

Prof. Garry Young
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Public Policy 201: Paper Assignment: Policy Case Study

Basic Description

Your paper assignment is to produce an original case study on some specific policy topic that you find interesting. The core of your paper must analytically contrast two policy theories (or approaches) with the goal of discovering which of the two approaches best explains what happened in the particular case.

Topics

You must clear your topic with me first, but I am very open to a wide range of policy areas (environment, education, health, etc.), geographic locales (local, state, national, non-U.S.), and time periods (past, present, but not future). The key is to find a topic with the following characteristics: 1. the topical area interests you; 2. the issue raises an interesting question or set of questions; 3. the topic is tractable, e.g., information and data is readily available, doing the analysis does not require a Ph.D. in nuclear physics, etc.

Competing Theories

Here too I am open as to what approach you take. My main criterion is that you choose two approaches that seem reasonable given the case. Specifically, I want to see you struggle with two genuine “competitors” rather than simply choose the alternative you think best explains the case and then pit it against a foil that is easily dismissed.

Methods and Evidence

I expect that most papers will rely on qualitative methods. If you have some background in quantitative methods then doing something more quantitative is fine but by no means expected. (Quantitative papers will not have a grading advantage over qualitative ones.) The real key to writing this paper is developing a critical argument about what we should see if Theory X is true and what we should see if Theory Y is true, and then carefully evaluating the evidence. Did the events that actually happen conform more with X or to Y?

Structure and Length

Generally speaking your paper should have three parts. First, you should provide a basic description of the facts of your case. Second, you should briefly overview the components of the two theories you will be using. Finally, and most critically, you should develop your analytical argument. Paper lengths should not *exceed* reasonable journal length, i.e., about thirty-five pages double-spaced with one inch margins all around.

Citations

Use parenthetical citations with full references at the end. See the *Policy Studies Journal* or the *American Political Science Review* for examples of this method.

Due Date

You should clear topics with me before October 17. A one page summary of your paper is due in class on October 17. The paper is due in class on December 7.

Academic Integrity

All examinations, papers, and other graded work products and assignments are to be completed in conformance with the George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity. Please read the below documentation on plagiarism. Plagiarism will minimally result in a zero on the assignment and disciplinary proceedings.

PLAGIARISM ¹

To plagiarize is "to take ideas, writings, etc., from another and offer them as one's own" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1984, p456). The act of plagiarism may result from inexperience; some students may not understand the gravity of the issue and some do not know the appropriate procedures for acknowledging sources. However, some students consciously use someone else's work without proper acknowledgment; this behavior constitutes cheating and theft. Stealing a writer's words or ideas is akin to stealing the artwork of an artist. The university considers plagiarism to be identical to other types of cheating (like copying another's answers on exams or other assignments). This document provides guidelines for avoiding plagiarism. The major point to remember is: Your paper should provide enough reference information to allow a reader to easily locate all the sources you consulted for the paper. More detailed guidelines are outlined below.

Word-for-word Quotations: When you incorporate sentences, paragraphs, or phrases from the work of another into your work, you must use quotation marks around the borrowed words, and you must identify the source, either in the text or in a footnote.

Paraphrase: If you have relied on another person's ideas or train of thought, but changed the actual words used or the order of the ideas, you must acknowledge the source.

Borrowed Ideas: When your ideas or opinions have been shaped by what you have read or lectures you have heard, you must acknowledge your source.

Material & Organization: If you rely on factual material gathered by another person, you must acknowledge it. If you have relied on another person's way of organizing common material, you must acknowledge it. If you have relied on another person's method of analyzing material, you must also acknowledge it.

Exceptions: You need not footnote information that is common knowledge (e.g. that Columbus arrived in America in 1492) or an opinion expressed by many people (e.g. that Shakespeare is a great English playwright).

Internet Sources: Treat electronic sources (internet homepages or other information from the web) as you would any other source. In other words, if you found the information or quotation on the web, you must cite it just as if you found it in a book or newspaper. The bibliography should include a full web address at the very least; information regarding authors, titles, and dates should also be included where possible. While you should put the *full* web address in the bibliography, in-text citations may use a more concise description of the site.

EXAMPLE: Last year, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the Communications Decency Act (ACLU webpage).

¹Source for some of the above information regarding definitions of plagiarism: Stone & Bell, 1972. *Prose Style: A Handbook for Writers*, 2nd Edition. NY: McGraw-Hill. pp. 260-265.