**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Applying Psychology to Public Policy:**

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

**COURSE TITEL: Skills for Impact - Applying Psychology to Public Policy**

**Instructor:** Kinga Göncz

**ECTS:** 2

**Term:** Spring

**Module:** MPA Skills for Impact Elective Course

**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 most 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, short videos 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. Break-out groups will work on the concepts of policy proposals and present it to the class, asking for questions and comments of the others, taking into consideration the following aspects:

* reviewing the situation and the current policy in place (if any)
* describing the reason why to propose a new or revised policy
* identify who’s behavior is supposed to be changed
* summarizing the policy proposal
* discussing policy interventions with the application of relevant psychological theories and methods
* discussing how the effectiveness of the new policy will be reviewed

**Assessment:**

The course’s credits are earned on a Pass/Fail basis.

For passing the module students have to attend all three days, participate actively in class discussions and policy proposal development.

They are additionally required to write a paper of 2500-3000 words on their own policy proposal along the concepts discussed in the class:

* reviewing the current policy,
* describing the reason for initiating changes: gathering data, mapping the process, identifying frequent drop-off points,
* identifying whose behavior is supposed to be changed,
* forming an intervention hypothesis addressing the drop-off points,
* designing a research to test it and describe the expected results,
* summarize how these results might influence intervention.

**Readings:**

***Recommended general readings:***

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

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

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

***Required pre-course readings****:*

* Sunstein, C.R., Jolls, C. (2006). The law of implicit bias. California Law Review,
* From groupthink to collective intelligence: A conversation with Cass Sunstein
* Kowol, A.: The theory of cognitive dissonance
* Slovic, P., Västfjäll, D. (2015). The more who die, the less we care: psychic numbing and genocide
* Thinking Fast and Slow. Chapter 1- 7 (pp.19-88) and Chapter 25-28 (pp.269-309)
* The Institute for Government (2010). MINDSPACE : Influencing behavior through public policy
* Datta, S; Mullainathan,( 2012). Behavioral design: A new approach to development policy.Center for Global Development, *Policy Paper 16.*
* Thaler, R.H., Sunstein, C.R.  (2008). *Nudge. Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness*. Yale University Press – ResearchGate. Chapter 5: Choice architecture (pp. 81-100)
* Krijnen, J.M. & al. (207) .Choice architecture 2.0:Behavioral policy as an implicit social interaction. mBehavior Science and Policy 3 (2)
* Michie, S. et al (2011). The Behavioral Change Wheel: A New Method for Characterising and Designing Behavior Change Interventions. In *Implementation Science 6:42*
* Polanski, T.: *Dr. Robert Cialdini and 6 Principles of Persuasion.* eBrand Media and eBrand Interactive

***Required readings for Day 2***

* Maseko, M.M.& Al. (2017). The third mental health revolution: Themes, values nd methods of Community psychology and its relevance in Zimbabwean and African cultural context. Psychol.Soc. n.54
* Happiness, well-being and human development: The case for subjective measures. 2016 UNDP Human Development Report
* Unanue, W.& al. (2017) The role of subjective well-being in measuring progress of nations and guiding public policy. Psychologist Papers Vol.38
* 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)

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

* 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)

*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>

**Course content:**

**DAY 1, MORNING**

**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?

**DAY 1, AFTERNOON**

**System I and System 2 thinking**

* 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?

**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?

**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?

**DAY 2, MORNING**

**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?

**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?

**DAY 2, AFTERNOON**

**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?

**DAY 3**

**Break-out groups working on one the following topics and presenting it to the class**

**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?

*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/>
* *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/>

**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?

*Readings:*

* 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)
* 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)

* 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>

* Behavior management of justice-involved individuals

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**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?

*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)
* The importance of behavioral economics during COVID-19
* Can behavioral economics help with the enforcement of social distancing?
* 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>

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