

## An Alternative Opening for a Class on Policy Analysis

Introducing a typical MPP class to professional Policy Analysis is challenging, and especially so in Europe. A majority of the class generally seems to have arrived at it to buy time after a bachelor's in economics. That majority have little or no background understanding of law, public administration or politics. Conversely, those that do come from political science may not appreciate policy as the primary *raison d'être* of the discipline of economics. The confusion stirred up by the more popular catch-all terms like 'institutions' or 'governance' does not help set apart 'public policy' as a distinct species.

The workshop- style module on writing policy memos is designed as an introduction to professional policy analysis, such that students appreciate the contribution of the various disciplinary threads to the final product of such analyses before they go on to learn numerous assessment tools and methods. It is styled as a way of bridging Michael O'Hare's Theory T and Theory C pedagogies for the introductory course.

The class begins with a review of concepts – what public policy is, in abstract and material terms, and what it is not. The lecture part emphasizes the conceptual differences to the other terms such as governance and institutions, as it is seen key to the skill of writing memos. The crisp take-home definitions that help the distinctions are seen as among the main values of the workshop. The class also discusses expectations from the job description of a 'Policy Analyst'. The introduction draws much on quotes from a 1998 JPAM review of Policy Analysis texts by Mendeloff.

The workshop then turns to look at an actual memo, to which we return throughout the session with regards to various elements of memos. The sample in focus is an actual student assignment submitted at Harvard. Two different structures are introduced. Elements such as problem definition, causal stories and common policy criteria are discussed at length. For manifestly illustrating these elements, the class undertakes exercise on the spot. For instance, for problem definition, the class chooses from one brief case from university life and tries to arrive at a problem definition. Each statement of the problem is projected onscreen in real time to make two points: (a) that problem definition varies greatly by actors and (b) that framing a problem a certain way limits the set of potential solutions in a most illuminating manner. We then consider the pros and cons of two divergent approaches to background investigation and analysis. The workshop concludes with pointers on the skill of concise writing, with emphasis on rhetoric, framing and forensics.

The hope is to promote the American understanding and teaching of policy analysis on the continent and better orient students to a view of policy analysis as a profession.