

Paper Assignment

CJ/POLS 442
North Dakota State University

1 Broad Guidelines

Working in groups, students will produce a 30-35 page policy paper dedicated to a global issue. The paper will make a specific policy proposal, provide a logical argument supporting the proposal, and present evidence to buttress this argument. The argument should build on topics and concepts developed in this class and students must apply some game theoretic logic to the policy problem that they tackle. You will complete the paper in multiple stages, as I outline below.¹

1.1 What is a Policy Paper?

The issue addressed should be a legitimate contemporary policy issue within which the current policy is clearly discernible. There should be clear alternatives to the current policy. There must be sufficient data present to provide the target audience (i.e. the decision-maker) with information to make a decision on the policy proposal.

1.2 Examples of Policy Issues

The following are some examples of general policy issues that can be explored in a policy paper. Students are in no way limited to, or restricted by, the following examples.

- Economics: Initiation of trade agreements; support for or opposition to protectionist legislation; relaxation or tightening of immigration or customs laws in a particular country or region; policies to achieve particular development goals (e.g. MDGs).
- Legal Issues: Adherence to or rejection of new facets of international law, space law, maritime law, intellectual property law, or (digital) privacy and security law; jurisdictions of international courts; implications for acceptance of or rejection of a proposed treaty or agreement.
- Political Issues: Matters pertaining to regime recognition (e.g., after a coup or revolution); participation in international conferences; a newly elected leaders' policy issues; initiation of a new policy involving human rights, environmental standards, or foreign aid.
- Security Issues: New arms transfer control initiatives; security assistance changes or new recipient candidates; renegotiations or an initial negotiation of case rights agreements; cyber-security, privacy, and free speech issues.

¹This assignment is based on the Pardee School of Global Studies' MA Research/Policy Papers Handbook (<http://www.bu.edu/pardeeschool/files/2009/08/MA-Papers-Handbook1.pdf>). Much of the text below is lifted verbatim from the handbook.

1.3 What is Not a Policy Paper?

An historical analysis is never an appropriate topic for a policy paper. A policy paper must focus on a current policy issue. For example, an analysis of what George W. Bush should or should not have done in 2001 would work well as a research paper, but it would not be acceptable as a policy paper. Comparative or case studies normally fit better as research papers than policy papers. For example, a comparative study of conflict resolution in South Africa and Northern Ireland, although certainly providing an analysis with contemporary relevance, would work far better as a research paper than a policy paper. An analysis of how something works should be a research paper. For example, a study of the political economy of the Ivory Coast would not work as a policy paper. Similarly, an analysis of development efforts in Guatemala would not in itself be a policy paper, although one could make a policy paper on a similar topic by analyzing U.S. development policy toward Guatemala.

1.4 Required Content

Relevant Actors

Identify the relevant actors in your policy domain. One of these actors will be your audience and you should evaluate that actor's options in your cost-benefit analysis, and when making policy recommendations. But remember that other actors are strategic; they have strategies that they may adopt, and their optimal responses will depend on the strategy of your audience. Try to keep the number of actors limited, ideally focusing on just one or two actors beyond your key audience.

Viable Alternatives (Strategies)

Policy papers must present several policy alternatives, and they must be serious alternatives. As a general rule, three options should be presented. One serious alternative will often be to maintain the status quo. Even if the status quo seems dangerous and stupid, students should take it seriously because in the real world it will often be the most likely outcome. The alternatives presented must not be strawmen that are so ridiculous they only serve to make the recommended policy look good. Of course, it is fine to go deeper into the preferred alternative than into the other options, but the other options must be given a fair presentation and analysis.

Cost-benefit analysis (Payoffs)

Policy papers should be based on clear cost-benefit analysis. This analysis may be either quantitative or qualitative. In either case, the student should be certain to think through all possible outcomes clearly and thoroughly. The cost-benefit analysis should seriously consider the feasibility of implementation, not only in terms of economic or strategic implications, but also in terms of political feasibility. Moreover, the analysis of likely effects must not be completely one-sided. There are always going to be some benefits and some costs to any policy proposal.

