

MPA 887 Reforming Public Services

Don Drummond
Stauffer-Dunning Fellow
School of Policy Studies, Queen's University
613 692-9105
613 406-9105 (cellular)

don.drummond@queensu.ca

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. 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.

MPA 877 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.

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 29th 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. 25 per cent.
2. Final project due June 26th 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). The other students will be actively engaged through role playing. 25 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 28 Introduction, course outline, survey of interest, framework for policy analysis

April 29 Macroeconomic policy and global issues

May 15 “State of the Nation” for Canada including economic and social results and policy needs

May 16 Health policy

- May 17 Education and social policy
- May 18 Economic development, innovation, business support and labour markets
- May 19 Environment policy
- June 5 Indigenous policy issues
- June 6 Program evaluation, regulation, benefit/cost analysis, private delivery of public services
- June 7 Implications of policy reform for the civil service
- June 8 Other topics and student presentations*
- June 9 Other topics and student presentations*

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