

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
ECTS: 2
Term: Winter
Module: MPP elective
Relation to other courses: None

Background and Overall Aim of the Course:

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.

The course – in a seminar format – will help students to create linkage between psychological theories and public policy practice. It will require participants to identify public policy problems and design interventions with the application of relevant psychological theories.

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;
- will have a deeper understanding of the consultant's role.

Learning Activities and Teaching Methods:

This is a seminar requiring active participation of the students. 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, 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 final policy paper. The concept of the policy proposal will be presented to the class, asking for the questions and comments of the others.

Assessment:

Class participation	10 %
Presentation and preparation of the class discussion on a selected topic	20%
Learning journal on thoughts, dilemmas, questions, personal reflections	20%
Policy proposal presentation based on a short outline or Power Point presentation	20%
Final policy paper	30%

Course Content and Readings:

Recommended general readings:

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

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>

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

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

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)

Week 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.adamkowl.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>

Week 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)

Week 3: Behavior change theory and ethical considerations

- How can behavior change theory address policy challenges?
- Who are the most effective messengers for delivering policy messages?
- Which are the acceptable guidelines for constraining and implementing nudges?

Required readings:

- *MINDSPACE*

www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk

- Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008). *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Chapter 17. Objections (pp.247-263)

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
- 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

Week 4: 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:

- Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R. (2008). *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Chapter 6. Save more tomorrow (pp. 114-129)

Week 5: 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:

- *Community Psychology: Challenges, Controversies and Emerging Consensus*. Chapter 11 (pp. 323-344)
- 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>

Week 6: Contribution of psychology of well-being to public policy

- What creates well-being?
- What is the relation between availability of common goods and well-being?
- What is the dynamic model of well-being?

Required readings:

- *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse*. Chapter 5, 6 (pp. 125-181)
- *Well-being and Beyond: Broadening the Public and Policy Discourse*. Chapter 14 (pp.321-343)

Recommended readings:

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

Week 7: 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
- 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

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

Week 8: 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](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf)
- Positive psychology program <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/what-is-positive-education/>

Week 9: 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?
- Which are the effective tools for deterrence and prevention in the criminal justice system?

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

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)

Week 10: Changing behavior and attitudes in different policy areas III: health, climate change

- What kind of messages can persuade people to adopt healthy life-style habits?
- Which psychosocial aspects are closely related to health?
- Which are the most important aspects of the interface between psychology and climate change?

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...
- 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>
- Psychology and Global Climate Change: Addressing a Multi-faceted Phenomenon and Set of Challenges. A Report by the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Interface Between Psychology and Global Climate Change. Executive Summary, Preface, Introduction, Section 1 (pp. 6-50)
<https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change.pdf>

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)
- *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Saving the Planet. Chapter 12 (pp.183-196)

Week 11: Integrating theory and practice. Policy proposal presentations I – class consultation

- How to design behavioral change interventions?
- Which are the main principles of persuasion?

Required readings:

- 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
- Polanski, T.: *Dr. Robert Cialdini and 6 Principles of Persuasion*. eBrand Media and eBrand Interactive
www.influenceatwork.com/wp.../E_Brand_principles.pdf

Week 12: Integrating theory and practice. Policy proposal presentations II - class consultation

- Closing the seminar
- Evaluation, feed-back