Clear Criteria (Payoffs)

Students should present clear criteria for evaluating the problem at hand and the policy alternatives to be considered. This will involve prioritizing among a variety of possible values. Trade-offs are the heart of the policy process—if solutions were easy or obvious, the problem would not be around for the student to analyze. Determining clear criteria from the start will greatly aid the development of a cost-benefit analysis.

Clear Predictions (Payoffs)

What are the likely results of the various alternatives? Be specific and reasonably detailed. What level of certainty can one have about them? And what middle-run indicators would demonstrate success?

Formal Model

The above requirements are common to all policy papers. This assignment includes a further requirement: you must develop a (simple) game theoretic model that embodies your argument. Think very carefully about the relevant stakeholders in your policy domain and how they are likely to react to attempts by your audience to implement different policy options. In other words, think about the players involved, the rules of the game, and the relationships between the strategies that the players adopt and the payoffs they can expect to obtain. Remember that almost all political interactions are strategic and other actors will react to the policies adopted by your target audience. Try to anticipate those reactions. You should use the theoretical tools that we have developed in this class to help you anticipate strategic behavior and to support your logic and arguments. To be clear, it is imperative that you use the game theoretic tools that we have studied in this class to make a case for the political feasibility of your policy proposal; this consideration will weigh heavily in my evaluation of your work. That said, make sure to make your model manageable. A simple model that abstractly describes the strategic situation broadly is likely to be more informative, and far easier to develop, than a very complicated model tailored to every detail of the situation. Your model should explain the situation in broad strokes; you can use the text of your paper to fill in the details. It is completely acceptable to rely on a well known model, or a few well-known models, to describe the strategic situation inherent in your policy problem, as long as your analysis leverages the logics of such models appropriately and effectively.

1.5 Format for the Policy Paper

Below are the guidelines for writing a policy paper. Some variation may occur depending on the topic of the paper and the research methods being used.

Executive Summary

At the beginning of the paper, in telegraphic style, explain who the target audience is (i.e., the decision-maker for your policy proposal) and the main points that the decision-maker should know. It may be best to write this section last because it will serve as a summary of the entire paper. At a minimum, the summary should include the following:

1. A statement of current policy
2. Reasons for initiating changes
3. Policy options to be considered
4. Pros and cons of each option
5. Recommended course of action
6. Brief reasoning for selecting that course of action

This summary should be written for someone with a short attention span, so no more than 1 page, single-spaced.

Body of Paper

The main portion of the paper should be dedicated to establishing the background and discussing the reasoning behind the policy recommendation. Students should include all of the basics from the executive summary, but fully elaborate on each point that the paper is making. The following is an outline describing what the main body of the paper should include. The body should be 30-35 pages, double-spaced.

Overview / Background

- Statement of purpose: Why is the decision-maker being asked to consider a policy change at this time?
- Review the Current Policy: What are we currently doing, why are we doing it this way, what is the public's perception of the policy? Assess how well it is or is not working.
- Statement on the Necessity for Change: What circumstances (e.g., changes in government, leadership, stability, etc.) have changed that make a new approach advisable or necessary?

Discussion

Discuss the alternatives to the current policy option by enumerating and explaining each policy option in turn. Next, you should discuss pros and cons of each policy option. Identify the political, economic, and security implications for each option. Compare and contrast the policy options. This is the most important part of the paper. Use your formal model as the foundation for this discussion and make sure to clearly identify the actors, strategies, and payoffs inherent in the game that you are describing. Remember that policy options may sometimes change strategies available to players, payoffs to different strategy combinations, or even the structure of the game itself. Sometimes the best policies “change the game.”

Recommendation

Clearly identify your recommended policy option. Clearly lay out the argument for why that option is better than each of the others. This will rely heavily on your game theoretic cost-benefit analysis.

Implementation

Write a detailed recommendation for specific steps on how and when to implement the recommended policy option.

