

Abstract for APPAM Teaching Workshop

Teaching Policy Analysis in Cross-National Settings: A Systems Approach

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This presentation will discuss a course in policy analysis and advising which is delivered to senior public sector practitioners from Australia and New Zealand. Since 2003 I have been a subject leader of a core policy course *Designing Public Policy and Programs* which is one of ten courses in the ANZSOG Masters of Public Administration Executive) degree. ANZSOG is a consortium of governments and universities in Australia and New Zealand which provides programs to build capability in policy, management and leadership among senior public servants. The course is delivered yearly as a five day intensive offering to separate cohorts of 40 students each in three different jurisdictions across the two countries.

The multi-jurisdictional nature of the student cohort is exploited through the use of cross-jurisdictional project teams. Some key learning outcomes of this course are:

- Developing an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of policy systems in Australia and New Zealand;
- Understanding different models of and approaches to policy analysis and advising, including the benefits of viewing some policy issues from a wider system perspective;
- Building new skills to scope and frame policy problems and to craft policy options for simple and more complex issues;
- Reflecting on the features which define 'quality' and 'value' in policy advisory work and developing strategies for enhancing policy capability and performance.

Designing Public Policy and Programs adopts a systems approach to policy design which broadens the perspective of the analyst/adviser and stimulates the design of options which include government and/or non-government actors and institutions which influence desired policy outcomes. Students work in cross-jurisdictional project teams throughout the course and experiment with various tools and techniques to scope and frame a policy issue with which they may have limited knowledge. They engage in brainstorming, various systems and causal mapping techniques, intervention (program) logic and other methods which encourage thinking 'outside the box'.

A key element of the course is the opportunity which it provides for individuals from different jurisdictions to work together as a project team to design a set of options which involve different approaches to policy issues and diverse roles for governments and other actors and institutions. The project work involves a presentation of the team's experiences in designing a policy outcomes matrix, including comments on problem/opportunity definitions, options, criteria, outcome projection and if possible, some 'contingent' if-then recommendations. Project teams present to one another and are questioned by their colleagues. I am always impressed at the penetrating questions they ask of one another and

how a particular team will identify a problem in another team's analysis which they may not have seen as problematic in their own work.

Comparing analysis across the teams allows participants to observe how specific methods and approaches are used to craft options for a range of different policy issues which are positioned in diverse jurisdictional and institutional contexts.

Topics for the project work are broadly defined and cross-jurisdictional project teams need to narrow down to a more specific analysis and to decide on a specific jurisdictional context in which to position their analysis. Examples of some policy topic areas used over recent year are: arts and culture, health priority setting, housing affordability, industry policy, and drug policy (methamphetamine, cannabis).

The systems approach has been effective in dealing with issues which are complex and has encouraged participants to explore different approaches to option design and overcome the tendency for public servants to be some-what state-centric in the developing 'solutions'. Students explore new approaches to 'problem-definition'; experiment with a wide range tools and techniques; and give careful attention to criteria – which includes values, impacts, implementation issues; and policy risks. It has given greater focus to the importance of information and evidence to support good policy analysis and offered insights regarding the benefits and limitations of the outcomes matrix as an analytical tool.

Australia and New Zealand governments operate in the Westminster tradition in which public service analysts and advisers play a central role in offering free, frank and fearless advice. Senior public sector advisers continue in their positions when the government changes, and particularly in Australia, Ministers also have access to political advisers who work in their offices. The approaches to learning in *Designing Public Policy and Programs* have encouraged students to focus attention on the need to bring together and meld both analytical and political dimensions of policy analysis and advising and to view issues surrounding the quality and value of policy advice from a wider systems perspective. The course was designed and co-taught until 2009 with my colleague Dr Karen Baehler (formerly of Victoria University and now at American University). Many of the ideas and methods used are discussed in C Scott & K. Baehler (2010) *Adding to Policy Analysis and Advice*, Sydney, UNSW Press which serves as the textbook. This book is available through www.amazon.com and can be 'searched'.

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