**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Psychology and Public Policy:**

**why do policy initiatives often fail and how can psychology contribute to more effective policy implementation?**

**COURSE TITEL:** Psychology and Public Policy

**Instructor:** Kinga Göncz, Visiting Professor

**Department:** School of Public Policy, Central European University

**Semester:** Fall 2018/2019

**Course level:** MPA elective

**No. of credits:** 2

**Pre-requisites:** no pre-requisites

**Contact:** gonczk@yahoo.com

**Teaching format:** Seminar

**Course Description**   
  
Psychology can inform policy makers to better anticipate behaviors in response to proposed policy initiatives and to design policy frameworks motivating people to act in ways beneficial for themselves and for society.

The course will be discussing psychological theories on how people perceive and judge situations; how they make decisions individually and in groups; what is the role of emotions and social networks in changing behavior and attitudes; why subjective well-being is a better indicator of social progress than GDP and how community psychology can contribute to empowerment.

Presentations, followed by class discussions will introduce the topics and investigate their relevance to public policy. Students will be encouraged to think about biases influencing their decisions and identify real world problems/issues they care about and design interventions to address them, using the learned psychological theories. They will be asked to explore these issues more in-depth in a learning journal and in a policy proposal - the latter will be presented to the class.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will learn how psychology can contribute to public policy issues and understand better why policy initiatives might fail and how they can be more effective.

By the end of the course students

* will be familiar with some of the main relevant psychological concepts contributing to understanding of social situations on different levels;
* will be aware of biases influencing decisions;
* will learn how to design a policy intervention taking into consideration the relevant psychological aspects.

**Assessment**

1. **Class participation (30 %)**

* regular attendance; if a student can not attend a class (after letting the professor know in advance), have to write a critical essay of 500 words based on the readings as a make-up assignment;
* reading the assigned articles and chapters before the class and prepare 2-3 written questions or discussion points;
* preparation of a 10 minute presentation on one of the topics together with 1-2 other students (we will decide on the groups and topics in advance);
* active participation in the discussions.

1. **Learning journal (20%)**

Students are asked to reflect on their learning throughout the course, by writing a learning journal. The learning journal focuses on students’ personal responses, reactions to the ideas, experiences they are exposed to. It is a collection of notes, observations, thoughts, dilemmas, questions.

Students are supposed to submit the first part of their learning journal by Week 7, and the second part together with their final policy paper.

The learning journal should be altogether a 2000-3000 word electronic document.

1. **Policy Proposal Presentation (20%)**

Students are asked to work with a policy problem they are familiar with, develop a proposal to address it and present their policy proposal to the class in a 10 minute oral presentation, taking into consideration the following aspects:

* reviewing the situation and the current policy if there is any,
* describing the reason why to propose a new or revised policy,
* identifying whose behaviour is supposed to be changed,
* summarizing the policy proposal,
* discussing interventions with the application of relevant psychological theories and methods,
* discussing how the effectiveness of the new policy will be reviewed.

A 500-800 word outline or a power point presentation shall be prepared to support the class consultation.

1. **Final policy paper (30%)**

the final paper is an expanded and more elaborated version of the material what students presented to the class, utilizing insights based on the comments, questions of the others. It shall be a 2500-3000 words paper, and must clearly address the question, show a good enough level of understanding of the concepts and theories, applied adequately to a real life situation, with properly cited bibliography.

The deadline for the paper will be agreed, but papers submitted after the deadline will be followed a 0,3 grade minus pro day.

**Grading criteria for terms papers**

This follows CEU grading. In summary, these should be approached in the following way:

B+: clearly addressing the question, showing a good level of understanding of the concepts with adequat application to the practice, with properly cited bibliography.

A-: beyond all above, an independent thinking and sound argumentation is proven.

A+: the paper demonstrates an exceptional degree of understanding of the topic and its application to a real life situation.

**Recommended general readings:**

*The following books will be useful references for many topics covered during the course:*

Shafir, E.(Ed.). (2013)*. The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Princeton University Press

Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R.  (2008). *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Yale University Press - ResearchGate

<https://www.researchgate.net>

Hamalainen, T.J., Michaelson, J.(Eds.). (2014). *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse.* Edward Elgar Publishing

Orford, J.(Ed.). (2008). *Community Psychology: Challenges, Controversies and Emerging Consensus.* John Wiley and Sons

Kahneman, D. (2010). *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Penguin Books

Robert.B.Cialdini, R.B. (2001). *Influence. Science and Practice.* Allyn&Bacon

[www.cfs.purdue.edu.../cialdini/robert\_cialdini-influence-science\_and\_practice](http://www.cfs.purdue.edu.../cialdini/robert_cialdini-influence-science_and_practice)

1. **Overview and introduction to the relevance of psychological theories to public policy**

* Reviewing the course structure and discussing expectations
* Which are the most common biases preventing us from being rational?
* What happens if our attitudes and behavior are not consistent?
* Why our mental efficiency and reality testing are deteriorated in a cohesive group?