Bibliography

You may use any standard format for your bibliography, such as APA or Chicago. Your paper should cite no fewer than 20 sources. Your bibliography does not count towards your page count.

2 Deliverables

2.1 Proposal

The proposal is worth 5% of your total grade and is due March 10. Each group will turn in a document containing (page counts are double-spaced):

1. (20%) A statement of purpose (1 pg): A short statement laying out what policy is under consideration, why changes to a current policy or initiation of a new policy is potentially warranted (i.e. what is the status quo policy and why might it be a sub-optimal strategy?), and why this policy problem is relevant, both generally, and with respect to this course. Be sure to clearly identify your audience (i.e. the policymaker you are advising).
2. (20%) A statement of research methods (1 pg): Establish how the research is to be undertaken, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how it will be presented.
3. (20%) A working outline (2–3 pg): An annotated and detailed outline of the layout of the paper. Be sure to include as much information in the outline as possible. For example, in the discussion section, identify the key actors in the game, the strategies available to them, and describe relevant payoffs to strategies as clearly as possible. While some of these points may be underdeveloped at this juncture, you will benefit most from my feedback only if you provide sufficient detail here.
4. (20%) A description of key data sources (1–2 pg): Identify five especially important source materials upon which your policy paper will be based. Describe why they are especially useful and note their potential limitations. These sources may include qualitative and quantitative data and can be drawn from primary or secondary sources.
5. (10%) A bibliography containing no fewer than 20 relevant citations, including your key data sources.
6. (10%) A plan of work, signed by all members of the group, detailing who is responsible for what during the paper drafting stage.

Table 1: Executive Summary Rubric

5%	Statement of current policy
30%	Reasons for initiation of changes
20%	Brief description of policy options considered
5%	Summary of pros and cons of each option
20%	Clear recommended course of action
20%	Brief summary of reasoning for selecting that course of action

2.2 Paper Draft

Students will submit paper drafts on April 10. While I describe these submissions as drafts, groups should strive to produce finished products and should attempt to satisfy all paper rubric points (see Table 2). These drafts will be distributed to members of the paper defense committee (see below) assigned to your group. Students will also individually submit short notes to the instructor describing any deviations from the plan of action and contract, as specified in the proposal.

We will conduct an oral defense of each draft paper. Paper writers will give a ten minute presentation, followed by 10–15 minutes of questioning from the audience. Group members will answer questions in turn, sharing the load evenly. Your presentation is an opportunity to concisely summarize the findings presented in your paper and to address questions that your draft may not

Table 2: Paper (Draft) Rubric

10%	Executive Summary (see Table 1)
5%	Statement of current policy
5%	Reasons for initiation of changes
10%	Description of policy options to be considered
10%	Clear presentation of pros and cons of each option
10%	Recommended a clear course of action and explain implementation
40%	Reasoning for selecting that course of action
(10%)	Clear link to game theory (actors, strategies, payoffs)
(15%)	Logical argument for why the proposed policy provides highest payoff to the audience
(15%)	Empirical support
10%	Final bibliography of 20+ academic sources

adequately address. The draft and defense are worth 20% of your grade, and will be based both on the evaluation of the instructor and that of the defense committee (again, see below).

2.3 Defense Committee

I will randomly assign each student to serve on the defense committee for another group. Defense committee members will read the relevant policy paper draft and individually grade it based on the rubric described by tables 1 and 2. Each committee member will also identify two major and two minor issues with the draft paper, write brief descriptions of these problems on the grading form, and publicly raise the major issues during the oral defense. After the defense the committee will meet outside of class and compose a three page evaluation of the draft paper, describing key outstanding issues. They will submit this document and their individual grade forms to both the instructor and the authors of the draft paper. Defense committee participation is worth 10% of your total grade. I will grade such participation on a useful (100%)/satisfactory (75%)/poor (60%)/fail (0%) basis.

2.4 Revised Paper

Revised papers are due on the last day of class. I will evaluate these revisions, which are worth 15% of your total grade, in light of both the paper rubric (Table 2) and how effectively they address issues identified by the instructor and defense committee.