

School of Public Policy  
University of Maryland at College Park

PUAF 660 -- Policy Analysis Workshop

Environmental Section

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The policy workshop is a course based on the concept that policy analysis is a craft that must be learned by practice and experience. Book learning can help but in the end the successful practitioner must learn by doing. The learning process thus should involve frequent opportunities for trial and error. Learning policy analysis skills is similar to learning the skills of a good artist, a good writer, or a good athlete.

The policy analysis workshop offers students an opportunity to undertake a major project that involves the actual practice of policy analysis. For 2004, the environmental section will study the potential uses of highway pricing as a policy tool in the Washington metropolitan area. Traffic congestion is a leading urban problem. It not only involves large amounts of time spent waiting in traffic jams but contributes to air pollution and may adversely affect patterns of urban land development. Attempting to limit the negative consequences of traffic congestion is a main objective of “smart growth” strategies of urban development.

Environmental Defense and some other environmental organizations have proposed greater use of highway pricing as a method of allocating access to urban highways and reducing traffic. This might be an especially attractive strategy for reducing the number of automobiles at peak hours. Other think tanks and study groups have made similar suggestions. In recent years, highway pricing systems have been successfully introduced in a number of cities around the world. New technology for collecting road access fees without stopping at a toll gate are making it more feasible to adopt highway pricing systems.

Various proposals have been made to apply highway pricing in the Washington metropolitan area. However, none have been adopted to date. Former Governor Glendening of Maryland actively opposed the use of highway pricing. Some opponents argue that the rich would be able to buy their way out of traffic, and the poor would continue to suffer from heavy congestion. Politically, there has often been strong opposition expressed to highway pricing by existing road users. Even assuming that highway pricing is a desirable long run goal, there are difficult policy issues relating to the best manner of transition. In some respects, these transitional issues resemble the transitions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from a system of low-cost, government supplied goods and services to a system of market pricing for

these goods and services. Many of these nations experienced major difficulties in the transition from government prices (a zero price in the case of most highways) to a market price.

The policy workshop will explore the possible use of highway pricing in the Washington metropolitan area. To the extent that highway pricing seems to have merits, specific proposals for roads and other appropriate situations will be developed. The class will examine the engineering, administrative, economic, political, legal and other constraints that may exist to highway pricing. Recommendations may be made for both short run strategies and long run strategies. The possible use of any revenues that may be obtained from highway pricing will be examined.

The overall result might be something like a “Plan for Highway Pricing in the Washington Area: Transitional and Long Run Strategies.” Whatever the exact outcome, the final product of the environmental section of the policy workshop will be sent to the Maryland Department of Transportation; the governments of Washington, D.C., Montgomery County and Prince Georges County; EPA; the Virginia Department of Transportation; the Maryland Congressional delegation; and other appropriate parties. The report may make specific proposals for near term adoption of highway pricing in the Washington metropolitan area.

This project will offer students an opportunity to study scientific, economic, political, administrative and other environmental issues in the context of an important real world decision facing the government today. The analysis developed by the policy workshop team will require blending in a practical setting of the various specific methods and skills taught in the School of Public Affairs -- including microeconomic analysis, political analysis, statistics, financial and normative analysis.

Students will undertake activities both as individuals and as a team. Each student will prepare a major paper as an individual effort. The paper will examine a subject that has been identified by the full class as a significant contribution to the overall team production of a final report. All students in the environmental section will work together to scope out the final project report, to define the necessary individual tasks, to produce the report, and to undertake other joint efforts as needed.

Each student at the end of the course will write an op ed piece on some aspect of the study. Well written op eds may be submitted to an appropriate newspaper.

Grading will be according to the following criteria:

- Individual major paper -- 50%
- Class discussion and other contributions to group efforts – 25%
- Team grade for overall project -- 20%
- Op ed piece -- 5%

### Schedule of Classes

This course is an example of “adaptive management.” It involves four broad phases: (1)

understanding the problem and general orientation; (2) scoping out a set of project objectives and tasks, including individual paper assignments; (3) the writing of individual papers; and (4) integration of the papers into a well formed final report. It is difficult to specify an exact timetable in advance. However, each phase may require roughly one month – February for learning about the problem, March for scoping out papers, April for writing the papers, and May for pulling together the final document. There will be no examinations. Unless otherwise notified, the class will meet on Tuesday at the assigned time (9:15 A.M) to receive progress reports, to discuss the analytical issues involved, to go over the next steps in the project, and other team concerns. As matters work out, there may be significant departures from the schedule below. There will probably be several team visits to organizations in the Washington area that are studying the issue of highway pricing. There may be a field trip to possible highways where pricing systems could be adopted.

January 27 -- Organization of class, introduction to issue and project, discuss possible assignments of students to particular areas of initial investigation.

February 3 – Team discussion to review readings and to “scope” the project

February 10 – Team discussion.

February 17 – Site visit to Environmental Defense, American Automobile Association, Maryland Department of Transportation, or other interested party.

February 24 – Site visit.

March 2 – Team discussion, individual papers proposed by each student.

March 9 – Site visit.

March 16 -- Finalize individual paper topics. Discuss further final report needs

March 23 -- No class, spring break.

March 30 – No class, students work on individual paper.

April 6 – First drafts of individual papers due. Discuss policy issues, status of report.

April 13 -- Student critiques of individual draft papers due (each student will read and annotate the paper of another student and prepare a one-page single spaced critique). One hour sessions will be scheduled this week with each paper writer to go over individual papers with the instructor and the student author of the paper critique present as well.

April 20 – No class, work on revision of papers.

April 27 – Individual final papers due. Organize team effort to integrate individual papers, to complete team report. Assign writing of final report sections, introductions,

conclusions, transitions, other tasks needed for final overall report.

May 4 – Instructor will prepare and distribute first draft of “integrated report,” incorporating and blending individual papers. Discuss progress of overall project report. Individual op eds (800 words) due.

May 11 – Discuss and comment on draft report. Rewriting and editing assignments for overall class report given out for each student.

May 17 – Final rewrites due.

May 19 – Final report completed.