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Organizational Change:
Case Studies and
Analysis

Using Community Resources to Teach Public Policy

by Keith J. Mueller, University of Nebraska, Lincoln

The recent growth in policy studies curricula in political science departments affords increased opportunities for experimentation with alternative instruction modes. This article describes one innovation found to be appropriate for courses for which the instructor has access to experts in the policy being studied. In this example, community experts in health policy issues were used as resource persons to assist in discussion of specific health policy concerns. Other policy courses should be amenable to this format, including energy, environment, and economic development courses. Even without using community experts, the general format of weekly colloquiums could be replicated for other policy courses.

The courses described herein is an upper division/graduate level course in American Health Policy. It is taught for one semester every other year as one of several topical courses in the public policy track within political science. The class meets once a week in evening sessions. The intention of the course is to acquaint students with a variety of concerns within the broad rubric of health policy, and sharpen their analytical skills *vis-a-vis* those concerns.

Objectives

Two principle objectives guided the development of this course in health policy. First, I wanted students to become knowledgeable concerning the unsettled questions in American Health Policy, particularly related to financing health care, assuring alternative modes of delivering health care, and consumer involvement in health care and health care delivery. Second, I wanted students to develop analytical skills useful in critiquing the arguments of those who advocate various policies relevant to the preceding questions.

The first objective can be satisfied in large part through careful reading of the various arguments and building an understanding of the defenses of various positions. Some additional material can be disseminated

through lectures. However, these traditional methods of exposing students to material does not assure us that they understand that material. I want them to become interested in the subject and challenge the views expressed in their reading material and the persons advocating those positions.

Developing analytical skills should help students become confident in challenging the views of others, even the experts whose opinions they are reading and hearing. Again, the traditional format is unsatisfactory for accomplishing this objective. More than exams and a possible term paper is needed. I need to see evidence of sound reasoning on a variety of specific topics before I can be confident the student is developing sharp analytical skills. Both written and oral communications would provide evidence of their improving skills.

Class Design

With those objectives in mind I designed a course in American Health Policy in a manner totally different from traditional classes. The lecture-discussion format of class sessions was replaced with weekly colloquiums. The exam-term paper format for evaluating student progress was replaced with a series of weekly essays and periodic short papers.

The course was divided into twelve subjects, each one assigned for a weekly meeting (2½ hour evening session). Reading was assigned for each of those topics, normally a series of journal articles. The outline and selected assigned readings are listed at the end of this article. Normally we expect students to complete reading assignments ahead of the class meeting; such a practice was assured in this course. Students were required to submit essay answers to questions derived from the readings — 10 of those essays would be recorded as grades.

Class sessions were devoted to discussing the essays the students (continued on p.6)

One continuing source of frustration in public policy and management education is the relative paucity of materials in empirical inquiry. Typically, instructors must borrow and adapt instructional materials originally developed for use in other fields (e.g., Political Science, Sociology). While many of these texts, laboratory manuals and other instructional resources are of excellent quality, they often are only marginally related to public policy and management concerns. Learning for skillbuilding in empirical inquiry is not content-free, however, and students frequently have difficulty applying concepts and techniques covered in these instructional materials to their own field of study—the linkages may not be readily apparent.

The problem is particularly acute when one is trying to provide students with relevant "hands on" experience in applying various analytic methods to actual data for public policy and management decision-making. Data sets available from the University of Michigan's Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, for example, focus heavily on public opinion surveys. The American Political Science Association's SETUPS monographs are oriented primarily toward the study of political processes, values and behavior. While valuable, these kinds of learning experiences are not as central to the concerns of public policy and management students as, for example, learning to use policy analysis techniques such as risk analysis, cost-benefit analysis, systems analysis, decision analysis and multi-attribute analysis. Equally important is the need to develop students' skills in organizational analysis. In both cases, instructional materials are needed that reflect the context of public decisionmaking. If the learning needs of public policy and management students are to be met adequately then, it seems clear that what is required is the development of instructional materials that are more directly aimed toward their specialized field of study. (continued on p.4)

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Educational Affairs/APSA
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

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Associate Editor/Elizabeth Hessman

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