

**Columbia University**  
**School of International & Public Affairs**  
**Fall 2020**

## **Tech & Tactics for Innovative Policymaking**

*Or how to get things done in government and other risk-averse institutions*

Professor: Dr. Alexis Wichowski  
Session: Thursdays, 6:10-8pm  
Location: Courseworks  
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### **WHAT IT IS**

This course will equip the next generation of policymakers with the skills, strategies, and savvy they'll need to secure lasting change in their governments. Building on a foundation that extracts practical guidance from political philosophers and public servants, the course will draw from behind-the-scenes experiences of how policy is developed using technology and tools. It will also provide students with a suite of resources for their own careers with communication, persuasion, and political tactics that will empower them to navigate the complex and frustrating bureaucracies in any government agency or risk-averse institutions.

### **WHAT WE'LL COVER**

The course will start with a macroscopic overview of the political philosophy behind government policy-making, studying what happens inside government by mapping the motivations and forces that drive government decision-making. It will take an overview of what happens outside government, studying the role of external pressures, including party politics, citizen advocacy, private sector interests, and the 24-7 news cycle.

The second half of the semester will focus on hard and soft skills necessary to create, implement, and ensure lasting policy change, including: using technology as a framework for change, applying tools for evidence-based policy making; leveraging crises, willing partners, and targets of opportunity; and how-to sessions ranging from memo-drafting and op-ed writing to persuasive pitches for authority figures to mastering the unspoken rules of bureaucracy navigation.

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

Once in government or any large institution, there's very little practical training offered to those who work there on how to convert innovative ideas into effective, lasting policy. This course will serve as a sort of tech-focused forensic study of political and cultural forces that impact policymaking, training students in the specific, tangible, applicable tools, tricks, and tactics that fuel how things actually get done in government and other risk-averse institutions.

### **WHY ME**

I've served in government for over a decade, both at the federal and city level, at multiple agencies. Starting as a mid-level Program Analyst in the Obama administration's State Department and working my way up to my

current position as Deputy Chief Technology Officer for Innovation for the City of New York, I've learned in the field -- the hard way, through trial and error -- how to write, pitch, persuade, and partner for successful real-world policy outcomes. To share and reflect on what I've learned, I've also been teaching, writing, and presenting about this topic for years, with articles and keynote speeches including "Hack the Bureaucracy: A User's Guide to Getting Things Done In Government," (*GovExec*), "What Government Can & Should Learn from Hacker Culture," (*The Atlantic*), and "'There Are No Hard Problems': Embracing Low- and No-Tech Solutions for Government Innovation" (*Google News Initiative - São Paulo, Brazil*).

## COURSE FORMAT

Classes will consist of brief background lectures and in-depth discussions on weekly topics and ongoing research projects. Teams of students will be assigned responsibility for one class over the course of the semester to lead discussions and provide timely examples illustrating practical application of reading topics.

Active participation is required. To participate effectively, students are expected to attend each course, having thoroughly digested the readings and prepared to discuss.

Classes will consist of:

- Short student pitch: 2-minute rapid-fire policy pitches to the "boss" (details provided in 1<sup>st</sup> class)
- Background lecture
- Breakout sessions
- Discussion

A list of readings can be found below. Readings may be modified with advance notice.

## ASSIGNMENTS

You all know how to write academic essays. Let's move on.

The goal for writing assignments in this course is to:

- Give you practice in the kinds of writing that will be useful in your careers
- Make you better writers in general
- (Ideally) get you published

To that end, there are 4 major assignments:

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|---|---|
| - <b>Policy paper -&gt; talking points (~500 words)</b> | convert complex policy document into plain language talking points  |
| - <b>Op-ed (~800 words)</b>                             | opinion piece on key concepts from class  |
| - <b>TP presentation + Q&amp;A (~1-3 min)</b>           | rapid-fire presentation, Q&A (see assignment #1)  |
| - <b>"What Next" policy memo (~3-5K words)</b>          | identify a key emerging challenge in government innovation. Write & present a policy memo that presents options for how to deal with it |

The goal for all writing assignments is deepen your understanding of your professional goals in relation to class topics. Rubrics and suggested topics will be provided, but specific topics will be chosen by the student and approved by the professor. Students are encouraged to expand upon one or two themes close to their professional interests for all assignments.