*Required readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 2 - 3 *(pp.32-74)*
* From groupthink to collective intelligence: A conversation with Cass Sunstein

<https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/deloitte-review/issue-17/groupthink-collective-intelligence-cass-sunstein-interview.html>

* Kowol, A.: The theory of cognitive dissonance*.* <http://works.adamkowol.info/Festinger.pdf>

*Students will be asked to take 3 freely selected online tests of the Harvard Implicit Association Test series (measuring their implicit attitudes and beliefs) before the next class. They should select those they consider the most relevant for themselves (e.g. Gender, Race, Age, Weight, Religion, Sexuality, etc.). We will discuss the learning points in the next class.*

<https://implicit.harvard.edu>

**2. Thinking fast and slow: System I and System 2**

* Why do people not always act in their best interest, but make irrational and inconsistent decisions?
* How does our associative machine work?
* Why do we have the conclusion first and the arguments afterwards?

*Required readings:*

* *Thinking Fast and Slow.* Chapter 1- 7 (pp.19-88)

*Recommended readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 7 (pp. 126-142)

**3. Behavior change theory**

* How can behavior change theory address policy challenges?
* Who are the most effective messengers for delivering policy messages?
* When do we need a public permission for using policy tools?

*Required readings:*

* *MINDSPACE*

[www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk)

*Recommended readings:*

* *Behavioral Economics and Social Policy: Designing Innovative Solutions for Programs Supported by the Administration for Children and Families (*April 2014) OPRE Report. No. 2014 16/a.

[www.acf.hhs.gov./programs/opre](http://www.acf.hhs.gov./programs/opre)

* Datta, S; Mullainathan,( 2012). Behavioral design: A new approach to development policy.Center for Global Development, *Policy Paper 16.*

[www.cgdev.org/.../1426679\_file\_Datta\_Mullainathan](http://www.cgdev.org/.../1426679_file_Datta_Mullainathan)

**4. Community psychology and public policy**

* What is the source of power for those who do not have power?
* What does a “good enough society” look like?
* How are trust and social capital interrelated?

*Required readings:*

* *Community Psychology: Challenges, Controversies and Emerging Consensus.* Chapter 2, 6 (pp. 35-66; 163-201)

*Recommended readings:*

* Towards a Theory of Change for community-based research projects

<https://.www.communityresearchcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Towards-a-theory-of-change-for-CBR-projects.pdf>

**5. Contribution of psychology of well-being to public policy**

* What creates well-being?
* How do gender, age, culture affect well-being?
* What is the relation between availability of common goods and well-being?

*Required readings:*

* *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse.* Chapter 5, 6 (pp. 125-181)

*Recommended readings:*

* *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse.* Chapter 2 (pp.17-67)

**6. Psychological aspects of inequalities, social exclusion and poverty**

* Which are the psychological consequences of being excluded?
* What does poverty mean for one’s identity, social bonds and everyday decisions?
* Which are the social barriers to poverty reduction?

*Required readings:*

* Sheehy-Skeffington, J.& Haushofer, J. The behavioral economics of poverty.

Bullock, H. E. Social barriers to poverty reduction.

Smith, L.& Ali, A. Precluding poverty through social inclusion.

*Barriers to and Opportunities for Poverty Reduction.* UNDP Report. (2014)

(pp. 96 -113 and 135 – 175)

[www.undp.org/.../2014\_Barriers\_to\_and\_Prospects\_for\_Poverty\_Reduction](http://www.undp.org/.../2014_Barriers_to_and_Prospects_for_Poverty_Reduction)

* Haushofer, J.& Fehr, E. (May 2014). On the psychology of poverty. *Science. Vol.344. Issue 6186* (pp.862-867)

[www.econ.uzh.ch/faculty/.../PsychologyPovertyPaper.pdf](http://www.econ.uzh.ch/faculty/.../PsychologyPovertyPaper.pdf)

*Recommended readings:*

* Richman, L.S.& Leary, M. R. (April 2009). Reactions to Discrimination, Stigmatization, Ostracism, and Other Forms of Interpersonal Rejection. *Psych. Rev.116 (2)* (pp. 365-383)

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19348546](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19348546)

* *he Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 16 (pp. 281-297)

**7. Changing behavior and attitudes in different policy areas I: education**

* How can teachers and parents support children’s motivation and interest effectively?
* How to prepare students for their future success and well-being?
* How to prevent school violence and bullying?

