provide very brief context as to why this issue is one that should be addressed right now. This should be no more than two paragraphs.
4. Research conducted. Summarize the desk research up until this point.
5. General research plan: Articulate your approach, methods and general plan for conducting research. For example, indicate whether you plan to focus on an intensive organizational review or data analysis or interviews or some combination of these and/or other research activities.
6. Planned interviews. You are required to conduct at least two interviews.
7. Challenges. What issues do you anticipate and how might you address each? (Please do not hesitate to set up an appointment with the professor if you would like to discuss anticipated challenges.)
8. Editorial plan. Who will review your paper for grammar and who will review for content? Aim for two to four readers.

**File format:** Word document, with your name in the file path

**Length:** About 1-2 pages single spaced. Bullets are acceptable.

**Policy Memo**

This assignment – while not a dissertation or a term paper – will qualify as your culminating exercise for the course. For this assignment, you must write a policy memo for a policy issue of your choosing. You may select any policy topic that is interesting to you, as long as it is connected to a domestic or international public policy problem that has not been solved. A policy memo traditionally proposes a solution to a clearly defined policy problem – in your memo, you should pick a problem that you care about, and propose a solution to that issue.

This assignment is intended to mimic a real assignment you might get one day in a professional setting (e.g., working for an elected official or a think tank). As such, you should go all in – please address your memo to a specific decision-maker (e.g., a mayor or nonprofit executive director). Please ensure that the voice and tone of your memo follow this structure. For example, if you are writing as a polling consultant working with a U.S. Senator, you will need to be sensitive to that Senator’s politics and values.

Research: Your topic should be current. That is, you will be researching issues that may not yet be written about. In addition to using published sources, you are required to consult with at least one expert – ideally two – in the field as well. Your professor can help you identify such people, and we will spend time in class discussing how to reach out to them and how to conduct an effective interview. An “A” paper will include a variety of sources, including consulting with experts. (We will also discuss in class what qualifies someone as an “expert” for these purposes.)

Please use some sort of memo format for your memo. [This policy memo format here](https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/students/NYU%20Wagner%20Memo%20About%20Memos.pdf) is a good guide, but you should feel free to use any memo format that you’re comfortable with. **The most important component of this memo is not the style or structure, but rather how convincing you are and your ability to present facts that support your argument.** It’s understood that everyone is not an expert on policy topics. That’s okay! That’s the point! You should do the research necessary to become an expert and then convince the reader of your point(s).

As you write, there are a few things you should think about:

* Lead with the most important points first – both overall and in each paragraph. Remember, your intended reader is incredibly busy. Tell them what matters first. Think about how you can incorporate your thesis statement into the first sentence of each paragraph, so that there is never any confusion.
* Remember to add value. Think about what helps tell your story – think about the narrative. While this is a research assignment, you don’t need to include every single detail you find. Use your research to create a compelling case for your position.
* Create sign posts so that your reader can follow along. Please think about including headers for each of your main sections so that it is clear what you are discussing.
* Anticipate counterarguments. Whatever your problem, it is very unlikely that there is only one solution. Please make sure to address why your solution is the best one. Please make sure to acknowledge some of the alternatives, briefly, so that your boss can understand the logic and thought process that went into your recommendation.
* Know your audience. Writing a memo in professional settings can be difficult. You often have to make sure to include enough information so that someone can follow along, but you don’t want to include so much information as to bore your reader or tell him or her something that is obvious. As an example, if you are writing a memo to a congressman it is unlikely that you would need to explain to him what the Affordable Care Act is. However, you may need to explain certain provisions, or a few of the processes through which it works.

Grades on this assignment will not be determined by style or format. Grades will be determined based on content – items such as problem definition, clarity, creativity, research, and feasibility. Please note that this is a research-intensive assignment. You should be spending a significant amount of time on the research portion of the document, before you ever begin writing.

A note on appendices. There is NO requirement that you have an appendix section. You can receive a top grade on the assignment with no appendices at all. If you do choose to have an appendix section, the format and amount of content are entirely up to you. An appendix is merely available to you if you feel that the memo page limit is too constraining.

**File format:** Word document, with your name in the file path

**Assignment format:** Memo

**Length:** About 3 pages single spaced (without footnotes)

**Sources:** Yes. You can use any style you prefer – footnotes, APA, MLA are all fine

**Policy Memo Presentation**

As you are working on your policy memo you will present your memo to the class in a 5-minute class presentation. You should strive to ensure that your presentation is informative, concise, and interesting to your classmates. Remember, this is your chance to inform them about something they might know little about.

**File format:** PowerPoint

**Assignment format:** Class presentation during class time

**Length:** Five minutes (you will be timed)

**Sources:** Yes. You can use any style you prefer – footnotes, APA, MLA are all fine, but remember for a presentation it is fine, maybe better, not to have many sources

**Guidance**: When it comes to a presentation the rule is: short, good; long, bad. Keep your points and words tight. Use visuals whenever possible and keep font sizes big.