## GRADING

<b>Daily participation</b> (rapid-fire pitch, discussion leading, attendance)	30% (10% each)
<b>Policy paper --&gt; TP conversion</b>	15%
<b>Op-ed</b>	10%
<b>TP presentation + Q&amp;A</b>	15% (7.5% each)
<b>“What Next” policy memo / presentation</b>	30% (20%, 10%)

## ATTENDANCE, LATENESS, & PARTICIPATION

Class discussions require active participation and thus attendance. Absences will be excused in case of unavoidable conflicts (eg conference attendance, job interviews), medical emergencies, technical issues, and other similar conflicts. Students are expected to make such issues known to the instructor as early as possible. Attendance will be taken at the start of class. If you are not on time, you may be marked absent. Don't be late.

## VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS & OPEN CLASSROOM

Virtual office hours are available by request. Every effort will be made to schedule virtual office hours within 48 hours of the request, pending scheduling availability between the student and the professor. Virtual office hours will never be recorded and all discussions will remain confidential.

In addition to one-to-one virtual office hour meetings, the virtual classroom will be opened 30 minutes prior to class for any student who wishes to gather and chat (don't worry, I will not be present!). I WILL be present for 30 minutes after class for any student who wishes to chat with each other or myself — topics will be decidedly un-academic, including favorite books, movies, and foods and the like. The goal with open classroom is to provide space for us all to get to know each other (in my absence or in my presence) beyond course topics.

## RECORDING & OTHER POLICIES

In the interest of protecting student privacy and encouraging frank and candid discourse, **classes will not be recorded**. Office hours will also not be recorded, nor will the “open classroom” before and after class. Course lectures and notes will be posted on Courseworks and awichowski.com. Students who miss a class can access the lectures to review and are welcome to schedule virtual office hours with the professor or teaching assistant to catch up.

Deadlines are provided to ensure timely progress and fair standards across the class. Paper extensions will not be granted barring exceptional circumstances. Papers must be uploaded to Courseworks before class begins on date papers are due.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

The School of International & Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean's Disciplinary Procedures. Read the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct [here](#).

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research – details [here](#). Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

## COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

Articles can be downloaded at [awichowski.com](http://awichowski.com) or Courseworks.

Books indicated by \*\* must be procured by the student.

### CLASS #1: OVERVIEW

*What we talk about when we talk about innovation in government. Overview of course syllabus & assignments.*

DUE: --

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Details and dates for student rapid-fire pitches

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### CLASS #2: FOUNDATIONS

*Political philosophy on what it means to govern and be governed, to be a citizen in a democracy, and the core responsibilities of the public servant*

\*\*Habermas, J. (1962/1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Ch. 2, “Social structures of the public sphere, pp. 27-56. Ch. 3, “Political functions of the public sphere,” pp. 57-88). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Madison, J. (1788). Federalist No. 39, "[The conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles](#)"

Putnam, J. (2016). "[The tech geeks burden](#)," *TechCrunch*.

Government Digital Service UK - [Service Standards](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Talking points conversion

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### CLASS #3: GOVERNING IN 2020

*How-to guides and personal accounts of how innovative government policy-making actually works; how to navigate and conquer the bureaucracy*

\*\*Richard Haas, *The Bureaucratic Entrepreneur*. (Ch1, pp. 1-12 “Finding Your Way”; Ch. 3, pp. 55-79, “North: Those for Whom You Work.” Brookings Institution.

O’Reilly, T. (2010). "[Government as a platform](#)" (Ch. 2, pp. 11-39) *Open Government*, O’Reilly Media

Wichowski, A. (2017). "[Hack the bureaucracy: a user’s guide to getting things done in government](#)," *GovExec*

(OPTIONAL) Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. [Embracing Innovation in Government](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students; Talking points conversion

ASSIGNED: (Handout provided) “What’s next” policy paper how-to & dates

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#### **CLASS #4: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLICYMAKING**

*Overcoming human obstacles in policymaking. Mapping the motivations and forces that drive government decision-making*

\*\*Robert Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*. Ch 6 pp. 178-202 “Authority”; Ch. 7 pp. 203-232 “Scarcity,” Allyn & Bacon.