*Required readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 19 (pp. 329 - 347)

<https://ed.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/a_social_psychological_approach_to_educational_intervention_0.pdf>

* *School Violence and Bullying: Global status report* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002469/246970e.pdf>
* *7 Skills Students Will Always Need* <http://www.teachthought.com/the-future-of-learning/how-to-prepare-student-for-21st-century-survival/>

*Recommended readings:*

* *The Future of Education and Skills. Education 2030*

<https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf>

* Positive psychology program <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/what-is-positive-education/>

**8. Changing behavior and attitudes in different policy areas II: human rights, justice system**

* What is the relation between social norms and the promotion of human rights?
* How to change social norms that support violence?
* How much sentence duration is effective in reducing rates of crime?

*Required readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 10 (pp.181-192)
* Prentice, D. A. (2012). The Psychology of Social Norms and the Promotion of Human Rights. In Godman, R. et al. (Eds.) *Understanding Social Action, Promoting Human Rights* . New York, Oxford Univ.Press. (pp. 1-37)

<http://psych.princeton.edu/psychology/.../2012humanrights>..

* Changing cultural and social norms that support violence

[www.who.int/violence\_injury\_prevention/violence/norms.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf)

*Recommended readings:*

* Three theories of criminal behavior

<https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/Three-Theories-of-Criminal-Behavior>

* Legal empowerment and group-based inequality

<https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publications/Working-paper/PDF/wp2018-39.pdf>

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 8, 9 (pp.145-180)

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**9. Changing behavior and attitudes in different policy areas III: health, environmental protection**

* What kind of messages can persuade people to adopt healthy life-style habits?
* Which psychosocial aspects are closely related to health?
* How can pro-environmental behavior be encouraged?

*Required readings:*

* Maio, G.R et al. (2007). Social Psychological Factors in Lifestyle Change and Their Relevance to Policy. In *Social Issues and Policy Review,Vol.1.No.1.* (pp. 99-137)

[www.researchgate.net/...Social\_Psychological\_Factors\_in](http://www.researchgate.net/...Social_Psychological_Factors_in)...

* *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Chapter 8 (pp.183-196)
* Cooperation in social dilemmas. How can psychology help to meet climate change goals?

<http://www.in-mind.org/article/cooperation-in-social-dilemmas-how-can-psychology-help-to-meet-climate-change-goals>

*Recommended readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 18 (pp. 310-328)
* *Community Psychology: Challenges, Controversies and Emerging Consensus.* Chapter 4 (pp. 101-145)
* Lehman, P. K. & Geller, E. S. (2004). Behavior Analysis and Environmental Protection: Accomplishments and Potential for More*.* In *Behavior and Social Issues. Vol.13. No.1.*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/bsi.v13i1.33>

**10. Improving decision making in different policy areas**

* How to overcome the path of least resistance in our decisions?
* What is the role of default options in retirement savings?
* How to use choice architecture to improve people’s welfare?

*Required readings:*

* *The Behavioral Foundations of Public Policy.* Chapter 24, 25 (pp.417-439)
* *Thinking Fast and Slow.* Chapter 25-28 (pp.269-309)

*Recommended readings:*

* Polanski, T.: *Dr. Robert Cialdini and 6 Principles of Persuasion.* eBrand Media and eBrand Interactive

[www.influenceatwork.com/wp.../E\_Brand\_principles.pdf](http://www.influenceatwork.com/wp.../E_Brand_principles.pdf)

* Michie, S. et al (2011). The Behavioral Change Wheel: A New Method for Characterising and Designing Behavior Change Interventions. In *Implementation Science 6:42*

[www.implementationscience.com/content/6/1/42](http://www.implementationscience.com/content/6/1/42)

**11. Designing policy interventions benefitting from psychological theories.**

**Policy proposal presentations I – class consultation**

* How to provide social support for disempowered groups?
* What are the benefits of participation?
* What is the dynamic model of well-being?

*Required readings:*

* *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse.* Chapter 14 (pp.321-343)
* *Community Psychology: Challenges, Controversies and Emerging Consensus.* Chapter 10 - 11(pp. 300- 321; 323-344)

**12. Policy proposal presentations II - class consultation**

* Closing the seminar
* Evaluation, feed-back