

MPA 887 Public Sector Reform (Revised April 9, 2020)  
2020

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MPA 887 will study the challenges for public policy and the persistent failures to achieve desirable socio-economic outcomes. Governments struggle to craft policies that will raise longer-term economic growth rates. They typically run fiscal policy in a pro-cyclical fashion, spending wildly in the good times and slamming on the brakes when deficits mount in bad times. Since the financial crisis of 2008 monetary policy has been locked in a regime of near-zero interest rates in the name of stimulating growth all the while undermining incentives to save and contributing to debt accumulation. Other problems such as unequal income distribution and environmental deterioration are discussed but effective actions are rarely taken. The policy focus is usually short term with little attention paid to investments that might offer substantial future returns. Programs tend to be defined in terms of money spent rather than outcomes achieved. Program evaluation is infrequent and superficial.

These general weaknesses in public policy will be examined from the perspectives of: the historical record, explanations and solutions. The scope will be international and Canadian with the latter including federal, provincial, territorial and municipal.

The first few classes will survey socio-economic conditions and develop a framework for public policy to improve them. Then this framework will be applied to various policy areas such as fiscal policy, monetary policy, health, education, social, labour market, environment, economic development, regulation and public service delivery. Implications will be drawn for the qualities of public servants needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services.

Reflecting the strong oral traditions of public policy formation, lectures will be complemented by discussion, debate and student presentations. Ideally the student presentations will involve active roles for all class members as the classroom would be set up to simulate the policy body that would address the issue at hand, with students assigned specific roles to play. The format and duration of presentations will be determined in part by the number of students enrolled.

A formal reading list will not be provided as this seems unnecessary given ready access to information and is inconsistent with practices in the workplace for public policy. Further, the richness of debate in the class will be impinged if everyone forms their views from the same reference material. Students will be expected to do their own research on the topics to be addressed and inform themselves as appropriate for the roles they are assigned for student presentations. The Commission on the Reform of Ontario Public Services (2012) can be reviewed for an example of how the framework that will be used in this course can be applied to many policy areas in the provincial government domain.

A tentative schedule of classes is set out below. However, the course will be adapted depending upon certain factors such as: expressed interests of the students; current events and; any gaps student perceive in their MPA or PMPA programs to date.

MPA 887 will involve the application of various principles in both macro- and micro-economics. However, no further background than that provided by MPA 804/805 will be required or necessary for the course.

Two significant changes are being made for MPA 887 for 2020 to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the course will be done in remote mode. Second, aspects of the pandemic will be analyzed from a policy perspective. In particular, health, monetary, financial and fiscal policy effects and responses to the crisis will be addressed.

**Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see <http://www.academicintegrity.org>). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the “freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas” essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities <http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/senate/report-principles-and-...>).** Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the Academic Integrity Policy of the School of Graduate Studies, available at [http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/sgsr/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy.html](http://www.queensu.ca/calendars/sgsr/Academic_Integrity_Policy.html) Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning and the loss of grades on an assignment to the rescinding of a degree

The course grade will be composed of the following:

1. Short briefing note (no more than 2000 words) due Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup> on a policy issue of choice (any policy field, any jurisdiction in the world). The note should define the problem/challenge, set out an objective, analyze why policy efforts have to date failed to achieve the outcome and make recommendations for the future. 30 per cent.
2. Final project due June 22<sup>nd</sup> providing an in-depth assessment of a program or programs (any field, any jurisdiction) that could deliver better outcomes and how the reforms should best be implemented. The policy issue can be the same as for the short briefing note, but the analysis and proposed recommendations must go much further for the final project. In addition, the bar will be set higher in terms of marking if the same topic is chosen. 50 per cent.
3. Participation in class through presentation and engagement in discussion. Each student will give a short presentation to the class on one of the assignments (or another topic of the student's choice). The other students will be actively engaged through role playing. 20 per cent.

Assignments are due by midnight on the indicated dates. 5 per cent will be deducted each day they are late to a maximum of 2 days and then assignments will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be assigned.

#### Tentative Schedule of Classes:

April 24 Introduction, course outline, survey of interest, framework for policy analysis. Allocation, distribution and stabilization are the traditional domains of public policy and they can be influenced through moral suasion, regulation, taxation or public spending. Examples will be drawn on how each of these policy tools can be applied to policy issues.

April 25 "State of the Nation" for Canada. This will feature an assessment of life in Canada from certain perspectives including economic, equality, social, environmental et cetera. The assessments will be against certain ideals, the historical record and achievements in other countries.

May 11 Health Policy I. This will be a combined class with MPA 836. There will be an examination of the juxtaposition of Canadians' generally favorable view of their health system against the evidence of high cost, long wait times and mediocre outcomes. Various dimensions of economics will be explored for their application to health and healthcare.

May 12 Health policy II. This will also be a combined class with MPA 836. The focus will be on Public Health. Preparedness, response and possible aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic will be examined.

May 13 Macroeconomic policy and global issues. This will include what went wrong to create the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing global recession. The situation prior to the pandemic will be examined whereby major economies, including Canada's, were operating at close to "full capacity" yet central banks and most fiscal authorities were still pumping out stimulus and fostering private and public debt accumulation.

May 14 Non-health policy before, during and after COVID-19. What pre-existing conditions in monetary, financial, fiscal and other (non-health) policies influenced the reaction to the pandemic? How will policy be influenced after the pandemic?

May 15 Education and social policy. Rates of returns to various aspects of education will be examined along with efforts and mostly failure to even the income distribution.

June 1 Economic development, innovation, business support and labour markets. We will probe why audits typically show economic interventions have not generated favourable net economic benefits.

June 2 Environment policy. Various aspects of the environment will be examined including climate change, traffic congestion, water use and waste disposal. The work of the EcoFiscal Commission will be drawn upon, especially the emphasis on the appropriate use of pricing environmental degradation.

June 3 Indigenous policy issues. Some historical context will be provided on the economic-socio gaps for Indigenous communities and this will be used as a platform to analyze current efforts to

establish a Government-to-Government relationship with First Nations, a new fiscal relationship and to close those gaps. Indigenous language revitalization efforts will be analyzed.

June 4 Program evaluation, regulation, benefit/cost analysis, private delivery of public services. Government programs tend to be infrequently subject to review and then only partially. Much of government intervention is through the regulatory arm but this is not typically studied to much extent. Certain powerful regulations, such as rent control, will be examined. The prominent trend away from public to private services will be discussed with the implications for policy and the public.

June 5 The changing environment for public policy and the implications for policy reform and the civil service. The shift toward private services, the rise of social media, the partiality of remaining news services will be among the recent developments discussed.

\*The schedule and choice of subject areas may be altered based on the survey of students' interest.