Course description

This course aims to develop policy inquiry skills that complement students’ qualifications and technical skills. Designed around the MPA competency profile, you will learn:

**Political Acuity** – the ability to discern and articulate political priorities, relationships and sensitivities and appropriately consider these realities while appraising the role of the public servant.

**Strategic Thinking** – the ability to link long-range visions and concepts to daily work, ranging from a simple understanding to a sophisticated awareness of the impact that plans, objectives, trends and changes have on strategies and choices.

**Problem-Solving** – the ability to recognize, analyze, anticipate and resolve a problem based on knowledge and experience (i.e. the ability to identify patterns, analyze and synthesize information and devise and implement workable and alternative solutions and strategies).

**Data analysis** – the ability to identify, retrieve, evaluate and use data to both ask and answer questions so as to support the development of evidence-based policy.

**Research** – the ability to use appropriate research tools and analytical methodologies to identify and analyze credible sources of information for the purposes of making evidence-based policy recommendation.

**Collaboration** – the ability to work collaboratively with team members, stakeholders, and colleagues to achieve group and organizational goals.

**Communications** – the ability to convey information clearly via traditional and digital media.
Learning Goals

This course adopts an inquiry-based approach to learning. We’ve tailored the course around real world policy challenges so you can begin to learn skills, content and knowledge you will use in the workplace. Teamwork and collaboration are a premium in the policy world today, therefore they are an essential part of this course.

Each team will pick a policy challenge to explore (see list at the end of the syllabus). These are current and authentic policy challenges that the government of Ontario faces. To develop strong policy analysis, you will need to accomplish many smaller, yet pivotal tasks leading up to your conclusions. The assignments, activities and tasks planned in this course will require you to develop and apply habits of mind that will encourage you to ask questions of:

- evidence (how do we know what we know?)
- viewpoint (who is speaking?)
- pattern and connection (what causes what?)
- supposition (how might things have been different?)
- why it matters (who cares?)

The course also builds-in processing and reflection activities, so you can start to think carefully about your competencies and consider which ones you need to develop to become more effective in your role as a policy analyst. This approach encourages you to be independent thinkers, use strategies of problem solving and gain confidence. It is our hope that you will become more skillful in your use of these competencies over time, that you will recognize their merit and value, use them more spontaneously in an increasingly wider set of situations and become more self-evaluative of your use of them.

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- see issues through different lenses
- use the power of ideas to influence policy discourse
- translate policy options into communication strategies

We encourage you to think outside the box and collaborate with a broad range of people beyond peers and teachers in order to gain insight on your policy challenge. We also urge you to take full advantage of all the co-curricular experiences at QSPS – the speaker series, conferences and study tours. These are valuable learning opportunities that will introduce you to key policy leaders who model these competencies in their own behaviour.
Assessment

Assessment will happen on an on-going basis. The process of inquiry is just as important as the final product. There will be discussions, tasks done in groups, demonstrations, peer and self-assessments, and a final project which involves developing two communication products describing your findings to different audiences.

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**Stakeholder map:** perform a stakeholder analysis to identify key project influencers and opposers. Due October 12th.

1. brainstorm key actors
2. plot stakeholders on a power/interest grid
3. identify what motivates them
4. frame the policy issue at hand from the perspective of three different stakeholders – this means I want to see three different frames/lenses

**Issue statement/backgrounder:** Drawing from the cabinet submission document posted on OnQ, the issue statement and backgrounder needs to demonstrate alignment with current government priorities and commitment. It needs to provide the context for action. It also should provide an overview of what other jurisdictions are doing. Due October 19th.

**Presentation slides:** Find a policy related powerpoint presentation that you have created during your MPA or in another context. Using the applied skills from the presentation workshop, transform the presentation. Make sure you include at least one slide that presents statistical data in an engaging way. Due October 30th

**Policy analysis and recommendation:** During the open house, each team will present their analysis, research and recommendations. You can pick the medium of your choice to communicate your results. Poster/presentation/video/dashboard/visualization. November 29th.
**Teamwork:** The assessment of your teamwork skills will be done by your peers using the Q-Team assessment tool.

**Learning portfolio:** You will be asked to create a learning portfolio to collect evidence of your learning and record your progress throughout the inquiry process. Consider collecting the following items:
- initial questions, wonderings
- drawings, diagrams
- anecdotal notes, research
- sources
- plans, next steps
- revision of original inquiry question as needed
- outline for the communication of findings
- reflections at end of each stage and at end of inquiry
- new questions that arise throughout and at the end of the inquiry

These portfolio items become a source of evidence of process learning and will be used for assessment purposes. In addition, at the beginning of the term, your team will create a concept map after observing how to do this using these steps:
1. map your usual research process
2. define focus questions based on what you know about policy
3. identify the most important lenses that are associated with policy analysis
4. order the concepts in the mapping field
5. add ‘cross links’ between ideas
6. review and revise the map for completeness and accuracy

Throughout the term, your team will make additions and refine its concept map and this will be a key component of your learning portfolio. This will be due Mid-December.

**Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see [www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org)). Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1), on the Arts and Science website (see [http://Arts and Science Calendar](http://Arts and Science Calendar)), and from the instructor of this course.
Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

**Students with disabilities**

Queen’s is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Wellness Services and register as early as possible.

**Course plan**

Week 1: **Thinking Like a Policy Analyst**  
Readings: Principal’s Commission on the Future of Public Policy at Queen’s University  
A Public Servant’s Commitments by IPAC

Week 2: **Building Effective Teams with Diana Drury, School of Business**

Week 3: **Inquiry 101 with Naomi Alboim, School of Policy Studies**  
Reading: Problem Solving 101: A Simple Book for Smart People by Ken Watanabe

Week 4: **Defining your research plan**

Week 5: **Thinking strategically and managing stakeholders**  
Reading: Stakeholder Engagement: The Game Changer for Program Management by Amy Baugh

Week 6: **Communicating to diverse audiences**

Week 7: Toronto trip

Week 8: **Data analytics with Soussan Tabari, Chief Information Officer, ADM Community Services I&IT**

Week 9: **Data visualization with Honey Dacanay, Senior Advisor, Ontario Digital Service**

Week 10: TBA

Week 11: **Open House** – showcase of final projects
Inquiry originates with a question, problem, issue or exploration that is significant to the discipline and provides opportunity to create or produce something that contributes to the world's knowledge. All of these policy challenges are authentic challenges that the current government is grappling with. Which are you drawn to?

**ECONOMIC**

1. How to generate a more-inclusive economy that does not feature large segments of the population in poverty.
2. As a sub-segment of #1, how to better select and integrate immigrants, the only net source of population growth in Ontario.
3. How to improve Ontario's mediocre productivity performance?
4. How can Ontario support the participation of its firms in international trade?

**FISCAL/TAX**

1. What should come after balancing the budget? Ontario still has a high debt burden. What should be done about that?
2. Ontario has very high marginal effective tax rates. What should/can be done about that, especially as they impact low-to-middle-income earners (as they combine with steep "clawback" rates on certain benefits)?

**PUBLIC SERVICE**

1. How to better serve Ontarians in the digital age?
2. How to create a more representative OPS, particularly in the management category?
3. Characteristics of OPS civil servants best suited to "modern environment" in terms of education background, training, selection, on-the-job training et cetera?
4. Appropriate balance today within government services between public and private (shift to the latter and within the latter, some greater autonomy)? go further? - see the latest move on Toronto-area gambling as an example.
5. Best "model" for public service work in "modern environment" of more stakeholders being involved, potential for a lot more information, rapidly-moving situations, cross-cutting of almost all files with Ministries largely remain silos, more communications opportunities but also challenges…)
6. How to re-orient Governments toward a) longer time perspectives and b) more holistic views of people and policy challenges (as opposed to operating within a government mandate and from Ministry silos)
HEALTH

1. How to improve the quality of health while containing cost growth of healthcare?
2. How to better (and more efficiently) care for the rapidly growing number of seniors?
3. How to offer better (and more efficient) care to vulnerable populations, including the poor, Indigenous people and the so-called frequent flyers (the 1 per cent accounting for more than 50 per cent of total health costs)?
4. The best governance system for healthcare (the 14 LHINS now getting over 50 sub-regions - does this make any sense)?

EDUCATION

1. How to improve education/literacy results for young Ontarians, especially from certain segments of the population (ie PISA scores aren’t great and some have been declining)?
2. How to improve the value of post-secondary education to the economy, individuals and business (anecdotally, but less obviously statistically, graduates believed to be struggling - wrong skills in the wrong place?)

EMPLOYMENT/TRAINING

1. What, if anything, to do about the howls from the business sector over recent proposals in labour legislation and regulations (not least of which is the rapid move to a $15 minimum wage)?
2. How to improve the prospects of a large segment of the population to be gainfully employed, especially with job market changing so rapid (lots of training initiatives but little evidence they work well…)?

ENERGY/ENVIRONMENT

1. What, if anything, to do about the electricity mess - high and still rapidly increasing costs that press household budgets and cause loss of competitiveness for business and a renewables sector that is still not solidly established?
2. How to complement cap-and-trade with more holistic environment measures (from water, to roads et cetera)?

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

1. How to improve socio-economic conditions of Ontario’s indigenous population, on and off reserve (even though the latter is largely federal responsibility, it isn’t turning out very well to just leave it with the feds - note Ontario Commission recommended Ontario support on-reserve education as per B.C., as just one example)