The New America Foundation, [\*Getting the Work Done: How Innovation Really Works In Government\*](#)

\*\*Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*. Ch. 1 pp. 1-32 “The Changing Nature of Power,” Public Affairs.

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout to be provided) Final project/presentation how-to & dates

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#### **CLASS #5: POLITICS VS DATA**

*Navigating the need to account for political pressures that ignores the data. Accounting for external pressures, including party politics, citizen advocacy, private sector interests, and the 24-7 news cycle.*

Noveck, B. (2010) “[The single point of failure.](#)” (Ch. 4, pp.49-69) *Open Government*, O’Reilly Media

Caimey, P. (2017). “[The politics of evidence-based policy making,](#)” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Oxford University Press.

Entman, R. & Stonbely, S. (2018). “[Political Scandals as a Democratic Challenge | Blunders, Scandals, and Strategic Communication in U.S. Foreign Policy: Benghazi vs. 9/11.](#)” *International Journal of Communication*, Vol 12.

Bracken, M. (Apr 8, 2019). “[Digital Transformation is a Leadership Problem,](#)” Medium.

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: (Handout provided) Op-ed writing tips & how-to on pitching media outlets

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#### **CLASS #6: EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING**

*How to use evidence to strengthen policy making*

(2018). “[The Evidence Based Policy Making Resource Center,](#)” Pew Charitable Trusts (“Program Assessment,” “Budget Development,” “Implementation Oversight,” “Outcome Monitoring,” “Targeted Evaluation”)

“[Setting goals and developing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives,](#)” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Rooney, J. & Vanden Heuvel, L. (2004). "[Root Cause Analysis for Beginners](#)," *Quality Progress*  
Wilson, Bill. "[Root cause analysis articles](#)," (Meaning of Root Cause I & II, Phases of Root Cause Analysis)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students; Op-ed

ASSIGNED: --

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### **CLASS #7: DIGITAL GOVERNMENT & DATA ANALYTICS**

*Ushering digital transformation into government & incorporating basic data analytics to further policy-making goals*

Numanović, A. (2017). "[Data Science: the next frontier for policy making](#)," *Policy Hub*

Gover, J. (2018). "[How to do data analytics in government](#)," Government Technology

(Explore) Harvard Kennedy School Ash Innovation Center [Civic Analytics Network Solutions Search](#)

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: --

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### **CLASS #8: WORKSHOP – PITCHING, PERSUASION, AND THE ART OF THE MEMO**

*Memo-drafting and quick pitches to persuade authority figures; mastering the unspoken rules of bureaucracy navigation to ensure your ideas stick*

Orwell, G. (1946). "[Politics and the English Language](#)," *Horizons*

\*\*Heath, C. *Made to Stick*. Ch.1, pp. 3-24. "What Sticks," Random House.

(1999). "[How to craft a tight, persuasive memo](#)," *Business Management Daily*

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

ASSIGNED: Prep for Talking Points Presentation

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### **CLASS #9: TALKING POINTS PRESENTATION**

DUE: Presentation

ASSIGNED: Readings on guest speakers

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### **CLASS #10: GUEST SPEAKERS FROM THE FIELD**

DUE: Questions for guest speakers

ASSIGNED: --

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**CLASS #11: SO WHAT?**

*Applying innovation in government lessons to actual work in the field in government and any other change-averse institution*

DUE: Pitches from 3 students

Lincoln, A. (1863). [The Gettysburg Address](#)

Obama, B. (2004). [Democratic National Convention Keynote Address](#).

Kalil, Thomas. (2017). "[Policy Entrepreneurship at the White House](#)" *Innovations*, Vol. 11, Number 3/4

ASSIGNED: --

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**CLASS #12: FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

DUE: Final presentations & policy memos (1/2 class)

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**CLASS #13: FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

DUE: Final presentations & policy memos (1/2 class)